CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, March 9, 1942, at 5.30 P.M.

Present:
The Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. C. R. Attlee, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. Oliver Lyttelton, M.P., Minister of State.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. Sir Earle Page, Special Envoy from the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia.
The Right Hon. L. S. Amery, M.P., Secretary of State for India, and Secretary of State for Burma.
The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles F. A. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff.

Secretariat:
Sir Edward Bridges.
Mr. W. D. Wilkinson.

The Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. Ernest Bevin, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.
The Right Hon. Viscount Cranborne, Secretary of State for the Colonies.
The Right Hon. Sir James Grigg, Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. Brendan Bracken, M.P., Minister of Information.
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.
General Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Mr. W. F. Burgis.
## WAR CABINET 32 (42)

### CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minute No.</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Naval, Military and Air Operations</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Air operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Naval operations:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shipping losses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Far East</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military operations:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Java</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Libys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Pacific</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The position of Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Disclosure of Information</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Press</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hong-Kong</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Treatment of prisoners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relations with the Vichy Government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Free France</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supplies of petrol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Naval, Military and Air Operations.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (42) 20th Conclusions, Minute 1.)

Air Operations.

Naval Operations. Shipping Losses.

The Far East.


Java.

Libya. Russia.

1. The Chiefs of Staff reported the main events of the past week.

Heavy night-bombing attacks had been carried out on the Renault works outside Paris on the night of the 3rd/4th March, and on Essen on the night of the 8th/9th March.

Overseas operations included the landing of air reinforcements in Malta (where the enemy continued to deliver heavy air attacks), the sinking of two vessels in Palermo Harbour and the landing of air reinforcements in Ceylon.

Allied shipping losses in the preceding seven days totalled about 140,000 tons.

The Allies had lost a number of warships in the A.B.D.A. area during the seven days. These included 2 British, 1 American and 2 Dutch Cruisers.

The Rangoon demolition scheme had been put into effect on the 7th March, and the withdrawal of our troops from Rangoon had followed. Our main forces from Rangoon were withdrawing in the direction of Prome. An enemy force, which had blocked the road had been dislodged after heavy fighting.

All communication with the Allied forces in Java had ceased on the 7th March.

There was little change in the Libyan theatre.

No big changes had taken place on the Russian front. The German forces encircled in the neighbourhood of Staraya Russa were estimated to amount to several divisions; they were still holding out, and were probably receiving supplies by air. There were favourable developments on the Smolensk front. The Russians appeared to be attempting to broaden the base of the Donets salient.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statements.

2. The War Cabinet discussed the situation in the Pacific, with special reference to the position of Australia. A record of the discussion is contained in the Secretary’s Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

Disclosure of Information.

3. Reference was made to a recent speech which disclosed information which might be of value to the enemy.

*The First Lord of the Admiralty* was invited to examine the matter and to report to the Prime Minister.

The Press.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (41) 115th Conclusions, Minute 6.)

4. The view was strongly expressed that the attitude of certain organs of the Press was gravely prejudicial to the national morale. In particular, certain sections of the Press, by persistent attacks on officers holding high rank appointments, were undermining the morale of the Army.

It was also pointed out that messages were frequently sent overseas by Press Correspondents in this country which were calculated to arouse ill feeling between this country and certain of the Dominions or of our Allies.

Criticism was also made of the fact that it was not possible under the existing regulations to stop publication here of a message containing matter which had already been published overseas. The time had come when Parliament should be asked for the necessary powers in order to deal with the situation.
The War Cabinet—

(i) Agreed in principle that effective control should be established to prevent the publication in this country of articles, or the sending out of this country of messages, calculated to undermine public morale at home, or to create ill feeling between the United Nations.

(ii) Appointed a Committee comprising—

- The Lord President (Chairman),
- The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs,
- The Lord Privy Seal,
- The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,
- The Minister of Labour and National Service,
- The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security,
- The Minister of Information, and
- The Attorney-General,

to examine the methods of giving effect to this decision and to report in a week’s time.

5. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that further information had now been received which indicated that our prisoners at Hong Kong were receiving rather better treatment. He had therefore considered whether it was still desirable to make the statement in Parliament on the following day which had been approved by the War Cabinet on the 5th March. He had reached the conclusion that, while the statement should be made, a sentence should be added to the effect that there was some reason to believe that our prisoners were now receiving somewhat better treatment, but that, until the Japanese would allow representatives of the Protecting Power to go to Hong Kong, we should have reason to fear the worst.

The War Cabinet approved this suggestion.

6. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reminded the War Cabinet that it had agreed that the consent of the United States Government should be obtained before the Note appended to W.P. (42) 96, setting out the action which we proposed to take in retaliation for the use of French shipping for supplying Axis forces in Libya, was communicated to the Vichy Government. The United States Government had now expressed the wish that we should refrain from taking the action proposed for the present. He (the Foreign Secretary) felt that we ought to defer to United States wishes in this matter.

The War Cabinet concurred in this view.

7. The War Cabinet had before them a copy of a letter from General de Gaulle to the Foreign Secretary regarding the position of Admiral Muselier (W.P. (42) 117).

The Foreign Secretary reported that, since this matter had last been discussed in the War Cabinet, he had had several interviews with General de Gaulle. The latter had taken the attitude that he was not prepared to acquiesce in our request that Admiral Muselier should retain his post of Commander-in-Chief of the Free French Navy. It would seem that in this attitude he had the general support of the Free French National Committee.
In discussion, the First Lord of the Admiralty emphasised the importance of maintaining good discipline in the Free French Navy, which was now the most powerful branch of the Free French movement. Admiral Muselier had not resigned the post of Commander-in-Chief, and the Admiralty saw no possible successor to him.

After discussion, the War Cabinet agreed that the Foreign Secretary should take the following line with General de Gaulle:

(a) We adhered to our view that Admiral Muselier should retain his post of Commander-in-Chief of the Free French Navy. We made this request speaking as one Ally to another.

(b) If, however, this request was refused, we should have no alternative but to review our agreement with General de Gaulle as leader of the Free French Movement.

8. The War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (42) 113) about the possibility of sending supplies of petrol to China from Russia, and suggesting—

(a) that he should urge upon the Soviet Ambassador the importance of the Soviet Government facilitating the development of supply routes to China, especially for the carriage of petrol;

(b) steps should be taken by the British Military Mission at Chungking to ascertain how much petrol was contained in the accumulation dumps on the Burma Road.

The War Cabinet approved the action proposed by the Foreign Secretary.

Great George Street, S.W. 1,
March 9, 1942.