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**W.M. (40)****179th Conclusions.****TO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY.**

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**WAR CABINET 179 (40).**

*CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, June 24, 1940, at 6 P.M.*

**Present :**

The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister ( <i>in the Chair</i> ).	
The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Lord President of the Council.	The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Lord Privy Seal.
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.	The Right Hon. A. GREENWOOD, M.P., Minister without Portfolio.

**The following were also present :**

The Right Hon. A. V. ALEXANDER, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty.	The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. Sir ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.	The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CALDECOTE, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.	The Right Hon. A. DUFF COOPER, M.P., Minister of Information.
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 JOHN DILL, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

**Secretariat.**

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.  
Major-General H. L. ISMAY.  
Mr. W. D. WILKINSON.  
Lieutenant-Colonel V. DYKES, R.E.  
Major C. R. PRICE, R.E.

## WAR CABINET 179 (40).

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**Sweden.**

Seizure of  
Swedish  
destroyers.

(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (40) 178th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 12.)

1. The War Cabinet resumed consideration of this question, which had been deferred at the morning's Meeting.

*The First Lord of the Admiralty* said that the four Swedish destroyers, when repaired, would be of considerable value to us for convoy purposes. The ships of the Swedish Navy that might fall into German hands were:—

- 3—11-in. Coastal Protection Vessels.
- 1—Modern 6-in. Cruiser.
- 9—Destroyers.
- 8—Submarines.

On the previous day he had opposed a reversal of the decision on the grounds that, first, the surrender of these ships would be interpreted as a sign of weakness, particularly by those concerned in their capture, and secondly, he had thought it unlikely that Germany would deliver an ultimatum to Sweden in view of the effect this would have on the Russian attitude. The Naval Staff had, however, from the beginning taken the view that the value to us of the four destroyers would be unlikely to compensate for the repercussions following our action in seizing them. In view of the difficulties anticipated by the Foreign Secretary, and his anxiety to avoid provoking a German *démarche* to Sweden, the Admiralty were prepared to see the destroyers released on the pretext that recent information from Sweden had thrown a fresh light on the whole matter. The Swedes should be asked to give an undertaking to the British Government that rather than allow these destroyers to fall into German hands they would cause them to be scuttled.

The War Cabinet expressed general agreement with the view taken by the First Lord.

*The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that if the release of the destroyers were to be authorised, the Swedish Government would be informed that we were not taking this action in reliance on German assurances of safe passage, and would therefore demand from Sweden the assurances suggested by the First Lord. We would explain that our decision had been made in the light of the new information furnished by the Swedish Government, which showed that they had believed that we had been fully acquainted with the plan for ensuring that the ships reached Sweden. In return for the destroyers, the Swedish Government should be pressed to suspend their contract for aircraft with the United States of America. He would try to make this a condition of their release and if successful, the transaction would be considerably to our benefit.

*The Minister of Information* asked if all mention of this incident should be kept out of the press.

*The Prime Minister* said that there was nothing really unusual in holding ships pending investigation and that, in releasing these destroyers, it would be quite easy to say that enquiries had shown that there were insufficient grounds for retaining them in view of the appeal made by the Swedish Government. There would be no need to make any public announcement, but our action could be explained to the officers and men concerned in the seizure of the ships.

*The Chief of Naval Staff* drew attention to the criticism contained in telegrams from Stockholm of the action of the Swedish captain in allowing the destroyers to be seized by us. It might save this officer from punishment if, in our reply to the Swedish Government, reference was made to the fact that he had taken all the steps he could to resist capture in the face of a very superior force.

*The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that he would make that point quite clear.

The War Cabinet—

- (1) Authorised the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to tell the Swedish Government that, as a result of the fresh information furnished by them, the destroyers would be released.
- (2) Invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to use the release of these destroyers as a lever to obtain the suspension of the Swedish contract for aircraft from the United States of America.
- (3) Invited the Minister of Information to ensure that this matter was not mentioned in the Press.

**France.**

Reply by  
President  
Lebrun to His  
Majesty The  
King's Message.

2. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* read to the War Cabinet the reply which had been received from President Lebrun to The King's message. The chief point made by the President was that, according to the terms of the armistice, the French Fleet could not be employed against Great Britain.

The War Cabinet—

Agreed that it would not be necessary to advise His Majesty The King to send any further communication.

**France.**

The French  
Fleet.

(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (40) 178th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 7.)

3. Further discussion took place in regard to the present position of the French Fleet. Particulars of this discussion, and of the Conclusions reached, are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

**France.**

French shipping  
and shipping in  
French ports.

(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (40) 178th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 5.)

4. After a short discussion, the War Cabinet agreed as follows:—

- (1) French shipping should not be allowed to sail from any British port.
- (2) All French ships on the high seas should be diverted into British ports.
- (3) Discretion should be given to the Naval authorities to allow French ships to sail in exceptional cases, provided that the Commanders of H.M. Ships were satisfied that the vessels were in a position to complete their voyage in safety; for example, shipping might be allowed to proceed to Indo-China, where the loyalty of the local Government to the Allied cause was above suspicion.
- (4) Ships of any flag should be stopped from proceeding to German-occupied ports in France.
- (5) The expedition to Le Verdon to cut out merchant vessels should proceed, subject to the proviso that French ships should not be taken if within the three mile limit. There was, of course, no objection to such vessels being seized if outside the three-mile limit.

**France.**

Armed forces in  
the United  
Kingdom.

(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (40) 178th

Conclusions,  
Minute 8.)

5. *The Secretary of State for War* said that there were some 21,000 members of the French armed forces in this country. This figure included some 9,000 Naval personnel. The rest consisted mainly of Chasseurs Alpins, and two battalions of the Foreign Legion. The French Government at Bordeaux had ordered their Service personnel to return to France, and many of the men were asking to be allowed to obey this order.

In discussion it was suggested that it might be desirable that the Secretary of State for War should mention this matter to General de Gaulle. Further, any really first-class troops, such as the Foreign Legion, should, if possible, be induced to stay and fight for us, although the usefulness of these troops would be greatly diminished if they did not volunteer as complete units. The rest were of no use to us, and had better be sent home at the first opportunity. They could not, of course, be permitted to take their equipment with them.

As regards transport, they should sail in French ships. If possible ships should be sent from France to fetch them.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Secretary of State for War to deal with the matter on the above general lines.

**France.**

French oil  
supplies.

6. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that he had been in communication with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in regard to the oil installations in France which had not yet been destroyed. The difficulties of effecting this were explained shortly.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Chiefs of Staff to obtain from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster the information in his possession regarding the oil installations in France which had not yet been destroyed, and to report what action they recommended should be taken.

**Franco-Italian  
Armistice.**

7. In the course of the Meeting a message was received to the effect that a Franco-Italian armistice had been signed. No news was available as to its provisions.

The War Cabinet took note of this information.

**France.**

Permits for  
French citizens  
to leave the  
United  
Kingdom.

8. *The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security* said that he had that morning taken steps to suspend the issue to French citizens of permits to leave this country. He did not propose to make exceptions in favour of members of the various French Military Missions or the French Purchasing Missions now in this country.

The War Cabinet approved the course proposed.

**France.**

Communication  
of information  
to the  
Dominions.

9. The view was expressed that it would be premature to make any communication at this stage to the Dominion Governments as to the position of Anglo-French relations.

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs* pointed out that Canadian and South African representatives were accredited to the French Government. France also had representatives in Canada and South Africa. For this reason it was most necessary that

these two Dominions should be given early information if any breach of diplomatic relations was about to take place between this country and France.

Telegram to  
Mr. Mackenzie  
King.

*The Prime Minister* said that he had received a cordial telegram from Mr. Mackenzie King, referring among other matters, to the possibility that the British Fleet might be sent to North America if the situation deteriorated.

The Prime Minister read his draft reply, in which he expressed his confidence as to the final outcome of the war and that there was no reason to fear that the Royal Navy would have to be transferred to American waters.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Prime Minister to telegraph to Mr. Mackenzie King on the lines suggested.

France.  
Message from  
the Bordeaux  
Government.

10. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* read a message which M. Cambon had brought to the Foreign Office that afternoon. The message was of a disagreeable character and M. Cambon had explained, in confidence, that M. Corbin had been unwilling to charge himself with delivering it. The text of the French communication is given in the *Appendix* to these Conclusions.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

*Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,*  
*June 24, 1940.*

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## APPENDIX.

*Communication from the French Government.*

(Minute 10.)

M. CAMBON called this afternoon to make the following communications on behalf of the French Government. He explained, in confidence, that M. Corbin, who was unlikely to remain Ambassador much longer, was unwilling to charge himself with these communications, and had commissioned M. Cambon to deliver them. M. Cambon doubted whether, if there were many such communications to make, he would be able to continue to come to us with them.

1. The French Government wished to point out that General de Gaulle had been recalled to France for disciplinary reasons. In view of this fact, the action of His Majesty's Government in permitting the services of the B.B.C. to be placed at General de Gaulle's disposal for an appeal to the public over the head of the French Government was quite irregular, and had created a most painful impression in France.

2. The French Government had been informed that His Majesty's Consular Representatives at Rabat, Algiers and Tunis, on instructions from His Majesty's Government, had made communication to the effect that, France having been obliged to sign an armistice, the French Government no longer had any powers in territory occupied by the enemy, and, consequently, His Majesty's Government appealed to all French territories overseas to abandon the French Government and to continue the struggle with Great Britain. (I told M. Cambon that I did not think this was an accurate summary. He suggested that we might point this out in any reply we made.) The French Government wished to say that they thought that these communications were quite inadmissible, and seemed to show that His Majesty's Government intended not to continue their relations with the French Government. The French Government could not believe that His Majesty's Government would assume such a responsibility, and they asked Lord Halifax to let them have an expression of his opinion on this subject.

3. In view of the above, the French Government asked that the Consuls-General at Rabat, Tunis and Algiers should be recalled. (M. Cambon suggested that one solution might be to let them go on leave.)

4. Finally, M. Cambon said that the French Government wished to make certain observations upon recent statements by the Prime Minister. These had created a very painful impression in France, and the French Government felt bound to protest against certain statements which were in complete conflict with the facts. The situation had been clearly explained to the Prime Minister on the 11th June.

The French Government had been compelled to withdraw from the struggle by circumstances which were well-known in London, and the French Government had never for a moment lost sight of the bonds which united them to His Majesty's Government. Their main preoccupation was not to agree to any condition which would be likely to make France, or any aspect of French activity, an instrument which might be directly used against Great Britain. In the view of the French Government none of the clauses of the Armistice implied that this preoccupation had been set aside. In particular, the French Government thought it certain that the French Fleet could not in any event be used against Great Britain. Formal assurances to this effect had been given on several occasions to His Majesty's Ambassador. The President of the Council and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had renewed these assurances a few days ago to Lord Lloyd and Mr. Alexander.

The attitude of His Majesty's Government, and the remarks of the Prime Minister, had given the impression that the solemn declarations of the French Government had not been received in London with the complete confidence which they deserved. Whatever difficulties might be caused by the present situation in France, these difficulties ought not to be allowed to break the moral and political front which the two Governments had maintained hitherto. The French Government were firmly convinced of this, and it was in this sense they would continue to influence public opinion in France. If the terms used by the Prime

Minister were any guide, the Prime Minister seemed to regard the present French Government as not accurately representing French public opinion, or as representing only part of it. It was important to emphasise that there was no "Government of Bordeaux." There was only the Government of France, which interpreted the feelings of Frenchmen and was fully supported by them. The French Government hoped, more particularly, that His Majesty's Government would see to it that the departure of Sir R. Campbell and the staff of the British Embassy should not be wrongly interpreted.

I told M. Cambon that I would report what he had said, and would abstain from any comment on his representations.

Speaking personally, M. Cambon warned us not to overlook the passage in the foregoing communication about the desire of the French Government not to break the common front. Unless this point was properly dealt with in any reply we sent, the French Government were quite likely to pretend that His Majesty's Government had rejected the hand of friendship offered by the French Government.

He said, further, that he hoped that His Majesty's Government would not say anything which made it necessary for the French Government to recall the Embassy from London. This Embassy was the sole link now existing between the two Governments, and it would be disastrous if that link were broken. It was important to gain time. The French Government were in a curious state of mind at the moment. In a few weeks' time, when the French people had further experience of German occupation, it might be possible to do something with them.

W. STRANG

*June 24, 1940.*

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