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Printed for the War Cabinet. June 1942.

SECRET.

Copy No. 22

W.P. (42) 271.

June 27, 1942.

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WAR CABINET.

POLICY TO BE ADOPTED TOWARDS MR. GANDHI.

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India.

WITH reference to War Cabinet Conclusions of the 15th June, 74 (42), Minute 3, and to my Memorandum W.P. (42) 255 of the 16th June, I circulate (Appendix I) for the consideration of the War Cabinet a telegram from the Viceroy, giving his appreciation of the situation.

I also circulate (Appendix II) a summary of a report of the discussion in the Congress Working Committee on Gandhi's original draft of the Congress War Resolution, the text of which will be found in W.P. (42) 255. This throws much light on the differences of opinion in the Committee.

L. S. A.

India Office, June 27, 1942.

APPENDIX I.

*Telegram from Governor-General to Secretary of State for India,
dated June 26, 1942.*

(Immediate.)
1928-S.

FOLLOWING is appreciation of present position *vis-à-vis* Gandhi and Congress:—

2. Cabinet will be familiar with recent happenings. Position as I see it is, briefly, that Cripps's negotiations disclosed (a) a certain readiness on the part of Congress to retreat, which was danger envisaged by Gandhi and which he did his best to offset; (b) they also involved a much more formal acceptance of the principle of Pakistan, &c.; (c) when negotiations broke down Congress had become involved in them to an extent which considerably weakened their position of entire refusal to accept *bona fides* of His Majesty's Government and of antagonism to retention of British connection with this country. Nehru himself was as deeply implicated as anyone; (d) following on collapse of Cripps's negotiations Gandhi suffered defeat and consequent loss of face in Allahabad discussions over his war resolution.

This was followed by defection of Rajagopalachari, who is still running his own opposition campaign, for which he has received a measure of support.

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3. I have always thought that two matters which weigh with Gandhi were, first, his personal vanity, and, second, his desire to keep Congress together. Situation described in the preceding paragraph threatened both. Congress showed signs of disintegration, had lost prestige and position in the country, and it had been made clear that Gandhi's words were no longer entirely authoritative with it. He was bound in these circumstances either to let process of disintegration (and parallel process of increasing loss of face on his own part) continue, or to endeavour by dramatic gesture to reconcentrate attention on himself and to reconsolidate divided ranks of Congress.

4. The first method of achieving these objects was "Britain getting out" slogan. To that very general (? refrain) he has endeavoured to (? hitch), firstly, general fears of Japanese with suggestion that were we not here India would have nothing to fear about Japanese aggression; secondly, grievance, minor but obviously far more acutely felt by rank and file, which may arise in operational areas in connection with orders to evacuate houses and holdings as result of our denial policy, &c. He has secured utmost publicity both here and in United States for "Britain getting out" slogan, and a fortnight ago it looked as though, assuming that that slogan were a success, and that if it was followed by an appeal for mass civil disobedience movement, non-payment of land revenue or other move designed to interfere in our war effort, we might have to take on a serious battle with Congress in immediate future.

5. The last fortnight, however, has, in my judgment, eased the situation. Gandhi, somewhat unwisely perhaps, made it clear that it was not only the British but the Americans also who must leave the country. The Harijan contained a series of somewhat insulting comments on American colour policy, treatment of negroes, &c., while American soldiers have been bracketed with British as unwelcome. And while Gandhi has seen a large number of American press correspondents, the accounts in Harijan show that his talks with them have at least on one occasion led to "some exasperation" on part of his visitor. He has not, so far as I am aware, had a good American press, and he is, of course, very sensitive to that. So far as India is concerned, unreal character of his proposals, failure to accept reality of Japanese menace, &c., has probably been contributory cause of what is undoubtedly a fact, that he did not get too good a press even in Indian papers which support Congress. There are indications also that soundings taken of provinces had not been wholly encouraging from his point of view: and while he has got Nehru and Kalam Azad on his side, our information suggests that neither of them is prepared to go in for mass civil disobedience. Finally, Jinnah has now published statement, gist of which you have seen, which shows that he is not prepared to acquiesce in Gandhi's policy, or in any action by His Majesty's Government or Gandhi which may prejudice Moslem claims.

6. The Mahatma's reactions to this position are shown by fact that in last ten days he has spared no opportunity "to interpret" (and in the process to cloud and befog) his original slogan. No metaphysician could now draw any really firm conclusion from original slogan read with variety of riders which Gandhi has passed upon it. He is thus, so far as broad policy stands, in position, which he always tries to create, in which he has the operation of a policy not clearly understood by either his followers or world at large and the definition of which remains entirely in his own hands.

7. At the same time, while he may not have had response for which he had hoped, he has with singular success again focussed attention in this country (and I should have thought also abroad) on himself. By securing support (under whatever limitations) of Nehru and Azad, he has got the backing of main figures in Working Committee, and the attention concentrated on Gandhi has still further detracted from significance and activities of Rajagopalachari. He has thus secured without any open clash with us certain of objects which he may be presumed to have had in view in launching his present agitation, and to that extent the need for extreme measures may perhaps be rather less from his point of view than it was at an earlier stage. It is very relevant, too, that Gandhi, so far as I can judge, has lost none of his political astuteness, and I remain of the opinion that he is as unlikely as in past, particularly at his age and the somewhat shaky condition of Congress, to engage in a battle in which he does not feel fairly confident of victory.

8. I see no sign of any particular excitement in the country. As suggested above, I doubt if response to an appeal for mass civil disobedience by Gandhi would be in any sense whole-hearted. Nor do I think such an appeal likely.

9. The next stage is meeting of the Working Committee of Congress on 6th July. There is at this moment no clear indication of what proposition Gandhi is likely to put before them. I doubt myself if he is really yet clear in his mind. Moreover, he is essentially opportunist. It may be that the course of Libyan campaign over the next fortnight will materially affect the line which the Working Committee and Gandhi will take. That we cannot judge.

10. I am, however, advised that, whatever the Working Committee decide, it would be impossible for them to implement it, particularly if they have to go for confirmation to All-India Congress Committee, within at least a fortnight from the date of their meeting. On that assumption, there is not a great deal to be gained at this stage by my examining for benefit of the Cabinet alternative possibilities. I would prefer, on the whole, therefore, to wait until the Working Committee has met, and thereafter to advise you and the Cabinet in the light of their conclusion. There need be no delay about that, and I should be (? able to) avoid wasting your time by examining a series of hypotheses. Meanwhile, I will, of course, keep you in closest touch with any developments that may affect the general situation.

11. But I think I can properly at this stage record the following general propositions: (a) Neither His Majesty's Government nor I have any desire to take on Congress if we can avoid that consistently with maintaining war effort and provisions of the law, &c. We have quite enough on our hands already. (b) On the other hand, if Congress attitude forces us to take them on, we must be prepared to do so and with the utmost vigour. That would be the case whether Congress attempted a policy of mass or individual civil disobedience throughout the whole country, or, alternatively, to slow down work in connection with war effort, or, alternatively (perhaps in some ways as likely as any), issue instructions to refuse to pay land revenue or to individuals in operational areas to get in the way of military arrangements for evacuation of areas, occupation of buildings, &c., and denial policy. (c) We might be prepared to contemplate the arrest of Gandhi, and, if necessary, of other leaders, if circumstances so dictate. I attach, I fear, little importance to other leaders, but Gandhi is a special case. If we are forced to arrest him, alternatives are to intern him outside India or in India. I have carefully considered these alternatives. In result, I conclude in favour of interning him in this country on same line as we had in view previously, viz., in a comfortable house, probably in Bombay Presidency, and giving all due consideration to him. He will, in my judgment, have far less popular appeal if he is interned here and be far less of a focus. I think effect, too, in United States will probably be less unfortunate if he is kept in his own country in comfortable surroundings than if he is deported to Uganda or the like. Finally, we avoid any risk of difficulties over food, medical attention, physical strain on him of a long air or sea passage, &c.

12. I would, however, also add following comments:—

(a) If we are faced with serious trouble here and are (? to come) through it successfully, I must be assured of complete backing of His Majesty's Government. My Council have made a very strong point of this. They complain that when they are invited to go all out against Congress they cannot risk position being radically changed at a moment's notice without consulting with them by a mission sent such as Cripps's from home which concentrates on Congress, and they urge very strongly that if they are to get on the platforms and expose the fallacies of Congress policy they should do so with an assurance that they will not be thrown overboard. I recognise that politics being what they are there cannot be any last word in matters such as these. But I should like to be able to assure my Council that in the event of their taking the line (and political risks to themselves) involved they would do so with complete backing of His Majesty's Government.

(b) His Majesty's Government must be prepared to prepare the way in United States and at home, and to do really active propaganda for our course

of action. I thought your telegrams to Home Department 10853 and 10854 admirable on those lines, but ground requires very careful preparation.

- (c) (?) We must be prepared to take a much more rigid line as regards news, broadcasts, &c. I am telegraphing separately to you about B.B.C., and suggesting that a far greater degree of control over Indian material put out by it is called for. I can do a good deal myself with Reuters; but I should have to look to you and to His Majesty's Government to help so far as they could with Reuter and with press generally. I recognise that we cannot prevent people like Sorensen, &c., from asking questions in Parliament.

APPENDIX II.

Summary of Discussion in Congress Working Committee on the Congress War Resolution finally adopted on May 1.

Nehru urged that Gandhi's draft made the wrong approach. The British could not reasonably withdraw their troops even if they recognised independence; withdrawal of troops and the whole apparatus of civil administration would create a vacuum which could not be filled immediately. Moreover, the conquest of India is in the Japanese plan. If the British withdrew, the Japanese would insist on certain facilities—aerodromes, occupation of strategic points, passage for troops to the Middle East. Acceptance of the policy in Gandhi's draft would make India a passive partner of the Axis Powers. He repeatedly emphasised this last point and said that the Japanese could not be stopped by non-violent non-co-operation, while Congress would get hostility from every other element outside the Axis Powers. The whole thought and background of Gandhi's draft was one of favouring Japan. It was Gandhi's feeling that Japan and Germany would win. He thought Congress were agreed (1) on their reactions to Government; (2) on their total inability to co-operate with Government; (3) on their policy not to embarrass Government because that would help the invader.

Points made by speakers who supported *Nehru* were:—

Pandit Pant: The language about condemnation of the Cripps proposals is highly exaggerated—if the proposals were so bad, why did we spend so much time over them? We must do our utmost to defend the country and swallow many things. If I can't co-operate with the British it is because it is not consistent with our dignity. But the approach in Gandhi's draft makes every soldier I see my enemy.

Asaf Ali: Telling the British to withdraw will do nobody any good.

Bhulabhai Desai: The resolution is inconsistent with our previous stand. We have said that if offered an opportunity we shall side with the Allies.

Satyamurti: I do not agree with the objection to the entry of foreign soldiers. India may defend herself even with the aid of foreign soldiers.

Rajagopalachariar also criticised the original draft and its amendment by *Rajendra Prasad*. The new interpretation of Congress policy would go terribly against them, and Japan would say: "Excellent!" Japan would fill the vacuum created by the British withdrawal. "Our reaction to the evils of Britain should not make us lose our sense of perspective. Do not run into the arms of Japan, which is what the resolution comes to."

But in spite of *Nehru's* criticisms the majority of the Working Committee supported Gandhi's draft, as amended by *Rajendra Prasad*.

Kripalani: The resolution will not necessarily lead to the passage of Japanese armies through India. Congress have asked British and Americans to withdraw their armies, and so also they ask others to keep out of their frontiers. "If they do not, we fight."

Patwardhan: If we do not take decisions Nehru's attitude will lead to abject and unconditional co-operation with British machinery which must collapse. Co-operation with Britain is an invitation to Japan. The war is an imperialist war. Our policy can be that we take no sides. I would reconsider the position if the Allies could defeat the Axis. But I see clearly that Britain is going towards the deep. We want to create neutrality.

Vallabhai Patel: The British cannot defend India. We cannot defend it either because they won't let us. But if they withdraw there is a chance for us. Congress to-day is reeling under two blows, one Cripps and the other Rajagopalachariar's resolutions. I feel Gandhi is instinctively right in the lead he gives in all critical situations. It is time the door (to negotiations with the British Government) was finally closed after the repeated insults heaped on us.

Sarojini Naidu: The draft is good as an expression of our extreme disgust and dislike and hatred of the British Government.

Bishwanath Das: The Cripps proposals if accepted would have kept us in permanent bondage. The appeal to Britain to withdraw is very proper.

A. N. Deo: Whatever unreality there is in Indian politics is due to British rule. Let it go and the unreality will disappear. I am not interested in defeating Hitlerite Germany.

Maulana Kalam Azad: Great Britain has made it impossible for us to defend our country. If I felt that Japan was better than Britain and her invasion was for the good of India I would have said so in public. Gandhi's prescription is the only alternative, though I doubt its effectiveness.

Gandhi's resolution, as amended by Rajendra Prasad, and an alternative resolution submitted by Nehru were put to the vote. The former was adopted at the morning session on the 1st May, but the matter was reopened at the afternoon session and Nehru's draft was finally adopted.



