CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Tuesday, April 9, 1940, at 8-30 A.M.

Present:

The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. OLIVER STANLEY, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. LORD HANKEY, Minister without Portfolio.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Secretary of State for Home Department and Minister of Home Security.
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN REITH, M.P., Minister of Information (part of time).
The Hon. Sir ALEXANDER CADOGAN, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office (part of time).
Admiral of the Fleet Sir DUDLEY POUND, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.

Sir ORME SARGENT, Deputy Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office

Secretariat.

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Major-General H. L. ISMAY.
Mr. W. D. WILKINSON.
Wing Commander W. ELLIOT.
Lieutenant-Colonel E. I. C. JACOB, R.E.
WAR CABINET 85 (40).

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The Chief of the Air Staff reported the situation, as it was then known to the Chiefs of Staff, as follows:

**Oslo Fjord.**—Four big German warships reported sailing up the Oslo Fjord at 2:25 A.M. and to have reached Tronsberg. These had been fired upon by Norwegian coast defences.

**Stavanger.**—One enemy ship reported to be approaching Stavanger at 3:25 A.M.

**Bergen.**—Five enemy warships approaching Bergen at 3:25 A.M. At 6 A.M. the British Consul reported that the port was occupied by Germans and that he had been unable to reach the quayside to investigate.

**Trondheim.**—A report from Oslo stated that two enemy warships were at Trondheim.

**Narvik.**—No German ships reported at Narvik.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that H.M.S. Renown had had a short engagement off Vest Fjord with enemy warships early that morning, and was in pursuit of these to the North. The wireless of the Renown had been shot away, and the weather was very heavy. British destroyers were covering the mouth of the Vest Fjord to stop enemy transports entering Narvik. In addition to the Gneisenau, the Scharnhorst with two other enemy warships had moved into the North Sea. The Commander-in-Chief meanwhile was concentrating a strong force, comprising 2 Battleships, 9 Cruisers and 25 Destroyers, off Bergen. The position of the German naval forces was not known.

Fifteen British submarines were operating in Norwegian waters; one had been ordered into Oslo, and another into Stavanger. No further news had been received of the Glowworm, and it was thought that she must have been sunk.

There had been an air raid on Scapa that morning in five waves. It had been a complete failure, and at least one enemy aircraft had been brought down.

The Secretary of State for War said that he had no news to report.

In the course of the Meeting, messages were brought in giving the following additional information:

1. Air attacks were taking place on a number of places near Oslo.
2. German aeroplanes were over Stavanger and troops had landed at Egersund.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff suggested that our first immediate action should be to go ahead with our plan for seizing Narvik. Our information was that the Germans were not in occupation there. One battalion could sail at mid-day that day and could be at Narvik in three days time. It was also most important to prevent the Germans from establishing themselves at Trondheim and Bergen. If the Norwegians were driven out of Oslo, they would retire on Bergen and Trondheim. The German forces there could not be very strong, probably not more than 2,000 men, and these had possibly accomplished little more than the taking of the docks. Now was the critical moment, and we should do everything to prevent the Germans from sending reinforcements, so as to leave these two places open for the Norwegians to fall back upon and to preserve them as ports of entry for ourselves.

If necessary, the railway lines could be torn up to prevent any German advance from Oslo.

The First Lord of the Admiralty agreed. We should take immediate steps to have transports ready to proceed to both places. No large forces would be required in the initial stages. Minefields...
could be laid to prevent further access by German forces. Meanwhile, he strongly advocated that we should proceed with the operation against Narvik.

The Chief of the Air Staff said that immediate air action could be taken by the despatch of bomber squadrons to Bergen and Trondheim with the object of attacking warships and transports. These squadrons would be ready to leave at 9 A.M. and could reach their objectives between noon and 1 P.M. He pointed out, however, that the port in Bergen was in the centre of the town, and the bombing of ships alongside the quays would inevitably involve civilian casualties.

Meanwhile air reconnaissances were in progress with a view to clarifying the position.

The Minister without Portfolio advocated that we should take immediate action at Oslo. So far as we knew, the forts had not yet been taken. The main German forces would be covering this operation. We should endeavour to find out the true position by air reconnaissance and should follow this up, if necessary, with all the air action at our disposal to help the Norwegians to defend their capital.

The Chief of the Air Staff said that Oslo was out of range of our bombers, but that reconnaissances were taking place in the Skagerrak. As regards Stavanger, it would be possible to bomb the aerodrome, though its destruction could not be guaranteed from the air.

The importance of the aerodrome at Stavanger was then discussed. This aerodrome was 11 1/2 kilom. outside the town and was the most northerly aerodrome of any size in Norway. It was therefore considered most desirable that we should take whatever steps we could to prevent it falling into the hands of the Germans, or, failing that, to make it unserviceable for them. It was pointed out that our original intention had never been to hold Stavanger, but to destroy the aerodrome. This could best be done by air action, renewed as necessary.

The Chief of Naval Staff said that the Commander-in-Chief had been ordered to take the Fleet to Bergen and Trondheim with the object of destroying German warships and transports, to gain control of the entrance to these ports, and to prevent any further reinforcements and military stores entering them. Whether this operation was feasible, however, would depend on whether the Germans had got control of the shore batteries.

After further discussion, it was agreed that it would be a mistake to order bombing operations until more information was available. In the meanwhile, everything possible should be done to push on preparations for sending expeditions to retake Bergen and Trondheim and to occupy Narvik. The French should be asked to move the Chasseurs Alpins, who were originally destined for Narvik, to the ports, and to embark them as soon as possible. Such naval action as might be possible should also be taken against the enemy in the former ports.

Discussion then turned upon what message should be sent to the Norwegian Government.

It was pointed out that it was essential for their own safety, as well as for our purposes, that Bergen and Trondheim should be freed as soon as possible; otherwise there was no line of communication open to the outer world. Further, unless we could take immediate and active steps to convince the Norwegians of our support, there was a grave risk that they might give in. The Norwegians should therefore be told that we would do everything possible to free these ports, and should be asked to co-operate. It would be an advantage if the railways from Oslo to Bergen, and
Oslo to Trondheim, could be cut, but it was thought unlikely that the Norwegians would do this as long as they held Oslo. The Norwegians should be encouraged as much as possible, and told that the Allies would come to their assistance.

The War Cabinet were informed that no news of importance had been received from Stockholm. There was nothing to indicate that the Germans had any intention of attacking Sweden. In these circumstances, no immediate question arose of sending a message to the Swedish Government.

The German Declaration.

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The First Lord of the Admiralty suggested that present events might well be the prelude to the opening of a German offensive on land, and that we should press the Belgians to come into the open before it was too late, and to allow the Allied troops into their country.

The Secretary of State for War agreed.

It was suggested that the events of that morning had presented us with an opportunity of raising again with the French the question of putting in motion the Royal Marine Operation. The French might still maintain their opposition to the early inception of this operation—unless, indeed, land operations on a large scale should develop on the Western Front. The Air objections to the Royal Marine Operation, which had weighed with the French Government, had still the same validity as before. Nevertheless, the point should be put to them.

The Minister of Information entered, the meeting at this point.

At this point the Declaration which the German Government had put out by wireless was received and read to the War Cabinet. The Declaration was as follows:

"The German High Command of the German Army announces that, in order to counteract the actions against Denmark and Norway and to prevent a possible hostile attack against these countries, the German Army has taken these two countries under its protection.

"Strong forces of the German Army have therefore invaded these countries this morning."

The War Cabinet then considered:

The message to be sent by His Majesty's Government to the French Government.

The Declaration to be issued by His Majesty's Government in reply to the German Government's Declaration.

As regards the latter, it was felt desirable to avoid conventional expressions of indignation. Such expressions had for long been the stock-in-trade of the German propagandists at moments when Germany herself was about to commit some fresh act of aggression. Our Declaration ought to follow more factual lines, e.g., it should be pointed out that so elaborate an operation, involving simultaneous landings at a number of Norwegian ports, must have been planned long in advance, and that it had probably been launched before we had laid our minefield.

The War Cabinet agreed—

(1) That the First Lord of the Admiralty should authorise the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, to take all possible steps to clear Bergen and Trondheim of enemy forces.

(2) That the Chiefs of Staff should set on foot preparations for military expeditions to recapture Trondheim and Bergen.
and to occupy Narvik. These expeditions should not, however, move until the Naval situation had been cleared up.

(3) That the Foreign Secretary should inform the Norwegian Government that we would take all possible steps to support them against the Germans, and, in particular, that we would take immediate action with a view to driving the Germans out of Bergen and Trondheim. The Norwegians should be encouraged to resist to the utmost, and the local forces instructed to co-operate. The Norwegian Government should also be asked to give us information as to the position and as to their plans. The Norwegian Government should be informed that we attached particular importance to denying Stavanger aerodrome to the Germans; i.e., if the Norwegians cannot hold it, the aerodrome should be destroyed.

(4) That the Secretary of State for Air should arrange for air reconnaissance to clarify the situation in the Norwegian ports and waters, in order to ascertain the position of the German naval, military and air forces, and that until this had been done no bombing of German forces in Norway should take place.

(5) That the Foreign Secretary should inform the French of the action which we were taking, and should ask them to consider whether it would be advisable, in view of the changed circumstances, to carry out the Royal Marine Operation forthwith.

(6) That the Chief of the Imperial General Staff should communicate with the French High Command and invite them to make preparations for the force of Chasseurs Alpins, originally destined for Narvik, to be embarked as soon as possible with a view to their participating in the recapture of Bergen and Trondheim.

(7) That a draft Declaration, in reply to the German Declaration, should be drawn up by the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of Information, on the lines discussed in the War Cabinet, and issued without delay.

(8) That the Foreign Secretary should consider, in consultation with the French Government, whether the present was a suitable time for putting further pressure on the Belgian Government to declare their attitude.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1,
April 9, 1940.