CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the House of Commons (Annexe) on Wednesday, November 13, 1940, at 12.10 p.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).


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

The Right Hon. LORD BEAVERBROOK, Minister of Aircraft Production.

The Right Hon. A. GREENWOOD, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon. SIR JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon. A. GREENWOOD, M.P., Minister without Portfolio.


The Right Hon. E. BEVIN, M.P., Minister of Labour and Minister of National Service.

The following were also present:


The Right Hon. SIR ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.

Admiral of the Fleet SIR DUDLEY POUND, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.

Air Chief Marshal SIR CHARLES F. A. PORTAL, Chief of the Air Staff.

Secretariat.

SIR EDWARD BRIDGES.

Major-General SIR HASTINGS ISMAY.

Mr. L. F. BURGIS.
## WAR CABINET 288 (40).

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1. *The Chief of the Naval Staff* reported that at dawn on the 12th November the Fleet Air Arm had carried out a very successful attack with torpedoes and bombs on the Italian Fleet in Taranto harbour.

From a photographic reconnaissance on the previous day it appeared that:

(a) 1 Littorio class Battleship was down by the bows with her forecastle awash and a heavy list.
(b) 1 Cavour class Battleship was beached with her after turret under water.
(c) The stern of another Cavour class Battleship just showed in the photograph, and it seemed certain that she also had been beached.
(d) 2 Cruisers were listed to starboard in the Inner Harbour, surrounded by oil fuel.
(e) 2 Auxiliaries had their sterns under water.

The devastating effect of the attack was rather surprising in view of the fact that only 18-inch aerial torpedoes had been used. Two Swordfish aircraft had been lost during the operation.

A further attack was to have been carried out the previous night, but so far no news of this had been received.

The convoy from Halifax attacked by the *Admiral Scheer* on the 5th November had consisted of 38 ships, one of which had become detached before the attack had been carried out. Of the remaining 37 ships, 24 were now in port and four others had been located at sea. Five ships were definitely known to have been sunk by the raider, and one bombed and sunk later in the North-Western Approaches. The fate of the other three ships still remains uncertain.

A number of heavy mines had been laid in the North-Western Approaches. *Tetrarch* had reported that on the 4th November she had attacked an east-bound convoy of two laden and escorted merchant vessels in the Gulf of Sidra, and had sunk one 3,000-ton ship, and possibly a second.

The Free French at Libreville had reported that the Vichy French sloop *Bougainville*, which had been damaged during the capture of the town, was resting on a sandy bottom, but should be easily salvable.

A destroyer had reported that during the attack on the previous Friday on the east coast convoy, she had shot down two Junkers 87's.

The *Creemuir* (British 3,897 tons) had been torpedoed and sunk off Aberdeen on the night of the 11th. The *Harlaw* (British, 1,141 tons) had been damaged by a bomb, but had arrived at Aberdeen. The *Lily* (Greek 5,719 tons) had been bombed and set on fire the previous night.

Information had been received that the Germans were sending a second meteorological expedition to Greenland. Steps were being taken to deal with it.

*The Chief of the Air Staff* reported that only 46 enemy machines had been over this country on the previous day. We had destroyed one and damaged another.

The previous night 120 machines had been over this country. Our fighters had made no interceptions.

The previous night 78 bombers had been detailed to attack targets in Germany and occupied France. The weather had been bad and no reports on the results had yet been received. Two of our machines had not yet returned.

On the 11th November our bombers, based in Greece, had made a successful raid on Valona and Sordinori. Two large ships had...
been seen burning fiercely, and the intensity of the fire suggested that they had been tankers. On the previous day Blenheims and Wellingtons had attacked Durazzo, and had gutted a fuel dump. They had also attacked Valona, setting on fire a fuel and petrol dump.

The Chief of the General Staff reported that there had been a considerable increase in wireless traffic between Rome and Libya since the 9th November.

Our forces now occupied Gallabat, and the enemy were in the adjoining town of Metemma on the Italian side of the border. On the 11th November advance elements of an Indian infantry battalion had ambushed and inflicted heavy casualties on an enemy force, estimated at four companies; our casualties had been three wounded. On the morning of the 12th one company of the same battalion had cleared the ridge overlooking the frontier from the west. Later our artillery had engaged two enemy companies advancing towards the stream between Metemma and Gallabat, and had also caused fires at Metemma.

In the northern sector there had been no change.

In the Pindus sector enemy detachments were still retreating in disorder from Konitza, and the Greeks were taking many prisoners.

In the Epirus sector the Greeks were again advancing towards the River Kalamas along the whole front. Yannina had been twice bombed and considerable damage had been reported.

Two further Italian divisions, the 47th and 56th, were on their way to Albania.

A report had been received to the effect that railway and other preparations were being made for the movement of German troops into Bulgaria.

A telegram had been received from our Military Attaché at Ankara stating that the Roumanian Military Attaché had seen the Italian Military Attaché, who had advised them that there was intense nervousness in Italy that the British Fleet and Air Force would cut off Italian reinforcements for Albania. The ports of Valona and Durazzo together could only handle four ships at a time. Both Bari and Brindisi were being used as ports of embarkation. The Italian Military Attaché had also admitted that the Italians had not expected the Greeks to resist.

General Smith had had a successful visit to Turkey, but unfortunately had been unable to see Marshal Chakmak.

The War Cabinet—
(i) Took note of these statements.
(ii) Invited the Minister of Information to give special attention to publicity in the Middle East for the successful attack on the Italian ships at Taranto.
(iii) Invited the Secretary of State for War to consider whether a message should be sent to India, announcing the successful action of the Indian brigade at Gallabat.

2. The Prime Minister said that the "Naval occasion" at Taranto (see Minute 1) might redound to our advantage in many ways. First, it might influence Japan, who would realise that the paper strength of the Italian fleet was not to be reckoned upon, and that we might well be in a position to send heavy ships from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Far East. Secondly, it might have some effect on Russia. Thirdly, it brought home the importance of hitting the Italians as hard as we could. If the Greeks could maintain themselves against Italy throughout the winter, the situation in this quarter might develop greatly in our favour. We
Military assistance to Greece.

(Previous References: W.M. (40) 282nd Conclusions, Minute 2, and W.M. (40) 287th Conclusions, Minute 5.)

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

3. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that it had been arranged that Sir Samuel Hoare, who in any event was going to Lisbon to see Lord Lothian on his return journey to Washington, should pay a short visit of two or three days to this country.

The Foreign Secretary feared that M. Molotov's visit to Germany might result in Germany and the U.S.S.R. joining in some attempt to overawe Turkey. He had wondered whether it would be a good plan to instruct Sir Stafford Cripps to tell the Soviet Government that, if they tried to intimidate Turkey, the result would be an immediate breach with this country. He had concluded, however, that this action might embarrass the Turks, and he had telegraphed to Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen asking what diplomatic action we could take to help Turkey in this contingency. It would also be useful if the Chiefs of Staff would consider what military steps could be taken. The War Cabinet were reminded that the Chiefs of Staff were already examining this question as the result of the approval by the War Cabinet of their Report on the possibility of an enemy advance through the Balkans and Syria.

Attention was drawn to telegram No. 253 from our Consul at Geneva, reporting the extent to which Swiss opinion had veered in our favour.

The War Cabinet took note of this information.

4. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on Assistance to China (W.P. (40) 436).

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that his main proposal was a loan for currency purposes and a credit to cover exports from the sterling area. He thought that we could also provide technical help of various kinds. As regards a demonstration of Anglo-American solidarity with China, the last sentence of the first sub-paragraph of paragraph 4 would perhaps have been better expressed if he had said that we should make some statement as soon as we were affording practical help.

He thought that the financial proposals, when ready to be put into effect, should be notified to Japan in as unprovocative a way as possible. Thus it should be explained that the loan had a direct bearing on our own interests, and that the export credits would assist the British export market.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that it was important to explain to the United States that we were able to give this financial help to China only because of the form which that help was to take; otherwise the fact that we had made these loans might land us in difficulties in our forthcoming financial discussions with the United States Government.
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Foreign Information.

Spain. U.S.S.R.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 286th Conclusions, Minute 7.)

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 284th Conclusions, Minute 2.)

Switzerland.

China.

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In discussion, three suggestions were made as to the supply of aircraft to China. First, when we had re-equipped our forces in the Middle East, the obsolete aircraft displaced might be sent to China. (Spares might be a difficulty.) Secondly, could Russia supply more aircraft? Thirdly, were there any aircraft in America which would be of no value to us but which might be useful to China? It was agreed that these suggestions should be explored.

The Prime Minister thought the War Cabinet should approve the Foreign Secretary’s proposals. The advantage of China’s friendship to us after the war might be very great indeed. Japan’s attitude would, in the last analysis, depend on whether she believed in the mobility of our sea power.

The Secretary of State for India and Burma made the following points:

1. It would be helpful if China’s commercial needs could be made known as early as possible, while the Delhi Conference was still sitting.

2. If China was allowed to buy much oil from Burma, India (which depended on oil from Burma) might have to make dollar purchases of oil.

3. The Loiwing aircraft factory had been bombed, and the Chinese Government might want to move it to India.

4. In his Paper, the Foreign Secretary had deprecated the despatch of economic and communications missions at the present time. With the concurrence of the Governor of Burma a proposal had just been made to the Foreign Office for the despatch to Chungking from Burma of a local mission which would indicate goodwill and would have for its main purpose the discussion of local communications questions. Was there any objection to this?

The Foreign Secretary saw none.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs asked for time to consult the Dominions before our proposals were communicated to the Chinese.

The War Cabinet—

(i) Approved in principle the proposals in the Foreign Secretary’s Paper, and in particular the grant to China of a loan for currency purposes and of credits for sterling purchases.

(ii) Invited the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and the Secretary of State for India to consult the Governments of the Dominions and of India in regard to these proposals.

The Allies.

Meeting of Allied Representatives.
(Previous References: W.M. (40) 284th Conclusions, Minute 3.)

5. In reply to a question, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that it had been hoped to arrange the Meeting of Allied Representatives for Friday, the 15th November, but this was not now possible. It was hoped that the Meeting might be held one day early in the following week.

Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
November 13, 1940.