

CAB 128/3041

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SECRET  
C.M. (56)  
19th Conclusions

CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Tuesday, 6th March, 1956, at 11.00 a.m.

Present:

- The Right Hon. Sir ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Prime Minister.
- The Most Hon. the MARQUESS OF SALISBURY, Lord President of the Council.
- The Right Hon. HAROLD MACMILLAN, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.
- The Right Hon. GWILYM LLOYD-GEORGE, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Welsh Affairs.
- The Right Hon. ALAN LENNOX-BOYD, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies (Items 1-8).
- The Right Hon. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Minister of Housing and Local Government.
- The Right Hon. D. HEATHCOAT AMORY, M.P., Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Items 6-9).
- The Right Hon. IAIN MACLEOD, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.
- The Right Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P., Lord Privy Seal.
- The Right Hon. the VISCOUNT KILMUIR, Lord Chancellor.
- The Right Hon. the EARL OF HOME, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.
- The Right Hon. Sir WALTER MONCKTON, Q.C., M.P., Minister of Defence.
- The Right Hon. PETER THORNEYCROFT, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.
- The Right Hon. Sir DAVID ECCLES, M.P., Minister of Education.
- The Right Hon. the EARL OF SELKIRK, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.
- The Right Hon. PATRICK BUCHAN-HEPBURN, M.P., Minister of Works.

The following were also present:

- The Right Hon. HAROLD WATKINSON, M.P., Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation (Items 7-8).
- The Most Hon. the MARQUESS OF READING, Q.C., Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.
- The Right Hon. LORD STRATHCLYDE, Minister of State, Scottish Office (Items 7-9).
- The Right Hon. AUBREY JONES, M.P., Minister of Fuel and Power (Items 7-8).
- The Right Hon. ANTHONY NUTTING, M.P., Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1-2).
- The Right Hon. EDWARD HEATH, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury.

Secretariat:

- The Right Hon. Sir NORMAN BROOK.
- Mr. H. O. HOOPER.

Jordan.  
(Previous  
Reference:  
C.M. (56) 18th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 2.)

1. *The Prime Minister* said that, since the Cabinet's meeting on the previous day, he had held a preliminary discussion with some of his colleagues on the effect which the dismissal of the Commandant of the Arab Legion was likely to have on our future relations with Jordan and on the general situation in the Middle East. Our general policy in the Middle East must be founded on the need to protect our oil interests in Iraq and in the Persian Gulf. The main threat to those interests was the growing influence of Egypt. This we had sought to counter by strengthening the Bagdad Pact; and there was no doubt that United States adherence to that Pact would be the greatest single contribution which could be made towards the easing of our present difficulties in the Middle East.

In discussion it was suggested that, if the United States Government remained unwilling to join the Bagdad Pact, they might be persuaded to pursue the alternative course of supporting a policy of greater firmness towards Egypt. Hitherto, they had been hoping that a friendly policy towards Egypt might lead to a settlement of the dispute between Israel and her Arab neighbours. If, however, Iraq's relative position in the Arab world could be strengthened—either by the growing strength of the Bagdad Pact or by a reduction of Egypt's influence—Iraq might be able to take the lead in bringing about an accommodation between Israel and the Arab States. This was a further reason for seeking, in present circumstances, means of strengthening Iraq's position.

*The Prime Minister* said that, at the meeting of Ministers which he had held on the previous evening, it had been agreed that our next move should be to urge the Government of Iraq to make a direct approach to the Jordan Government about the situation created by King Hussein's dismissal of British officers from the Arab Legion. We should indicate to the Iraq Government that we could not be expected to continue our financial support to Jordan if the reliability of the Arab Legion was undermined, and should suggest that the time might have come for them to take over some of the responsibilities which we had hitherto assumed in Jordan. He read to the Cabinet the draft of a telegram in this sense which it was proposed to send to H.M. Ambassador in Bagdad.

The Cabinet then discussed the handling of the debate which was to be held in the House of Commons on the following day arising out of the dismissal of British officers of the Arab Legion. It was pointed out that, in view of the consultations which were now to be held with the Iraq Government, it would not be possible for Government spokesmen in this debate to make any new pronouncement of policy on our future relations with Jordan. It would therefore be preferable that the debate should range more widely over the general question of policy in the Middle East.

#### The Cabinet—

Took note of the Prime Minister's statements, and approved the terms of the telegram which was to be sent to H.M. Ambassador at Bagdad instructing him to urge the Government of Iraq to make a direct approach to the Jordan Government on the future of the Arab Legion and the question of Jordan's future relations with the United Kingdom.

Government of Malta and the Roman Catholic authorities in the Island or, failing that, by the result of a further election in Malta. The Parliament at Westminster would not be asked to take definitive decisions until further progress had been made, by these means, to establish the wishes of the Maltese people.

*The Prime Minister*, summing up the discussion, said that he was in favour of holding a preliminary debate on this question in the House of Commons before the Easter recess. This debate might take place on 26th March, on a Government motion inviting the House to take note of the report of the Round Table Conference. If the Labour Opposition pressed the suggestion that the debate should not be held in Holy Week, he would accept this postponement on condition that they undertook to state publicly that they favoured it. In that event it should be publicly stated that the debate would be held in the course of the week in which Parliament reassembled after the Easter recess.

**The Cabinet—**

Took note that, in his consultation with the Opposition leaders on the Parliamentary handling of the report of the Round Table Conference on Malta, the Prime Minister would put forward the proposal which he had outlined in summing up the Cabinet's discussion.

British  
Industries  
Fair.  
  
(Previous  
Reference:  
C.M. (56) 23rd  
Conclusions,  
Minute 9.)

3. *The President of the Board of Trade* said that, in accordance with the Cabinet's decision of 15th March, he had informed the organisers of the London section of the British Industries Fair that the Government were not prepared to give them the financial support needed to ensure the continuance of this section of the Fair. The organisers had accepted this decision; but they were anxious that, in view of their obligations to traders, the announcement of the decision should not be deferred until after the end of the forthcoming Fair in April but should be made at once. The President said that this was a point on which the Cabinet might be content to be guided by the views of the organisers. If so, he would announce the decision on 27th March. He would make it clear, in his announcement, that the Birmingham section of the Fair would continue and that the Government would also make increased efforts in future to improve the quality of British exhibits in industrial fairs overseas.

**The Cabinet—**

Took note of this statement by the President of the Board of Trade and authorised him to announce, on 27th March, the Government's decision to terminate their financial support of the London section of the British Industries Fair.

Cost of  
Living.  
  
(Previous  
Reference:  
C.M. (56) 20th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 3.)

4. *The Minister of Labour* said that the figure for February, under the new Index of retail prices, would be published on the following day. It would show no increase, as compared with the base figure for January 1956. This was satisfactory.

**The Cabinet—**

Took note of this statement by the Minister of Labour.

Middle  
East.  
  
(Previous  
Reference:  
C.M. (56) 17th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 4.)

\*5. *The Foreign Secretary* recalled that, before leaving on his recent tour of the Middle East, he had discussed with the Cabinet the line which he should take in his conversations with the Prime Minister of Egypt. As a result of those conversations he was satisfied that Colonel Nasser was unwilling to work with the Western Powers or to co-operate in the task of securing peace in the Middle East. It was evident that he was aiming at leadership of the Arab world; that, in order to secure it, he was willing to accept the help of the

\* Originally recorded in a Confidential Annex.

Russians; and that he was not prepared to work for a settlement of the Arab dispute with Israel. Despite the conversations in Cairo, there had been no slackening in the Egyptian propaganda against the British position in the Middle East. It was now clear that we could not establish a basis for friendly relations with Egypt. That being so, we ought to realign our policy in the Middle East: instead of seeking to conciliate or support Colonel Nasser, we should do our utmost to counter Egyptian policy and to uphold our true friends in the Middle East. Thus, we should seek increased support for the Bagdad Pact and its members. We should make a further effort to persuade the United States to join the Pact. We should seek to draw Iraq and Jordan more closely together. We should try to detach Saudi Arabia from Egypt, by making plain to King Saud the nature of Nasser's ambitions. We should secure further support for Libya, in order to prevent the extension of Egyptian or Communist influence there. We should seek to establish in Syria a Government more friendly to the West. We should counter Egyptian subversion in the Sudan and in the Persian Gulf. There were also possibilities of action aimed more directly at Egypt—e.g., the withholding of military supplies, the withdrawal of financial support for the Aswan Dam, the reduction of United States economic aid and the blocking of sterling balances. In all this we should need the support of the United States Government. The first task would be to seek Anglo-American agreement on a general realignment of policy towards Egypt.

*The Prime Minister* said that the Foreign Secretary had already discussed with him and some of his senior colleagues the proposals which he had now outlined to the Cabinet. He was in full agreement with this approach to the problem. It might not be easy to secure United States support for a new policy on these lines. We must, however, do our utmost to persuade them of the importance and urgency of checking Colonel Nasser in his bid for leadership of the Arab world. He had therefore authorised the Foreign Secretary to put these proposals to the United States Secretary of State, through H.M. Ambassador at Washington, and he had reinforced this approach by a personal message to the President.

In discussion there was general agreement that every effort should now be made to persuade the United States Government to go forward with us in a new policy towards Egypt on the lines indicated by the Foreign Secretary. In the course of the discussion the following particular points were raised:—

(a) Since the Foreign Secretary's visit to Cairo the Egyptians had made a further attempt to supplant us in Libya. No further time should be lost in promising further financial support to the Libyan Government.

(b) British influence in the Persian Gulf must be maintained. For this purpose British forces must be readily available, so that they could intervene without delay to restore law and order in an emergency. The Army must have sufficient hot-weather accommodation, whether at Aden or at Sharjah, to enable them to undertake these duties. The Navy must have at their disposal a sufficient number of ships equipped for duty, under all weather conditions, in the Gulf.

(c) Further study should be made of the economic aspects of the policy outlined by the Foreign Secretary. The Foreign Secretary should arrange for this study to be carried out by officials of the Foreign Office, Treasury and the Board of Trade. The results should be reported to Ministers.

(d) An early increase in Israel's military strength might deter the threatened aggression by Egypt. At the moment Israel's greatest need was for interceptor aircraft. We had recently supplied them with some Meteor night fighters; and some Mystère fighters were on their way from France. The United States Government might, however, be asked to consider urgently whether any further assistance could be given to Israel in this respect.

The Cabinet—

- (1) Took note with approval of the approach that had been made to the United States Government with a view to the formulation of a new Anglo-American policy towards Egypt.
- (2) Invited the Minister of Defence to follow up the points noted in paragraph (b) above.
- (3) Invited the Foreign Secretary to arrange for further study of the economic aspects of this policy in accordance with paragraph (c) above.
- (4) Invited the Foreign Secretary to take up with the United States Government, as suggested in paragraph (d) above, the question whether further fighter aircraft could be supplied to Israel.

East/West  
Trade.

(Previous  
Reference:  
C.M. (55) 33rd  
Conclusions,  
Minute 5.)  
Tractors for  
China.

6. The Cabinet were informed that the Chinese wished to place a trial order for 100 agricultural tractors in this country. H.M. Ambassador at Washington, who had been asked to forecast the likely reactions of the United States Government, had at first advised that the export of the tractors should be licensed. Subsequently, however, he had telegraphed that this would be an unpropitious time at which to raise this matter with the United States Administration who were involved in difficulties with Congress over the Foreign Aid Bill.

In discussion it was pointed out that it would be difficult to justify a refusal to export agricultural tractors to China at a time when short-time working and unemployment were developing in the motor industry. The export of these tractors could be licensed under the "exceptions procedure" and the French were believed to be about to send tractors to China under that procedure. Moreover, the refusal of licences would not prevent the Chinese from obtaining tractors; for, under the present arrangements governing East-West trade, the Soviet Union would be free to import them and transfer them to the Chinese. In these circumstances we should be fully justified in raising the matter with the United States Government.

The Cabinet—

Invited the Foreign Secretary to instruct H.M. Ambassador at Washington to discuss with the United States Government the question of licensing the export of agricultural tractors to China.

Agriculture.  
Disciplinary  
Powers and  
Security of  
Tenure.

(Previous  
Reference:  
C.M. (55) 24th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 6.)

7. The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Lord Privy Seal (C.P. (56) 81) reporting the conclusions reached by the Home Affairs Committee on a proposal to appoint an independent committee of enquiry to review the statutory provisions for ensuring satisfactory standards of husbandry and estate management and for giving security of tenure to tenant farmers.

*The Lord Privy Seal* said that the arguments in favour of such an enquiry were strong. The disciplinary powers under Part II of the Agriculture Act, 1947 had fallen virtually into disuse; and the Agricultural Holdings Act, 1948 continued to provide an excessive degree of security of tenure for the tenant farmer. Unless these Acts were amended or their administration put on to an acceptable footing, it would become increasingly difficult for the Agriculture Ministers to discharge their responsibilities. It was important that there should be a greater freedom of entry into agriculture, and the statutory powers governing both discipline and security of tenure were out of harmony with Conservative principles.

On the other hand, it could not be expected that such an enquiry would be welcomed by the farmers. It would arouse controversy and

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C.M. (56)

16th Conclusions

**CABINET**

*CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, S.W. 1, on Wednesday, 22nd February, 1956, at 4 p.m.*

Present:

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| The Right Hon. Sir ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Prime Minister.                                |  |
| The Most Hon. the MARQUESS OF SALISBURY, Lord President of the Council.               | The Right Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P., Lord Privy Seal.  |
| The Right Hon. HAROLD MACMILLAN, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.                   | The Right Hon. the VISCOUNT KILMUIR, Lord Chancellor.  |
| The Right Hon. SELWYN LLOYD, Q.C., M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.      | The Right Hon. GWILYM LLOYD-GEORGE, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Welsh Affairs. |
| The Right Hon. JAMES STUART, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.                   | The Right Hon. the EARL OF HOME, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.                                      |
| The Right Hon. A. T. LENNOX-BOYD, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies.          | The Right Hon. Sir WALTER MONCKTON, Q.C., M.P., Minister of Defence.   |
| The Right Hon. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Minister of Housing and Local Government.         | The Right Hon. PETER THORNEYCROFT, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.  |
| The Right Hon. D. HEATHCOAT AMORY, M.P., Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. | The Right Hon. Sir DAVID ECCLES, M.P., Minister of Education.  |
| The Right Hon. IAIN MACLEOD, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.           | The Right Hon. the EARL OF SELKIRK, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.  |

The Right Hon. PATRICK BUCHAN-HEPBURN, M.P., Minister of Works.

The following were also present:

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| The Right Hon. JOHN BOYD-CARPENTER, M.P., Minister of Pensions and National Insurance (Items 8-9). | The Right Hon. HAROLD WATKINSON, M.P., Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation (Item 10). |
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The Right Hon. EDWARD HEATH, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Items 1-9).

*Secretariat:*

- The Right Hon. Sir NORMAN BROOK.  
 Mr. H. O. HOOPER.  
 Mr. J. M. WILSON.

Technological  
Education.  
Imperial  
College  
of Science.  
(Previous  
Reference :  
C.M. (56) 3rd  
Conclusions,  
Minute 10.)

4. *The Prime Minister* recalled that on 11th January the Cabinet had agreed that, despite the objections which the Royal Fine Art Commission had raised to the demolition of the Colcutt building, the Government should proceed with their plan for constructing on this site new and enlarged premises for the Imperial College of Science. It had now been suggested to him that the Financial Secretary, Treasury, should hold a meeting with representatives of the Commission and of the University authorities concerned with a view to explaining the grounds for the Government's decision and persuading the Commission to withdraw their objections to it. He doubted whether it would be expedient to take this course. The Government were already being criticised for failing to take earlier steps to expand the facilities for technological education. They should not risk the charge of further delay in the execution of their plan for enlarging the Imperial College.

In discussion some Ministers expressed regret at the decision to demolish the Colcutt building. It was a building of some architectural interest, and was a feature of the London skyline. Other Ministers expressed disquiet about the design of the new building which was to take its place. They suggested that this had little merit in itself and would not be congruous with the surrounding buildings. They thought it would be wise to consider any suggestions which the Fine Art Commission might have to make for improvement of the design of the new building.

In further discussion it was agreed that there might be advantage in holding a meeting with representatives of the Fine Art Commission, provided that it was made clear from the outset that the Government were not prepared to modify their decision to demolish the Colcutt building and to build new premises for the Imperial College on this site, and that the discussions could not be allowed to delay progress in the construction of the new building. On this understanding, however, the Government could offer to consider any comments which the Fine Art Commission might wish to make on the design of the new building.

#### The Cabinet—

Agreed that the Financial Secretary, Treasury, should be authorised to invite the comments of the Royal Fine Art Commission on the design of the new building for the Imperial College of Science, on the understanding that the Government were finally committed to proceed with this project and that this consultation with the Commission would not be allowed to delay its execution.

Egypt.  
(Previous  
Reference :  
C.M. (55) 42nd  
Conclusions,  
Minute 9.)

5. *The Foreign Secretary* said that he would shortly be meeting the Prime Minister of Egypt in Cairo. Subject to the Cabinet's views, he proposed, in his discussions with Colonel Nasser, to take a firm line about the tone of Egyptian propaganda on British policy in the Middle East and to make plain the advantages to Egypt of a friendlier relation with the United Kingdom. It was not to be expected that, if Egypt showed such hostility towards us, we should continue to treat her as a friendly State and, for example, to give her financial assistance towards the construction of the Aswan High Dam. His object would be to make it clear that Egypt could not expect further help from us unless she changed her policy towards us.

In discussion it was pointed out that our decision to make a financial contribution towards the construction of the Aswan Dam had been taken, after full consideration, because it was thought to be in our interests to prevent the Soviet Government from obtaining contracts which would give them a foothold in Egypt. We could not lightly withdraw from this undertaking and certainly could not do so without prior consultation with the United States Government.

The Foreign Secretary said that he was not asking the Cabinet to reverse their decision about the Aswan Dam and would not propose, in his forthcoming discussions, to threaten to withdraw the offer of British assistance in this project. He need not at this stage be specific about the consequences which would follow if the Egyptians failed to modify their policy towards us. He need go no further at present than to emphasise the common advantages to both countries of a better understanding and friendlier relations between the United Kingdom and Egypt.

The Cabinet—

Took note with approval of the line which the Foreign Secretary proposed to take in his forthcoming discussions with the Prime Minister of Egypt.

Capital  
Punishment.  
(Previous  
Reference :  
C.M. (56) 10th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 3.)

6. In the debate in the House of Commons on 16th February, the Government motion commending the retention of capital punishment as the penalty for murder had been defeated, on a free vote, by 293 votes to 262. The Cabinet considered what course the Government should now take in the light of this expression of the view of the House of Commons. They had before them a memorandum on this question by the Home Secretary (C.P. (56) 43).

In discussion of the Home Secretary's memorandum the following points were made:—

(a) There was general agreement that, as the Government had invited the House to support a motion for the retention of capital punishment, they could not now introduce a Government Bill to abolish it. Government supporters who had voted in favour of the motion would be unwilling to support Government legislation to the contrary effect.

(b) Doubts were expressed about the expediency of the alternative course, suggested by the Home Secretary, of providing Government time for the passage of the Death Penalty (Abolition) Bill which had been introduced by Mr. S. Silverman, M.P. This Bill provided that the death penalty for murder should be suspended for five years and that after a further five years it should be abolished altogether unless, in the intervening period, prayers for its continuance had been passed by both Houses of Parliament. The House of Commons had now declared for the abolition of the penalty, and it was undesirable that legislation should be passed which would have the effect of reopening the issue after a period of five years. Might it not be preferable that the leaders of the Labour Opposition should themselves promote a Bill providing for the abolition of the death penalty?

As against this it was argued that, if the principle of Mr. Silverman's Bill was confirmed on Second Reading, it would be open to the Government to move in the Committee Stage amendments which would transform the measure into one for the complete abolition of the death penalty. There was much to be said for allowing the House of Commons to proceed with this question on the basis of the Bill already before them. The Government would seem to be assuming a greater responsibility than they need if they took the initiative in inviting the leaders of the Labour Opposition to sponsor a different form of Bill.

(c) This should be treated as a Private Member's Bill. The Government should provide no facilities for it, apart from finding Government time for its discussion. In all proceedings on it Government supporters should be allowed a free vote.

(d) In the House of Lords there was a great body of authoritative legal opinion in favour of retaining the death penalty. Even if this Bill should pass the Commons, it was likely to be rejected by the