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MOST SECRET.COPY NO. 19W.M. (40) 50th CONCLUSIONS, MINUTE 2.Confidential Annex.

(23rd February, 1940.)

U.S.S.R.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 28th Conclusions, Minute 6.)

Probable Development of Policy.

In the course of discussion on the preceding item, the SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that there was one element in the situation which, although not strictly relevant, the War Cabinet should have in mind. If the fear of invasion by Russia was lifted from Norway and Sweden, this would leave them menaced only by Germany. A conversation which the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had had on the previous evening with the Soviet Ambassador was therefore very relevant, and he proceeded to read a note* of this conversation to the War Cabinet. Briefly, M. Maisky, who said that he was speaking on instructions, had indicated that Russia wanted to maintain her neutrality, and that she had no idea of invading Norway or Sweden after the Finnish situation had been liquidated. He had given Mr. Butler the terms on which Russia would be prepared to make peace with the Finns. These were even more severe than the offer which had led to the Finnish war in the first place, but he had said that if these terms were not accepted, the war would go on until Finland was defeated. We should then have lost for ever the goodwill of Russia, but should not have saved Finland, which would be another Abyssinia in our diplomatic history.

* Despatch to Moscow
N^o 73 (copy attached).

The view was generally expressed that it would be most unwise to have anything to do with the Russian proposals. If we communicated them to the Finns, one of two things might happen. Either we should give an impression that we thought the terms should be accepted, or we should give the impression that we wished to encourage the Finns to resist, in which event they would feel that they had a strong moral case for pressing us to give them sufficient help to enable them to put up an effective resistance. The best way of dealing with the matter would be to inform M. Maisky that, if his Government wished to get their proposals considered, they should make them direct to the Finns; but that, if the war continued, Anglo-Soviet relations would undoubtedly become progressively worse.

The War Cabinet:-

Agreed that the Foreign Secretary should deal with M. Maisky's proposals on the above lines.

SECRET.

Copy No. 25

[N 2252/G]

Viscount Halifax to Mr. Le Rougetel (Moscow).

(No. 73.)

Sir,

Foreign Office, February 22, 1940.

THE Soviet Ambassador called to see Mr. Butler this evening at his own request. He said, on entering, that he had not come to talk about the s.s. *Selenga*. He had more important matters to speak about. Since their last talk he had been in communication with his Government and he was now speaking on instructions from them.

2. M. Maisky recalled that in their last talk they had run over the various questions which interested the two Governments. In the first place he had authority to speak about the Soviet-German Trade Agreement. This certainly was an agreement of considerable scope, but it was of a purely economic character. From the Soviet point of view it was hoped to obtain considerable quantities of machinery, machine tools and military equipment. But there was no intention of entering into a military alliance with Germany. He said that he thought that Mr. Butler might have observed, in studying Soviet statesmen over the past few months, that they were not simpletons. To make a military alliance with a nation like Germany already at war was a far bigger commitment than the Soviet Union would care to undertake. Soviet policy was, in fact, one of neutrality in the world war, as he had told me in September last. The Soviet Union would not move from this neutrality *vis-à-vis* the main belligerents, Great Britain and France, unless they were attacked by either.

3. Mr. Butler asked the Ambassador whether this definition of Soviet policy applied to the Middle and Near East. He said that it certainly did. He did not anticipate that after their experience in Finland his Government would indulge in further foreign adventure. They were, however, fortifying the Caucasus, since they, on their side, had apprehensions. The arrival of the Anzac troops and the presence in the Near East of a large French army caused them apprehension. Moreover, His Majesty's Government had recently given a credit to Iran which caused them to be nervous in that quarter of the world. Mr. Butler replied that no doubt we had both of us reason to be nervous of the other.

4. Reverting to the north, the Ambassador said that the Russian objectives in Finland had been of a strategic character in order to safeguard the western approaches to Leningrad and the northern portion of the Union. He did not consider that similar arguments would apply to protecting the southern approaches to the Union through the Bosphorus. Nor did the Soviet intend to invade Northern Norway or North Sweden. There was no question of their aiming at occupying Narvik. Mr. Butler asked him whether assurances of this character had been given to Norway and Sweden, and he said that he thought they had.

5. M. Maisky said that he now came to the most important thing which he wished to tell Mr. Butler. During their previous conversation he had noticed an interest on Mr. Butler's part as to how the Finnish war would be likely to end. He himself had said on that occasion that the Russian troops would have to proceed to the bitter end. He would now, however, alter his answer as a result of an exchange of views with his Government. His Government would be ready to make peace with the Finns on similar terms to those offered before the war broke out. The "military people," as he described them, insisted, however, on making a more extended provision for the defence of Leningrad than had previously been suggested to the Finnish Government. Mr. Butler asked M. Maisky at this stage whether the Soviet Government would negotiate with the Government at Helsinki and not with the puppet Government. His Excellency said that he considered

that a peace settlement could be arrived at with the Government at Helsinki on the following terms :—

- (a) Retention by the Soviet of the islands in the Gulf of Finland which they already occupied.
- (b) The lease of Hangö and a few islands round.
- (c) The retention by the Soviet of the western half of the Rybachi Peninsula.
- (d) The cession of the whole of the Karelian Isthmus to the Soviet. The southern frontier of Finland would then run on a line: Vipuri, Sortavala and then curving round the north of Lake Ladoga in the neighbourhood of Kitela to the present frontier of the Soviet Union. This would mean that the whole of Lake Ladoga would be on the side of Russian territory.
- (e) Soviet troops would retire from Petsamo as some *quid pro quo* for the extra territory to be ceded in the Karelian Isthmus.
- (f) No compensation for the cession of these districts would be offered to the Finns, and in this respect the terms would be different from those offered before the war. Compensation was out of the question after the great expense and trouble of the war.

6. The Ambassador said that in the view of the Soviet military experts, although the Mannerheim Line was not yet destroyed or passed, it was broken. If terms of the type that he had put to Mr. Butler were not accepted now, the war would have to go on. He was most anxious himself for Great Britain and the Soviet Union to improve their relations. If terms such as these were accepted, there would be a turning-point. If not, he anticipated that Finland would rank in our diplomatic history with Abyssinia, since, owing to its geographical position and the difficulty of adequate help being sent there, and the obvious reluctance of Sweden and Norway to send armed forces apart from volunteers, the Russians would eventually overrun the country. Then we should have done just enough to excite Russian animosity for many years without doing enough to save Finland.

7. Mr. Butler told the Ambassador that when they had talked together previously they had neither of them been acting on the instructions of their Governments, nor had they been giving official messages to each other on major policy. On this occasion he thought that M. Maisky's message was too important for him to make any observations without consulting me. The Ambassador said that he fully accepted that position and he also accepted the present official position of His Majesty's Government, which was that we should offer help to Finland under cover of the League of Nations resolution. He agreed with Mr. Butler as to the strength of feeling in this country against the Soviet action and also that it was impossible to say whether the Finns would accept such terms as he had suggested. He would, however, be interested to hear, if possible to-morrow, what impression his messages had made upon the mind of His Majesty's Government.

8. Mr. Butler told the Ambassador that he would see that he received some message when His Majesty's Government had had time to consider what the Ambassador had told him. It should be added that M. Maisky told Mr. Butler that he thought that these suggestions had not been put to any other Government.

I am, &c.
HALIFAX.

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MOST SECRET.COPY NO. 20W.M. (40) 50th CONCLUSIONS. MINUTE 8.Confidential Annex.

(23rd February, 1940).

ASSISTANCE TO
FINLAND.(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (40) 49th
Conclusions,
Minute 6).

THE CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF gave the War Cabinet an oral report of the progress which had been made during the week ending Thursday, 22nd February, in the steps which were being taken to afford assistance to Finland. The full details of these steps are set out in the Appendix to this Annex.

The War Cabinet took note of the statement by the Chief of the Air Staff and agreed as follows:-

- (a) To accept the recommendation of the Chiefs of Staff, endorsed at the Meeting by the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, that the transportation of the personnel for the projected expedition should be carried out in small liners only, to the exclusion of the two 42,000 ton liners which had been earmarked under the original plans, (see Paragraph 1 of Appendix); and that the necessary adjustments to the original plans should be made accordingly, particularly with a view to minimising the risks which would be entailed by the consequent overloading of the small liners.
- (b) To take note of Telegram No. 8, dated the 21st February, from Sir H. Kennard (His Majesty's Ambassador to the Polish Government at Angers) objecting to the inclusion of Polish troops in the proposed expedition (see Paragraph 3 of Appendix); and to invite the Foreign Secretary to inform the French that in our view both on political and on military grounds this part of the project should not be proceeded with.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.

MOST SECRET.APPENDIX.COPY NO. 45PROGRESS REPORT.WEEK ENDING THURSDAY, 22nd FEBRUARY, 1940.MOVEMENT PROGRAMME.

1. The provisional time-table given to the War Cabinet last week holds good.

Further investigation of the embarkation facilities in the Clyde has disclosed that it will not be possible to load the store ships at this port. The Clyde will therefore be used for the embarkation of personnel and M/T only. Stores, ammunition and petrol will be embarked in Bristol Channel ports. This will involve an increase of two days in the time of passage for these ships, but no increase in the amount of merchant shipping taken up will be necessary. There will, however, be some addition to the naval escorting forces.

The above arrangements apply only to the transportation of the main expedition. The store ships for the first echelon will load at the Clyde, and no change in the programme for the sailing of these convoys will therefore be necessary.

Use of Large Liners for Personnel Ships.

Under the original plans two 42,000-ton liners, the "Empress of Britain" and the "Aquitania", were earmarked for personnel in addition to 11 smaller liners. The Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that the use of these large ships would be unsound owing to their great vulnerability and the need of spreading the risk of sinkings as much as possible.

The personnel could be transported in the 11 smaller liners which are being taken up if the carrying capacity of these smaller ships was increased by about one-third. The objections to this are:-

- (i) There would not be sufficient boats and rafts to carry the complement in these ships if they were sunk by enemy action.
- (ii) It is desirable for the troops to arrive as fresh as possible, since they may be subjected to heavy air attack at the port of disembarkation. Overcrowding of ships is therefore to be avoided if possible.
- (iii) If ships are loaded to their maximum capacity there is no safety factor for last-minute additions which may be necessary.

The Chiefs of Staff feel that these objections are insufficient to outweigh the risks of the use of the two large liners, but they understand that the Ministry of Shipping consider that the deficiency of lifeboats and rafts rules out the proposal to use the smaller liners only. The Minister of Shipping will no doubt state his objections to the War Cabinet.

It should be added that no additional small liners of the necessary speed are available for the expedition. Only slower ships could be found, which would reduce the speed of the convoy by 3-4 knots. This would not be acceptable.

ADVANCEMENT OF THE STATE OF READINESS OF "STRATFORD" FORCE.

2. As already reported to the War Cabinet the state of readiness of force "Stratford" (Trondhjem, Bergen and Stavanger) has been advanced. Troops will be ready to move as from the early hours of the 26th February. From the date of the Cabinet decision it will take 3½-4 days for this force to reach the Norwegian ports any time after the early hours of the 26th February.

3. CO-ORDINATION OF ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE FRENCH.

General Audet, who is to be the senior officer with the French contingent, has been in London during the last week, and has been engaged in detailed discussions with the Service Planning Staff. As a result of these discussions we have now definite information of the composition of the French contingent. It transpires that the brigade of Chasseurs Alpins is now almost entirely mechanised.

It is proposed to ship the French contingent in three echelons, as follows:-

1st Echelon.

4,000 personnel.
141 vehicles
150 animals
3,000 tons of stores.

2nd echelon.

4,600 personnel
450 vehicles (including some tanks).
200 animals
5,000 tons of stores.

3rd echelon.

4,500 personnel (mainly Poles).
128 vehicles.
3,500 tons of stores.

The idea of using the Foreign Legion in the first contingent has apparently been dropped by the French. The Poles are being sent mainly on political grounds, and will not be fully trained troops. They will however be of great use as labour.

4. MOVEMENT OF THE 5TH DIVISION FROM FRANCE.

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The War Cabinet may be interested to know that the movement of the 5th Division from France is not due to begin until some days after the first convoys of the expedition have set sail. There is therefore no question of these troops being withdrawn from the B.E.F. unnecessarily.

5. General Gamelin's Proposals for Immediate Assistance to Finland.

Information has been received from General Audet regarding General Gamelin's proposals to send a small token force immediately by air for the assistance of Finland. The project has not been worked out in any detail by the French, but their proposal is to send 100-115 men by air to Bergen via England and Scotland. By impressing civil aircraft a further 100 men could be sent. How it is proposed that these men should travel on from Bergen the French do not say, but they realise that the project could not be carried through without Norwegian and Swedish co-operation, which at present appears hardly likely. General Gamelin is not keen on the proposal, because such action might disclose our whole plan prematurely.

The Air Ministry calculate that by commandeering every available large civil aircraft in the country, it would only be possible to transport about 40 men, complete with personal arms equipment and winter clothing, direct to Turku, the nearest Finnish aerodrome. If the aircraft could refuel in Norway and Sweden about 440 men could be carried.

The Chiefs of Staff do not consider that any useful purpose would be served by the despatch of a small force of this nature, even if it were feasible.

6. POSSIBLE SCALE OF AIR ATTACK ON TRONDHJEM.

The Chiefs of Staff have given further consideration to the question of enemy air attack on Trondhjem. In the event of a German blockade of the Baltic ports, and of a German occupation of southern Sweden, Sweden will have to depend for the majority of their import requirements on Trondhjem and the railways used by the Allied forces in south Sweden.

These requirements have been the subject of a detailed examination by the Ministry of Economic Warfare. If the Germans succeeded in reaching the line of the lakes in south Sweden, the greater part of the industry and population of Sweden would lie behind their lines. The responsibility for feeding this part of Sweden would therefore be theirs. There is insufficient statistical information available to enable an exact calculation of the import requirements of the civil population of the remainder of Sweden to be made, but in the opinion of the Ministry of Economic Warfare the civil population might be

maintained on imports amounting to 1½-2 million tons a year through the port of Trondhjem. A lower rate of import might be found adequate in the first few months, during which available stocks could be drawn upon. The maintenance tonnage of the Allied forces, when all have arrived, will be at the rate of about 1 million tons a year.

The Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion, after taking all the relevant factors into account, that the risks to Trondhjem and its communications may be reasonably accepted as part of the price we may have to pay for seizing the ore fields and thus hastening the end of the war.

7. AIR DEFENCES OF THE BASE PORTS.

18 first-line balloons are the most that can be made available in the first instance for the air defence of the bases. It has therefore been decided to concentrate these at Trondhjem, which will then have an adequate balloon defence. To spread them between Trondhjem and Narvik would mean that neither base had adequate protection.

9 of the balloons will be moored to trawlers, which will move over with the first convoy. There will be sufficient time to set up the balloon barrage between the arrival of this convoy and that of the first echelon of the main body. The light anti-aircraft guns will be disembarked at the same time as the balloons.

8. AERODROMES IN NORTHERN SCANDINAVIA.

Investigation has shown that the aerodromes in northern Scandinavia are likely to be unusable, owing to the thaw, for about one month, somewhere between the middle of May and the end of June. The Swedes are reported to be trying to arrange for seaplane squadrons to co-operate with their land forces in the event of their being involved in hostilities during this period. It is probable that Kemi aerodrome (in Finland) will be usable even during the thaw, since it has firm gravel runways.

We require the use of Boden aerodrome and to overcome this difficulty, it is proposed to purchase portable runways consisting of coconut matting with an overlay of chain link fencing, such as has been successfully used recently at Wick. The possibility of using Fleet Air Arm seaplanes for Army co-operation work is also being examined by the Admiralty and Air Ministry.

9. SECURITY MEASURES.

The Inter-Service Security Board are acting on the policy already approved by the War Cabinet. Arrangements are being made for calculated leakages abroad and indiscretions in the provincial Press in this country referring to the movement of troops to the Middle East. Similar arrangements are being made by the Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East. Wireless traffic between the United Kingdom and the Middle East is to be increased for purposes of deception. Other deceptive measures such as preparations for the reception of shipping in the Middle East, are under active consideration.

10. PLANNING FOR OPERATIONS IN THE PETSAMO AREA.

In accordance with the agreement reached with the French at the 5th meeting of the Supreme War Council, the possibility of a landing at Petsamo has been further examined. A full appreciation was drawn up by the British Military Representatives on the Allied Military Committee, which has been approved by the Chiefs of Staff, who instructed that it should now be discussed with the French Representatives on the Allied Military Committee.

A landing in the Petsamo area presupposes that the cooperation of Sweden has not been obtained. In these circumstances operations to seize the Galivare area would not be practicable. The project must therefore be judged on its merits as a means of supporting the Finns against Russia. The object of the operation would be to cut the Murmansk railway and subsequently capture Murmansk as a base for further operations.

The broad conclusions which emerge from the appreciation are as follows:-

- (i) A landing on Russian or Finnish territory is impracticable.
- (ii) A landing at Kirkenes (an adjacent Norwegian fjord) would be the only practicable means of getting ashore, but would involve the violation of Norwegian territory.
- (iii) Even if a landing was effected, it would not be possible to capture Murmansk itself in the time available before the Russians at Murmansk could be heavily reinforced by sea from Archangel.
- (iv) The most that could be done would be to clear the Russians out of the Petsamo area and possibly the Ribachi Peninsula, but this in itself would not materially reduce the pressure on the Finns.

The Chiefs of Staff are therefore of the opinion that an operation at Petsamo would fulfil no useful object. If the French High Command agree with this, no further action on the proposal will be required. It is understood that General Gamelin is not at all in favour of the project. In the meanwhile the possibility of a landing at Petsamo is not being taken into account in our preparations for the major project.