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WAR CABINET 86 (42).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, July 6, 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. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Lord President of the Council.
The Right Hon. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Minister of Production.
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, His Majesty's Ambassador to the United States of America.
The Right Hon. S. M. BRUCE, Accredited Representative of the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia (Items 1-5).
The Right Hon. KINGSLEY WOOD, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.
The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CRANBORNE, Secretary of State for the Colonies.
The Right Hon. Sir JAMES GRIGG, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. Andrew Duncan, M.P., Minister of Supply (Item 7).

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 SIMON, Lord Chancellor (Items 2-7).
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.
Colonel the Right Hon. J. J. LLEWELLYN, M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production (Item 7).
The Right Hon. Lord Leather, Minister of War Transport (Items 6-7).
The Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1-4).
Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles F. A. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff (Items 1-4).

The Right Hon. Brendan Bracken, M.P., Minister of Information.
The Right Hon. James Stuart, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Items 6-7).
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (Items 1-4).
Lieutenant-General A. E. Nye, Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 1-4).

Secretary.
Sir Edward Bridges.
Major-General Sir Hastings Ismay.
Mr. Norman Brook.
Mr. L. F. Burgis.

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Naval, Military and Air Operations.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (42) 89th Conclusions, Minute 1.)

Air Operations.

1. The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the past week:

Two raids had been made on Bremen and 965 tons of bombs had been dropped.

Coastal Command had made three attacks on U-boats, one of them promising. Two enemy merchant vessels had been hit and three probably hit.

Total enemy losses for the week amounted to 11 machines for certain, 1 probable and 15 damaged. We had lost 5 fighters, 29 bombers and 1 Coastal Command aircraft.

There were signs that the enemy, who had received reinforcements from the South Russian front, intended to make heavier air attacks on Malta. During the previous week enemy losses amounted to 23 machines for certain, 5 probable and 25 damaged. We had lost 13 machines (5 on the ground) with 15 damaged.

Air operations had been on an intense scale and there were indications that the enemy air force was suffering from administrative difficulties. The enemy losses had amounted to 41 destroyed, 13 probable, 45 damaged as against 40 destroyed and 8 damaged of our own. Most of our losses had occurred when attacking ground troops. These figures were probably incomplete.

The Allied shipping losses in the previous seven days amounted to 141,000 tons.

Details were given of the attacks on the latest convoy to North Russia. Reports showed that up to date we had lost 11 ships out of 34. Five ships of the returning convoy had been mined off Iceland.

The Prime Minister said that early consideration must be given to the arrangements for escorting future convoys to North Russia.

Details were given of the recent fighting about El Alamein, where the enemy offensive had been successfully held.

In the north there had been no activity on the Finnish Front except for the bombing of Murmansk, where great damage had been done.

In the Moscow Sector German attacks had been of only local significance. Further south a major German offensive had developed in the Kursk and Kharkov Sectors, where the enemy had in some places penetrated to a depth of 50 miles. In the Crimea Sevastopol had fallen after twenty-six days' fighting, but isolated Russian units were holding out round the city itself.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statements.

2. The Secretary of State for War undertook to arrange for information to be collected by the Army authorities in the Middle East as to the circumstances which had led to the surrender of Tobruk.

The Prime Minister said that he would consult with the Secretary of State for War with a view to submitting to the War Cabinet proposals defining the conditions which must be satisfied before any General Officer in the field was justified in surrendering, and emphasising the obligation on all units to continue fighting so long as possible.
Czechoslovakia.
Relations with
Czechoslovak
Government.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (41) 71st
Conclusions,
Minute 2.)

3. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum on this subject by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (42) 280).

Our recognition of the Czechoslovak Government in July 1941 had been subject to reservations regarding future frontiers, the juridical continuity of the Czechoslovak Government, and the authority of that Government over Sudeten Germans now in British territory. Dr. Beneš was anxious for a further declaration, designed to make it clear that these reservations implied no difference in status between the Czechoslovaks and our other Allies. To meet his views, it was proposed that a further communication should be made to the Czechoslovak Government, in the terms set out in the Annex to the Memorandum, declaring that, as regards frontiers, His Majesty's Government would not be influenced by the terms of the Munich Agreement; and that, when arrangements had been made for adequate Sudeten German representation on the Czechoslovak State Council, we would also withdraw the reservation regarding the relations between the Czechoslovak Government and Sudeten Germans now in British territory. The second part of this communication would not be published until arrangements had been made for the addition of Sudeten German representatives to the State Council.

The Foreign Secretary also proposed that, in discussions with Dr. Beneš and the Sudeten German representatives, he should indicate that His Majesty's Government approved in principle the transfer to Germany after the war, in appropriate cases, of German minorities in Central and South-Eastern Europe.

On this point it was suggested that special care should be taken to make it clear that the principle approved related only to the transfer of populations and did not commit His Majesty's Government as regards the transfer of territory.

The War Cabinet—
(1) Approved in principle the proposals put forward in W.P. (42) 280.
(2) Authorised the Foreign Secretary to proceed forthwith to discuss the position with Dr. Beneš on these lines.
(3) Invited the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to communicate the text of the proposed declaration to Dominion Governments, on the understanding that the declaration would not be published until their replies had been received.

War Criminals.
Proposed
United Nations
Commission on
Atrocities.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (42) 3rd
Conclusions,
Minute 5.)

4. The War Cabinet had before them—
(a) A Note by the Prime Minister (W.P. (42) 277) regarding a scheme, agreed in principle with President Roosevelt, for the establishment of a United Nations Commission on Atrocities.
(b) A Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (42) 204) covering a Memorandum by the Law Officers of the Crown setting out the issues involved in the trial and punishment of war criminals.

In discussion, it was explained that the proposed Commission on Atrocities would be purely a fact-finding body. Its functions would be somewhat similar to those of the Committee appointed in September 1914 to investigate reports of German atrocities in Belgium; but its composition would be international and it would report to the United Nations.

Separate arrangements would have to be made for the trial and punishment of particular war criminals.
The War Cabinet—

(1) Approved in principle the proposal for the appointment of a United Nations Commission on Atrocities, on the lines indicated in W.P. (42) 277.

(2) Invited the Prime Minister to appoint a small Committee of Ministers (including the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Privy Seal, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Information and the Attorney-General) to work out the details of a scheme, covering both the fact-finding Commission and the trial and punishment of particular war criminals, on the general lines indicated in W.P. (42) 264.

India.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (42) 74th Conclusions, Minute 3.)

5. The War Cabinet had before them two Memoranda by the Secretary of State for India (W.P. (42) 255 and W.P. (42) 271) setting out the policy likely to be adopted by Gandhi and the Congress Party, and the counter-action which might be necessary.

The War Cabinet—

Decided to take note of these Memoranda, without at this stage endorsing all the Viceroy's suggestions.

Parliament.

Debate on the shipping situation.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (42) 81st Conclusions, Minute 1.)

6. The War Cabinet were informed that a request had been made for a Debate in the following week on a group of Votes, including that for the Ministry of War Transport, the object being to secure a debate on the Shipping Situation. A strong desire had been expressed that the Debate should not be held in secret.

The War Cabinet were reminded that a Debate on the Shipping Situation had been held in Secret Session not very long ago, in which the Government spokesman had replied very effectively to the critics. The desire for a further Debate arose largely out of the particulars of American shipping losses published in the United States. As a result, statements had been appearing in the Press suggesting that very large numbers of ships had been lost, and some alarming rumours were in circulation.

It was explained that the United States practice was to publish the names of ships lost when survivors were landed in American territory. No tonnage figures were mentioned. The published particulars of losses were thus incomplete and misleading. The Prime Minister, on his recent visit to the United States, had suggested to the United States authorities that they should consider stopping the publication of these particulars.

The point for decision by the War Cabinet was whether the Debate should take place in Secret Session. After discussion, the War Cabinet agreed as follows:—

(1) The Lord Privy Seal, as Leader of the House, should explain that it was not possible for the Government to deal with the question of shipping losses in Public Session. If, therefore, the Debate took the form of a discussion of shipping losses, it would have to take place in Secret Session. If, however, it was desired to confine the discussion to other aspects of the shipping situation in which the House had recently shown an interest, the Debate would be held in Public Session.

(2) If the Debate took place in Secret Session, the actual figures of shipping losses would not be disclosed, but the main factors of the situation could be explained in general terms.
7. The War Cabinet were informed that representatives of the Ministry of Aircraft Production had given evidence before the Fighting Services Sub-Committee on the 30th June. Questions put made it clear that the Committee wished to be given the detailed production programme of gliders, &c., and the dates by which the different stages of production were due for completion. This information had been refused, on the ground that it had an important operational significance and that the Government were not prepared to disclose it.

Although this position had been reaffirmed by the Minister of Aircraft Production in a letter dated the 3rd July, the Chairman of the Sub-Committee had nevertheless pressed that he should appear before them to give evidence on Tuesday, the 7th July.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Agreed that the particulars asked for should not be disclosed.

(2) Took the view that the Minister should appear before the Committee and should explain that the evidence asked for clearly concerned issues of an operational or policy character, which, in the Government's view, fell outside the terms of reference given to the Committee by the House.

Reference was also made to a letter sent to the War Office, on behalf of the Sub-Committee of Production and Supply (A), asking for evidence on "the present tank situation, whether production is considered satisfactory, and whether the tanks and their armaments now in extensive production are designed to meet all likely requirements in the field."

The War Cabinet—

(3) Agreed that most, at any rate, of the particulars covered by these enquiries were outside the Committee's terms of reference. The Secretary of State for War was authorised to deal with the matter on this basis, keeping in close consultation with the Minister of Aircraft Production, as regards the exact terms of reply sent.

Reference was also made to certain other requests from Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Committees for information about the development of munitions of war. In dealing with these requests, Ministers would be guided by the general rule that, while it was within their discretion to disclose information in appropriate cases to Parliamentary Committees or Members of Parliament, there was no obligation to disclose information if it would be contrary to the public interest to do so.

*Great George Street, S.W. 1,*  
*July 6, 1942.*