CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Tuesday, September 28, 1939, at 11.30 A.M.

Present:

The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).


Admiral of the Fleet The Right Hon. LORD CHATFIELD, Minister for Co-ordination of Defence.

The Right Hon. L. HORE-BELISHA, M.P., Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon. Sir SAMUEL HOARE, Bt., M.P., Lord Privy Seal.

The Right Hon. Viscount HALIFAX, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.


The Right Hon. Sir KINGSLEY WOOD, M.P., Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon. LORD HALIFAX, Minister without Portfolio.

The following were also present:


Sir Horace J. WILSON, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury.

Admiral of the Fleet Sir DUDLEY POUNIO, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.

The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.

Air Chief Marshal Sir CYRIL L. N. NEWCALT, Chief of the Air Staff.

General Sir W. EDMUND IRONSIDE, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Secretariat.

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.

Major-General H. L. ISMAY.

Rt. Hon. STANLEY.

Mr. W. D. WILKINSON.

Wing Commander W. MILTON.

Rear-Admiral W. P. T. SCOTT, R.N.
### WAR CABINET 38 (69).

**THE MILITARY SITUATION IN FRANCE.**

**STAFF CONVERSATIONS WITH BELGIUM.**

**SINO-JAPANESE HOSTILITIES.**

**POLICY OF SOVIET RUSSIA.**

**THE SETTING UP OF A POLISH GOVERNMENT.**

**ARMAMENT SUPPLIES TO POLAND.**

**EVACUATION OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS.**

**FACILITIES TO ENABLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT SERVING IN HIS MAJESTY'S FORCES TO ATTEND TO THEIR PARLIAMENTARY DUTIES.**

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The Secretary of State for Air informed the War Cabinet that reports had been received that the previous night of the presence of Japanese aircraft. No definite activity had been observed. One of our aircraft had been attacked at 10,000 feet and hit in the petrol tank but had returned safely. Anti-aircraft fire had been negligible. Three aircraft had dropped leaflets in the previous night over north-west Germany, and had returned to France. Aircraft had also left early that morning to carry out a reconnaissance of the German Fleet. Three of our aircraft had had encounters with enemy aircraft over the North Sea the previous day without casualties to either side. Intelligence reports describe a certain activity in the Frankfurt area, including the presence of transport aircraft, which might indicate a transfer of advance parties from Poland to the West.

There seemed to be no foundation for the report in that morning's newspapers of a raid by the French on Friedrichshaven.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

2. The Lord Privy Seal questioned the wisdom of announcing the dropping of leaflets over Germany at a moment when Warsaw was being so heavily attacked.

The Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs said that opinion in the Dominions took the same view.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer doubted whether the reports of the dropping of leaflets were of as great news value as formerly, and suggested that too much attention was being devoted to them, in particular by the B.B.C.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs mentioned a report which had been received from two non-Nazi business men, saying that up to mid-September the dropping of leaflets was not having a good effect.

The Secretary of State for Air said that when previous attempts had been made to withhold reports of leaflet-dropping from the Press, the news had filtered back from abroad and this had provoked complaints.

The War Cabinet agreed:

To invite the Lord Privy Seal to ask the Director-General, Ministry of Information, to explain the position to the Press with a view to persuading them not to give prominence to reports of the dropping of leaflets on Germany.

3. The First Lord of the Admiralty informed the War Cabinet that a submarine which had been reported as having been damaged off the coast and being escorted home. No merchant ship had been sunk in the previous 24 hours. A trawler had reported seeing a submarine entrance, with three submarines in attendance, 8 miles east of Flamborough Head the previous day. Aircraft had been out to locate that day to investigate. Various attacks had been made on enemy submarines. A rendezvous of German submarines with an Italian submarine had been detected.
A. The First Lord of the Admiralty referred to the position of Eire, which was unsatisfactory from the Naval point of view.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs said that the Eire Government had now agreed to the appointment of Sir John Mailey as our Representative in Dublin. Sir John Mailey was taking up his appointment at once, and he thought that it was better that any representations which it might be desired to make on this matter should be made by Sir John Mailey after he had taken up his appointment.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

The Military Situation in France.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (59) 19th Conclusions, Minute 7.)

5. The Secretary of State for War informed the War Cabinet of the measures he was taking to reinforce the Field Force with 2 Infantry Brigades, 2 Machine Gun Battalions, and an Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

He had seen representatives of McAlpine's, and had arranged for one of their engineers to accompany a senior Royal Engineer Officer to examine the construction of a defensive line in France. In all, 10 Field Companies, Royal Engineers, with mechanical diggers, would shortly be despatched. These resources would be over and above anything the Field Force already had.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that, according to reliable information, there were now the elements of 7 German Divisions opposite the Dutch frontier, North of the Rhine. South of the Rhine, there were only 2 Reserve Divisions. The Rhine might be regarded as the boundary between offensive operations against Holland alone, for which purpose troops would be massed North of the river, and an invasion of Holland and Belgium which would take place South of the river. An invasion of Holland would no doubt be resisted, but unfortunately we had no knowledge of either the Dutch or the Belgian plans.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

6. In connection with the preceding Minute, discussion ensued as to what further action could be taken to persuade the Belgian Government to initiate Staff Conversations forthwith. Reference was made to Telegram No. 118, dated the 25th September, from Brussels, from which it appeared that our Ambassador had been reluctant to pass on to the Belgian Government our views as to how the situation might develop and of the action which we should probably have to take against German forces passing through Belgium. Further, the Belgian Government still did not realise that, if they called on us for assistance at the last moment without having consented to previous consultation, we should not be able to help them.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs doubted whether it would be in our interests that we should notify the Belgian Government beyond what was plain. He agreed, however, that it was right that the Belgian Government should be informed of the situation of the moment. The Cabinet agreed that this should be done.
The Chief of the Air Staff said that, as agreed upon by the War Cabinet at the meeting noted in the margin, the Chiefs of Staff had prepared an appreciation regarding the situation reached in the Sino-Japanese hostilities. The main conclusions which they had reached were as follows:

(a) as the present time there was no ground for anticipating that Chinese military resistance was likely to collapse;

(b) so long as the neutrality of Italy was not assured, it was essential to avoid fresh embarrassments, and for this reason it would not be in our advantage to free Japan of her entanglements in China, which (except from the naval point of view) were serious. On the other hand, it was important not to assist the Chinese Government to an extent which might exasperate the Japanese Government into taking action against us;

(c) from the strictly military point of view, the prolongation of the Sino-Japanese conflict was to the advantage of this country.

In the course of the subsequent discussion the following considerations were stressed:

(i) from the political point of view it was important to remember that after the establishment on the 10th October next of the new Government under Wang Ching-Wei there was a danger that civil war might break out in China with possibly serious embarrassments to us. Moreover, if our relations with Japan deteriorated too much, she might thereby be forced into the hands of the enemy, with consequent danger to the Netherlands East Indies and elsewhere in the Pacific;

(ii) once freed from embarrassments in China, the Japanese might launch an attack on the Netherlands East Indies. Again it was pointed out that, even if hostilities were to cease in China, the Japanese would be faced with a tremendous task in that country, and would be by no means freed from their entanglement. From telegram No. 1076, dated the 22nd September, 1939. from His Majesty's Ambassador, Shanghai, it appeared that according to the French Ambassador it was the intention of the Government of the U.S.S.R. to attempt to bring the Chinese and Japanese Governments together. It was important that if the parties were to be brought together this should not be done under the signs of the Soviet Government;

(iii) the passage in telegram No. 1264, dated the 23rd September, 1939, from the British High Commissioner in Poland, in which it was reported that the Government of the U.S.S.R. will give undertakings in Poland to the British High Commissioner, General Chiang-Kai-shek, relied for the moment on the advice of Mr. Churchill.
The War Cabinet agreed——

That in view of the fact that His Majesty's Ambassador, Shangri, has been arranged shortly to visit Chungking, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, should instruct him, while there, to inform General Chiang Kai-shek privately of the proposed report of His Majesty's Ambassador, Tokyo, in his telegram No. 155 dated the 23rd September, 1939, namely, that the present conflict should be kept out of the war, and that the Japanese Government should use their best efforts for arranging a meeting between Chinese and Japanese representatives at Hong Kong to discuss ways and means of bringing the present Sino-Japanese conflict to an end; that the Ambassador should make it clear to the General that we had no intention of taking any action which might break his front against the Japanese, and that if it was for this reason that we wished to ascertain his views before deciding on the reply to be made to the Japanese Government.

8. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs gave certain information regarding the motives underlying the recent action in Europe of the Government of the U.S.S.R. and the probable future policy of that Government.

A note of this information is recorded in the Secretary's standard file of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The Setting Up of a Polish Government.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 25th Conclusions, Minute 6.)

9. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he had sent a telegram to His Majesty's Minister in Bucharest (in reply to Sir Reginald Heor's telegram No. 473, dated the 26th September, 1939), urging the importance of steps being taken to constitute a new Polish Government by nominating persons as substitutes for the members of the Polish Government now detained in Romania. One of the chief difficulties appeared to be that the number of suitable representatives was limited.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

The Chief of the Air Staff stated that the S.S. Clan Mackenzie, carrying, among other Armament, 16 Battle aircraft, 5,000 Hekatobritons guns and 16 million rounds of small-arms ammunition, had now arrived at Malta. These stores had originally been intended for Poland, and were in a store at Commeau, which had been delivered to Turkey. The question for decision was, in what part the S.S. Clan Mackenzie should be sent, and to whom the above should be given. The Chief of Staff recommended Turkey.

The War Cabinet agreed——
The Secretary of State for War said that a question was to be asked in the House of Commons that afternoon by Mr. Henderson Stewart, M.P., as to the facilities which would be granted to Members of Parliament serving with His Majesty's Forces to enable them to attend meetings of Parliament and to visit their constituencies. It had been decided that Officers serving overseas should obtain leave once every six months. He thought that difficulties would arise if Members of Parliament were treated in a special manner. He was therefore disposed to answer the Question to the effect that no special facilities could be granted.

In the discussion which ensued, The First Lord of the Admiralty pointed to the precedent of the last War, when Members of Parliament had frequently returned from their units to take part in important debates.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he had given a ruling in the Treasury to the effect that the facilities for free railway travel at present accorded to Members of Parliament travelling to Westminster from their constituencies or their homes would be extended to Members of Parliament serving with the Forces and travelling to Westminster from the place where they were training.

In the course of discussion, general agreement was expressed with the view that the right procedure was not to raise the question whether Members of Parliament were entitled to any special facilities, but to take the broad line that the precedent of the last War would be followed, and that the question of allowing Members of Parliament facilities to attend to their Parliamentary duties without undue interference with their military duties was one which was capable of adjustment as in the last War.

The War Cabinet agreed:

To invite the three Service Ministers, in consultation, to frame a reply to Mr. Henderson Stewart's Question on the lines of the above discussion.

Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1.
September 28, 1919.
A Meeting of the War Cabinet at which only the Ministers, Members of the War Cabinet, and no officials, were present, was held at No. 10, Downing Street, at 6.0 p.m. on Tuesday, the 26th September, 1939.

No record of the proceedings at this meeting was made.