CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, August 17, 1942, at 5.30 p.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. C. R. Attlee, M.P., Deputy Prime Minister (in the Chair).


The Right Hon. Ernest Bevin, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.


The Right Hon. Viscount Halifax, His Majesty's Ambassador to the United States of America.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. S. M. Bruce, Accredited Representative of 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 James Grigg, M.P., 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 (Items 1-6).

Lieutenant-General A. E. Nye, Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 1-6).


The Right Hon. Viscount Cranborne, Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.

Lord Bruntisfield, Parliamentary Secretary, Admiralty (Item 4).

Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles F. A. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff (Items 1-6).

Sir Orme Sargent, Deputy Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office (Items 1-6).

Secretariat.

Sir Edward Bridges.

Major-General Sir Hastings Ismay.

Mr. Norman Brook.

Mr. W. D. Wilkinson.
## WAR CABINET 113 (42).

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Naval, Military and Air Operations.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (42) 109th Conclusions, Air Operations, Malta.

.G. (42) 112th

The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the last week.

Bomber Command had carried out two very successful raids on Mainz, where 185 acres of the town were believed to have been devastated.

The enemy had carried out a number of nuisance raids, mainly over East Anglia. Enemy losses had been 5 destroyed and 13 damaged. We had lost 4 fighters, 33 bombers, 8 Coastal Command aircraft and 2 Army Co-operation aircraft.

In the convoy action R.A.F. aircraft based in Malta had destroyed 11 enemy aircraft with the loss of 4. Apart from these operations, activity had been on a reduced scale. In the week the enemy had lost 28 aircraft for certain and we had lost 8.

Among other operations, we had carried out raids on Tobruk involving over 300 aircraft.

A full account was given of the operations connected with the Malta Convoy.

In the fighting off the Solomon Islands the Japanese had sunk the Australian cruiser Canberra and 3 out of 4 8-inch United States cruisers. United States Forces were believed to have landed on two of the Solomon Islands. Tulagi was in their hands.

Merchant shipping losses during the past week amounted to 204,000 tons. This total included 88,400 tons lost in the Malta Convoy and belated reports of the loss of 47,000 tons.

The enemy had made little progress in their attempts to reach Stalingrad from the west and south-west. They claimed to have reached the Don in the whole of the "elbow."

German progress on the Caucasus front had slowed down. In the north they had reached Elista, 175 miles west of Astrakhan. In the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains the enemy were south of the Kuban River and advancing, in the face of stout Russian resistance, in the direction of Tuapse. Further east the enemy had reached Georgievsk.

The War Cabinet—

(i) Asked the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary of State for Air to send messages on their behalf to the Commanders concerned in the Malta Convoy operation, expressing their appreciation of the gallantry shown by the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and the Merchant Navy.

(ii) Invited the Minister of Information to take steps at the appropriate time, in consultation with the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary of State for Air, to ensure that the public was made aware that the operation had achieved its purpose.

U.S.S.R.

Russian Warships and Merchant Ships in the Black Sea.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (42) 112th Conclusions, Minute 2.)

The Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported that a telegram had been received from Moscow to the effect that it had not been deemed appropriate to raise this matter at the present time.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.
3. Reference was made to the reports in the newspapers of Sunday, the 16th August, of a speech made in the United States by Air Vice-Marshall Lloyd, lately Air Officer Commanding in Malta.

The War Cabinet were informed that Air Vice-Marshall Lloyd had been asked to make a public statement by a member of the staff of the Embassy at Washington concerned with propaganda. Beyond this, nothing was known except what had appeared in the Press.

_The Secretary of State for Air_ said that in this country no such public statement could be made by an officer of the R.A.F. without his consent. For all practical purposes, no fresh rule was required, except as regards statements made in the United States.

The view generally taken was that, while public statements in the United States by serving Officers often served a useful purpose, they should be confined to a script which had been submitted to and approved by the Ambassador, and, in appropriate cases, by the Joint Staff Mission. It was undesirable that serving Officers should give interviews to the Press which might cover a wide range of subjects, though it was important that any ruling given should not be so tightly drawn as to forbid tours by junior Officers of the Services who had been concerned in particular exploits.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Air to ascertain the circumstances in which the public statement, which had given rise to this discussion, had been made.

(2) Laid it down that, as a general rule, Staff Officers of high rank, or Officers who had held high Commands, should not give interviews to the Press in the United States; nor should they make any public statements or speeches in the United States unless the script had been approved by the Ambassador and, in appropriate cases, a representative of the Joint Staff Mission.

4. The War Cabinet had before them a Note by the Deputy Prime Minister (W.P. (42) 361) covering the Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare Conditions in the three Women’s Services. The issue for consideration was whether the Report should be published forthwith, without waiting for decisions to be reached by Departments on the recommendations contained in it. It was pointed out that effect had been given to a considerable number of the recommendations during the compilation of the Report, and that it would be an advantage that this should be made clear at the time of publication.

_The Minister of Labour and National Service_ referred to the recommendations in paragraphs 150–151 and 211–212 of the Report. He would welcome further consideration of the extent to which immobile units and part-time civilian labour could be used in the three Services.

_The Secretary of State for War_ said that he had already set up a Committee to examine all mixed establishments, and that he would arrange for this matter to be considered by this Committee.

The War Cabinet’s conclusions were as follows:—

(1) Arrangements should be made for the Report to be published as a Parliamentary Paper as soon as was practicable.
(2) At the time of publication, the Press should be told that effect had been given to a number of the Committee's recommendations while the Report was being compiled, and emphasis should be laid on the fact that the Report dispelled the allegations of malpractices which had been current at an earlier date.

(3) The Service Ministers and the Minister of Information should consult together in regard to the statement referred to in (2) and the arrangements for publication.

5. The Lord President of the Council reported that Sir Findlater Stewart had had a letter from General Eisenhower to the effect that the United States military forces did not now desire to take advantage of the offer of His Majesty's Government to provide the Carlton Hotel as premises for a Club to be run in London for American Officers.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

6. The War Cabinet were given the latest information about the state of public order in India. Over the country as a whole the situation was easier, but there was some cause for anxiety about the position in Bihar. The widespread interference with communications indicated a premeditated purpose, but the results suggested that Congress had not had time to perfect their organisation. So far, there had been no serious communal trouble in any part of India.

Reference was made to the suggestion made in a telegram from a Provincial Governor that the publication in the Indian press of reports of incidents in certain areas was leading to the spread of disorder to other parts of the country. The Secretary of State for India said that the Viceroy was watching this position, and suggested that he might be left to take such steps as he thought wise to restrict publication of these reports in the Indian press.

As regards press reports in this country, it was suggested that, after the excessive publicity during the first few days, there might now be some tendency to misled the public into thinking that all danger in India was now over. The Minister of Information undertook to give some guidance to the Press on this point.

7. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India (W.P. (42) 362) suggesting that an assurance should be given to the Viceroy's Executive Council that His Majesty's Government would neither renew negotiations with Congress, or any other Indian political party, except after full consultation with the Government of India, nor modify its present policy as a result of pressure from the United States, China, or any other of the United Nations. Annexed to the Memorandum was a draft telegram to the Viceroy giving an assurance on these points.

The Secretary of State for India handed round copies of an amended draft telegram which had been prepared to meet the suggestion that the assurance should not include a reference to pressure from Allied countries.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Secretary of State for India to telegraph to the Viceroy in the terms of the amended draft.
India.
Detention of Gandhi.
(Previous Reference: W.M. (42) 109th Conclusions, Minute 7.)

8. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India (W.P. (42) 363) covering an exchange of telegrams with the Viceroy. These telegrams gave the Viceroy's answer to the suggestion that, if Gandhi fasted, he should be sent back to Sevagram, where the responsibility for looking after him would be that of his friends. The Viceroy replied that detention at Sevagram had been considered and was not regarded as practicable. It appeared that the Viceroy's advisers still held the view that, if Gandhi fasted, it would be necessary to release him unconditionally as soon as it was thought that his life was in danger.

In discussion, it was suggested that, if Gandhi was not to be held in detention, whatever the consequences, there was much to be said for releasing him as soon as he began to fast. The responsibility for deciding when the point had been reached at which further fasting would endanger his life must be left to the Medical Officer; in practice, no instruction could be given to him by the Government of India which would limit his professional discretion. Left with this responsibility, he would certainly take no risks.

The Lord President of the Council said that the Viceroy's attitude on this point confirmed his view that the War Cabinet had been right in recommending at the outset that Gandhi should be deported rather than detained in India. He feared that the course which the Viceroy now favoured would be interpreted as a sign of weakness on the part of the Government of India. He therefore suggested that it would be wise to put more specifically to the Viceroy the suggestion made in the discussion at the War Cabinet on the 10th August (W.M. (42) 109th Conclusions, Minute 7), that Gandhi should be detained under such conditions as would leave the Government of India free of responsibility for safeguarding his life and health. What he had in mind was something like the system of "house domicile," which was well known in India. Gandhi would be placed in a suitable house, where some of his friends could, if he wished, be interned with him, and a close guard would be maintained round it in order to restrict his freedom of movement, visits and communications. It would, however, be made clear that the Government assumed no responsibility for his food or living conditions or for his health and welfare. He could have his own medical advisers, and, if he was attended by a Medical Officer in the employ of the Government of India, this would be only at his own request. Having thus made it clear that they were concerned only to prevent him from carrying on his revolutionary campaign and that they assumed no responsibility for his life and health, the Government of India could then, if Gandhi chose to fast, leave him to take the consequences. The responsibility would rest with Gandhi himself and his friends and medical advisers.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Secretary of State for India to inform the Viceroy that the War Cabinet felt considerable anxiety about the policy envisaged in his telegram No. 2443-S of the 18th August. It was, in their view, important to avoid a situation in which Gandhi or his followers could interpret his release from detention as a victory in his struggle against the Government of India. In these circumstances, they wished the Viceroy to give further consideration to the possibility of modifying the conditions of Gandhi's detention, on the lines indicated by the Lord President in the course of the discussion, so as to leave the Government of India free of responsibility for safeguarding his life and health, and thus able, if he chose to fast, to leave him to take the consequences.
9. The Secretary of State for India read to the War Cabinet a telegram received from the Governor of Bombay in reply to the enquiry about the extent to which it was proposed to resort to whipping as a punishment for offences against public order. This indicated that this punishment was only intended for offences involving violence, and that it would be sparingly used.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Secretary of State for India—

(i) To inform the Viceroy that the War Cabinet, while they did not suggest the withdrawal of the statement already made regarding the availability of corporal punishment for certain offences of violence, would strongly deprecate any extensive use of this penalty, and hoped that steps would be taken to ensure that it would be used most sparingly by the courts.

(ii) To ascertain what instrument was used for carrying out sentences of corporal punishment in India.

(iii) To consider whether some statement could not be issued for the guidance of the Press in this country and the United States, indicating the limited extent to which the courts would, in fact, impose sentences of corporal punishment in these cases.

10. The War Cabinet took note of a Memorandum by the Minister of Production (W.P. (42) 353)—

(i) Setting out revised Terms of Reference for the North American Supply Committee and the Supply Council in North America; and

(ii) Stating that it was proposed to invite the High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom to be a member of the North American Supply Committee as soon as sufficient progress had been made with discussions regarding the association of Canada with the work of the various Combined Boards.

11. The Deputy Prime Minister said that this was the last meeting which Mr. Nash would attend before returning to Washington. On behalf of the War Cabinet, he would like to say how glad they had been to welcome Mr. Nash to their meetings. They hoped that he would be able to visit them again before long.

These views were cordially endorsed by the War Cabinet.

Great George Street, S.W. 1,
August 17, 1942.