CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, 25th September, 1944, at 5.30 p.m.

Present:

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

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. Viscount Cranborne, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
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. Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production.
The Right Hon. James Stuart, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Item 11).
Mr. Duncan Sandys, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Supply (Item 5).
Mr. P. J. Noel Baker, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of War Transport (Items 9–11).
Vice-Admiral Sir E. Neville Syfret, Vice-Chief of Naval Staff (Items 1–6).

The Right Hon. Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Privy Seal.

Colonel the Right Hon. Oliver Stanley, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies (Items 9–11).
The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. the Earl of Selborne, Minister of Economic Warfare (Items 6–11).
The Right Hon. W. Whiteley, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Item 11).
Mr. Ernest Thurtle, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Information (Item 5).
Sir Orme Sargent, Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1–10).
Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 1–6).

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

Secretariat:

Sir Edward Bridges.
Mr. W. S. Muririe.
Major-General E. I. C. Jacob.
Mr. L. F. Burgess.
**WAR CABINET 127 (44).**

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1. The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the previous week.

Bomber Command had made 2,600 sorties and dropped 9,360 tons of bombs, 6,000 of them on Germany. It was now believed that in the attack on the Tirpitz on the 15th September a hit had been obtained in the fore part of the ship with a 12,000-lb. bomb.

United States heavy bombers had flown 2,800 sorties, dropping 4,470 tons of bombs. 650 sorties had been flown carrying supplies to the Army in France and Holland. 110 aircraft had taken supplies to Warsaw, two of which had been lost. In all, 40 British and 36 United States bombers had been lost during the week.

The Allied Expeditionary Air Force, whose losses amounted to 91 aircraft, had flown 7,460 sorties. 5,173 sorties had been flown in the Airborne Operations and their subsequent support, 3,139 being by powered aircraft and 2,034 by gliders. Losses in powered aircraft had been 146. The total lift had been some 22,000 men and 2,600 tons of stores and equipment. The weather had been unfavourable, but on the whole the air part of the operation had been successful.

Coastal Command had sunk 2 submarines and possibly damaged 3 others.

10,900 sorties had been flown and 8,700 tons of bombs dropped. Forty-eight enemy aircraft had been destroyed as against 57 Allied. Attacks had been made against shipping in the Formosa area. It was claimed that 1 transport, 7 freighters and a tanker had been sunk and 197 small vessels damaged.

There had been no shipping losses from enemy action during the previous week.

On the night of the 18th September H.M.S. Stayner had sunk 3 E-boats north of the Straits of Dover, taking 67 prisoners. Havre had been cleared of mines. At Ostend a small number of ships could now be berthed.

A U-boat had been destroyed near Crete. It was thought that there were only 2 U-boats left in the Mediterranean.

A convoy of 33 ships had arrived in Russian ports without loss.

The main operations during the previous week had been the thrust to link up with the airborne troops dropped on the 17th September. This had been achieved so far as concerned the two United States Airborne Divisions. But one brigade of the British Airborne Division dropped at Arnhem had been definitely lost. Some contact had been made with the other brigade of the Division and further efforts to this end were in progress. Further to the south the Germans had twice pushed into the corridor, interfering with our communications, but the position had been re-established.

The Canadians had now reached the banks of the Scheldt at Antwerp. Contrary to reports, Belfort still remained in German hands. Generally speaking, enemy resistance was stiffening, but the main Allied difficulty was still the supply situation.

In the Adriatic sector considerable progress had been made and our troops had captured Rimini and were now moving into open country. In the centre the American forces had cleared the main crest of the Apennines and were approaching the Bologna-Rimini road.

Progress had been made in the north and Tallinn had been cleared. Minor progress had been made on the Hungarian-Czechoslovakian frontier. The Russians had also made a pronounced thrust to the west in the neighbourhood of Arad.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of these statements.

Production.

2. In connection with the preceding item, the question was raised whether an endeavour ought not to be made to ensure that ships returning from Russian ports carried cargoes of timber. This might mean some delay in the turn-round of ships, but, having
regard to our urgent need to build up stocks of timber, this might well have to be faced.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Minister of Production, in consultation with the Minister of War Transport, to enquire into this matter.

Foreign Affairs.

Bulgaria.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (44) 111th Conclusions, Minute 6.)

Russia and Poland.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (44) 123rd Conclusions, Minute 9.)

3. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the terms for the Bulgarian Armistice were being settled by the European Advisory Council. The Russians and the United States had agreed that the Bulgarians should be told that before discussions could be concluded they must withdraw their troops from Greece and Yugoslavia. It had also been agreed that the terms of the armistice should be presented at Ankara.

The question whether a representative of General Wilson should sign the armistice, as well as a Russian General, had not yet been settled.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs gave details of an interview which the British and American Ambassadors had had with Marshal Stalin, at which the decisions of the Quebec Conference had been communicated to the Marshal. Marshal Stalin had made certain observations regarding the situation at Warsaw. His attitude towards the Poles now seemed more favourable, but the population of Warsaw was in sore straits and very short of food.

The War Cabinet—

Requested the Chiefs of Staff to suggest to the United States Air Command that they should consider undertaking a further flight to Warsaw, dropping mainly food supplies.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he had seen M. Raczkiewicz, the Polish President, who was still considering the unanimous decision of the Polish Cabinet that General Sosnkowski should be removed from his post. It remained uncertain whether the Polish President would comply with this request. But M. Mikolajczyk, who had stated he would resign if the President did not accept his Cabinet’s recommendation, had agreed to hold his hand for the moment. General Anders had stated that General Sosnkowski’s retention, or otherwise, was a matter of indifference to the Polish Army.

4. The War Cabinet was informed that two rockets had been launched (on the 18th September), of which one had fallen in the London area. Since then none had fallen in this country.

During the week 83 flying bombs had been launched from aircraft, of which 11 had reached the London area. Two enemy aircraft launching flying bombs had been destroyed the previous night.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of this statement.

Future Scale of Attack by Flying Bombs and Rockets.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (44) 122nd Conclusions, Minute 2.)

5. The War Cabinet had before them a Report by the Chiefs of Staff (W.F. (44) 534) on the future scale of attack by flying bombs and rockets. The Chiefs of Staff stated in their Report that the attack by flying bombs might persist for some considerable time on an average of about 20 launchings a night, of which 4 might reach the London defence region. There had been no rocket firings for a week, but the possibility of attack could not be entirely ruled out until the whole of Holland West of the line running North and South through Eindhoven had been overrun. The Chiefs of Staff recommended that there should be no public statement on the rocket firings, and suggested that the matter might be reviewed in a week’s time.
The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security said that, while he had no strong views on the matter, he thought that on the whole it might be best to make a statement in Parliament. It was nearly three weeks since the attacks started, though there had been a lull for a week. Parliament was about to meet, and it was probable that the Germans must by now have received some information about the fall of the rockets. If the War Cabinet wished a statement to be made, it could be done as a special statement at the end of Questions, or else the Prime Minister might deal with the matter in his forthcoming speech. He thought it would be quite easy to restrain the Press from giving details which might be of assistance to the enemy.

The Minister of Aircraft Production thought that, as the Germans had said nothing about the attacks, it would be far better for us also to remain silent. There was no particular demand for publicity, and we ought to avoid anything which might give the Germans encouragement.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Information, confirmed that there was no particular demand for publicity. He said that, if it were decided to make an announcement, there should be no difficulty in restraining the Press.

The view of the War Cabinet was that it would be best to leave well alone and say nothing—at any rate until we could definitely say that no further threat existed.

It was pointed out that statements might soon be published in the American Press, as people crossing the Atlantic would tell the story; but it was thought that, if approached, the American authorities would co-operate to maintain secrecy.

The Cabinet—

(1) Took note of the estimate of the future scale of attack made by the Chiefs of Staff.

(2) Agreed that no public statement about the rocket attacks should be made for the time being, and that it should be suggested to the Prime Minister that, if he wished to refer in his forthcoming speech to the attacks on London, he should confine himself to a statement indicating the scale of attack now being experienced from both rocket and flying bomb, without making specific reference to the rocket.

(3) Invited the Chiefs of Staff to approach the American Chiefs of Staff with the suggestion that they should take steps to restrain publicity in America.

6. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (44) 514), to which was annexed a copy of a letter from Admiral Mountbatten regarding operations which he desired S.O.E. to conduct in Siam.

It was explained that up to the present it had not been possible to conduct successful operations in Siam, but that S.O.E. now had reason to expect assistance from the Regent and the new Prime Minister. Although there was a risk that contacts between S.O.E. and the Regent and Government of Siam might be misconstrued as committing His Majesty's Government in some way to them, it was felt that in view of the military advantages there would be no objection to the proposal provided that it was made clear in any dealings with the Siamese that our only interest was the defeat of Japan and the expulsion of the Japanese from Siamese territory, and that no political commitment was involved as regards the ultimate régime and organisation of Siam.

The Minister of Economic Warfare strongly supported the proposal made in W.P. (44) 514, and confirmed that complete liaison had been established with the United States Forces on this matter.
The Secretary of State for India supported the proposal, and paid tribute to the efficiency of the organisation which S.O.E. had built up for operations in the Balkans.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the proposal that S.O.E. should undertake operations in Siam on the lines proposed in W.P. (44) 514.

Enemy Assets and Looted Property.

7. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (W.P. (44) 533), to which was appended a resolution passed by the Bretton Woods Conference on the subject of the transfer and concealment of enemy assets, and especially of looted property, in neutral countries.

The War Cabinet—

Endorsed the proposal made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in W.P. (44) 533, and agreed that the Foreign Office should arrange for action to be taken accordingly.

Finance of Relief in the Military Period.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (44) 1251. Conclusions, Minute 5.)

8. At their meeting on the 22nd September the War Cabinet had agreed that, before reaching a decision on the proposals in the telegram dated the 19th September from the Minister of State (No. 10 Relief), they should have before them a memorandum setting out the considerations in favour of these proposals and dealing with the points which had been raised in discussion.

The War Cabinet now had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (44) 543).

The Memorandum explained that there appeared no escape from our sharing in the expenditure on relief in the military period and that, in so far as the total expenditure depended on the course of military operations, and on the extent to which it was possible to recover the costs from the countries in which the military operations were carried out, it was not possible to put any definite limit on the total commitment. While it was unfortunate that so much expenditure had had to be incurred in Italy, from which we could not at present recover the costs, this was an inevitable result of the course which military operations had taken.

With regard to the scale on which supplies were made available in the military period, we might well argue that if for humanitarian, political or other reasons, the United States desired to raise the scale above the standard necessary for the prevention of disease and unrest, they should pay the additional cost. The main question, however, was whether we should accept a commitment to meet 25 per cent. of the cost of relief in the military period with the stipulation that the situation should be reviewed should the total cost reach $450 million. This would mean the definite acceptance of a liability of up to roughly £253 million.

It would be impracticable to earmark any part of our contribution for use in Greece or Yugoslavia, since expenditure had to be incurred wherever operations took place, and the course of operations might well lead to greater expenditure being incurred in Italy than in Greece or Yugoslavia. On the other hand, every effort would be made to ensure that U.N.R.R.A. would operate in Greece and Yugoslavia as soon as possible after our Forces had entered them.

The Memorandum accordingly suggested that in all the circumstances the Minister of State should be authorised to conclude the negotiations on the terms which he suggested.

Against the settlement proposed, it was recalled that when the question of the procurement of supplies for relief in the liberated areas had been raised earlier in the year, the very modest standard of relief proposed had been criticised on the ground that it might affect adversely the standards of consumption in this country
Suez Canal.
(Previous Reference: W.M. (43) 151st Conclusions, Minute 6.)

If it was now proposed that we should share the cost of a more lavish standard of relief for a former enemy the Government would have great difficulty in defending the position, particularly if the scale of relief granted in Italy were to lead to some curtailment of the scale given in Greece and Yugoslavia. There was little evidence that the Italians were really trying to help themselves, and there was a danger of pauperising them. $150 million had already been spent in Italy and it was idle to suppose that as we gained control of the North the total expenditure would not soon exceed the total of $450 million.

On the other hand, it was argued that the settlement now proposed represented a great improvement on the original proposal, and that, so far as concerned relief in the military period on a scale sufficient to prevent disease and unrest, our obligation was inescapable.

In further discussion, the question was raised whether we could not limit to some extent our commitments by suggesting that the figure at which the situation would have to be reviewed afresh should be $400 million instead of $450 million and by stipulating that our acceptance of a liability for 25 per cent. of the total expenditure was on the clear understanding that nothing beyond expenditure on supplies necessary in the interest of military operations for the prevention of disease and unrest should be brought into account. The effect of this would be to require the United States Government to pay the whole cost of any supplies on a higher scale which they might choose to provide for political reasons. While it was not certain that we could stand out for this principle consistently with the general policy towards Italy, an attempt to secure acceptance of it was worth making.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he would favour this course.

The War Cabinet—
Agreed that the Minister of State should be instructed to continue negotiations on the basis—
(a) that the United Kingdom contribution should be limited to 25 per cent.;
(b) that there should be a review of the whole situation when the total irrecoverable expenditure reached $400 million; and
(c) that our acceptance of a liability for 25 per cent. of the total expenditure was on the clear understanding that nothing should be brought into account beyond expenditure on supplies necessary in the interest of military operations for the prevention of disease and unrest.

9. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (44) 507) proposing that a Ministerial Committee should be set up to formulate our policy in regard to the issues involved.

The War Cabinet—
Approved this proposal, and invited the Prime Minister to settle the composition of the Committee.

10. The War Cabinet had before them Memoranda by the Secretary of State for Air (W.P. (44) 530) and by the Lord Privy Seal (W.P. (44) 540) about the forthcoming International Conference on Civil Air Transport, due to begin in Washington on the 1st November.

The first question discussed was our attitude to the American invitation to the Conference.

The Secretary of State for Air reminded the War Cabinet that at the Anglo-American discussions in London in April last it had
been agreed that we should go forward to a full International Conference as soon as possible. We had made it clear that this would be on the basis of the recommendations of the Balfour Sub-Committee formulated at the time of the Commonwealth discussions. This had been accepted by Mr. Berle.

At a later date Mr. Berle had apparently abandoned any idea of an International Conference, and proposed that we and the United States, so far as possible on a non-exclusive basis, should move out on the civil air routes of the world. We had made it clear that we could not acquiesce in this position and had offered to call an International Conference ourselves in London. In the result, the United States had changed their attitude and had issued invitations to a full International Conference without further reference to us. In the circumstances, he (the Secretary of State for Air) thought that it would be extremely difficult for us now to say that we were not prepared to attend the proposed conference.

The Americans had not issued a formal agenda for the conference, but had issued a full statement which included a list of objectives. From this it was clear that they hoped that by dealing, in the first instance, with interim operating rights they would avoid discussion of the proposal put forward by the United Kingdom and endorsed by the Commonwealth countries for the establishment of an international authority with executive powers. In the Secretary of State for Air’s view, we must make it clear that we had not changed our views and intended to press for the discussion of this project at the conference.

Closely connected with this was a second question, namely, the proposals for a further Commonwealth discussion on civil aviation before the proposed International Conference.

The War Cabinet were informed that, in the first instance, it had been proposed that this should take place in London. It had become clear, however, that Canada would not attend a conference in London, the ground put forward being that their officers would not have time to go to London before the proposed International Conference. New Zealand had then proposed that the conference should take place in Ottawa. A week ago we had telegraphed to Canada supporting that suggestion. Canada had not yet replied, but it was thought that South Africa would be willing to send representatives to Ottawa.

The latest development was that a telegram had been received from Australia pressing for a conference at Canberra before any international conference took place.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs said that, much as he liked the Australian line of approach, he felt in the circumstances it was impracticable to fix up a conference in Canberra in the time available. He thought that Canada would not go to Canberra and that the best prospect would be to concentrate on bringing about a conference at Ottawa ten days or a fortnight before the International Conference on the 1st November.

The Lord Privy Seal explained the reasons why he thought that we should endorse Australia’s proposal for a Commonwealth meeting at Canberra and should ask the United States to postpone the international conference. In his view there was not sufficient time to work out a scheme for Empire air routes between now and the 1st November, and Ottawa was not the most favourable place in which to make the attempt. It was of the utmost importance that we should not go to the conference until an Empire policy had been worked out.

The general view of the War Cabinet was that we could hardly take the line that we would not now accept the invitation to the international conference in the United States. At the same time, there could be no question of agreeing to attend the conference if there was to be no discussion of the scheme which we favoured for an international authority with effective powers to regulate both the technical and economic aspects of post-war international air transport. We should therefore accept the invitation to attend the
conference, but should make it clear that it was our intention—as it had always been—to raise the question of the orderly development of post-war civil air transport under the control of an international authority with executive powers.

Discussion then turned on the arrangements for a Commonwealth meeting prior to the international conference. The general view of the War Cabinet was that we should concentrate on bringing about the proposed conference at Ottawa, and making it fully effective, and that if necessary we should bring strong pressure to bear on the Canadian Government to agree to this course.

The War Cabinet's conclusions were as follows:

1. The United States invitation to the proposed international conference on civil air transport in Washington in November should be accepted on the understanding referred to at "X" above, and subject also to (b) of the Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air (W.P. (44) 350).

2. Every endeavour should be made to secure an effective Commonwealth conference in October in Canada, with strong delegations from this country and the Dominions.

3. A decision was deferred on the question whether a White Paper should be presented to Parliament in the near future, outlining the policy which we advocated for the future development of air transport until a draft White Paper had been prepared by the Secretary of State for Air and considered by the War Cabinet.

4. In reply to a Question by Mr. Ronald Tree, M.P., on the following day, the Secretary of State for Air should state that he was not at present in a position to give answers to the points raised.

11. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (W.P. (44) 528) on the prolongation of Parliament.

The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security explained that the Prolongation of Parliament Act, 1943, expired on the 25th November, and that legislation to prolong Parliament for a further period must be passed before that date. Although it would no doubt be argued that at the present stage of the war a prolongation for six months would be sufficient, his view was that the right course was to prolong Parliament for a further year. This, of course, would not preclude a dissolution at any time. It would also be desirable to empower the House of Commons of Northern Ireland to prolong its life, if it chose to do so. This would be justified on the ground that Northern Ireland was equally involved in the war.

The War Cabinet—

Authorised the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security to proceed with legislation prolonging Parliament for a further year from the 25th November, and empowering the House of Commons of Northern Ireland to prolong its life for a corresponding period.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
25th September, 1944.