CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Thursday, December 21, 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. Sir Kingsley Wood, M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. Lord Hankey, Minister without Portfolio.
The Most Hon. the Marquess of Zetland, Secretary of State for India and Secretary of State for Burma (Item 1).
Sir Horace J. Wilson, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury.

Brigadier C. N. French, Controller of Postal and Telegraph Censorship (Item 4).

Secretariat:

Sir Edward Bridges.
Mr. F. Hemming.
Mr. W. D. Wilkinson.
Wing Commander W. Elliot.
Lieutenant-Colonel W. Porter, R.E.
Mr. G. N. Flemming.

The Right Hon. Viscount Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1 and 2).
The Right Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, Bt., M.P., Lord Privy Seal.
The Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. Oliver Stanley, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (Item 4).
General Sir W. Edmund Ironside, Chief of the Imperial General Staff. (Item 4).
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India and the War.

1. The War Cabinet had under consideration a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India (W.P. (G.) (39) 154) covering:—
   (a) a letter from Mr. Jinnah to the Viceroy, dated the 5th November;
   (b) the draft of a reply from the Viceroy to Mr. Jinnah.

The Secretary of State for India said that, as explained in the Memorandum, the only point on which he and the Viceroy had not at first been in complete agreement was as to the answer to be given to Mr. Jinnah's first question. The Viceroy had, however, now stated that he preferred the draft reply proposed by him (the Secretary of State for India).

The following points emerged in discussion:—

(1) Now that the Congress Ministries had resigned, the administration of the Provinces had reverted to a basis similar to that which had existed before the Minto-Morley reforms. The general situation in India continued to be peaceful, but there was some risk of a serious communal clash taking place, owing to Mr. Jinnah's precipitate action in calling for a day of rejoicing over the disappearance of the Congress Ministries.

(2) A standing offer was already open to the Congress ex-Ministries, so that they could return to office at any moment, if they so decided. The ex-Ministers had, however, placed themselves completely under the domination of the central caucus of the Congress party.

(3) On the whole, the constitutional position was more hopeful than might appear. There were already one or two "breaches in the dyke." In Assam a new Provincial Government had taken office. It had not yet met the Legislature, but there was some hope of its securing a small majority. At the Centre the Viceroy had already received one or two "feelers" from Mr. Birla. There were also strong differences of opinion within the Congress Party, although these differences were not known to the public.

(4) Under Section 93 of the Act of 1935, it was necessary to report the position to the Parliament at Westminster six months after the assumption of sole charge by the Provincial Governors. Unless, therefore, the position materially improved, Parliament would have to be invited in April next to pass resolutions continuing in force the Proclamations in virtue of which the Provincial Governors had taken charge. The Congress party might conceivably think it good tactics to arrange for disturbances to break out shortly before that date.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the draft reply to Mr. Jinnah attached to W.P. (G.) (39) 154.

Civil Defence Measures.

2. The War Cabinet had before them a Report by the Civil Defence Committee on the State of Public Opinion as regards Civil Defence Measures (W.P. (G.) (39) 159).

The Secretary of State for Home Affairs said that the members of the Civil Defence Committee were concerned at the increasing tendency, reflected in the Press, to regard the Government's policy in regard to Civil Defence measures as unnecessary and even to take the line that there would be no air raids and that the sooner life could return to normal the better. The Committee therefore...
suggested that the hypothesis on which the Government's policy had been based, should be reviewed by the Chiefs of Staff, so that the Government could then announce that they had reviewed their Civil Defence Plans as a whole, and that an examination of all the factors involved led to the conclusion that there was no case for modifying the policy previously adopted.

They had also in mind that some Civil Defence plans, e.g., the provision of hospital beds and fire-fighting arrangements, were based on a quantitative calculation as to the possible results of air raids, and that it might be useful to have an up-to-date calculation on these points.

The Secretary of State for Air said that the Air Staff agreed with the Report of the Civil Defence Committee. Nothing had yet happened to give any adequate grounds for modifying the assumptions made before the war. There had so far been no experience in dealing with heavy sustained air attacks on the scale previously envisaged, and, if attacks took place, there was no assurance that they could be completely prevented, especially if they took place at night. They fully realised that the precautions were a great burden on the country, but their existence might be one of the reasons why heavy attacks had not materialised, and it would, in their view, be a grave mistake to relax them. They considered it very important that steps should be taken to counter the spirit of false optimism, as suggested by the Civil Defence Committee, and that the Press should be induced not to give the impression that the defences were perfectly capable of dealing with the much heavier attacks which might yet eventuate.

In discussion the view was very generally expressed that it was not necessary to refer this matter to the Chiefs of Staff, more particularly as the Air Staff had already given as their opinion that nothing had happened to modify the assumptions made before the war. There might be grounds for thinking that indiscriminate attacks on the civil population, as distinct from attacks on military objectives, were not very likely, or at least that we were likely to receive some warning of them as war grew more intense. But, whatever the probabilities, it was clearly necessary to assume that attacks involving the civil population might be made, and to frame our plans accordingly.

During the course of the discussion reference was made to a number of specific civil defence measures.

The Secretary of State for Home Affairs said that the state of public opinion was making it more difficult for him to secure the completion of essential programmes of shelter provision, even in vulnerable areas, such as the Medway towns. There were difficulties in securing steel or reinforced concrete, but his more immediate concern was the lack of enthusiasm in the matter.

The First Lord of the Admiralty stressed the great importance of proceeding as rapidly as possible with the provision of shelters. They would be particularly valuable in case of sudden attack, while the moral effect of a strong push to complete the shelter programme might help to stem the drift of evacuated personnel back to the dangerous areas.

The Secretary of State for Home Affairs said that the Civil Defence Committee feared that the Christmas holidays might accentuate the tendency for children to drift back. Their general view, however, was that, if it could be made generally known that in the Government's view the need for evacuation remained as before, it might be possible to stabilise the existing position. About one-third of the children evacuated from London had returned, but individual difficulties had now been largely adjusted, and the only trouble to be feared was the tendency to complacency encouraged by the press. It was very different in the North, where in some cases practically all the children had returned to their home towns.
Reference was made to the suggestion that parents should now be asked to give a voluntary undertaking to keep their children where they were, in order to obviate the great difficulties of planning school accommodation for entirely unknown numbers of children both in the country districts and in the towns; but it was generally felt that, if parents were required to commit themselves in this way, it might encourage them to bring their children back at once.

The Secretary of State for Home Affairs said that, although there was no question of Government control in this matter, he was being pressed to give advice, and in particular to say whether, in the Government's opinion, the assumptions which had been adopted in regard to the danger of air attack were still valid. He had in mind to reply that nothing had happened to invalidate them, but that each business must use its own judgment as to the best course to adopt. It was generally agreed that this was the right line to take.

The Secretary of State for Home Affairs said that steps were already being taken to enable existing hospitals to take in more civil cases in the accommodation which was being reserved for air raid emergencies, but that he would very much like, if possible, to reduce the programme of emergency hospital provision by means of extensions formed of huts, more particularly in view of the great shortage of timber and the claims on the restricted supplies for other services.

It was agreed that this possibility should be examined on its merits and that it was not necessary to obtain further advice from the Chiefs of Staff as to the number of air raid casualties to be expected.

In answer to a request for information as to his recent interview with the Staff side of the National Whitley Council, Sir Horace Wilson said that the Staff side representatives had stressed the inconvenience falling on Civil Servants as a result of the policy of evacuation and had referred to the lack of danger in London. He had told them that there was no ground for complacency and that the policy of evacuating non-essential staffs had been fully considered and that the Government proposed to proceed with it. They had been sorry to hear this, but had not made any serious objection.

The Secretary of State for Home Affairs said that he thought that the Civil Service Staffs would accept the Government's policy in this matter long as they were strictly consistent in carrying it out and were careful to replace staff evacuated as non-essential only by staffs whose work was clearly of a more essential character.

The Prime Minister said that he had in mind, when speaking in the New Year, to take as his principal theme that we were approaching a grimmer phase of the war, and that we should prepare ourselves accordingly, and he suggested that his colleagues should take the same line. This would seem to be the best way of dealing with the difficulties to which the Civil Defence Committee had drawn attention.

The Secretary of State for Home Affairs agreed that the wishes of the Committee would be met if steps were taken in this way to make the Government's attitude clear beyond question. He said that it would be particularly helpful if emphasis could be laid on the need for the completion of civil defence preparations which were not being pressed on as quickly as possible.

The War Cabinet—

(i) Approved generally the Report of the Civil Defence Committee (W.P. (G.) (39) 159), subject to the modification that it was unnecessary to ask the Chiefs of Staff to review the assumptions on which the nature and scale of Civil Defence preparations were based.
(ii) Took note that the Prime Minister proposed to deal with this matter in his speech in the New Year, and invited Ministers, in their public speeches, to emphasise the need for continuing our Civil Defence measures and completing Civil Defence preparations.

(iii) Invited the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, in consultation with the other Ministers concerned, to re-examine the programme for the erection of temporary emergency hospital accommodation, with a view to its reduction.

3. The War Cabinet had before them the following papers:—


Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty (W.P. (G.) (39) 110).

The Lord Privy Seal said that the Committee's Report was one of a periodical series. It had been found possible in the light of experience to make several important relaxations. The country was now divided into two zones: a coastal zone (extending for a distance of 50 miles to the West of the East Coast), and an inner zone comprising the remainder of the country. A small Interdepartmental Committee had been appointed, charged with the duty of ensuring that in the coastal zone lighting was brought up to the permitted standards (which had not been the case hitherto), and, as regards the inner zone, of arranging for further relaxations of the lighting restrictions in individual cases. A good start had been made and he hoped that substantial results would be achieved. As regards street lighting, the Home Secretary's experiments had proved successful and a start on the new system of diffused street lighting, which was equivalent to the light of a starlit night, had been made in Central London the previous evening. The experiments in regard to the lighting of shop windows had also proved successful, and a modified form of lighting was now permitted. It was also clear that there had been a considerable lack of uniformity in the practice of Chief Officers of Police in the administration of lighting restrictions, and arrangements had been made for the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland to improve matters in this direction. The Committee were in favour of all permissible modifications being introduced as rapidly as possible, but they thought that this should be done without publicity of any kind. A further report would be submitted by the Committee at a later date.

The First Lord of the Admiralty thought that the conclusions did not go nearly far enough to secure a rational system of wartime lighting. In his opinion they were based upon a military fallacy, since air attack by night could not be directed against particular objectives. If the Germans were to decide on terror bombing of large built-up areas, it would be possible for them to locate such areas, even under blackout conditions, just as the Royal Air Force had in Germany. The question was not how to relax precautions, but how to remove an unnecessary burden imposed on our national life, a burden which had caused heavy casualties through accidents in the streets and had led also to a grave diminution in the production of munitions. It was important also to pay regard to the general gloom caused by the black-out which exhausted the strength of the people for meeting the resistances which would be required as the war proceeded.

The Secretary of State for Air said that the Air Staff had given the Ministerial Committee good evidence to show why in general the present lighting restrictions were essential. Every effort...
had, however, been made to meet the points raised by the First Lord, and these efforts would be continued. It must be remembered that Germany was completely blacked-out, and so also was France with the exception of Paris.

The Prime Minister said that while a higher standard of lighting was permitted in Paris, it must be remembered that within five minutes of the receipt of an air raid warning, lights of every description in Paris were extinguished.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department said that as regards factories, there was no reason why the black-out should have any bad effect at all, since factories were encouraged to employ a higher standard of internal lighting than in peace time, once they had completely blacked-out their external lighting. The lighting restrictions had, however, affected adversely industrial output in such establishments as shipyards, docks, and marshalling yards. As regards these, substantial relief was being afforded by the Interdepartmental Committee to which the Lord Privy Seal had referred. Very substantial progress had already been made by that Committee both in the coastal and in the inner zones.

The Minister without Portfolio said that as a member of the Ministerial Committee he had felt it impossible to reach a different conclusion in view of the technical opinion expressed by the Air Staff. While it was true that Paris was less blacked-out than London, it must be remembered that it was much further from the frontier, and therefore had a considerably longer period in which air raid warnings could be given.

The War Cabinet:


POSTAL CENSORSHIP.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 98th Conclusions, Minute 11.)

Proposals for Extension

4. The War Cabinet had under consideration a Note by the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence covering a Memorandum by the Standing Inter-Departmental Committee on Censorship (W.P. (G.) (39) 139 (Revis)).

The Minister for Co-ordination of Defence said that the recommendations made by the Censorship Committee arose from the representations of the Treasury that steps should be taken to prevent evasion of the Defence (Finance) Regulations. The proposal that a world-wide postal censorship warrant should be issued did not imply that world-wide postal censorship was to be instituted, but would enable the Censorship Authorities, subject to the safeguards stated in the Memorandum, to impose censorship without delay. This would be particularly useful for the purpose of test censorships. As the War Cabinet would see from his covering Note, the whole question of the Postal and Telegraph Censorship Organisation was at present under examination by a special Committee which would report to the War Cabinet.

Sir Horace Wilson said that this examination was being carried out by Mr. Stevenson, Managing Director of Woolworth's, assisted by representatives of the Treasury and the War Office, and had as its object the reduction of postal delays.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that it was essential to obtain control of individuals who might be transmitting dollar securities to the United States in evasion of the Defence (Finance)
Regulations. It was of course important for the export trade that no additional avoidable delays should be imposed on mails, but the present proposal was only to examine mails between the London area and New York, and it should be possible to ensure that the mails examined did not have to wait for a later boat. As regards the proposal to issue a world-wide warrant, there would be no publicity until such time as censorship was applied to a particular mail.

The Minister without Portfolio pointed out that a world-wide warrant would, subject to the concurrence of the Secretary of State for the Dominions, enable censorship to be imposed on mails to Eire with a minimum of delay. This might prove of importance in connection with the investigation of the leakage of information from Eire.

It was pointed out that the mail to Northern Ireland would also have to be examined, and that at the most it would only be possible to "dip" into these mails.

The President of the Board of Trade said that he was concerned at the effect of postal delays on the export trade. He realised that most of these delays were caused by shipping difficulties and not by the censorship, but he viewed with apprehension any proposal which might increase them. He would therefore like the War Cabinet to reconsider this censorship of the American mails, if it should prove in practice that it caused additional delays.

Brigadier French said that there ought not to be any additional delay. The Post Office would sort out mail from the London area addressed to New York, and the Censorship would concentrate on financial letters from the E.C. district.

The War Cabinet:

Approved the recommendations of the Standing Inter-Departmental Committee on Censorship in W.P. (G.) (39) 139 (Revise), which were as follows:

(a) That mails between the United Kingdom and the United States of America should be subjected to censorship forthwith, to a degree necessary to ensure that the Defence (Finance) Regulations are not being evaded.

(b) That similar action should be taken in regard to mails between the United Kingdom and Canada, the question of whether such mails are censored in this country or in Canada being determined in consultation between the Dominions Office, the Government of the Dominion of Canada and the Controller of Postal and Telegraph Censorship.

(c) That in connection with (a) and (b) above, a world-wide postal censorship warrant should be issued, on the understanding that censorship should not be applied to mails between the United Kingdom and the Dominions (other than Canada) without the agreement of the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, and between the United Kingdom and foreign countries (other than the United States of America and the countries for which postal censorship warrants have already been issued*) without the agreement of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

* These are detailed in the Annex to Paper W.P. (G.) (39) 159 (Revise).
5. The Secretary of State for Air informed the War Cabinet that on the previous afternoon a routine reconnaissance of 12 Blenheims had been despatched to sweep an area in the South-east of the North Sea. A formation of mine-sweepers had been observed North-west of Horns Reef. An escort vessel had opened fire on our aircraft. Four 500-lb bombs had been dropped near the ships.

Five other mine-sweepers had been seen towing paravanes 80 miles West of Sylt, and six bombs had been dropped. Our aircraft had encountered heavy and accurate fire from pom-poms and anti-aircraft guns.

Aircraft had been despatched for patrol of enemy seaplane bases from dusk onwards on the previous evening, but bad weather conditions had developed and caused a suspension of the patrol system. Some bombs, however, had been dropped on lights on the water at Hornum, near Borkum New Harbour, and in Westerland Bay, Sylt. Searchlights had been turned on and anti-aircraft fire had been encountered.

Nine unidentified aircraft had been reported at heights varying from 1,000 to 15,000 feet over the following areas:

- Hornsea,
- Lincolnshire Coast,
- Lowestoft,
- North London,
- The Wash.

Weather conditions over England had been very bad, and the patrols searching for the enemy had failed to find them.

Consultations had taken place between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry as to the action which should be taken to deal with the German air attacks on our fishing trawlers. As a result a patrol by Blenheim Fighters had been carried out both during the morning and afternoon over the fishing-fleet areas off the Norfolk coast. Several trawlers had been seen but no enemy aircraft.

The usual routine patrols and reconnaissance had been carried out by Coastal Command. Shortly after noon a Hudson on patrol had sighted a man on a wooden raft 70 miles East of Buchanness. A cargo vessel, Gronland, had arrived about the same time and picked him up.

An aircraft on the line patrol across to Norway had sighted and reported a raft with six men on board 150 miles East by North of Newcastle. On receipt of this report a destroyer had been despatched by the Naval authorities to rescue the men. An aircraft had been detailed to help the destroyer in finding the raft. This had been successfully accomplished and the men had been rescued by the destroyer.

One of our aircraft escorting a convoy off the mouth of the Tyne had observed four bombs fall close to a trawler near the convoy. Our aircraft, an Anson, had climbed higher and had then seen a Dornier 17 making off to the South-East. A patrol of our Fighters had arrived shortly afterwards and had gone in pursuit.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that it was clear that the Germans were not enjoying the same freedom of action in the air over the North Sea as formerly. In this connexion he mentioned that a very complete liaison had been established between the Air Ministry and the Admiralty for the conduct of operations over the North Sea.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.
6. The First Lord of the Admiralty informed his colleagues that a large German warship, thought to be the Deutschland, had been seen passing North through the Great Belt at 4:30 p.m. on the previous day. The vessel might either have left harbour for a short reconnaissance patrol or be intending to attack the Norwegian convoy. The First Lord gave particulars of the dispositions taken to guard against the latter possibility.

A parachute mine had been observed to fall North-East of Lower Hope Point (Thameshaven). It was estimated that there would be only 3 feet of water over it at low water.

The German policy of attacking trading vessels had continued. The steamship Lister (Swedish), a vessel of 1,300 tons, had been sunk on the 16th December by torpedo in a position 140 miles East of North of the Tyne.

The steamship Mars (Swedish) (1,900 tons) had struck a mine and sunk on the 20th December, one mile South-East of Blyth. Fifteen men had been saved (three injured) and seven were missing.

The steamship Dosinia (British) (a tanker, 8,000 tons) had been mined off the Happisburgh Light on the 21st December, but had not sunk.

The anti-submarine trawler Arctic Explorer had attacked a submarine on the 20th December in the entrance to Kirkwall with five depth charges. Three hours later Fleet Air Arm aircraft had reported sighting a large submarine on the bottom at that point. The spot was being watched by anti-submarine trawlers, and a destroyer.

The hunt had been continued until dusk on the 20th December for the submarine which had been reported by the destroyer Khartoum as having fired a torpedo at her in the approaches to the Clyde on the 19th December. No reports of success had been received.

A report from secret sources stated that the Admiral Scheer had left Wilhelmshaven on the 12th December for a long cruise, that the Leipzig had a hole in her bottom and also in the forepart of the ship caused by torpedoes, and that three destroyers damaged by mines were in Wilhelmshaven. Portions of two torpedoes, each containing a large electric motor, had been recovered from the sea bed near the two forward holes in the hull of H.M.S. Royal Oak.

The British ship Cristales (5,389 tons) had reported at 4:45 p.m. on the 20th December, that she was firing at a submarine in a position 180 miles West of Freetown. A destroyer had been sent from Freetown. The presence of an enemy submarine in this neighbourhood had not, however, been confirmed.

The First Lord said that he felt sure that his colleagues would be touched to hear that ten truck-loads of toys had been received from France as a Christmas present for the children of British sailors who had been drowned.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statements.

Finland.

7. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that information had been received that the Finns had counter-attacked with some measure of success in the Kukahjarvi sector. Russian prisoners captured were stated to be very ill-clothed and in a low state of morale. The position in this area seemed more hopeful.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.
8. The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs informed the War Cabinet of a telegram which he had received from the South African Minister in Stockholm. Dr. Gie was far from optimistic as to the future prospects of Sweden, in the light of possible developments which might result from the Russo-Finnish war.

The Cabinet took note of this statement.

9. The War Cabinet agreed:

That their Meeting on the following day should be at 11 A.M.

*Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
December 21, 1939.*