WAR CABINET 28 (45).  

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Cabinet War Room, on Monday, 12th March, 1945, at 12 noon.

Present:
The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Deputy Prime Minister (in the Chair).
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. STAFFORD CRIPPS, K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production.
Sir ORME SARGENT, Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir CHARLES F. A. PORTAL, Chief of the Air Staff.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. Sir ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. RICHARD LAW, M.P., Minister of State.
Admiral of the Fleet Sir ANDREW CUNNINGHAM, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.
Field-Marshal Sir ALAN BROOKE, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Secretariat:
Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
General Sir HASTINGS L. ISMAY.
Mr. NORMAN BROOK.
Sir GILBERT LAITHWAITE.
Mr. L. F. BURGIS.
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War Cabinet.

1. The War Cabinet were informed that, in view of the change in the hours of sitting of the House of Commons, the Prime Minister had decided that, on days other than Monday, meetings of the War Cabinet should normally be held at 11-30 a.m. or 12 noon.

Naval, Military and Air Operations.

2. The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the previous five days.

Bomber Command had flown 3,250 sorties and dropped 9,100 tons of bombs. Their targets had included Dessau, Cassel and an oil refinery at Harburg.

United States bombers had flown 4,780 sorties and dropped 12,800 tons of bombs.

The Tactical Air Force had flown 8,600 sorties and dropped 3,600 tons of bombs.

Total Allied losses for the week had been 53 bombers, 43 aircraft by the Tactical Air Force and 6 Coastal Command aircraft.

Mediterranean.

In the Mediterranean 11,000 sorties had been flown and 6,500 tons of bombs dropped for the loss of 96 aircraft. Successful attacks had been made on railway communications in Austria, Hungary and Yugoslavia. Many rail cuts had been made on the Brenner route and in the Po valley.

Super-Fortresses had dropped 437 tons of bombs on Tokyo. This total excluded the heavy attack made on the previous day, when 1,100 tons of incendiaries had been dropped on the city.

Confirmed shipping losses for the period, due to enemy action, had been 5,725 tons. The confirmed shipping losses for March now amounted to 20,641 tons.

A merchant ship had been torpedoed off Beachy Head and a trawler off the east coast of Scotland. One U-boat had been sunk by aircraft off the Scillies and two other U-boats had probably been sunk in St. George’s Channel and off Beachy Head. There appeared to have been no great change in the number of U-boats operating in our coastal waters.

There had been considerable activity by midget U-boats, particularly off the Scheldt approaches. Three had been sunk, one had been captured intact and 4 had been beached and abandoned.

On the 9th March a small enemy force, consisting of about 100 men in landing craft, had carried out a raid on Granville on the west coast of the Cherbourg Peninsula. Damage had been caused to harbour installations and to coasters in the harbour.

H.M. Submarine Thorough had recently returned from patrol off the Burma coast, during which she sunk or destroyed 2 T.L.Cs., 2 junks and 16 native craft.

The enemy bridgehead at Wesel had now been eliminated; and Allied troops were holding the west bank of the Rhine from Nijmegen to the junction with the Moselle. Rapid progress had been made during the week by the United States 1st and 3rd Armies operating south of Cologne. A bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhine had been established at Remagen; and substantial German forces had been cut off north of the Moselle. The enemy would be hard put to it to find sufficient troops to hold the Moselle, defend the Remagen bridgehead and meet possible Allied threats further north.

The total number of prisoners known to have been taken since the beginning of this drive to the Rhine was about 93,000; and many had still to be counted. Total Allied casualties had been 36,000.

The Russians continued to advance in the north, had captured Leba and were exerting considerable pressure on Danzig and Stettin. There had been rumours of German counter-attacks north of Budapest, but no confirmation had been received from Russian sources.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of these statements.
3. The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security informed the War Cabinet that during the previous week there had been 68 incidents from long-range rockets. Of these, 41 had occurred in London, 18 in Essex, 3 in Kent, 2 in Hertfordshire, 1 in Norfolk and 3 in the sea. Casualties had been 304 killed, 552 seriously injured and 1,060 slightly injured.

These figures represented an average of 11.3 rockets a day, the highest rate of fire yet attained, and the percentage falling in London was also above the average.

Of 10 flying bombs launched during the period, 5 had crossed the coast but none had reached London. Casualties had been 3 seriously injured and 5 slightly injured.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of these statements.

4. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of Production and the Paymaster-General (W.P. (45) 153) asking for guidance on the extent to which scientific and technical information should be disclosed to members of a Mission which the French were anxious to send to this country and to the United States to survey the field of aircraft production and development.

Decisions on this question were held over for a meeting at which the Prime Minister could be present, but the War Cabinet had a preliminary discussion for the purpose of ascertaining the views of the Chiefs of Staff.

The Chief of the Air Staff said that, in the telegram to the Joint Staff Mission at Washington, reproduced in the Annex to W.P. (45) 153, the Chiefs of Staff had given a broad indication of the types of information which should in their view be disclosed to, or withheld from, this French Mission. They thought it likely that the United States authorities would be disposed to go further than we ourselves would wish to go in the direction of full disclosure to the French; and for this reason they thought it essential that a firm agreement on what could and what could not be disclosed should be reached with the United States Chiefs of Staff before any discussions with the French Mission began. It should be borne in mind from the outset that any information given to this French Mission would have to be disclosed, on demand, to the Russians; and it was important that this point should be brought clearly to the notice of the United States authorities.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of the views expressed on behalf of the Chiefs of Staff.

5. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of State (W.P. (45) 149) reporting that the German authorities had agreed that supplies might be sent to the civil population of La Rochelle, Oléron and Ré by a Red Cross ship. S.H.A.E.F. had agreed that relief supplies should be sent to these areas; and, on the understanding that the International Red Cross assumed responsibility for distribution, no objection had been raised by the interested Departments of His Majesty's Government.

Supplies by sea would involve a technical breach of the blockade; but supplies sent to these places could not benefit the German economy as a whole, and food had already been going to them by land. In these circumstances it was recommended that, once the French had made their arrangements with the International Red Cross, we should agree in principle to grant a safe-conduct for all future voyages of the ship to be employed for this purpose.

The War Cabinet—
Approved the recommendation made in W.P. (45) 149.
6. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of State (W.P. (45) 133) reporting that the Director-General of U.N.R.R.A. had asked whether His Majesty's Government would agree that the next meeting of his Council should be held in London.

The Minister of State said that by the terms of the U.N.R.R.A. agreement a meeting of the Council would have to be held in May or June of this year; that it was expedient that this meeting should be held in Europe; and that since difficulties of transport and accommodation made it impossible to meet in France, as had originally been hoped, he was in favour of holding the meeting in London. It was unlikely now that the meeting could take place before June.

The War Cabinet were informed that there would be difficulties in finding accommodation and staff for such a meeting in London; but it was agreed that every effort should be made to overcome these difficulties.

The War Cabinet—

Authorised the Minister of State to suggest, as proposed in W.P. (45) 133, that the next meeting of the Council of U.N.R.R.A. should be held in London in June, 1945.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
12th March, 1945.