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CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1, on Sunday, October 15, 1939, at 12 noon.

Present:

The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, Admiral of the Fleet the Right Hon. LORD CHATFIELD, Minister for Co-ordination of Defence.

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The following were also present:

Lieutenant-General Sir RONALD F. ADAM, Bt., Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff.
Air Vice-Marshal R. E. C. PEIRSE, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff.
Rear-Admiral T. S. V. PHILLIPS, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff.

Secretariat.

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Colonel L. C. HOLLIS, R.M.
Mr. F. HEMMING.
Lieutenant-Colonel V. DYKES, R.E.
Wing Commander W. ELLIOT.
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Reported purchase of Mexican Oil.
The War Cabinet had previously been informed by the Prime Minister that an attack had been made on a German submarine some 100 miles west of Norway, but no success was claimed for it.

The war cabinet had been told to permit flights for the dropping of supplies containing the Prime Minister's statement, but it was intended that these should be carried out as soon as conditions permitted.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

The Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff gave certain further particulars as to the sinking of the Royal Oak.

There had been a continuance of enemy submarine activity. Three merchant ships had been attacked, just after the dispersal of an incoming convoy. The Karentia had been shelled, but was believed to have escaped; the Brestiane, a French ship, had been sunk; the third, the Loch Awe, had been torpedoed and abandoned, but had not sunk. An attack had been carried out against one of the U-Boats which had probably caused these losses, and was thought to have been successful. The steamship Louth had been attacked off the Mull of Galloway, but had escaped.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

In connection with the preceding Minute the Chief of the Naval Staff said that, now that enemy submarines were operating far out on the Western Approaches, the lack of Berehaven as a base for our anti-submarine forces was a serious hindrance. Even if it was not possible to use the base for air reconnaissance and anti-submarine craft, it would be a great help if the Government of Eire would permit our salvage tugs to be stationed at Berehaven. This might prove to be the thin end of the wedge.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the First Lord of the Admiralty to consult on this matter with the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.

The Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that reports of German military movements on the Western Front indicated a slow but steady drift from Dusseldorf towards the Moselle. The presence of thirteen new bridges between Trier and the Sieur had been confirmed, which pointed to an attack down the Meuse in the direction of Metz. The latest messages from General Gouraud were full of confidence. The French defences in this area were very strong. Even if the Germans were to succeed in making a dent in the Maginot Line, it was improbable that they would penetrate to any depth, and they would undoubtedly suffer very heavy losses at the hands of the French, who had prepared additional defences behind the main Maginot Line. The new dispositions appeared to indicate that the original German plan of an invasion through Belgium had been abandoned. It seemed improbable that Germany could now hope to carry out an attack through Belgium before the date which General Gouraud had given for bringing any large army could be estimated. Although
Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff considered that they would be using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

The Prime Minister said that the explanation might be found in the fact that the Germans had not so far dealt with the Western problem on military lines. Had they done so, they would, for example, have taken military measures to prevent the arrival of the British Expeditionary Force in France, and to stop the concentration of the French Army.

Continuing, the Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that German attacks had been restricted so far to the engagement of outposts. There was a report that Hitler had taken supreme command on the Western Front with Göring as his second-in-command.

General Gamelin had reported that the whole of his forces opposite the Saar had now been equipped with gas-masks proof against arsenical gas. The similar proofing of our own gas-masks would be completed within the next ten days.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

5. The Deputy Chief of the Air Staff drew the attention of the War Cabinet to the constant and repeated allusions in German broadcasts to the false reports that the Polish Army had used gas, which had been supplied by the British. These suggested the German technique of preparing the ground to justify their own use of gas in the forthcoming operations on the Western Front. The denial, which had been issued to our Press, had received little publicity, and he suggested that stronger steps should be taken to give the lie to these German reports, and that the B.B.C. should broadcast an emphatic denial.

The Prime Minister agreed. He suggested that the denial should bring out two points, first, that the German report was a lie; second, that the dissemination of such a lie was the usual prelude to the use by Germany of some prohibited weapon of war, under the guise of retaliation.

The War Cabinet agreed:

That the War Office, in consultation with the Ministry of Information, should take immediate steps to issue a strongly worded denial of the German report that we had supplied Poland with gas, which should be broadcast by the B.B.C. and published in the Press.

6. The Minister for Co-ordination of Defence drew attention to the fact that the resumés of broadcasts, which were supplied to the War Cabinet, covered foreign countries only, and did not include a summary of British broadcasts.

The War Cabinet agreed:

That the daily resumés drawn up by the Ministry of Information should in future cover British as well as foreign broadcasts.

7. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he was still without definite news as to the progress on the discussions in regard to the proposed Russo-Soviet Pact between Mr. Stalin and Mr. Molotov and M. Wajnrogi.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.
3. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs gave the War Cabinet certain additional information regarding the possible development of German policy received from the source referred to at the meeting of the War Cabinet noted in the margin. Details of the information in question are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The War Cabinet took note of the statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

9. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the previous evening a rumour had been current that the German Government had made an arrangement with the Mexican Government for the sale to Germany of oil produced by the expropriated British oilfields in Mexico. He (the Secretary of State) had instructed the News Department of the Foreign Office to ascertain the origin of this rumour, and, if possible, whether it had any foundation in fact.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

*Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1, October 15, 1939.*