CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, 23rd April, 1945, at 6 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. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.

The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.

The Right Hon. LORD WOOLTON, Minister of Reconstruction.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. LORD BEAVERBROOK, Lord Privy Seal.


The Right Hon. Sir ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon. HUGH DALTON, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (Items 3–8).

The Right Hon. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Minister of Works (Items 2 and 3).

The Right Hon. The EARL OF SELBORNE, Minister of Economic Warfare (Items 5–8).

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 (Items 1 and 2).

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. H. U. WILLINK, M.P., Minister of Health (Item 3).

The Right Hon. BRENDAN BRACKEN, M.P., Minister of Information.

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 (Items 1 and 2).

Lieutenant-General Sir ARCHIBALD NYE, Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 1 and 2).

Secretariat:

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
General Sir HASTINGS L. ISMAY.
M. NORMAN BROOK.
Sir GILBERT LAITHWAITE.
Mr. W. S. MURRIE.
<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>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Air Operations—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Naval Operations—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home Waters and North Atlantic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Indies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military Operations—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North-West Europe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Crossbow”</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Publicity about Sites in Northern France</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Production Agreements, Bulk Orders and Erection of Houses by the Ministry of Works</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supply of Equipment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Policy towards Siam</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Future of Tangier</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Press</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tass Agency’s Request for Accrediting of Andrew Rothstein to S.H.A.E.F. as a War Correspondent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Payment of Postage on Correspondence of Ministers and Members of Parliament</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the previous week.

On the Western front the weather had been good, but there had inevitably been a decline in the number of available targets. Allied Air Forces had flown an average of 6,500 sorties a day.

Bomber Command had flown just under 4,000 sorties for the loss of 14 aircraft and had dropped nearly 10,000 tons of bombs. In an attack on the Lützow on the 18th April, three direct hits and one near miss had been scored and reconnaissance now showed that she was aground. Successful attacks had also been made on Heligoland on the 18th and 19th April. There had been daylight raids on Munich, Regensburg and Bremen and night attacks on Pilsen and Schwandorf. Mosquitoes had attacked Berlin on six nights.

United States bombers had flown 6,400 sorties for the loss of 18 aircraft and had dropped nearly 14,000 tons of bombs. Targets had included rail communications in Southern Germany and Berlin.

The Tactical Air Force had flown 3,500 sorties for the loss of 193 aircraft, and had destroyed 8,000 and damaged 9,000 enemy motor vehicles.

Losses of enemy aircraft during the week were 1,984 destroyed, 36 probably destroyed and 1,250 damaged. About six-sevenths were destroyed or damaged on the ground.

Air supply had recently assumed increasing importance. During the last week 6,300 sorties had been flown and 14,000 tons carried. The total numbers of released prisoners and casualties brought to this country by air since D-Day were 20,000 and 277,500 respectively.

Coastal Command had flown 1,688 sorties for the loss of 7 aircraft. 20 U-boats had been sighted and 14 attacked: one had been sunk and 3 possibly damaged, while 3 promising attacks had been made. One midget submarine had been sunk. In attacks on surface craft, 9 merchant vessels and 1 tanker had been damaged. 45 Mosquitoes returning from a shipping reconnaissance off Norway had without loss destroyed 9 out of 18 enemy long-range bombers encountered over the North Sea.

The German Air Force in Norway was believed to consist of 285 aircraft, including 80 long-range bombers.

In the Mediterranean 22,000 sorties had been flown for the loss of 89 aircraft. Communications in Austria and Southern Germany had been attacked and support had been given to our land forces in Italy. Enemy losses had been 21 aircraft.

In South-East Asia 13,000 sorties had been flown for the loss of 5 aircraft. Operations, which had been mainly in support of our land forces, had also included an attack on docks and power stations at Bangkok. 12,000 tons of stores and 7,000 troops had been carried by air. A party had now arrived at the Cocos Islands to open a staging post and fighters based on this post were now ready for action.

In China, 1,000 sorties had been flown for the loss of 4 aircraft. 11 enemy aircraft had been destroyed on the ground.

In the Pacific, 6,000 sorties had been flown for the loss of 1 aircraft. Enemy losses were 2 destroyed in the air and 28 on the ground. Targets had included airfields in Formosa, the docks at Hong-Kong and oil storage plants at Canton.

Super Fortresses had flown 840 sorties for the loss of 20 aircraft and had dropped 5,000 tons of bombs. The main attacks had been on Tokyo (2,000 tons) and Kawasaki (1,300 tons). 27 square miles of Tokyo had now been devastated by air attacks.

Ten merchant vessels, totalling 53,483 tons had been lost by enemy action during the week. Losses for April now amounted to 93,774 tons. During the week 4 U-boats had probably been sunk and there had been 5 promising attacks. U-boats were active in the North-West and South-West approaches to the North Sea, off the American east coast and off Kola inlet. About 90 were probably at sea at present.
Five enemy explosive motor boats had been found ashore in the Scheldt estuary and four more had been sunk by one of our frigates. A successful minelaying operation had been carried out off Kola inlet. 3 midget U-boats had been sunk and 2 possibly sunk during the week.

Between the 11th and 16th April one of our cruisers, with United States and French destroyers, had bombarded enemy positions on the French-Italian frontier. Attacks had been made on two enemy convoys in the North Adriatic.

In recent patrols 4 of our submarines had sunk 3 small enemy craft.

Operations in the Okinawa area had continued. The British Pacific Fleet had made further successful attacks on airfields in the Sakishima group.

After meeting considerable opposition, especially in the Nuremberg area, the 1st French and 7th United States Armies had made very rapid advances towards the end of the week. The French forces had taken Freiburg and Stuttgart and, reaching the Swiss Frontier, had now moved eastward along the northern shore of Lake Constance. The United States forces had reached the Danube astride of Ulm and had seized a bridge intact at Dillingen. Gains had also been made on the 3rd United States Army front and the Czech border had been crossed. Leipzig had been cleared by the 1st United States Army and the Harz mountain pocket had been eliminated, with the capture of the German 11th Army Headquarters and 3 Corps Commanders. The whole of the Ruhr was now under Allied control: in this area 17 German Divisions had been eliminated and 320,000 prisoners taken. The 9th United States Army were regrouping and had held off counter-attacks on their Elbe bridgehead. British 2nd Army forces had cleared the South bank of the Elbe from south of Lauenburg to the suburbs of Hamburg. Stiff resistance was being encountered both at Hamburg and Bremen.

North-East Holland was now practically clear of enemy troops and Western Holland had been virtually sealed off. Reports about flooding by the enemy were conflicting, but there was no definite evidence that the enemy had yet resorted to flooding which could not be related to military needs.

Since the crossing of the Rhine, British casualties had been 13,000 and United States casualties 38,000. Over 1 million enemy prisoners had been taken.

The Russians were maintaining a very strict security silence with regard to their advances from the Oder. From German admissions, however, it seemed clear that they had launched two main attacks, one between Eberswalde and Frankfurt and the other between Forst and Gorlitz. The northern attack had probably reached the suburbs of Berlin: the other was evidently aimed at encircling the city from the south and west. The Russians had made comparatively little progress in Czechoslovakia and Austria.

Heavy fighting along the whole of the Italian front had culminated in a break-through after the capture of Bologna; and forces of the 3rd and 5th Armies were now moving on Ferrara, Bologna and Modena. 25,000 prisoners had been taken and our casualties had been 19,000. The battle was going very well, and if the Po crossings could be seized quickly it should be possible to cut off a number of enemy divisions on the western sector of the front.

The Prime Minister said that the achievement of the 8th and 5th Armies had been remarkable, especially when account was taken of the extent to which their strength had been depleted by the withdrawal of forces for other campaigns. He was proposing to send a telegram of congratulation to Field-Marshal Alexander; and he hoped that the publication of this message would give the Press an opportunity to give full publicity and credit to the outstanding achievements of these Armies.

Marked progress had been made on both the lines of advance to Rangoon. About 8,000 Japanese troops appeared to have been
isolated by our advances towards Magwe; and on the other line of advance our troops had captured the airfield at Toungoo.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of these statements.

"Crossbow."

Publicity about Sites in Northern France.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (45) 41st Conclusions, Minute 1.)

2. The War Cabinet had before them Memoranda by the Minister of Information (W.P. (45) 263) and the Chiefs of Staff (W.P. (45) 245) on the extent to which publicity should be given to the Report of a technical inter-Services mission which had examined the large "Crossbow" sites in Northern France.

The Minister of Information said that a good deal of information about the existence and purpose of these sites had already been published without official authority, and he thought it would be useful if the full story were now officially released to the Press. The public in this country should know how narrowly they had escaped disaster. Publication of these facts might also have a salutary effect in the United States.

The Chief of the Air Staff said that the Chiefs of Staff raised no objection to the unofficial release to the Press of the information contained in this Report, so long as the Report itself was not published and information about the Mimoyecques gun was withheld. They recognised that details about this gun would form the most striking part of the story; and that some information about it had already been disclosed unofficially. If, however, we now released this information officially, other countries would no longer have any doubts about its accuracy; and research in other countries might thereby be facilitated.

In discussion the view was expressed that, apart from the security objections advanced on behalf of the Chiefs of Staff, it was doubtful how the official release of this information would be received now by people in this country, particularly in London and the Home Counties. The relief might be tempered by apprehension lest, even at this late stage, the enemy had some further surprise in store for them. The general view of the War Cabinet was that it might be preferable to postpone for a time the official release of the information contained in this Report. At the same time, it was recognised that the publication of this information could not be delayed indefinitely, and that there would be advantages in preparing, for circulation in this country and in the United States, a book in which the full story of all the "Crossbow" weapons would be told at length. It might take as long as two months to prepare the book for publication; and by that time there might be less objection to publishing this information. Moreover, it would be inappropriate to include in such a publication much of the technical information to the disclosure of which the Chiefs of Staff had raised objection.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Minister of Information to arrange for the preparation of a book dealing with the "Crossbow" weapons as a whole, and to submit the draft for examination by the Chiefs of Staff;

(2) Agreed that, when the proposed book had been prepared, the timing of its publication should be further considered by the War Cabinet.
3. The War Cabinet considered a Memorandum by the Minister of Works (W.P. (45) 266) seeking authority for the introduction of legislation empowering the Minister to make agreements for the production of housing materials, components or fittings, or of complete houses; to buy and sell any such items; and to undertake the development of sites belonging to local authorities and the erection of houses on them.

The Minister of Works explained that this legislation was required to implement undertakings given in the recent White Paper on Housing (Cmd. 6609). The power to make agreements for the production of materials, components and fittings was necessary in order to give manufacturers an assurance of a market for their products, and so ensure that they would put standard articles into production without waiting for specific orders. It was not clear how far it would be necessary to give bulk orders for materials, components and fittings, but a power to buy and resell would be needed at an early date in connection with the erection of timber houses from Sweden. The power to develop local authority sites and undertake the erection of houses on them was needed because some of the types of houses which might be used would require special technical skill for their erection, and because prisoners of war could not be employed for this purpose unless the work were carried out by the Ministry of Works. The new powers would be taken only for the period up to the 1st October, 1947, at which date other housing legislation would fall to be reviewed. If necessary, the powers could then be continued.

Points in discussion were:

(a) The War Cabinet were informed that, although the power to develop local authority sites and erect houses on them would be exercised by the Minister of Works only at the request of the Health Minister concerned and only with the agreement of the local authority, the Secretary of State for Scotland had proposed that this power should not extend to Scotland. It was generally felt that it would be unfortunate if this had the result of retarding the erection of houses in Scotland. It might be preferable that the Bill as introduced should provide for the application of this power to Scotland, though this provision could be modified if it were strongly opposed by Scottish members in Parliament.

(b) Although the proposed legislation gave the Minister of Works power to make agreements for the production of materials, components and complete houses, it gave him no power himself to undertake the production of these items. It seemed desirable that the Minister should have this power.

(c) The Minister of Works explained that it might be necessary to extend the power to make production agreements and to purchase and resell materials, components and fittings so as to cover the requirements of building in general and not merely those of housing.

(d) It seemed likely that a sum of £25,000,000 would be required to set up a revolving fund to finance these operations by the Ministry of Works. Most, if not all, of this expenditure should be recoverable.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Authorised the early introduction of legislation on the lines indicated in W.P. (45) 266, and invited the Minister of Works to submit the draft of the Bill to the Legislation Committee.

(2) Asked the Minister of Works to consider whether he should take power in the Bill to manufacture himself houses or materials, component parts and fittings required for houses.

(3) Invited the Minister of Works, in the light of the discussion, to consult further with the Secretary of State for
Scotland with regard to the suggestion that the proposed power of the Minister of Works to develop local authority sites and erect houses on them should not apply to Scotland.

4. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (45) 230) recommending that, in the interests of our export trade and post-war commercial connections, we should now permit the export to Spain of articles which were not purely war material and, in particular, of certain articles of a semi-military character specified in the Annex to the Memorandum.

*The Minister of State* said that, in the view of the Foreign Office, the time had come for some relaxation of the rules restricting the export of such goods to Spain. Even if we pursued a self-denying policy it was likely that the United States would supply material of this type. There was no question of supplying strictly military material, but material and equipment which might be regarded as having a somewhat military character should, he thought, be permitted for export in the terms of the formula set out in paragraph 6 of W.P. (45) 230. Under this formula it would be possible to supply the articles of a semi-military character for which approaches had been made by Spain, but not the A.A. guns and Bren carriers for which they had asked.

In discussion, the proposals of the Foreign Secretary were supported in the interest of our post-war trade, the disposal of surplus military equipment, and the restoration of favourable trade balance between Spain and this country. We had reason to think that the United States were already making arrangements for supply, and it was undesirable that the market should pass to them. In particular, in the case of trainer aircraft, the Minister for Civil Aviation was anxious that we should establish ourselves in Spain. The total amount of trade involved was unlikely to exceed £1 million.

On the other hand, it was strongly urged that action on these lines would expose us to grave risk of misrepresentation, and that the political dangers involved more than outweighed the commercial arguments on the other side.

After discussion, the *Prime Minister* suggested that, in the first instance, the Foreign Office should, without indicating our attitude, ask the United States Government what view they took of this matter, and should propose that the two countries should pursue a common policy. If the United States Government replied that they saw no objection to the supply of this material to Spain, we should be in a stronger position to meet any subsequent criticism for having ourselves supplied such material. If, on the other hand, they shared our doubts, both countries might agree to refrain from supplying such material to Spain.

*The War Cabinet—*

Endorsed the view expressed by the Prime Minister, as summarised at "X" above, and invited the Minister of State to arrange for the necessary approach to be made to the United States Government.
5. The War Cabinet considered a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (45) 249) on policy towards Siam.

The discussion and the conclusions reached are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

6. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (45) 236) on the future of the Tangier Zone of Morocco. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs proposed, if the suggestions put forward in his Memorandum were approved, to open discussions in the first instance with the United States Government and, when broad agreement had been reached, to join with them in discussion with the French Government with a view to—

(i) a joint communication to the Spanish Government, on the conclusion of hostilities in Europe; to lead up to

(ii) agreement on the modifications to be made to the existing Tangier statute before the latter was reintroduced to cover the interim period pending the conclusion of a fresh treaty; and

(iii) the summoning of an international conference to determine the final form which the régime should take.

It was not proposed that the Soviet Government should be invited to participate in the future régime for the administration of the Tangier Zone, since they had never taken any interest in the area; but they would be informed at the appropriate moment of what we had in mind.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the proposals outlined in W.P. (45) 236 and invited the Minister of State to arrange for the necessary action to be taken.

7. At their meeting on the 19th March the War Cabinet had invited the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for War to consider what arrangements could be made for Mr. Rothstein to proceed to Belgium as the representative of the Tass Agency, consistently with the decision that the Daily Worker should not be allowed to have accredited correspondents with His Majesty’s Forces.

The War Cabinet now had before them a Memorandum (W.P. (45) 236), in which the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for War recommended that Mr. Rothstein should be allowed to proceed to Belgium as the civilian representative of the Tass Agency; and suggested that, if the Daily Worker should ask to be allowed to send a civilian correspondent to Brussels under a similar arrangement, no objection need be raised. At the time of the earlier discussion in the War Cabinet the facilities available for the transmission of messages by civilian correspondents had been far from satisfactory; and it had been thought that for this reason it would be insufficient to give Mr. Rothstein the status of a civilian correspondent. Since then, however, there had been a marked improvement in the facilities available to civilian correspondents, and it was felt that the solution suggested was no longer open to objection on this ground.

The Minister of Information still felt that it was difficult to deny Mr. Rothstein the status and facilities of a war correspondent. Mr. Rothstein had in the past been given facilities by the Service Departments to visit military installations in this country and was
a journalist of standing and reputation; it would be difficult to explain to him or to the Soviet Government why he could not be given similar facilities in Belgium.

As against this, it was pointed out that, if Mr. Rothstein were allowed to proceed to Belgium as an accredited war correspondent, it would be difficult to maintain the decision of the War Cabinet that the *Daily Worker* should not be allowed to have accredited correspondents with His Majesty’s Forces.

The War Cabinet—

Agreed that Mr. Rothstein should be allowed to proceed to Belgium as a civilian correspondent of the Tass Agency, as proposed in W.P. (45) 238.

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8. The Chancellor of the Exchequer reminded the War Cabinet that on the 27th March the question of the facilities afforded to Ministers for franking mail had been raised in the House of Commons, and Mr. Driberg, M.P., had given notice that he would raise the matter on the adjournment.

Particulars of the present practice of Ministers had been obtained from Departments and showed a considerable diversity. The Chancellor of the Exchequer thought that some general ruling would have to be given. He would himself welcome a decision that replies to letters addressed to Ministers on matters affecting their Departments (whether or not from their constituents) should be franked; but that Ministers should pay for the stamping of letters to constituents on essentially personal matters and also on matters not affecting the business of the Minister’s Department.

If, however, any general ruling on this matter were given, it would bring into prominence the fact that Ministers, unlike private Members, were not entitled to include postage on constituency correspondence as a necessary expense for tax purposes. It had been suggested to him that a small Committee of Ministers might be appointed to consider these related issues.

Discussion ensued as to the present practice in this matter and as to the issues involved.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said that, in his view, a Minister should pay for the postage of all correspondence essentially of a private character whether or not it affected his constituency. On the other hand, he thought that the whole of a Minister’s correspondence which concerned the conduct of public business (whether in his own or in some other Department) ought to be stamped at the public expense. Border-line cases would no doubt arise, but it must be for the Minister to settle what correspondence did and did not concern the conduct of public business. The Prime Minister was disposed to think that, when the matter was raised on the Adjournment, it could be settled by a statement on these broad lines and he would, if necessary, be prepared to speak himself when the matter was raised.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of this statement.

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

*23rd April, 1945.*