CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, April 28, 1941, at 5 P.M.

Present:

The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. LORD BEAVERBROOK, Minister of Aircraft Production.
The Right Hon. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Minister of Labour and Minister of National Service.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.
The Right Hon. LORD MOYNE, Secretary of State for the Colonies.
The Right Hon. H. D. MARGESSON, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. A. DUFF COOPER, M.P., Minister of Information.
The Right Hon. JAMES STUART, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Item 3).
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. W. D. WILKINSON.
TO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

It is requested that special care may be taken to ensure the secrecy of this document.

WAR CABINET 44 (41).

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The Right Hon. A. Greenwood, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. A. Greenwood, M.P., Minister without Portfolio.
The Right Hon. Ernest Bevin, M.P., Minister of Labour and Minister of National Service.
The Right Hon. Lord Moyne, Secretary of State for the Colonies.
The Right Hon. H. D. Macrossan, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. A. Duff Cooper, M.P., Minister of Information.
The Right Hon. James Stuart, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Item 3).
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.
The Right Hon. Viscount Cranborne, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. Lord Hankey, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Items 7 and 8).
The Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
General Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles F. A. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff.

Secretariat.
Sir Edward Bridges.
Major-General Sir Hastings Ismay.
Mr. W. D. Wilkinson.
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1. The Chiefs of Staff made the following reports in amplification of Cabinet War Room Records Nos. 600–603.

**Summary of aircraft losses since the 24th April:**

**Home Theatre—**

**Enemy—**
- 5 destroyed.
- 1 probable.
- 8 damaged.

**Our Own—**
- 13 destroyed. (8 bombers, 3 fighters, 2 Coastal Command aircraft.)

That afternoon a Stirling bomber, taking advantage of cloud, had been over Emden for three-quarters of an hour and had returned safely. It had dropped 18 500-lb. bombs and had machine-gunned the streets from a height of 1,500 feet.

News of air fighting in the Middle East was very scanty.

**Shipping casualties since the 24th April had been:**

**Ships Lost—**
- By aircraft: 1 ship about 4,600 tons.

**Ships Damaged—**
- By aircraft: 3 ships about 21,000 tons.

In addition to the above casualties, most of which had been in the North-Western Approaches, there had been some heavy losses in Greek waters, mostly Greek vessels. For the period 1st–28th April the figures in respect of Greek waters were:

- Tonnage sunk or destroyed — about 64,000.
- Tonnage damaged — about 73,000.

Particulars were given of the areas in the Western Atlantic being patrolled by units of the United States Navy.

Particulars were also given of the manner in which the submarine Regent, which had gone to Kotor to take off His Majesty's Minister to Yugoslavia and his staff, had made good her escape after finding that the port was in enemy occupation. The Commander's conduct had been cool and gallant.

It was now known that Mr. Campbell, our Minister in Yugoslavia, was a prisoner.

An important convoy had arrived safely at Malta from the Western Mediterranean.

Evacuation of our troops was proceeding. The total of our forces in Greece had been about 42,000, or 59,000 if base details were included. The latest telegram reported that some 27,000 had been evacuated, of whom 13,000 had landed in Crete. It was believed that this figure of 27,000 covered those evacuated in the last two or three days, and did not include a number of base details who had been evacuated earlier. It was hoped that these figures would be substantially increased.

The enemy had advanced from Sollum in three columns, which had penetrated some five or six miles across the frontier.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

2. Further discussion took place on the progress of operations in the Middle East, a record of which is contained in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.
3. The Prime Minister said that in view of the progress of events, he saw no reason why there should not now be a public debate in the House of Commons. The critics of the Government were few, but vocal; but they had succeeded in spreading reports of dissatisfaction which, he believed, were entirely false. His impression from going about the country was of complete national unity. Parliamentary government depended on voting, and not merely on debate. He proposed, therefore, that on the occasion of the debate, which might be on the following Thursday, the Government should put down a Resolution and make it a matter of confidence.

This view met with acceptance, but it was felt that the terms of the Resolution would require a good deal of thought. The Prime Minister said that he would speak himself, and would prefer to open the debate.

Mr. Menzies suggested that the defence of our action in sending help to Greece should be based, not so much on the guarantee we had given Greece, as on the compelling reasons of international honour which necessitated our participation in the Greek campaign. The view was also expressed that the campaign had been strategically sound. The enemy had hoped to have a walk through, and had been compelled to fight his way with considerable losses.

The War Cabinet:

(1) Agreed that arrangements should be made for a one day's debate in the House of Commons on Thursday, the 1st May, on the policy of sending help to Greece and on the conduct of military operations in the Middle East.

(2) Agreed that a Resolution should be put down by the Government and treated as one of confidence. A three line whip should be issued, and the Chief Whip should arrange for the attendance of Members of the House serving in the Forces.

(3) Invited the Prime Minister to settle the terms of the Resolution, in consultation with the Lord Privy Seal, the Minister without Portfolio, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Air and the Chief Whip.

4. The War Cabinet were reminded that on the 7th April they had decided that in future shipping losses should be published monthly, instead of weekly. The April figures were due to be published shortly. Although the losses in Greek waters had been fairly serious, the losses as a whole were much lighter than anticipated.

The Prime Minister thought that if unexpectedly low figures were now published, this might give a handle to American Isolationists at a crucial moment. He therefore thought that the publication of the April shipping losses, due to be made at the end of the month, should be deferred for the present. Publication of these figures might perhaps be put on a quarterly basis.

The War Cabinet were reminded that there was considerable pressure for publication of figures of the losses which had occurred of munitions from the United States while crossing the Atlantic. The general view of the Cabinet was against publishing information on this subject at the present time, on the grounds that the small proportion of munitions from America so lost might have an unfortunate effect on American opinion.

* Note.—This date has since been altered to Tuesday, May 6.
The War Cabinet:—

(1) Decided against the publication of particulars of munitions from the U.S.A. lost while on the Atlantic.

(2) Took note with approval of the suggestion that the publication of the April shipping losses should be deferred for the present.

5. In connection with the preceding item, the Minister of Information referred to the complaints made by our Ambassador in Washington that he was not provided with adequate information on military matters. (Telegram 1726 from Washington.)

Mr. Menzies said that the journalists and Press in the United States were strongly pro-British, but that the bulk of their news came from German sources because we did not provide them with adequate news. He thought that the dissatisfaction of Australian opinion had also been due to the dearth of news. Generally, he thought that we underestimated the propaganda value of news service.

In discussion, considerable support was expressed for this view.

The Prime Minister pointed out that in regard to the operations in Greece it would have been impossible for us to give more information, since for a period of several critical days we had been without any information ourselves. He had sent a telegram of protest to General Wavell. In conditions such as prevailed in this war, he thought that there must necessarily be periods when virtually nothing could be said about the progress of operations. But later a time would come when a full account could be given. As, for example, in the debate which had now been arranged.

The Lord Privy Seal thought that a distinction should be drawn between information about military operations, which must be kept secret, and adequate descriptions of events after they had taken place. A strong endeavour should be made to get the latter type of information published fully and quickly.

The importance of photographs was also emphasised, and the Minister of Information said that he was proposing to discuss the question with his Service colleagues in order to ensure more adequate machinery in the Services to enable rapid accounts, including photographs, to be made available as quickly as possible in regard to successful operations.

The War Cabinet:—

Took note of the discussion, and of the statement made by the Minister of Information.

6. The Foreign Secretary said that the position of Syria was serious. An attempt was being made to ascertain what action General Dentz would take if German air-borne troops landed in Syria. If he said that he would resist, we should offer to help him. If, on the other hand, he said that he would have to obey the orders of the Vichy Government, the position was grave.

The Foreign Secretary therefore favoured an approach to the French Government to deal with three contingencies: (a) German air-borne troops landing in Syria, (b) German occupation of Morocco, (c) passage of German troops through unoccupied France. We should make it clear that if the Vichy Government allowed any of these things to happen, we should hold ourselves free to take
action as military necessities might require (e.g., bombing German lines of communication in France), and should no longer be bound by our undertaking to restore the independence and greatness of France. If, on the other hand, the French were willing to resist, we should do all that we could to help them. It was important to make it clear to the French that they could not reckon on our support at the Peace Conference if they took no action to resist the enemy.

Points made in discussion:

(1) The Prime Minister thought that the most effective course would be if His Majesty's Government were to tell the Vichy Government, through the United States Government, that they would be doing a great wrong if they agreed to German troops landing in Syria, or Morocco, or passing through unoccupied France. He favoured a shorter document than the Foreign Secretary had in mind.

(2) The Secretary of State for War said that a report had been received from General Wavell that French morale in Syria was low, and that only token resistance might be offered to a landing by enemy air-borne troops.

(3) It was pointed out that Syria was a Mandated Territory, and as the Vichy Government was no longer a member of the League of Nations, we should be on strong ground in treating Syria differently from other territories administered by the Vichy Government.

(4) The Secretary of State for the Colonies thought that, from the point of view of our position at the Peace Conference, it was very desirable to free ourselves from any obligation to maintain Syria under French rule. This, however, was a long-term project.

The War Cabinet:

(a) Approved the suggestion that this matter should be dealt with by a communication addressed to the Vichy Government by His Majesty's Government, through the United States Government, on the lines proposed by the Foreign Secretary.

(b) Invited the Defence Committee to consider the terms of this communication, a draft of which would be furnished by the Foreign Secretary.

Turkey.

General Policy.
Supply of Munitions, &c.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (41) 22nd Conclusions, Minute 2.)

7. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, reviewing our policy towards Turkey, with particular reference to the continued sending of supplies to Turkey (W.P. (41) 77).

The Foreign Secretary thought that we must acquiesce in the Turkish view that Turkey's rôle must be a passive one, but that we should continue and accelerate the programme of supplies, both military and civil, to Turkey.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, as Chairman of the Committee on Allied Supplies, reviewed the position of supplies to Turkey. Military requirements were being furnished, in the first place, in accordance with the Anglo-French Agreements complementary to our treaty. As was natural, we had supplied less to Turkey of those items of which we were short, but items such as clothing or motor tyres had been supplied in full. The most serious...
arrears were in respect of articles which had been due to be supplied by France and which we had undertaken to provide after the French collapse. The difficulties of the position were increased by the fact that the Turkish armaments comprised a very large number of different types. We were, however, doing our best to obtain supplies from the United States.

There was also a long list of civil supplies which Turkey required. These included considerable quantities of raw material. Locomotives, both light and heavy, were badly required owing to the weak state of the Turkish railways. Material was also required for the coalmines at Zunguldak, which, however, were not strategically in a very sound position. It looked as though imports to Turkey could now only be brought in through Mersin and Iskanderun, and as though the Turks ought to be asked to transfer landing material to these ports from other ports which we could not now use.

If it was intended to go all out to help Turkey, this would involve:—

(i) The largest possible release of British material still due under the Agreement.
(ii) Diplomatic pressure in the United States to manufacture Turkish requirements, at some cost to our own requirements.
(iii) Priority of steel for civilian requirements of a strategic character.
(iv) Pressure on the Turks to move transport facilities.

If this policy was to be pursued, we ought to insist on our Military Mission being permanently installed at Ankara, in order that we might be better informed than at present on technical matters.

The Prime Minister thought that we must acquiesce in the view that Turkey's rôle would be a passive one; but as a neutral she might protect our flank. As regards supplies to Turkey, he saw no reason to reach any far-reaching decision that day. Events were likely to develop quickly in the Middle East. Our policy should be based on the fact that no useful purpose would be served by putting strong pressure on Turkey. Equally it would be wrong at this moment to discontinue furnishing supplies to Turkey. We should therefore continue to send supplies, but the volume should not be increased. Indeed it might be a wise precaution to diminish the despatch of articles which would have little or no value to our own forces in the Middle East if circumstances were to prevent their delivery to Turkey. The Prime Minister thought that if events should be so managed that the enemy forces did not march through Turkey, we should have derived a great benefit from the Turkish alliance. The factor which was most likely to be effective in persuading Turkey to remain faithful to the alliance would be a still further advance on the part of the United States towards the attitude of belligerent alliance.

The War Cabinet agreed as follows:—

(1) We should acquiesce in the view that Turkey's rôle must for the present be a passive one.

(2) Our policy in regard to furnishing military and civil supplies to Turkey should for the present be as follows:—

We must continue to furnish supplies. There should, however, be no increase in the volume of supplies; rather, caution should be exercised in regard to long-term projects; and no undue calls should be made on shipping space in respect of articles which would be of little service to ourselves in the Middle East.
8. The First Lord of the Admiralty said that, after consultation with the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, instructions had been issued on Saturday, the 26th April, that vessels identified as enemy vessels might be attacked within Turkish territorial waters by H.M. Ships and aircraft, provided:—

(a) Care was taken to avoid damage to persons and dwelling houses ashore.
(b) Attacks were not made within the Dardanelles Straits.

The War Cabinet:—

Gave covering approval to these instructions.

Great George Street, S.W. 1.,
April 28, 1941.
Copy of a Telegram from the Foreign Office to Washington, dated 29th April, 1941.

No. 3289.

MOST IMMEDIATE.

Please request United States Government to transmit through their Ambassador in Vichy following message from His Majesty's Government to French Government:

"If French Government allow Germans or Italians to land unopposed in Syria, or to occupy North Africa leading to West Africa and use those countries for operations against ourselves, or if they permit passage of German troops through unoccupied France, France will then have been forced from capitulation to collaboration and from collaboration to participation in the war and will suffer from both sides and gain nothing.

Such participation would constitute a departure from the condition of passive capitulation in which France received from us our guarantee to restore her independence and greatness. It would be impossible for us to maintain in any respect the distinction we have hitherto drawn between unoccupied and occupied France in the execution of our military and economic plans.

If, on the other hand, the French Government would effectively resist these encroachments, we should give them the utmost assistance in our power. It should be possible to hold Syria against any forces which the Axis could bring against it in the near future. The French and British fleets acting together in the Eastern Mediterranean could cut Axis communications with Africa, and invaluable bases would be available to us. French resistance and renewed Franco-British collaboration would go far to prevent the dangers which the French at present fear."

We should not be too hopeful of the effect of this message, but it is the best that we can do for the moment. The United States Government have a special interest in North Africa, and must be fully aware of the critical situation developing there. The arrival of United States observers may steady the situation, but events are moving fast. They will have noticed suggestions from French sources that protective United States forces should be landed at North and West African Atlantic ports. This may not be practicable politics at the moment, but some effect might be produced by visits of units of United States fleet to Dakar and Casablanca.

Short of that, it would be of great value if United States Government would indicate that they entirely share the sentiments that have inspired foregoing messages.

Please urge United States Government to instruct their Ambassador, in communicating message from His Majesty's Government, to make strong representation on their behalf on similar lines.