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Notes of Informal Meeting between Representatives of the British Government and French Government held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1.

on THURSDAY, 11th APRIL, 1940,

at 9.45 a.m.

PRESENT:UNITED KINGDOM.

- The Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M.P., Prime Minister.
- The Right Hon. Viscount Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
- The Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty.
- The Right Hon. Oliver Stanley, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
- The Right Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
- The Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office.
- 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 Edmund Ironside, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

FRANCE.

- M. Corbin, Ambassadeur de France à Londres.
- M. Coulondre, Ambassadeur de France.
- Général Mittelhauser, Ancien Commandant d'Armée.
- Général Lelong, Chef de la Mission Militaire Française à Londres.

SECRETARIAT:

- Sir Edward Bridges.
- Major-General H.L. Ismay.
- Captain Berkeley. (Interpreter).

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THE PRIME MINISTER extended a warm welcome to the French Representatives.

M. CORBIN said that he had received news from M. Reynaud the previous evening that M. Coulondre and General Mittelhauser were proceeding to Stockholm on a Mission to the Swedish Government. The Mission had been instructed to consult with His Majesty's Government on their way to Stockholm.

M. COULONDRE said that some 36 hours previously M. Reynaud had seen the Swedish Minister in Paris and had warned him of the possible implications for Sweden of the latest developments in Norway. They might constitute the gravest threat to Sweden's independence. M. Reynaud had told the Swedish Minister that the French Government were prepared at once and unreservedly to extend to Sweden an assurance of French support, in the event of Sweden's independence being threatened.

M. Coulondre said that the message which General Mittelhauser and he were charged to convey to the Swedish Prime Minister was to the same effect as M. Reynaud's statement to the Swedish Minister in Paris. The situation required that the Swedish Government should make their military dispositions without delay; hence the urgent need for the French declaration to be in the hands of the Swedish Prime Minister at the earliest possible moment.

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It was also an instruction to the Mission to say to the Swedish Government that, in the view of the French Government, the iron ore mines at Galivare constituted the main temptation to Germany. They were indeed vital to Germany for her prosecution of the war. It was to be apprehended that as soon as the thaw set in Germany would send an expedition to Lulea. If that expedition were to make itself master of the Galivare ore deposits, the hopes of Sweden regaining control of those deposits, in any foreseeable future, would be slight. Germany would go to all lengths to retain a permanent lien on Galivare. For this reason the Galivare situation was of vital importance to Sweden herself as much as to the Allies.

M. Coulondre went on to say that he had been instructed to offer a firm assurance to the Swedish Government on behalf of the French Government that their country's neutrality would be respected. The Mission would then say that on the assumption that the Swedes invited the United Kingdom and France to go to their assistance, some time must necessarily elapse before the actual arrival of any British or French troops. In the meantime the Swedish Government themselves would have to hold the position; inactivity on their part might be fatal, since a German attempt was to be anticipated as soon as the thaw came in the Gulf of Bothnia. Sweden ought at once to set on foot all necessary military preparations including the manning of all her strategic points, especially the key positions in the North.

visit to London were to say to His Majesty's Government that if the Mission to Stockholm was to succeed, it was essential that it should express an Inter-Allied determination. M. Reynaud hoped that the British War Cabinet would think fit to add British representatives to the Mission, so that it could continue its journey to Stockholm as an Inter-Allied body.

M. Reynaud had also said that he was alive to the importance of French participation in the operation which the British Government were now undertaking in Norway. The French would play their part fully, and their Expeditionary Force would be ready to start on the following day.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN said that it was hardly necessary to emphasise that the British Government fully appreciated the importance of giving Sweden assurances sufficient to stiffen her attitude and to help her preserve her independence. The French Government had been wise in selecting two distinguished representatives to make this clear to Sweden personally.

It might be useful, however, to consider the present situation in Norway and Sweden, and to examine how it was likely to develop. The first Swedish reaction to Allied assurances would doubtless be to ask what form the proffered assistance would take, if Sweden took, on the strength of those assurances, some action which precipitated a German attack upon her. M. Coulondre had expressed his conviction that Germany would send an expedition to Lulea as soon as the Gulf of Bothnia became navigable.

That, however, would not happen for another month. It seemed to him (Mr. Chamberlain) that the Germans were more likely before then to demand from Sweden the free use of her railways, which also provided access to the North; such a demand would be even more likely if the Germans had reason to suppose that the Allies were intending to secure the orefields.

Returning to the question of possible Allied assistance to Sweden, he pointed out that, under the original plan, a considerable force was to be despatched to assist the Swedes in holding a line in the South of the country, this force being landed in Norway at Bergen and Trondhjem. It was not true that these two ports had now been recaptured from the Germans. For the present, therefore, that plan could not be put into force. Nor was there any immediate prospect of a change in this respect, since all the efforts of the British force were now being concentrated on the recapture of Narvik, and it could not be said how long this would take. There was no doubt, however, that if the Swedish Government could be induced to send forces overland to assist the Allies at Narvik, then that port might be recaptured very much sooner, and an expeditionary force could be sent through Narvik into Sweden at an earlier date.

At the time when the Allied plan for assistance to Finland had been under consideration, we had had information that Sweden had considerable forces in the extreme north of the country. If that force was still in position, it could certainly provide for the effective defence of the iron orefields.

If the Swedish Government, therefore, feared an early German move towards the North of the country, they could not do better than decide at any rate to defend the Galivare area. At the worst, a Swedish force placed there could destroy the mines and hence cut off Germany's supply permanently. His own view was that the mere threat of destruction of the mines by the Swedes themselves would exercise a restraining influence on Germany.

The British Government were reluctant to give Sweden definite assurances of rapid and considerable assistance, because they could not see clearly how such assistance could, in fact, be given. Moreover, they felt that Sweden was at the moment in a fairly strong position. Germany wanted the iron ore supplies; she did not want to pick a quarrel with Sweden. He concluded, therefore, that the most useful purpose would be served if the Swedish Government could be convinced that their duty was, first, to resist a German attack when it came, and secondly, if that attack seemed likely to succeed, to destroy the iron ore mines, which were Germany's real objective.

He urged that these points should be put to the Swedish Government, with the further suggestion that if they could see their way, not only to protect the Galivare area, but also to despatch a force further west to help the Allies to recapture Narvik, then the process of expelling Germany from Scandinavia would be greatly facilitated, to the advantage not only of the Allies, but of Sweden herself.

M. COULONDRE said that it would be convenient if at this stage he developed in more detail the objects of his Mission. His exposition would show that the British and French views were in close accord.

The message which General Mittelhauser and he had been charged to convey to the Swedish Prime Minister was a solemn declaration that France would go to Sweden's aid if she were attacked by Germany. There was no question of French assistance, if no German attack materialised. It was indeed part of their instructions to make it clear to the Swedes that France intended to respect Sweden's neutrality. In those circumstances, the Swedish Government were unlikely to come forward with the objection that their acceptance of the French guarantee would itself provoke aggression by Germany.

The Mission would deal with the situation in a frank and realistic manner. If it was clear that the British and French assistance could not reach Sweden by way of Norway, or could in any case not reach Sweden for some considerable time, the only proper course was to make this clear to the Swedish Government. It would be all the more necessary, if no date could be given for the arrival of our forces in Sweden, to urge upon the Swedes the imperative need of putting their key positions into a state of immediate readiness.

We ought to give the Swedish Government any other relevant information, for example - we should tell them the size of the Anglo-French forces to be sent to Norway, and the date when they would reach

that country as soon as we had this information. It was presumably the intention that some part of the Anglo-French forces would proceed to Sweden after operating in Norway.

In all probability the attitude of the Swedish Government to any immediate démarche from Germany (such as the possible demand for control of the Swedish railways, of which Mr. Chamberlain had spoken) would be mainly determined by the strength of the British and French military position in the Scandinavian Peninsula, and the extent to which we could demonstrate to the Swedes that we had a plan of operation which offered a good prospect of success.

Mr. CHAMBERLAIN thought that it would be a dangerous mistake to underrate the strength of the position which the Germans had already built up for themselves in Norway. There could be little doubt that they would shortly be in a position (if they were not already) to send reinforcements by rail and by air from Oslo to their outposts in Stavanger, Bergen and Trondhjem. To dislodge them from these ports would, therefore, not be an easy matter, and it would be rash to say that on a given date a force of a definite size would arrive to assist Sweden. He asked Mr. Churchill to give the French Mission some information on our strategic plans for Norway.

MR. CHURCHILL said that it had been agreed with the French Government that the first task was to recapture Narvik. The first troops of this expedition would leave the next day in order to establish a base to which further reinforcements could be sent. He hoped that it might be possible to recapture Narvik within one or two weeks, and until this had been accomplished no serious operations could be undertaken against Bergen or Trondhjem. In the meantime, we were attacking German warships and supply ships by sea and air. It was practically impossible to put submarines into the Baltic now that the Germans held the Danish coast. A most important point was that, if possible, the Swedes should be persuaded to interrupt the land communications by which the Germans could reinforce Bergen and Trondhjem, since without these ports we could not establish direct communication with Southern Sweden.

He thought, therefore, that we could hold out a reasonable prospect of opening communications with Northern Sweden via Narvik in a fairly short time, but he would deprecate any promise of assistance on a large scale. We could, in fact, only tell the Swedes that if they fought on our side they would share with us in the final victory. There was even some danger of giving any guarantees that might make us responsible for feeding the population of the whole Scandinavian Peninsula. Further, we should not tell Sweden that we would respect her "neutrality". We would certainly respect her territorial independence, but we must be free to take certain action at Lulea, and that would not be consistent with a strict respect for Swedish neutrality.

wished to suggest that we should tell the Swedes exactly when help would reach them, but that we should tell them when our Forces for action against the Norwegian Ports would be sailing and so forth so as to show that the Allies meant business. We should not, of course, give any definite indication where they were intending to land. The French fully agreed that the plan for action at Narvik, as a first step, was right. The early recapture of this Port would show not only that we had a footing in Norway, but that we had established a junction with the Norwegian Forces.

The chief object of the Mission was a moral one, to encourage the Swedes, to remove their feeling of isolation and to countreact the moral factors which might make them disinclined to resist German aggression. We should tell them that, as Germany had decided to extend the War to Scandinavia, the Allies were resolved to pursue the struggle there to the utmost. To convince the Swedes of this would be the best way of ensuring that they did everything possible to defend their country.

The French representatives had taken due note of Mr. Churchill's comments on the question of neutrality and would certainly enter into no commitments which would restrict the future liberty of action of the Allies in Allied interests which, after all, were Swedish interests also.

The success of the Mission would depend in a high degree on the extent to which it represented the common views of France and Britain, and the French Government therefore hoped that the British Government

would agree that British representatives should

join the Mission. A joint Mission was the best means of convincing the Swedish Government of Allied strength and unity of purpose.

M. COULONDRE said that the recent seizure of Norwegian Ports by the Germans made it urgent that the Swedes should make immediate preparations, particularly in North Sweden; otherwise the Germans might achieve a surprise landing at Lulea in the same way as they had at the Atlantic Ports. That would render the further plans of the Allies with regard to Lulea most difficult to carry through.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN said he felt sure that M. Corbin realised that our first consideration was to act in unity with the French, and to maintain the fullest understanding with them. He had made the points to which he had referred only for the purpose of clarifying the position, so that the object of the Mission should be clearly understood by both parties, and that there should be complete agreement as to what should be said to the Swedes.

It must be remembered that at any moment a great offensive might start in the West, possibly through Holland. Consequently, it was undesirable to disperse our forces more than was necessary. If the Allies were to urge Sweden to declare war on Germany now, on the basis that the Allies would come immediately to her aid, we might thus be committed to operation on a considerable scale. From what had already been said, it was clear that troops could not at present be sent to Sweden except possibly through Narvik, and this might not be possible for some time yet. Trondhjem and Bergen

were no longer available as the ports of entry which had been envisaged in the original plan for helping Finland.

There was no doubt that the Swedes' chief fear would be air attack from Germany. In discussing the help which could be given to them they would undoubtedly ask what the Allies could do to assist them to meet this danger. M. Reynaud had made it clear at the last meeting of the Supreme War Council that France was not in a position to help with air forces. Hence Sweden would have to rely exclusively on such air aid as could be provided by the United Kingdom. It must be clear that the United Kingdom could not give any air help without weakening the air forces which might be urgently required in the event of an attack in the West. Again, if our proposal to Sweden was that in consequence of German air attack upon that country, we would be prepared to bomb Germany, the whole question of opening up total air war would arise. Up till now the Allies had agreed that it was not in our interest to start total air war.

It seemed, therefore, that it was not advisable to urge the Swedes to approve a policy which might provoke Germany into action; a policy which would result in the Allies having to send forces to Sweden's aid and might also, incidentally, lead later to the immense problem of feeding Norway and Sweden from outside sources. It was to be borne in mind that the present main source of food for those countries lay in the south, in the areas which presumably would be first occupied by the Germans.

In his opinion, therefore, it was not necessary for Sweden to go to war with Germany, provided that Germany did not gain access to the ore fields. As a practical measure the Swedes should be urged to maintain their neutrality so long as the Germans did not take steps to reach the ore supplies. In that event, however, the Swedes should immediately resist, and the Allies would give them all the assistance possible under the circumstances. The Allied object would be achieved if Sweden either protected, or destroyed, the ore fields. That must be fully appreciated by Germany, who consequently would be very cautious in what she did vis-a-vis Sweden.

If the general ideas which he had outlined were agreed to by the French, he would gladly support the object of the Mission and appoint British Representatives to accompany it.

Finally, he added that of course if the Swedes themselves were ready to fight without definite assurances from the Allies, then naturally they should not be discouraged; but, in general, the Allies should not commit themselves to assistance which could not in any case be sent for some time, in order to inveigle Sweden into hostilities with Germany.

M. CORBIN thought that everything Mr. Chamberlain had said was completely in the spirit of the French Government's policy in this matter. The whole question was to maintain a proper balance between two extreme courses of action. There

had been a suggestion that the Swedes should be urged to abide by their neutrality as long as possible, but that this should be combined with a demarche stating that help would be forthcoming if Sweden were attacked, so that they would be induced to resist should such an event occur. At the same time the Swedes should now be urged to take all possible precautions to maintain the security of their ore fields. That seemed to him to be the agreed general purpose of the Mission. He was glad to learn that British Representatives would join the Mission.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN said he understood that the best time for the Mission to leave would be that evening. It was his intention to send a British Admiral and General with the Mission. The British Air Attache in Stockholm would be instructed to join the Mission on its arrival in Sweden. The time available before the departure of the Mission would enable the British to formulate the instructions to be given to their representatives.

M. COULONDRE mentioned that the latest information at his disposal indicated that it would be necessary for the Mission to leave that night from the North of Scotland. By this means they would be able to cross the sea during the night and avoid any unfortunate encounters and they would also be in time to avoid a depression which was now moving Southwards towards Scandinavia.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN said that the Chief of the Air Staff would arrange for the details of the time and place of departure to be settled with the French Staff.

M. CORBIN agreed to this.

It was also agreed that Lord Halifax should be responsible for drafting instructions to the Joint Mission, the terms of which would be agreed with M. Corbin in the course of the morning.

The Meeting then adjourned.

C

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN.

N. Dept

W

* The French Govt said that they wd. put forward an alternative sentence today

Mission + Inst

Minutes.

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The French Government urged this evening through the French Embassy that the last sentence in para: 3 of the instructions to the Allied Mission should be omitted on the grounds

- (1) That it is not very clear
- (2) That it could be interpreted by the Swedes as an encouragement to sit back and do nothing.

I referred the question to the Secretary of State and asked authority to cut it out of the telegram to Mr. Mallet. The Secretary of State agreed on my strong recommendation.

General Lewin will be informed if we can reach him. If not it will be necessary to

Minutes.

To Mr. Mallet tomorrow morning.

W.M.

11/14

I got General Levin on the telephone at Paris at 11.5 p.m. (Kinnaird's Air Ministry will show he had already spoken)

I told him that the last sentence of para. 3.

("So long integrity") was to be deleted from the instructions.

He wrote this down & repeated it to me.

I also told him to be sure to let the French see the revised instructions.

S. 11/14

I learn from the Air M. this morning that Gen Levin & one of

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN.

Minutes.

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The Frenchmen got off from Perth at 12.40 a.m. in a British Lockheed machine. It is not yet known whether they have arrived in Stockholm. The French machine was unserviceable but should be ready again tonight. Admiral Evans & the other Frenchmen are waiting at Perth. & will leave tonight either in the French machine or the other British Lockheed.

KOV

12/14

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN.