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C.O.S.(40) 65th Meeting.

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WAR CABINET.

CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE.

65

MINUTES of Meeting held on 5TH APRIL, 1940, at 10.15 a.m.

PRESENT:-

Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril L.N. Newall,
Chief of the Air Staff. (In the Chair).

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.

Major General H.L. Ismay.
Colonel L.C. Hollis.
Lieut.-Colonel E.I.C. Jacob.

1. INFORMATION SUMMARY.

THE COMMITTEE took note of the Summary of Information received between 0700 hours, 4th April, and 0700 hours, 5th April, 1940; and of a Report that an air reconnaissance on the previous afternoon had observed 60 merchant ships moving North in formation from the Shillig roads.

2. ALLIED MILITARY POLICY IN THE BALKANS.

(Papers Nos. C.O.S.(40) 235 and 283(J.P.)).

THE COMMITTEE had before them the following Papers:-

Report by the Allied Military Committee.
(Paper No. C.O.S.(40) 235).

Note by the Joint Planning Sub-Committee submitting a draft Report for the Chiefs of Staff. (Paper No. C.O.S.(40) 283(J.P.)).

1	PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE
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3	Cab. 79 / 3
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228

SIR CYRIL NEWALL recalled that the Allied Military Committee had been asked to discuss with the French the strategical situation in the Balkans, and to ascertain the views of the latter as to what the Allied policy should be. The Chiefs of Staff had always resisted the idea of sending a British force to Salonika with a defensive rôle, but, as a result of the discussion which had taken place, it now appeared that the French wished to send a force to Salonika with the idea of stiffening the Balkan countries by giving visible proof of our power to support them.

SIR EDMUND IRONSIDE said that the French held the view that, if an attack developed on Thrace through Bulgaria, the best means of countering it would be by threatening its flank from Salonika. This was a fallacious idea, since there were no roads leading from Salonika towards Bulgaria, and the country was very mountainous and difficult. It might be of service to the Committee if he obtained the views of Lord Milne on this point.

In considering the Allied policy in the Balkans, the following points should be appreciated:-

(a) It would be months rather than weeks before the Germans could be capable of putting an Army into the field in the Balkans. Whereas, in the last war, the Germans had an Eastern and a Western Army, and could easily ring the changes by moving reserves from one to the other, in this war their Army was concentrated on the Western front. Moreover, the state of the communications from Germany to the Balkans was not such as to justify the idea that large forces could be moved down there in a hurry.

(b) There were two possible routes for a German invasion - via Roumania, and via Yugoslavia. It was most unlikely that the Germans would go through Yugoslavia unless Italy was in - in which case an expedition to Salonika would not be possible.

(c) Only a small force could be maintained through Salonika - probably about 5 Divisions.

(d) The French were anxious to combine the Allied Army in the Middle East under the command of General Weygand.

(e) The significance of Russia should not be overlooked. If she were concerned in any move in the Balkans, that would be an additional reason for our forces to go to Thrace rather than to Salonika.

Bearing in mind all these considerations, it would be unwise for us to send anything more than a token force to Salonika. Our interests were centred in the Straits, the Bosphorus, and the Black Sea, whereas the

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Cab. 79 / 3					
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French interests were centred in supporting the Greeks and the Yugoslavs. We should concentrate our efforts on supporting Turkey, and leave Salonika to the French if they wished to go there.

There was some discussion on the procedure which should be adopted in dealing with the draft for agreement by the French High Command. It was thought best that it should be sent through the Allied Military Committee to General Gamelin, for preliminary discussion on the military plane, rather than that it should be submitted to the War Cabinet in the first instance. If General Gamelin agreed with our proposed policy, the War Cabinet would then have it before them with the knowledge that it represented the combined military views of the French and ourselves. If necessary, the Chiefs of Staff could go to Paris to discuss it with General Gamelin.

It was agreed:-

- (a) To instruct the Secretary to revise the draft Statement of Anglo-French Military Policy in the Balkans (Annex to Paper No. C.O.S.(40) 283 (J.P.)), so as to incorporate the views expressed by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and to circulate the revised edition for consideration.
- (b) To invite the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to obtain the views of Field Marshal Lord Milne on the French strategical conception of an expedition based on Salonika, with the objects enumerated in paragraph 6 of the draft Report by the Chiefs of Staff attached to Paper No. C.O.S.(40) 283 (J.P.).

[SIR DUDLEY POUND, at this point, left the meeting.]

3. PLAN R.4: DRAFT INSTRUCTIONS TO COMMANDERS.

(Paper No. C.O.S.(40) 277(S)).

(Previous Reference: C.O.S.(40) 63rd Meeting, Minute 2).

THE COMMITTEE had before them a Note by the Secretary covering draft instructions to Commanders for Plan R.4. (Paper No. C.O.S.(40) 277(S)).



THE COMMITTEE agreed to the alternative wording for paragraph 3 of Enclosure 1, and decided to incorporate an addition to paragraph 10 of Enclosure III in terms communicated by the Chief of the Air Staff to the Secretary.

It was agreed:-

To approve the draft instructions* to Commanders for Plan R.4, subject to the amendments agreed upon at the meeting; and to instruct the Secretary to submit them to the War Cabinet.

Cabinet War Room,
5TH APRIL, 1940.

* Subsequently circulated as Paper No. C.O.S.(40) 281(S).

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