CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, October 9, 1939, at 11.30 A.M.

Present:

The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
Admiral of the Fleet the Right Hon. WINSTON S. LORD CHATFIELD, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty.
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. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.
The Right Hon. L. H. AUSTEN-CLARKE, M.P., Secretary to the Treasury.
Admiral of the Fleet Sir DUDLEY POUND, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (Items 1-7).

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominon Affairs.
Sir HORACE J. WILSON, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury.
Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril L. N. NEWALL, Chief of the Air Staff (Items 1-7).
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley POUND, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (Items 1-7).

Secretariat:

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES
Major-General H. L. ISMAY
Captain A. D. NICHOLL, R.N.
Mr. F. HEMMING
Lieutenant-Colonel V. DYKES, R.E.
Mr. G. N. FLEMING
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The Air Situation.

W.M. (39) 41st
Conclusions.
Minute 1.)

1. The Secretary of State for Air said that the Wellington
Bombers which had been sent out on the previous afternoon had
been unable to make contact with the German Naval Force which
had been reported to be off the Norwegian Coast. All the machines
had returned safely.

A reconnaissance of road and rail movements in North-West
Germany had been carried out the previous day by aircraft of the
Royal Air Force component of the Field Force. All aircraft
taking part had returned safely. The results of the reconnaissance
were not yet known.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

The Naval Situation.

W.M. (39) 41st
Conclusions.
Minute 1.)

2. The First Lord of the Admiralty said that the strong
Naval forces which had been sent out to intercept the German
force, referred to in the previous Minute, had also failed to make
contact. It was probable that the German ships had returned to
harbour.

No attacks had been made on our ships in the previous
twenty-four hours.

There now appeared to be little doubt that the German ship
reported in the Southern Atlantic was the Admiral Scheer. Nine
hunting units had been sent out.

The United States liner Iroquois had been met by an escort of
United States destroyers; a thorough search of the vessel had taken
place and no bombs had been found.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

The Military Situation.

W.M. (39) 41st
Conclusions.
Minute 3.)

3. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that during
his recent visit to the British sector of the line in France he had
found a much greater advance in the preparation of the defences
by the French than he had expected. Although our troops had now
taken over the sector, the French engineer units were carrying on
with uncompleted works. Our own engineer units were in full
operation and the work would be pressed forward as rapidly as
possible.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff gave the War Cabinet
a brief description of the layout of the defence line in the British
sector. He laid particular emphasis on the shortage of effective
weapons against low-flying attack. In conclusion, he said that he
had found the Field Force in great heart and he was more than
satisfied with everything he had seen.

U.P. Weapon.

The Prime Minister asked what progress had been made in the
development of the U.P. weapon.

The Chief of the Air Staff said that considerable progress had
been made. Hitherto the development of the high-altitude weapon
had been the main consideration, but it was now under considera­
tion whether it would not be better to concentrate on the low-altitude
weapon.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statements.
Negotiations with the Turkish Mission under General Orbay.
(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 32nd Conclusions, Minute 14.)

4. The Chief of the Air Staff reminded the War Cabinet that at the second meeting of the Supreme War Council on the 22nd September the French had asked for additional British A.A. guns to be sent to France in order to relieve French A.A. guns.

We had already been able to go some distance towards meeting the French request, and the Chiefs of Staff had been examining whether more could not be done. It would no doubt have an excellent political effect if some further concession could be made to the French following upon the recent meeting with General Gamelin. The Chiefs of Staff recommended that 48 3-inch guns should be released from the Air Defence of Great Britain, of which 40 would be allotted to the Advanced Air Striking Force area and 8 to the British Expeditionary Force area.

In the course of the discussion which ensued it was pointed out that the output of 3-7-inch guns would be about 80 per month, and personnel was ready to take them over as soon as the guns were produced. The subtraction from the Air Defence of Great Britain would therefore very quickly be made up. Some of the areas from which the guns were to be withdrawn were admittedly very important, but it was necessary to balance up the risks all the way round and to spread our resources accordingly.

The War Cabinet agreed—

(i) To authorise the War Office and the Air Ministry to take immediate steps for the release of 48 3-inch guns from the Air Defence of Great Britain and their transfer to the British forces in France.

(ii) That the French should be informed forthwith of this decision.

5. The War Cabinet had under consideration a Note by the Chiefs of Staff dealing with the negotiations with the Turkish Mission (Paper W.P. (39) 76).

The Chief of the Air Staff said that the officers who were negotiating with General Orbay had been originally instructed to play for time until the Treaty had been signed. At that time it had been anticipated that the Treaty would be signed very shortly. Now, however, that signature was clearly going to be delayed for a long time, we could not keep General Orbay in play indefinitely. His first mission had failed, and if this one was equally unsuccessful there was a grave danger that the Turkish General Staff, who carried great weight in Turkey, would turn against us. The Chiefs of Staff considered that we should now proceed on the assumption that the Treaty would be signed. There was admittedly a risk in doing this, since the Turks might back out at the last moment. But we could then always either stop shipment of the munitions or recall any which had not actually arrived in Turkey.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer observed that the proposals contained in paragraph 10 of the Chiefs of Staff's Note meant that we might have to consent to the Turks placing orders up to the full amount of £25 millions and taking deliveries in advance of the signature of the Anglo-French Credit Agreement with Turkey.

It was pointed out that at least a month would elapse before deliveries reached Turkey and there would therefore be time to see whether the Treaty was signed or not.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs supported the proposal of the Chiefs of Staff.
The Chief of the Air Staff, in answer to a question by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said that the French were acting jointly with us in the negotiations with General Orbay and that it was hoped that they would take the same line as ourselves over the question of immediate deliveries to the Turks.

The War Cabinet agreed:

To approve the instructions proposed by the Chiefs of Staff for the British Permanent Military Representatives in their discussions with General Orbay as set out in paragraph 10 of their Note (Paper W.P. (39) 76).

8. In connection with the preceding Minute the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs drew attention to the following communications:

(1) Telegram No. 581 from His Majesty's Ambassador, Ankara, reporting that the Turkish Government had decided to send to the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs at Moscow the following instructions on the 10th October:

(a) if we and the French agreed to the modifications proposed, he was to stay and sign the Turco-Soviet Treaty;

(b) if we refused, he was to leave at once;

(c) if we returned no reply to the Turkish enquiry, he was equally to leave at once.

(2) Telegram No. 495 to His Majesty's Ambassador, Ankara, reporting that the Turkish Ambassador in London had informed the Foreign Secretary that he had been instructed to give an assurance that, if the proposed changes were made in the Anglo-Franco-Turkish Treaty, they would not in practice involve any change in the scope and sense of the undertakings between our Governments.

(3) Telegram No. 372 from His Majesty's Ambassador, Moscow, reporting an interview which he and the French Chargé d'Affaires had had with the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs. The latter had suggested that the French and ourselves should authorise him to tell Stalin orally that we agreed to the new wording of the Reserve Clause. Negotiations for the Turco-Soviet Treaty could then be pressed forward, and the text, when it emerged, could be submitted for the approval of the French and British Governments. If they took objection to anything in the draft Treaty, they could withdraw their previous oral approval. The Ambassador, who was not in favour of any further delay, supported this proposal.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs took the view that we should act quickly in this matter, and that if we did so we should probably secure the Treaty with Turkey. The French were coming round to our point of view, and there was every reason to believe that the Turks were playing straight with us over their negotiations with Russia. We should be fully safeguarded, under M. Sarajoglu's proposals, in the event of the Turco-Soviet Treaty containing anything objectionable to us.

The War Cabinet—

Authorised the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to accept the suggestion set out in Telegram No. 372 from His Majesty's Ambassador, Moscow.
7. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed the War Cabinet that he had telegraphed to His Majesty's Ambassador, Tokyo, stating that, in view of the doubt as to whether the intermediary with whom he had been in touch in regard to the proposed Sino-Japanese meeting at Hong Kong was, in fact, authorised to speak for the Japanese Government, he considered it would be better that His Majesty's Ambassador, Shanghai, should not broach the subject to General Chiang Kai-shek during his present visit to Chungking, at least until the situation became clearer.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

8. The War Cabinet had before them the draft of a Statement to be made on behalf of His Majesty's Government in reply to Herr Hitler's speech in the Reichstag (Paper W.P. (39)77).

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs explained that he had since received a copy of a further draft prepared by the First Lord of the Admiralty. It was agreed that the most helpful course would be to have a discussion as to the general lines of the Statement, and not to deal with drafting points.

The Prime Minister drew attention to three main considerations: First, that he thought that, as the speech had aroused an unfriendly or critical reaction throughout the world, except perhaps in Italy, we should be justified in taking a somewhat stiffer line in our reply than if the speech had revealed any serious cleavage of opinion. Secondly, that Herr Hitler's speech said in effect that there was to be no further discussion about Poland, as her future was the concern of Germany and Russia exclusively. Our reply should draw attention to this, and make quite clear that it was an impossible basis for starting peace negotiations, though we should not, on the other hand, commit ourselves to any specific solution of the Polish problem. He would not rule out the possibility of a similar reference to Czecho-Slovakia, but would emphasise that Germany's actions in Poland were the immediate background with which we were at present concerned. Thirdly, that, in regard to the more general proposals in Herr Hitler's speech, the answer should be that it would be no use discussing them, since it was impossible to believe anything that Herr Hitler said. This should be illustrated by reference to his past words and deeds. An essential preliminary to any discussion would need to be actions which would be evidence of Germany's intention to abandon the policy of domination by force, to accept discussion and to abide by their words. We should avoid any precise statement of our war aims.

The First Lord of the Admiralty expressed his general agreement with the Prime Minister's points. Herr Hitler's proposals fell far short of what had been suggested in some quarters as likely to come from him, and opinion in all parties in this country and also in the Dominions and in neutral countries was clear that it was no use holding discussions with Herr Hitler until he showed by his actions that his policy had changed. His conclusion was that the reply should be more definite than he had contemplated even a few days previously, and that we should not attempt to manoeuvre in order to gain time.

The following further points were made in discussion:

(i) The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Coordination of Defence attached importance to making clear the general nature of our aims at any Peace Conference, otherwise there was a risk that inadequate German wording implied that if the armed forces were not included with a defined peace. This was reinforced by a later report
Lord Lothian. There was general agreement, however, that we should not state our war aims in detail, and that this would have to be done in very general terms, as, for example, that we were fighting for the restoration of the life and sovereignty of Poland. The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs thought that it was a general statement on these lines that Mr. Mackenzie King, in his telegram of the 7th October, had been anxious to see included in our reply.

(ii) It was agreed that, while the tone of the reply should be very firm, it should not definitely shut the door, but should make it clear that it was for Herr Hitler to give a reply to our answer.

(iii) One way to test the statement would be to look at it from the point of view of the average German, who might ask on what basis could peace be obtained, short of a peace imposed at the end of a long and bloody war. It must emerge from our statement that France and ourselves were not prepared to make peace unless there was some guarantee for the continuance of real peace thereafter. No doubt it would occur to many Germans that the easiest way to achieve this would be to get rid of Hitlerism.

(iv) The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the French Government’s attitude was one of anxiety that our reply was to be postponed as long as Wednesday. In further discussion, he said that he would be reluctant to abandon altogether the suggestion that non-belligerent Powers would be associated at the Peace Conference. He was in doubt whether this would let in Russia; but could we hope to exclude Russia altogether? He was anxious to include the United States of America; he also had in mind the section of opinion in Germany which took the view that, if they abandoned the Nazi régime, the result would be another Versailles.

(v) On the other hand, it was suggested that French opinion might be sensitive on this point, having regard to the fact that at the end of the last war the United States Government had withdrawn from their promise to guarantee the Franco-German frontier.

(vi) The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the French did not ask to be shown a complete draft of our reply. He had therefore instructed Sir Alexander Cadogan to inform M. Corbin of the general lines of the statement which had been prepared. He agreed that it might be necessary that key sentences should be submitted to the French Government.

The War Cabinet agreed:

(a) To remit the drafting of a revised Statement, in the light of the discussion which had taken place, to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the First Lord of the Admiralty, with a view to the revised draft being submitted to the War Cabinet on Tuesday, the 10th October.

(b) That the Statement should be made by the Prime Minister on Wednesday, the 11th October.

(c) To invite the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to send further particulars as to the lines of the Statement to the Dominion Premiers that evening, after the Meeting of the Drafting Committee referred to in (a).

Ramsden Terrace, S.W.1.
October 9, 1939.