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W.M. (40)**116th Conclusions.****TO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY.**

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WAR CABINET 116 (40).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, S.W. 1, on Thursday, May 9, 1940, at 11.45 A.M.

Present :

The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Prime Minister (<i>in the Chair</i>).	
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN SIMON, K.C., M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.	The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. Sir KINGSLEY WOOD, M.P., Lord Privy Seal.	The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty.
The Right Hon. OLIVER STANLEY, M.P., Secretary of State for War.	The Right Hon. Sir SAMUEL HOARE, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
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 the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.	The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Hon. Sir ALEXANDER CADOGAN, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.	Air Chief Marshal Sir CYRIL L. N. NEWALL, Chief of the Air Staff.
Admiral of the Fleet Sir DUDLEY POUND, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.	General Sir W. EDMUND IRONSIDE, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Secretariat.

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Major-General H. L. ISMAY.
Lieutenant-Colonel V. DYKES, R.E.
Lieutenant-Colonel E. I. C. JACOB, R.E.
Mr. G. N. FLEMMING.

WAR CABINET 116 (40).

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Strategical Situation.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 76th Conclusions, Minute 2.)

1. The War Cabinet had before them a Report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee (W.P. (40) 145) making certain recommendations on the assumption that Germany had decided to seek a decision in 1940.

The War Cabinet considered *seriatim* the recommendations set out in paragraph 3 of the Report.

- (a) *That every possible step should be taken to hasten the production of anti-aircraft equipment, particularly Bofors guns, bomber and fighter aircraft and fully trained crews, even at the temporary expense of our long-term programme.*

Bofors guns.

The Chief of the Air Staff said that the Bofors gun situation was very serious, and the Chiefs of Staff had put up a special Report on the subject to the Military Co-ordination Committee (M.C. (40) 95).

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 47th Conclusions, Minute 1.)

In discussion, it was explained that the Military Co-ordination Committee had recently examined the situation with the Minister of Supply. The factory at Nottingham was working at full capacity. At Coventry, however, owing to labour difficulties, a full night-shift was not employed, and it was suggested that further endeavours should be made to improve the labour situation at Coventry. Another difficulty was the weakness of the Nuffield Organisation.

The Prime Minister referred to the statement that some of the Bofors guns sent to Norway had lacked predictors. *The Secretary of State for War* explained that this was not so, but that, owing to difficulties in unloading, certain guns might have been unloaded without their predictors.

Reference was also made to reports from officers returning from Norway that the predictor made the working of the Bofors gun too slow. The Secretary of State for War said that this point would be dealt with in reports of operations in Norway.

Output of aircraft.
(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 111th Conclusions, Minute 9.)

In regard to the part of this recommendation which dealt with Fighter aircraft, *the Secretary of State for Air* said that he had been examining what steps could be taken to improve output during the next few months without interfering with our long-term programme. He would submit a Report to the War Cabinet on this matter in the near future.

Denial of Dutch aerodromes to the Germans in the event of a German invasion of Holland.
(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 113th Conclusions, Minute 9.)

- (b) *That every endeavour should be made to induce the Dutch Government to give the assurance for which they have been asked that they will make immediate preparations for the demolition of their aerodromes in the event of invasion.*

The Chief of the Air Staff said that the Dutch Government were believed to have taken certain steps in preparation for the demolition of their aerodromes in the event of invasion. He was trying to get further information through the Air Attaché.

Invasion of Great Britain.
(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 108th Conclusions, Minute 4.)

- (c) *That the plans already prepared for dealing with invasion of this country should be reviewed forthwith and requirements met. In this respect the Ministry of Home Security should be instructed to maintain the closest touch with the Service Departments.*

The Chief of the Air Staff said that the Chiefs of Staff Committee were engaged in a full examination of this problem, and

had discussed the matter with the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces. They would be reporting shortly to the Military Co-ordination Committee.

The Minister of Home Security said that the Regional Organisation was in very close touch with the Service authorities, but the new appreciation which extended the area for raids to the North of Scotland, and envisaged the possibility of invasion anywhere between the Wash and Newhaven, would involve the working out of plans on a broader basis than before.

The Secretary of State for War questioned whether any part of the South coast of England could be regarded as a likely area for invasion. If areas in which attack was unlikely were included in the scheme, one result would be to detract from the strength of the forces available to protect more vulnerable areas.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs thought that the proposal made in debate by Lord Mottistone that local levies armed with rifles might be found from among the older men to guard isolated places of importance, was worth consideration.

The Chief of the Air Staff said that all these matters would be fully studied by the Chiefs of Staff.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that the first essential of a successful defence against invasion was the holding of compact mobile forces composed of good troops, armed with complete and up-to-date equipment, ready to strike any force landing in the country.

The Secretary of State for War said that Armoured Divisions represented the best type of troops for this purpose. When the 1st Armoured Division went to France—which it would shortly be doing—it was proposed to bring back the rest of the 5th Division, so that there would be a complete Regular formation in this country.

Passive defence
measures.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (89) 121st
Conclusions,
Minute 2.)

(d) *That active steps should be taken to educate public opinion to the reality of the air threat and to develop to the highest pitch of efficiency our passive defence measures.*

The Minister of Home Security strongly supported this recommendation. He was anxious about the apathetic attitude displayed by the general public towards civil defence, in spite of efforts to stimulate them. Many people seemed to think that air attack would not take place, or, if it did, would be easily dealt with. This idea had been to some extent fostered by the cutting down of permanent A.R.P. personnel. If the general public, from whom civil defence volunteers were drawn, were apathetic, it was difficult to arouse enthusiasm in the volunteers. He thought that much could be done in the course of speeches by Ministers, and in talks to the Press, to draw attention to the danger of air attack.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that he would deprecate a regular campaign at this stage as to the danger of air attack. He thought the right policy was to perfect the organisation to deal with air attack, and to rely on the falling of the first bombs to bring people to their senses.

The Prime Minister agreed. If a fresh campaign to arouse public opinion on this point were now undertaken, and if no bombing took place in the course of the next month or so, the campaign would not only lose its effect, but would cause a renewed onset of public apathy. It would be right, however, that an occasional warning should be made by Ministers in their speeches.

The First Lord of the Admiralty suggested that a circular to local authorities drawing attention to recent events in Norway might serve the purpose of warning the country of the type of danger to be expected.

The Prime Minister thought this suggestion worth following up. He undertook to draw the attention of the Minister of Information to the need for counteracting apathy without causing alarm.

Diversion of shipping.
(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 93rd Conclusions, Minute 15.)

(e) *That arrangements for the diversion of shipping to West Coast ports should be placed in a state of immediate readiness. This should be combined with urgent measures drastically to restrict non-essential imports.*

The Minister without Portfolio said that in the course of the previous few days he had overhauled the arrangements for the diversion of shipping to West coast ports. All the recommendations of Lord Chatfield's Report had been carried out. Steps had been taken to ensure that there was no congestion at the West coast ports. In fact, at the present moment, there were less goods in the West coast ports than at any time for years past.

The First Lord of the Admiralty enquired whether there was an executive officer, who, if the emergency arose, could over-ride Government Departments, and ensure the successful execution of diversion plans.

The Minister without Portfolio said that the whole arrangements were centred in the Ministry of Transport, where the Port and Transit Committee dealt daily with all movements of shipping in a most efficient manner. He reminded the War Cabinet that he had been invited to act as the referee to whom Departmental Ministers could come for help in any case of difficulty.

Reduction of non-essential imports.
(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 56th Conclusions, Minute 2.)
Financial considerations.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he had recently examined the question of cutting down non-essential imports. A drastic reduction had already been made, and he was satisfied that non-essential goods would not be imported.

(f) *In view of the seriousness of the situation we submit that, in putting these recommendations into effect, financial considerations should not be allowed to stand in the way.*

The Chief of the Air Staff said that the Chiefs of Staff Committee had put forward this recommendation with diffidence, as they appreciated the great financial difficulties; but they hoped that, if there were any financial restrictions which were holding up production, or the execution of contracts, they would speedily be removed.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he in no way objected to this recommendation. He had examined the Report to see whether any of the measures recommended were being held up for financial reasons, and he was glad to find that they were not. The difficulties of production rather than of payment were the governing factors.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Took note of the Review by the Chiefs of Staff of the strategical situation on the assumption that Germany has decided to seek a decision in 1940 (W.P. (40) 145), and gave general approval to the recommendations contained in paragraph 3.

(2) Took note of the points made in discussion in regard to these recommendations, and agreed that the following action should be taken:—

(a) *Production of anti-aircraft equipment, particularly Bofors guns.*

That the Military Co-ordination Committee should keep a close watch on the production of anti-

aircraft equipment, especially Bofors guns. The possibility of increasing the production of the Nuffield Factory at Coventry, by working a full night-shift, should be examined.

(b) *Passive defence measures:*

That, while it would be undesirable to institute an intensive campaign, steps should be taken to remind public opinion of the reality of the air threat, and of the need for bringing our passive defence measures to a high state of efficiency. In this connection—

- (i) The Prime Minister undertook to consult with the Minister of Information as to the steps which should be taken to counteract public apathy:
- (ii) The Minister of Home Security undertook to consider the issue of a Circular Letter to Local Authorities, drawing attention, in the light of the campaign in Norway, to the dangers which must be guarded against:
- (iii) Ministers would no doubt take the opportunity of drawing attention to this matter from time to time in their speeches.

**Netherland
West Indies.**

Protection of oil
refineries in
Aruba and
Curaçao in the
event of a
German
invasion of
Holland.

2. The War Cabinet had before them a Report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee (W.P. (40) 148).

The First Sea Lord said that it was of vital importance to prevent interference with the oil refineries in Aruba and Curaçao. The greatest danger was that of sabotage. There were seven German ships now in Curaçao and one at Aruba, and many German residents in the Islands. A scheme for the despatch of troops to the Islands had been agreed with the French, and the Commander-in-Chief, America and West Indies Stations, had been instructed to make all arrangements for the transport of three companies of British troops from Jamaica to Curaçao, and a detachment of French troops from Martinique to Aruba. The Chiefs of Staff proposed that the Admiralty should be responsible for giving the executive order for these moves immediately a German invasion of Holland began.

In answer to a question by the Prime Minister, he said that the Dutch, who seemed to realise the danger of sabotage and also the possibility of the Venezuelans trying to occupy the Islands themselves, had already increased their precautions.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs deprecated the proposal in paragraph 4 of the Report to warn the Dutch Government now to be on their guard. The Dutch showed clearly that they did not wish to be involved with us in any way in taking precautions against enemy action. Moreover, such a move would run counter to our present policy, which we had followed in the case of Iceland, of having no preliminary consultations before landing forces in the outlying possessions of countries overrun by Germany. All the necessary arrangements had been made by the Foreign Office for inviting the United States Government to share in the control of the Islands, though we should be careful not to use the word "occupation" when the approach was made. We should make it clear that the despatch of troops was a purely temporary measure so long as the danger lasted. The texts of the communications to be made to the United States Government had been agreed with Lord Lothian in Washington, who was in favour of the proposals of the Chiefs of Staff to send troops to the Islands and to invite

the United States to share in their control. Drafts of these communications had been given to the French; they were suggesting some amendments which had not yet been received.

The Minister without Portfolio suggested that, if a formal approach to the Dutch Government was not to be made, the British Consul should be instructed to make an informal approach to the Dutch authorities in the Islands as to the danger of sabotage.

The Secretary of State for War said that he had spoken to Mr. Rogers, the Canadian Minister of Defence, on the matter, and had suggested that it would be of great assistance to us if the troops withdrawn from Jamaica could be replaced by Canadians. Mr. Rogers had undertaken to mention the matter to Mr. Mackenzie King, without stating the destination of the troops to be withdrawn from Jamaica. He was hopeful that the Canadian Government would supply the necessary troops.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs thought that it would be better to take Mr. Mackenzie King completely into our confidence.

The War Cabinet—

- (i) Approved the recommendations of the Chiefs of Staff contained in paragraph 12 of W.P. (40) 148, subject to the proviso that no official approach should be made to the Dutch Government in regard to precautions against sabotage in Aruba and Curacao.
- (ii) Invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to consider the desirability of instructing the British Consul in the Islands to make an informal approach to the local Dutch authorities on the subject of anti-sabotage precautions.
- (iii) Authorised the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to communicate with Mr. Mackenzie King :
 - (a) informing him of the action proposed; and
 - (b) asking him to agree that, if British troops were withdrawn from Jamaica, they might be replaced by Canadian troops.

The Air Situation.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 115th Conclusions, Minute 2.)

3. *The Secretary of State for Air* said that the only enemy activity reported in the neighbourhood of our coast had been the approach of two aircraft to the south coast early on the morning of the 9th May.

No operations had been carried out by the Bomber Command on the previous night on account of the bad weather.

The Coastal Command had carried out reconnaissances of the Heligoland Bight and of the Norwegian Coast. At Stavanger only 12 aircraft had been seen on the aerodrome and two aircraft moored in the adjacent anchorage.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

The Naval Situation.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 115th Conclusions, Minute 3.)

4. *The First Lord of the Admiralty* described certain naval movements which were being made to meet the contingency of a German invasion of Holland.

Submarine operations.

H.M. submarine *Taku* had reported that she had attacked two transports escorted by two destroyers 100 miles north-north-west

of Horns Reef on the afternoon of the 8th May and believed that she had made three hits. She had subsequently been attacked by depth charges and had retired to westward to repair her damage.

An enemy submarine was suspected in the Dogger Bank area and a suspicious surface craft, which might have been mine-laying, had been reported off Newcastle. The Tyne was now closed pending search, but, generally speaking, traffic was proceeding almost normally in spite of the recent enemy mine-laying activities.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

Operations in Norway.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 115th Conclusions, Minute 4.)
Kirkenes area.
Narvik area.

5. The War Cabinet were given the following information—

- (1) The cruiser *Devonshire* had sailed from Scapa for Kirkenes to forestall any landing of Germans there.
- (2) Lord Cork had reported certain operations which he was planning in order to improve the position of his troops. He had explained that he was committed to these operations, but that he would prepare at the same time for a more direct attack.
- (3) The arrival of H.M.S. *Ark Royal* had had a marked effect on the air situation for 24 hours, but bombing had begun again, all anchorages having been attacked on the 8th May, as well as ships off Narvik.
- (4) Lord Cork had visited Skaanland aerodrome and reported that at least 9 days would be required before it could be used. He stressed the importance of securing the arrival of Hurricane aircraft at the earliest possible date, as these were the only aircraft capable of dealing with Heinkels.

The Chief of the Air Staff pointed out that, while it was no doubt important to expedite the arrival of the Hurricanes, Gladiators were in fact of considerable use against Heinkels. Skuas had also had some success against Heinkels in the Trondhjem area.

- (5) In answer to a question, *the Chief of the Air Staff* said that there were rumours from Sweden that the Germans had established new aerodromes in Norway, but that this information had not been confirmed.
- (6) The destroyer *Isis* had hit submerged wreckage in Ballenger Fjord close to Narvik and was being towed to Skjel Fjord after landing her troops. *Penelope*, which had been effecting repairs at Skjel Fjord, had been due to leave on the night of the 8th-9th May. *Aurora* had reported some casualties and one turret out of action; the cause of the damage was not yet known, but was presumed to have been a bomb. A convoy with fuel and stores was due to arrive on the evening of the 9th May. Arrangements had been made to man a British destroyer with the crew of the Polish destroyer *Grom*, which had been sunk a few days previously. Lord Cork had described the crew as "excellent material."
- (7) Fog had prevented the proposed landing of troops at Bodo, but troops had been disembarked at Mosjoen and the French troops embarked from there. The French reported 2 German battalions 25 miles to the South.

Bodo and Mosjoen.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that this information need not necessarily be accepted as

altogether accurate. The force which had been landed under Lieut.-Colonel Gubbins was specially equipped for guerrilla tactics, and might be expected effectively to harass the enemy.

Casualties in the Trondhjem area.

- (8) *The Secretary of State for War* said that definite information was not yet available as to casualties incurred by our troops in the fighting North and South of Trondhjem, but it was thought that they would probably amount to 1,700 or 1,800 in all. Brigadier Phillips's Brigade, which had been described by American Press Correspondents as having been seriously cut up, had, in fact, suffered some 200 casualties in all.

The War Cabinet took note of these statements.

Italy.

Naval dispositions in the Mediterranean. (Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 115th Conclusions, Minute 8.)
Diversion of Australian and New Zealand troop convoy. (Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 111th Conclusions, Minute 6.)

6. *The First Lord of the Admiralty* informed the War Cabinet that H.M.S. *Warspite* had now passed through the danger zone and would shortly join the rest of the Fleet at Alexandria.

The First Sea Lord said that the slow convoy with Australian and New Zealand troops was now approaching Aden and that it would soon be too late to divert it from going through the Red Sea. The convoy consisted of five ships and would be escorted by H.M.S. *Ramillies*, one cruiser and two destroyers. This escort could be regarded as adequate against any possible sea attack but could not, of course, provide complete protection against air action in the dangerous stretch of 500 miles immediately after passing Aden.

In answer to a question, *the Chief of the Air Staff* explained that some protection could be provided by fighter aircraft from Aden and again when the convoy would be approaching Suez, but not in between.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he had no information which would suggest that the position was becoming more serious and that the convoy ought to be diverted.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs said that the Australian Government were ready to accept our proposals in regard to the convoy, but that they assumed that sufficient protection would be provided against sea and air attack.

It was generally agreed that while it was impossible to give an assurance that the convoy was provided with "sufficient protection" against all possible air attack, it was nevertheless reasonable in the circumstances that the convoy should be allowed to proceed. In the ordinary way it would reach Suez about the 15th May.

The War Cabinet agreed—

That the slow convoy with Australian and New Zealand troops then approaching Aden should proceed on its voyage to Suez, as originally planned.

**The
Netherlands.**

Possible
German
invasion.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (40) 115th
Conclusions,
Minute 6.)

7. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that there was no confirmation of the report received the previous night via the United States Embassy that the German Government had presented an ultimatum to the Netherland Government.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

*Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
May 9, 1940.*



