MILITARY IMPLICATIONS OF A COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL FROM NORWAY.

APPRECIATION BY THE CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE.

In view of the general gravity of the situation on the Western Front and the obvious necessity for cutting our commitments in secondary theatres of war to a minimum, we have been considering the implications of a complete withdrawal from Norway.

OBJECTS OF THE NARVIK OPERATIONS.

2. The objects of H.M. Government in prosecuting operations at Narvik are:

(a) Denial of iron ore through that port to Germany.

(b) Interference with the export of iron ore from Lulea to Germany, and

(c) The maintenance of a seat of government and a centre of resistance in Norway.

Object (a) has probably already been achieved for months to come as a result of the destruction effected by the Navy and by the enemy. The chances of carrying out object (b) effectively depend on the active co-operation of the Swedes, a condition which is unlikely to be fulfilled. We refer in a later paragraph to the more limited results which might be expected from operation "Paul". The maintenance of a seat of government and a centre of resistance in Norway is therefore the only true remaining object of the Narvik operations.

ARGUMENTS FOR WITHDRAWAL.

3. These are:

(a) The idea that our detachment at Narvik will keep Norwegian resistance alive is to some extent fallacious, since any serious resistance must fall to the lot of the French and British forces. The Norwegians have neither the numbers, the material, nor the heart to offer a firm core on which to build. Recent telegrams from Norway indicate that the Norwegian Government may be considering coming to terms with Germany.

* Unnumbered telegram from Mr. Lascelles dated 17th May.
(b) The land and air forces now allotted for operations in Norway — and we can make no more available — are less than those which General Auchinleck considers necessary for the retention of the Bodo, Narvik and Tromse areas. The deficiency is marked in the case of A.A. guns. The one squadron of Hurricanes and the one squadron of Gladiators now earmarked for Narvik would be insufficient to make that place tenable in the face of the scale of air attack which the Germans could put out from bases in Southern Norway.

Moreover it will be most difficult to maintain these two squadrons, which will certainly suffer a high rate of wastage. More Hurricanes cannot be spared; Gladiators are no longer manufactured and reserves of this type are very few.

(c) We are particularly short of A.A. guns and aircraft. The withdrawal of the 48 heavy and 60 light A.A. guns and the fighter aircraft at Narvik could not be effected in time to influence the land battle now being fought in France. These air defence resources would be invaluable if the enemy brings his main weight of attack to bear on this country in the coming weeks, as is probable.

(d) The establishment of our army and air forces at Narvik is proving a most heavy naval commitment. A list of the forces employed on 20th May is attached at Annex I.

Demands on destroyers are particularly heavy. Their release would approximately double the destroyer strength immediately available to oppose an enemy expedition against this country.

On the other hand, after the passage to Narvik of two important convoys during the next 7 days, a reduction in our naval commitments should be possible. Even so the allocation of naval forces for Narvik will cause a reduction in those available for home waters that we can ill afford.

In addition to the forces directly employed in connection with the Narvik commitment, the problem of providing cover for these forces would conflict to some extent with the provision of cover for forces engaged in defending this country against invasion.
(e) Our present operations in Norway do not constitute a profitable military detachment. It is true that the Germans have 11 divisions in the country and that we have the equivalent of only 4½ divisions. But the Germans employed their forces to overcome Southern Norway and there is no reason for them to continue to lock up large forces in Norway merely because we are at Narvik. There are, in fact, reports that they are already evacuating considerable forces from the country.

Further it must be realised that German air concentrations in Norway can be used to attack either Great Britain or Narvik, whereas our own air forces and A.A. guns at Narvik can only be used in a local role.

Arguments against Withdrawal.

4. These are:

(a) Reports indicate that the Germans intend to relieve Narvik. If this is so, they may attack Sweden and we think that Sweden might resist so long as there are Allied Forces in Norway. A German attack on Sweden would clearly be to our advantage, in that it would imperil German iron ore supplies from Lulea and would be a further diversion of German forces.

(b) While we are in the Narvik area the Germans may continue to divert some of their air forces to attacking us there. Any such diversion would reduce the weight of attack on the United Kingdom and France.

(c) If we withdrew from Narvik without having destroyed the railway effectively, the Germans would only have to repair the port facilities, which we estimate they would be able to do in about six months. In view of their possession of the Southern Norwegian coast, the Germans would then be able to maintain a small proportion of their imports of iron ore throughout the winter.

This is therefore a strong argument for staying at Narvik at least until we have destroyed the railway.

(d) Operation 'Paul' will almost certainly be impracticable after we withdraw from Narvik. A land aerodrome for that operation is necessary. Once we abandon Narvik the only possible aerodrome would be at Karlboten, near Kirkenes, and the chances of our being able to operate from there once the Germans were in Narvik would be very remote.
(e) The operation of withdrawing our forces would involve heavy naval and shipping commitments.

(f) There is reason to hope that we shall shortly capture Narvik. The success, although of minor military importance would hearten our own people, the Norwegians and the Swedes.

(g) If we remain in Northern Norway we shall be able to import iron ore and timber from Kirkenes, and high grade Swedish steel in limited quantities. Of these the timber and Swedish steel are particularly important. We should also retain one avenue of communication via the Arctic Highway, with Sweden and Finland.

(h) We have given our word to support the Norwegians.

(i) We understand from the Ministry of Shipping that we might find it extremely difficult to retain control of that large proportion of Norwegian tonnage, the use of which we at present enjoy. Moreover, the Ministry of Shipping take the view that withdrawal from Norway might endanger the continued co-operation of Swedish shipowners of whose shipping we now have a large volume in our service.

Conclusions.

5. There are clearly substantial arguments both for and against withdrawal. To arrive at a correct division it is therefore necessary to consider what is and what is not essential. The security of France and the United Kingdom is essential, the retention of Northern Norway is not. The question then is - will a withdrawal from Norway assist the security of France or the United Kingdom?

6. The security of France probably depends on the battle now in progress. A withdrawal from Norway cannot assist France in that battle.

7. In the near future we shall require in the United Kingdom and Home Waters all the forces that can be mustered. A withdrawal from Norway now could probably be carried out in time to allow of the forces there becoming available.

8. A conclusive argument in favour of withdrawal is that we cannot find the minimum requirements which the Commander on the spot has said that he requires to maintain his position in Northern Norway. This applies particularly to fighter aircraft and A.A. equipments.

Proposed Armistice in Northern Norway.

9. We have considered a proposal, put forward by M. Dahlerus, that an armistice should be negotiated in Northern Norway under the aegis of the Swedish Government. The precise terms of this armistice are not specified, but it is understood that the proposal is that Allied and enemy forces should both withdraw from Northern Norway, which would then be regarded as neutral territory, and under the control of the Swedes. Among the advantages claimed for such an arrangement are that we should be able to withdraw without loss of prestige and would retain Swedish and Norwegian goodwill.
10. We have had the advice of the Foreign Office on the proposed armistice but we doubt very much whether time will allow of the necessary negotiations being completed. From the military point of view, however, we see no harm in the attempt being made. The capture of Narvik might well increase the chances of reaching a successful agreement on these lines. We would point out, however, that if a decision is taken to withdraw from Northern Norway, the operation should be carried out at the appropriate moment, irrespective of these negotiations.

Recommendations:

11. We accordingly recommend that, owing to our inability to provide adequate forces to hold Northern Norway permanently, our present forces must be withdrawn. It would be to our advantage to withdraw them as soon as possible, to strengthen our Home defences. Nevertheless, we consider that every effort should be made to capture Narvik before the withdrawal, as this will give us the chance to destroy the rail and port facilities and will make operation of withdrawal less difficult.

12. The Inter-Service Planning Staffs are now engaged on working out the shipping and naval requirements for the operation and the amount of equipment which we should be able to evacuate from the area.

13. We have received appreciations from General Auchinleck and Lord Cork, and these are attached. It will be seen that views expressed by General Auchinleck reinforce the conclusions which we have reached above.

14. Subject to the agreement of the War Cabinet to the above policy we submit a draft telegram for despatch to Lord Cork and General Auchinleck.

(Signed) C.L.N. NEWALL.

" DUDLEY POUND.

" EDMUND IRONSIDE.

The Chiefs of Staff have not had an opportunity to see this Report in its final form and reserve to themselves the right to suggest such modifications as they may wish to put forward.

* Annex III and IV.
+ Annex II.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.
## ANNEX I.

British Naval Forces employed in connection with Narvik Operation on 20th May

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Ship</th>
<th>In Narvik Area</th>
<th>Escorting</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft Carriers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.A. Cruisers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8&quot; Cruiser</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Cruiser (modern)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Cruisers (old)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroyers (modern)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroyers (old)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloops</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A considerable number of auxiliary craft are also employed in the Narvik area.

* The daily average works out at about 30.
ANNEX II.

Draft Telegram to Lord Cork
(repeated to General Auchenlech).

Following for Lord Cork from Chiefs of Staff.

MOST SECRET.

For your personal information. In the light of your and General Auchenlech's appreciations and of the general situation His Majesty's Government has decided that it will not be possible to give you adequate forces to hold Northern Norway permanently and that therefore your force will in due course be withdrawn. Nevertheless it is important that Narvik should first be captured so that you will be able to destroy the port and transit facilities and at least a portion of the railway and thus deny the export of iron ore to Germany. On receipt of information from you as to when capture of Narvik may be anticipated decision will be taken as to when the withdrawal will take place. You will appreciate the absolute necessity for secrecy.
From: N.W.E.F.
To: The War Office.

MOST IMMEDIATE.

G.136 cypher 21/5/40.

PART 1. Begins.

To Chiefs of Staff from Lt.-General AUCHINLECK.

Reference 1129/17 from Chiefs of Staff following remarks represent my considered opinion after consultation with Lord Cork and Group Captain Moore. They are based on assumption situation in Norway remains generally as it is now. Any radical change such as surrender by Norwegian Government, Russian (?advance) through Finland or a German offensive from Lulea or by air and sea from Murmansk is not repeat not catered for. They should be read in conjunction with Lord Cork's telegram No.2217/18/5 which explains strategic situation this theatre. First land forces namely 12 French and 3 British battalions plus 10 Independent companies which one is understood to be administrative should suffice provided 3 Field Batteries 25 pounder or 4.5 howitzers 2 6-inch howitzer batteries some kind of mobile unit for patrolling 1 machine gun battalion also 4 field and one field Park Company which are essential to operations in this difficult country can be sent without further delay. 48 heavy and 60 light anti-aircraft guns can of course be distributed to give some apparent protection to vital areas but this is unlikely to be effective should enemy put in heavy air attacks on bases and aerodromes as appears probable.

Part 1 ends. Part 2 follows separately.
PART 2. Begins.

It is REITERATED that destruction of aerodrome at HARDOS or of port facilities and accommodation at HARSTAD might in existing circumstances make position of the force untenable in a short time. I cannot agree that there is reasonable prospect my being able to achieve my task if less half of my considered demand for anti-aircraft artillery is to be provided which itself is only 2/3 of the original estimate prepared by General Staff at War Office before my departure from London.

Second Air Forces. The range of Gladiator aircraft is very limited and even Hurricane cannot give effective support in BODO area where it is urgently needed from base SVALBARD. To maintain effective patrol over base areas and fleet anchorages and patrols in HARSTAD-NARVIK area 2 squadrons Hurricane are minimum required. Failure to provide bombers will deprive me of only effective means of replying to enemy offensives and thereby strengthening morale forces both naval and military which is being steadily undermined by German superiority in the air and is causing me anxiety. Some bomber aircraft are essential to achievement of object and 1 squadron is minimum. 1 Flight Army co-operation aircraft is entirely inadequate in relation to area to be covered.

Part 2 ends. Part 3 follows separately.

The inevitably of evacuation of Northern Norway in circumstances envisaged in your telegram is in my opinion entirely dependent on enemy's will to avail himself of his undoubted ability to attack. Should he attack I cannot with reduced forces suggested by you hold myself responsible for the safety of this force nor will I pretend there is any reasonable certainty of my being able to achieve object given to me in my instructions.

If in spite of this larger considerations lead H.M. Government to decide that Northern Norway must continue to be held with diminished resources laid down by them I cannot answer for the consequences but you may rest assured that every effort will be made to do what is possible with the resources at my disposal.

Part 3 ends. Message terminates.
From F.O.I.C. Narvik. Date 21.5.40.
1928/20 May. Read. 1602.
Addressed Admiralty.

For Chiefs of Staff.

Your 0030/20 The Troops Aircraft A.A. Guns and fast Light craft suggested are what are considered necessary for the defence of Northern Norway. If they cannot be found the best possible must be done without them. I fully understand that occupation of the town of Narvik is desired and am anxious to report it's capture. The most important work at the moment however is the completion and protection of Aerodromes and for this all F.O.I.C's are required.

If we are to maintain our position here it is of paramount importance that we can operate Aircraft as quickly as possible and be able to counter German Bombers. Indeed under altered conditions it might be said to be a necessary preliminary to a combined operation on whatever scale. It is very probable only a small Garrison is left in Narvik. The landing at Bjervik was a first step and it was proposed to follow it up. The Troops are ready to do so. It would take 36 hours at most to prepare an assault. In my view however it would be folly under existing conditions to switch off from the essential preparation of Aerodrome to that of attacking Narvik a place which does not affect main issue and which can be got on with at the end of this week. A delay there does not matter, a delay with Aerodrome is dangerous. It is intended to capture this force if possible but it is Mountain Fighting. Germans falling back before French advance and it may well end in Enemy slipping over Frontier and French occupying Railway, their present objective Snow is thick on Mountain Tops, melting on slopes.