CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Thursday, 18th May, 1944, at 6-15 p.m.

Present:
The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.
The Right Hon. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Minister of Production.
The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Minister of Production.
The Right Hon. JOHN CURTIN, M.P., Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia.
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CRANBORNE, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. SIR ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. LORD LEATHERS, Minister of War Transport (Items 5-6).
The Right Hon. BRENDAN BRACKEN, M.P., Minister of Information.
The Right Hon. LORD CHERWELL, Paymaster-General.
Mr. C. U. PEAT, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Supply (Items 5-6).
Admiral of the Fleet SIR ANDREW CUNNINGHAM, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (Items 4-6).

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. P. FRASER, M.P., Prime Minister of New Zealand.
The Right Hon. LORD BEAVERTON, Lord Privy Seal.
The Right Hon. SIR JAMES GRIGG, M.P., Secretary of State for War (Items 5-6).
The Right Hon. HUGH DALTON, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.
Colonel the Right Hon. J. J. LLEWELLYN, Minister of Food (Items 5-6).
The Right Hon. the EARL OF SELBORNE, Minister of Economic Warfare.
The Hon. SIR ALEXANDER CADOGAN, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1-3).
The Right Hon. HARCOURT JOHNSTONE, M.P., Secretary, Department of Overseas Trade (Items 5-6).
Marshal of the Royal Air Force SIR CHARLES F. A. PORTAL, Chief of the Air Staff (Items 5-6).

Field-Marshal SIR ALAN BROCK, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 5-6).

Secretariat:
SIR EDWARD BRIDGES.
Lieutenant-General SIR HASTINGS L. ISMAY.
SIR GILBERT LAITHWAITE.
Mr. W. S. MURRIE.
## WAR CABINET 65 (44).

### 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>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italy, Burma and Far East.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Policy towards Turkey</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Naval Construction Programme</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>United Kingdom Import Programme</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Prisoners of War</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. The Prime Minister informed the War Cabinet of the latest developments in Italy, Burma and the Far East.

Policy towards Turkey.

(Previous Reference: W.M.(44)64th Conclusions, Minute 1.)

2. The War Cabinet had before them:

(a) A Memorandum by the Minister of Economic Warfare (W.P. (44) 242) on Economic Policy towards Turkey.

(b) A Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (44) 244), recommending that in the immediate future our policy towards Turkey should be as follows:

(i) We should begin slightly to modify our attitude of aloofness to take into account the new co-operative spirit of the Turks, but not abandon it.

(ii) The ban on arms supplies should remain and no definite response should be made to Turkish hints for resumption of military conversations unless and until the military authorities so desired.

(iii) We should continue our economic warfare campaign aimed at the disruption of Turco-German supplies, details of the next stages of which were given in the Memorandum by the Minister of Economic Warfare.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs commended the proposals in his Memorandum to the War Cabinet. There seemed advantage from all points of view in continuing a stern economic policy towards Turkey though, in view of their recent decision to cut off supplies of chrome to the Axis, the policy of extreme aloofness which we were at present working need not be pursued to the same extent as hitherto.

The President of the Board of Trade said that if it was desired, on grounds of policy, to send some supplies to Turkey, no difficulty would arise under certain heads, e.g., raw wool and some chemicals, but that he would be opposed to making available supplies of further cotton piece-goods or hides.

The Prime Minister thought that, while a slight easing of our attitude would be justified, we should be at pains to make it clear to the Turks that we were still far from satisfied with their attitude, and that their change of policy over chrome by no means went as far as we would wish. We should bring it home to them that they had missed their market but if, in fact, as the campaign progressed, they showed signs of wishing to join the Allies, there would unquestionably be distinct advantage to us in their doing so. In his handling of the situation, our Ambassador should have this in mind and direct his course accordingly.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the proposals of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Economic Warfare as set out in W.P. (44) 244 and W.P. (44) 242, subject to the points made in the discussion by the Prime Minister and the President of the Board of Trade.
3. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs told the War Cabinet that he had recently put it to the Russians that if they wished us to allow them to take the lead in Roumania, they should be prepared to reciprocate by allowing His Majesty's Government to do likewise in Greece. He had just heard officially from the Russian Ambassador that the Russians had agreed that His Majesty's Government should play the hand in Greece. They had asked, however, whether the United States would mind this, to which he had replied that he was sure that no difficulty would arise over that.

The War Cabinet—

Took note with satisfaction of the statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

4. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty on the new Construction Programme 1944 (W.P. (44) 245). The 1944 Programme was as follows:—

- Redesign the 4 "Lion" class battleships and proceed with the production of 5 Triple 16-inch Turrets of revised design.
- 5 6-inch Cruisers.
- 22 Fleet Destroyers.
- 20 Submarines.
- 3 Sloops (including 3 authorised in previous programmes).
- 32 Small type M.T.Bs.
- Miscellaneous small craft.

In addition the programme included provision for such numbers of landing ships and craft as would, broadly speaking, absorb capacity for a further 12 months. But the position would be reviewed and a more specific submission would be made to the War Cabinet as soon as the outlook was reasonably clear.

Authority was asked to place orders in the Dominions for a further 36 L.S.Ts. No final decision had been taken about the construction of further L.S.Ts. in this country when those already authorised had been completed.

The First Lord of the Admiralty pointed out that the 1944 Programme estimated the cost at £93 millions as compared with a total of £203 millions for the 1943 Programme. The following were the main features of his programme.

**Battleships.**

He attached considerable importance to approval being given to revising completely the design of the Lion, Temeraire, Conqueror and Thunderer, and to proceeding with the construction of the 6 16-inch turrets for the first two named of these ships so that they could be laid down in the 1945 Programme.

**Cruisers.**

Excluding very old ships, we had now only some 40 cruisers. He proposed that 5 should be laid down this year. Their armament would be 12 6-inch guns, 12 4-5 A.A. guns on power-mountings. They would have very long endurance, and would be completely equipped with the latest types of Radar.

If very heavy casualties were sustained in "Overlord," he might ask for further cruisers to be laid down this year. We had already lost 29 cruisers during the war.

**Destroyers.**

We had lost 139 in the war and now had 90 fleet destroyers and 138 escort destroyers. About 100 were building or on order. He asked for 22 as compared with 49 last year.
Submarines.

We had lost 81 in the war. We now had 132 operational submarines, and 34 in training, while 85 were building or on order. He proposed to include 20 "A" Class submarines in the Programme.

Other Types.

No additions were proposed to the existing programmes of escort vessels. He asked for approval to order 5 sloops, of which 3 could be reinstated from programmes approved in 1941 and 1942. He attached great importance to placing an order of 36 L.S.T.s to be built in the Dominions, and also to the programme of landing craft. During the last three years, we had turned out an average of 2 landing craft a day and one small seagoing craft a day. The labour employed in building these small craft was in the aggregate very considerable.

The Minister of Production said that it would be a great help if steps could be taken to accelerate the completion of the 45 L.S.T.s now under construction in this country.

Having regard to the acute shortage of man-power, he thought that there would have to be a substantial cut in the Admiralty allocation of industrial man-power about the middle of 1945, and he suggested that the rate of production of the long-term projects included in the programme should not be settled until the forthcoming man-power review had been completed.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that his main concern was with the long-term projects, particularly capital ships. He hoped that no decision need be taken now as to the balanced fleet which the post-war navy would require. He did not, however, object to work being started on the gun turrets for the Lion and Temeraire, or to the redesign of 4 battleships. Apart from this, it seemed to him that the limiting factors on the programme were factors other than financial.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that throughout the war the Admiralty had not been allowed to carry out any long-term projects. The time had now come when we must think of our requirements for the Far East war, and also for the sort of fleet which we would have if we were to exercise due influence in the transitional period.

The Secretary of State for Air said that as it was clear that the man-power shortage would continue after the end of the war with Germany, he thought that strong justification would be necessary before man-power was expended on projects which would not mature until, say, 1950. He also suggested that if long-term projects were under consideration, the position of all three Services should be looked at.

The Minister of Labour and National Service attached importance to maintaining in this country a labour force for shipbuilding in which a due balance was kept between naval shipbuilding and merchant shipbuilding. He hoped, therefore, that the Minister of War Transport would be asked to state the commercial fleet which this country would require for essential trade purposes after the war.

The Prime Minister recalled the various stages of the battleship controversy over the last 30 years or more. In his view, the sovereignty of the battleship was still maintained. The submarine
was not regarded as a real risk to a battleship with an appropriate escort. No doubt the battleship was exposed to great risks if within the range of shore-based air forces. But in the big open spaces, if attended by an aircraft carrier, the battleship still held its sway.

With the exception of the King George V class, which were armed with 14-inch guns, all our battleships were now very old. No work had been done on the 4 battleships, which it had been proposed to lay down just before the war. The only battleship on which we were still working was the Vanguard, and he hoped that that Admiralty would do their best to complete this ship in time for the autumn of 1945. He hoped that the Admiralty would go in for complete redesign of the 4 battleships now in question, so as to incorporate all the latest improvements.

(The First Sea Lord confirmed that this was the case.)

Looking at the long-term position, it was clear that after the war we should be very badly off in battleships as compared with the United States. At the same time, he did not think that this was a position which need alarm us very much, and it might prove that the United States had put too much of their resources into battleship construction. Further, he thought the United States might find man-power difficulties in maintaining the very large fleet which they had built up. It was also worth remembering that at the present time we could build up a line of battle which should be capable of beating the Japanese Fleet.

Some discussion ensued as to the future of battleships after the war. The First Lord of the Admiralty pointed out that we had lost only two battleships in this war by air attack, and in those cases they had not had the protection of aircraft carriers.

The Paymaster-General said that he wished his view to be recorded that after the war air power would gain the mastery over battleships. The Lord Privy Seal concurred in this view.

The Prime Minister said that he saw no reason to lose faith in the battleship at the present time, but of course the position would have to be reviewed in the light of experience.

Cruisers.

The Prime Minister said he felt a little doubtful about the Admiralty programme of cruisers. Aircraft carriers now carried out a good deal of the work of scouting previously carried out by cruisers. He also questioned the advisability of armament not exceeding 6-inch guns.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that the cruisers proposed would be ships of about 14,000 tons, would have 12–6-inch guns, and be capable of a very rapid rate of fire.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that the strength of these ships would lie in the hitting power of 12 guns, capable of rapid fire. This, he thought, would be very effective. A 6-inch cruiser would not be outranged by an 8-inch cruiser since a cruiser would not hope to engage another cruiser at a range over 20,000 yards. The United States were building some 6-inch-gun cruisers and some 8-inch-gun cruisers. The latter were very big ships.

The Prime Minister said that he still thought that there was something to be said for building a smaller number of rather larger cruisers.

Fleet Destroyers.

The Prime Minister referred to the tendency to include more and more improvements in these ships, with the result that they got larger and larger and virtually became little cruisers. What was more serious was that this increase in size meant that destroyers ceased to be hunters and joined the class of the hunted. He thought that a great effort should be made to reduce the size of these vessels.
The First Lord of the Admiralty said that the destroyers proposed would be vessels of 2,700 tons. They would have 6 guns. The great weight was mainly due to the propulsion machinery and to the necessary endurance. He did not think it would be possible to build lighter ships for this purpose until means had been found of providing a far lighter type of propulsion. This was being intensively studied.

The First Sea Lord said that he cordially agreed with the importance of reducing the size of destroyers. But in the circumstances of the Japanese war he saw no prospect of reducing the size of the destroyers it was proposed to include in the 1944 programme.

Landing Ships and Craft.

The Prime Minister of Australia said that he thought that the Government of Australia would find great difficulty in building any more L.S.T.s.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that originally it had been proposed to place orders for 42 of these ships in the Dominions, including 6 to be built in Australia. As a result of communication with the Australian Government, we understood the Australian difficulties and were not asking them to build any of these ships this year.

The Prime Minister said that the United States Government had at one time reached the programme of 55 of these ships a month, and that they then proposed to drop the programme to 40 a month. We strongly urged them not to make this reduction. They had replied that it had only been possible to maintain the higher figure for a short time as a result of great efforts. We had, however, made it clear to them that, if they reduced the programme, the result might well be a limitation on the contribution that we could make to the war in the Far East in 1945.

The Minister of Production said that the Americans had now reinstated 65 L.S.T.s. to the programme as from the end of the year. Although these additional ships had not been assigned to us, there was a strong presumption, in view of previous negotiations, that we should get a considerable number of them.

The War Cabinet's conclusions were as follows:

1. The New Construction Programme, 1944, proposed by the First Lord of the Admiralty was approved.
2. The completion of the L.S.T.s. under construction in this country should be accorded the highest priority.
3. Note was taken of the Minister of Production's suggestion that, in view of the man-power situation, no firm decisions should be taken as to the rate at which work should proceed on the long-term items in the programme until the forthcoming man-power review had been completed.

5. The War Cabinet had before them a note by the Lord President of the Council (L.P. (44) 91) proposing a reduction in the United Kingdom import programme to meet 'Overlord' shipping requirements.

The note explained that in order to provide the essential maintenance requirements of the forces put ashore in 'Overlord,' it would be necessary to make some reduction, either in the United Kingdom import programme or in the 'Bolero' import programme. For operational reasons no reduction could be made in 'Bolero' shipments and it appeared, therefore, that the only way of meeting the 'Overlord' requirements was to impose a cut of some 180,000 tons a month on the United Kingdom import programme over a period of two months or more.
The Prime Minister said that there was no doubt that the "Overlord" requirements must be met and the only question was whether this country could stand a further cut in the import programme. It was important that the United States Government should realise the extent of the sacrifices that we were making, and it might be desirable that he should send a message on the matter to the President.

The Minister of War Transport said that it had been contemplated that throughout 1944 we should import at the average rate of 2 million tons a month and that he had indicated to the United States Government that our target for the year was 25 million tons. He was confident that we should receive 12 million tons in the first half-year and had good hope that a further 12 million tons would be imported in the second half-year. Having regard to the expected sailings with cargoes for discharge in this country, and to certain arrangements to ease the strain on berth facilities at the ports and on inland transport (e.g., by bringing in large quantities of wheat and iron ore) he hoped that the actual reduction would be less than 180,000 tons a month for the two months in question. In his view the issue was hardly of sufficient importance to justify the Prime Minister in approaching the President.

The Minister of War Transport referred to a difficulty which had arisen in connection with the "Bolero" import programme, in that the United States Government were sending to this country ships considerably in excess of the numbers which had been agreed on. Berthing facilities for these ships could not be provided and many of them would have to stand by in British waters awaiting discharge. This had been made clear to the United States Government and they had been told that they must themselves settle, within the agreed numbers, the order of priority in which their "Bolero" cargoes were discharged.

The Minister of Food said that our food stocks would have diminished by 1·2 million tons between the beginning of the year and the end of June. The proposed cuts would further diminish our reserves but, provided that reasonable imports of food could be secured in the second half of the year, it would be possible to carry on without making any cuts in food rations. Butter was the commodity in shortest supply. He drew attention to the commitment to supply 750,000 tons of food to S.C.A.E.F. at the initial stage of the invasion of the Continent, and pointed out that if our stocks fell below the danger level it might be necessary to give notice that we could not fulfil this commitment.

The following points arose in discussion:—

(a) The Paymaster-General said that it seemed probable that in three months' time our stocks might have fallen as low as the Spring 1943 level, and suggested that serious consideration should be given to the cancellation of the commitment to supply 750,000 tons of food to S.C.A.E.F.

(b) The Minister of Production drew attention to the fact that owing to the arrangements for loading cargoes any cut in raw materials would probably not affect imports of steel but would fall mainly on miscellaneous items such as timber, where the effect of the reductions might be serious.

The Minister of War Transport said that he was reasonably confident that the balance of cargo could be fairly maintained.

(c) It was made clear that the cuts would not affect imports of food from Australia and New Zealand.

(d) The Prime Minister of Australia said that he had been impressed by the evidence of war strain in the population of this country. The Dominions were most anxious to make the greatest possible contribution to the United Kingdom and he suggested that if some arrangements could be made, under which the Dominion Governments would be consulted at an earlier stage as to what contribution they might make to the general pool of resources
available to the United Nations, they might be able to suggest ways and means of helping more effectively.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Agreed to the proposal that some reduction should be accepted in the United Kingdom import programme, in order to enable the essential maintenance requirements of "Overlord" to be met.

(2) Agreed that it was not necessary for the Prime Minister to address a communication to the President at this juncture about these reductions. The matter should, however, be noted in order that it might be brought to the attention of the United States Government at some suitable opportunity.

Prisoners of War.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (44) 64th Conclusions. Minute 3.)

6. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that information about the officers who had been killed after escaping from a German prisoner of war camp was beginning to appear in the Press. He therefore proposed that a statement, which he would prepare in consultation with the Secretary of State for Air, should be made in the House of Commons on the following day. No reply had yet been received from His Majesty's Minister at Berne and the statement would simply give the bare facts, as known to us, and inform the House that urgent enquiries were being made. Full information had been sent to the Dominion Governments.

The War Cabinet—

Agreed that a statement on the lines proposed by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should be made in the House of Commons on the following day.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
18th May, 1944.