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W.M.(43) 44th CONCLUSIONS, MINUTE 2.

Confidential Annex.

(22nd March, 1943 - 5.30 p.m.)

SUPPLIES TO
RUSSIA.

(Previous
Reference:
W.M.(43) 42nd
Conclusions).

The War Cabinet were informed that the enemy had effected a strong fleet concentration in Northern Norway. This made it an unacceptable risk to send convoys to North Russia, unless they were escorted into the Barents Sea by capital ships of the Home Fleet. The Defence Committee had always considered that it was an unacceptable risk to send capital ships of the Home Fleet into the Barents Sea. The decision had therefore been reached that the sailing of the March convoy to Russia would have to be postponed.

The question had then arisen whether, if the sailing of the March convoy was postponed, the escort vessels which would have accompanied the convoy should be used to combat the U-boat menace in the North Atlantic.

Authority had been given for this to be done, and as the result it had been possible to establish forthwith support groups, which would be available to help our convoys to fight their way through the U-boat concentration in the North Atlantic.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he had consulted President Roosevelt, who had agreed that postponement of the sailing of the March convoy was necessary. This decision would, of course, have to be conveyed to Premier Stalin, but this had not yet been done. In the meantime the March convoy was being kept loaded, and loading was also proceeding in the United States of two U.S. vessels which had been earmarked to form part of the May convoy.

The Prime Minister added that, as it had been necessary to postpone the sailing of the March convoy, he had thought it right to use the escort vessels, which would have accompanied the convoy, to help combat the serious situation in the North Atlantic, although it might take from 14 to 18 days to re-constitute the escorts required for the North Russian convoys, when circumstances permitted the sailing of these convoys. to be resumed.

The War Cabinet took note, with approval, of the action taken in this matter.

Offices of the War Cabinet,
S.W.1.



