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S E C R E T.

COPY NO. \_\_\_\_\_

C A B I N E T 18 (36)

Meeting of the Cabinet to be held in the  
Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons,  
on WEDNESDAY, 11th March, 1936, at 6.0 p.m.

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A G E N D U M.

THE LOCARNO TREATY - GERMAN OCCUPATION OF THE  
RHINELAND.

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign  
Affairs.

(C.P.73(36) - already circulated)

Telegrams Nos. 121, 122 and 123 from Sir George  
Clark (Paris), transmitting messages from the  
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

(Signed) M.P.A. HANKEY,

Secretary to the Cabinet.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.,

11th March, 1936.

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S E C R E T.

COPY NO. \_\_\_\_\_

C A B I N E T 18 (36).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held  
in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons,  
on WEDNESDAY, 11th MARCH, 1936, at 6.0 p.m.

PRESENT:

The Right Hon. Stanley Baldwin, M.P.,  
Prime Minister. (In the Chair).

The Right Hon.  
J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P.,  
Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon.  
Neville Chamberlain, M.P.,  
Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Right Hon.  
The Viscount Hailsham,  
Lord Chancellor.

The Right Hon.  
Sir John Simon, G.C.S.I., K.C.V.O.,  
O.B.E., K.C., M.P., Secretary  
of State for Home Affairs.

The Right Hon.  
Anthony Eden, M.C., M.P.,  
Secretary of State for Foreign  
Affairs.

The Right Hon.  
The Viscount Halifax, K.G.,  
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.,  
Lord Privy Seal.

The Right Hon.  
A. Duff Cooper, D.S.O., M.P.,  
Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon.  
Malcolm MacDonald, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for  
Dominion Affairs.

The Right Hon.  
The Viscount Swinton, G.B.E.,  
M.C., Secretary of State for  
Air.

The Most Hon.  
The Marquess of Zetland,  
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., Secretary  
of State for India.

The Right Hon.  
Sir Godfrey Collins, K.B.E.,  
C.M.G., M.P., Secretary of  
State for Scotland.

The Right Hon.  
J.H. Thomas, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for the  
Colonies.

The Right Hon.  
Walter Runciman, M.P.,  
President of the Board of Trade.

The Right Hon.  
The Viscount Monsell, G.B.E.,  
First Lord of the Admiralty.

The Right Hon.  
Walter Ellicott, M.C., M.P.,  
Minister of Agriculture and  
Fisheries.

The Right Hon.  
Oliver Stanley, M.C., M.P.,  
President of the Board of  
Education.

The Right Hon.  
Sir Kingsley Wood, M.P.,  
Minister of Health.

The Right Hon.  
W. Ormsby-Gore, M.P.,  
First Commissioner of Works.

Colonel Sir M.P.A. Hankey, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., ..... Secretary.



GERMANY.

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The Locarno  
Treaty.

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German Re-occupa-  
tion of the  
Demilitarised  
Zone.

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(Previous  
Reference:  
Cabinet 17(36)  
Conclusion 1).F.R.  
19(36)1.

1. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs gave the Cabinet an account of the conversations he and the Lord Privy Seal had held with representatives of the French, Belgian and Italian Governments in Paris on the previous day. Both Ministers were impressed by the complexity and gravity of the situation which confronted Europe, and more especially our own country as one of the guarantors of Locarno. On the outcome of the present situation depended the course of events in Europe over the next ten years, and it had to be remembered that our influence was greater than that of any other nation.

At the outset of the conversations the two Ministers had been surprised at the identity of the French and Belgian views, especially when it was remembered that M. van Zeeland, the Belgian Prime Minister, was Flemish, and a man of independent character. Nevertheless, he had taken the same view as the French.

The Ministers had soon discovered that our policy of condemning the German action and then developing a constructive policy to re-establish the European situation had no chance of acceptance.

The Secretary of State then read a Memorandum of a private conversation he had had with M. van Zeeland, whose views were especially important in the light they shed on French and Belgian public opinion. Both nations felt that, if the German challenge was not taken up now, a much more formidable situation would arise in two years time. At the moment these peoples believed that the risk of war being precipitated by firm action was remote, but

that if Germany was allowed to remain unmolested in military occupation of the Rhineland, war in two years time was a certainty and would be fought under very unfavourable conditions.

Hitler was believed to have acted under pressure from Göring and Goebbels and contrary to the view of the German General Staff *and Dr. Schacht*.

A Frenchman had told him that the French people were "au bout des nerfs". They felt that if Germany could tear up the Locarno Treaty they would have no confidence in German good faith or in any guarantee Treaty. If that was to be the result, France would not leave the League of Nations, but any Government would become a laughing stock that continued to rely on collective security. They would fall back on the former system of alliances to secure themselves, and, if driven to that course the French and Belgians would say that it was due to our failure to implement our Locarno obligations.

On the previous evening the two British Ministers had reached the conclusion that our policy of trying for a negotiation was still the right one, and the only hope of securing a peaceful outcome. The alternative proposed by the French Government for forcing the Germans out of the Rhineland would not produce a satisfactory settlement.

If a negotiation was to take place, three points had to be taken into account:-

- (i) A vindication of international morality. That was essential for France and Belgium:
- (ii) A reasonable regard for the position into which Germany had got herself:



(iii) Reassurance to France and Belgium of support in any new Treaty to replace Locarno.

The next question that arose was how best to proceed. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs' suggestion was as follows:

To send for the German Ambassador that very evening. To tell him of the acute consciousness of His Majesty's Government of the very grave situation created by the German action, and to speak quite plainly as to the feelings of His Majesty's Government and of the House of Commons on the subject. He would point out the difficulties into which the Germans had plunged His Majesty's Government and would remind him of our own guarantee under the Treaty of Locarno and of what our obligations are, as well as of our reputation for fulfilling our obligations. To emphasise how inexcusable the German action was vis-a-vis Belgium who had no part in the Franco-Soviet Alliance. He would emphasise that despite all this we were anxious to obtain a peaceful settlement; that we were not asking for anything impossible; but that we wanted some contribution from Germany to give our efforts some prospect of success in the difficult circumstances. What he would ask Hitler to say would be that, having stated that he wanted to negotiate a series of new pacts as a basis for peace in Europe, he would, as a proof of his intentions, withdraw all his forces from the Rhineland over and above the troops necessary for a symbolic occupation. In addition that, pending the conclusion of the new pacts, for the regularisation of the situation, he should not reinforce the "symbolic" troops, nor build fortifications in the demilitarised zone. He proposed to fortify this request by reminding the German Ambassador that in his first communication he had stated that the number of troops would be small and limited to a symbolic occupation. He proposed to

add that, if Herr Hitler would do this he would be doing something to help us in working for a peaceful settlement, and we would then do our best/- <sup>to get negotiations under way</sup> but as the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs explained later - he would be careful to avoid any optimism or undertaking.

The Secretary of State then informed the Cabinet that French Ministers had not exercised any undue pressure on the Lord Privy Seal and himself. Nevertheless, unless at the forthcoming conversations they could be confronted with some new factor such as he had suggested, he thought it inevitable that the French and Belgians would both announce their intention - if Germany could not be persuaded to evacuate the demilitarised zone - to ask the Council of the League to make a pronouncement. Then, if Germany was still obdurate, they would proceed to military measures and ask us to do the same. In that case we should have to decide whether we intended to fulfil our Treaty obligation - and we should be in an impossible position if we refused.

In reply to an inquiry as to the position of Italy, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the Italian Ambassador in Paris had not departed from the Italian point of view that they could not undertake any obligations while they themselves were exposed to sanctions. At one moment M. Flandin had suggested that this could easily be got over by withdrawing sanctions, but he himself had given no encouragement to that remark.

In the course of discussion the question was

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raised as to what would be the French and Belgian attitude if we approached Germany without prior consultation with them.

The Lord Privy Seal pointed out that if France was approached on the subject it would appear in the French press next day and this would probably ruin all chance of its acceptance by Germany.

The suggestion of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was then discussed from the point of view of its probable reception by Germany and France respectively.

It was pointed out that there was a risk that Herr Hitler might ask for an assurance of British neutrality if he fell in with the proposal. In that event we should have to try and get an assurance from the French that they would not march into the Rhineland. From the German point of view a disadvantage of the proposal was that it would handicap us in asking for a complete withdrawal of German forces from the Rhineland. It was pointed out also that Herr Hitler might ask as a condition of acceptance for an assurance that France would not enter the Rhineland. It was realised that Herr Hitler could only be expected to consider the proposal favourably if it came from the United Kingdom Government. If the suggestion were to be postponed until after the meeting of the Locarno Powers (other than Germany) in London, he would be almost certain to reject it. Consequently, the suggestion, if made at all, must be made the same evening in order to give Herr Hitler a chance of accepting it the following morning, in which case, the meeting of the Locarno Powers would be presented with this new factor when they assembled. Even so, it would be necessary to make quite clear to Herr Hitler that the proposal had been made

spontaneously by the United Kingdom and was not a product of the Paris meeting.

So far as France was concerned, it was realised that there was a risk that when the French Ministers heard of the suggestion they might say that they did not agree. They might object to it on the ground that if accepted it would thwart the policy that they themselves and the Belgians intended to follow. In short, they might suggest that we had betrayed them behind their back.

In this connection it was suggested that a stage would very soon be reached in the forthcoming conversations when it might be necessary to tell the French our position as to the possibility of fulfilling our obligations under the Locarno Treaty. That subject, it was admitted, might be fraught with grave issues for the future of the League of Nations and the principle of collective security. From information given by the Service Ministers it transpired that our position at home and in home waters was a disadvantageous one, whether from the point of view of the Navy, Army or Air Force, or anti-aircraft defence. In addition, public opinion was strongly opposed to any military action against the Germans in the demilitarised zone. In particular, the ex-Service men were very anti-French. Moreover, many people,

perhaps most people, were saying openly that they did not see why the Germans should not re-occupy the Rhineland. In these circumstances, it was generally accepted that it was worth taking almost any risk in order to escape from that situation. Admittedly the suggestion of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs involved some risks from the point of view of the attitude of Germany on the one hand, and France and Belgium on the other, but we could hardly be left in a more/<sup>embarrassing</sup> position than we were in already. Moreover, public opinion would consider that the Government had taken a reasonable step in handling the situation.

Some discussion took place as to what would be the position of the Council of the League of Nations.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs explained that the Council's obligation would be to pronounce on the German action. It had no obligation to proceed to military sanctions. This was why he had asked whether the French Government contemplated military action by the Locarno Powers only, and M. Flandin had replied "yes". At this point the Secretary of State read an extract from the leading article in "Figaro" of the 11th March.

The Prime Minister thought at some stage it would be necessary to point out to the French that the action they proposed would not result only in letting loose another great war in Europe. They might succeed in crushing Germany with the aid of Russia, but it would probably only result in Germany going Bolshevik.

The Lord Privy Seal said their reply would be that if they did not take action now there would only be a war under much more adverse conditions in three years' time. The French and Belgians sincerely



believed that the Germans would not fight if they took action.

Some members of the Cabinet were very sceptical about this assumption.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs pointed out that at bottom the French nation was very pacifist. What they really apprehended was the outbreak of a serious war in three years' time when Germany was re-armed. He shared their conviction as to this danger.

The Secretary of State for War pointed out that in three years' time, though we should have reconditioned at any rate to some extent our small forces, yet by that time Germany would have 100 divisions and a powerful fleet. We should not relatively, therefore, be in a better position.

One suggestion was that we should adopt the proposal of the French and Belgian Governments to begin with financial and economic sanctions. In support of this it was pointed out that it was known from various sources that Dr. Schacht had opposed the re-occupation of the Rhineland owing to his apprehensions of economic and financial sanctions, more especially the resulting inability of Germany to secure foreign exchange. That was bound before long to bring about a financial crash and this would force Germany to decide either to come to terms or to fight. In the latter event, particularly if they attacked France or Belgium, public opinion both in this country and in the world as a whole would rapidly change. The objection to this course was that the United States of America, and perhaps other nations, might refuse co-operation, and economic pressure could not then be supported without blockade which would be very difficult.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs pointed out in this connection that the Franco-Belgian proposal had been for the imposition of sanctions by successive stages culminating in military action.

The Lord President of the Council was apprehensive of what would happen if ~~Germany accepted the proposal of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and then France turned against it.~~ France might easily ask what business we had to make this proposal without consulting them as it really involved opening up negotiations. That, he thought, would create a situation worse than the present one, since it would arouse an indignation that would besmirch us. He was reluctant to go back on a friend before agreement was reached as to how the problem was to be handled. In general, he was favourable to the suggestion of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, but he asked the Cabinet to consider how it could be put most effectively to Herr Hitler. Would it not be possible, for example, to put it forward, not as a definite proposal, but rather in the form of passing our own thoughts over to Herr Hitler to help him in getting out of the difficult situation he had created for himself? He returned to this suggestion several times during the discussion.

The Lord Privy Seal said he had gathered from private conversation that the French were as anxious not to have to fight as we were, but were convinced that Germany would not resist.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs read a Memorandum of a private conversation he had had with M. van Zeeland before leaving Paris, in the course of which the Belgian Prime Minister had made certain proposals which did not differ very widely from his own.

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Secretary of State  
Foreign Affairs  
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whether Germany  
accepted the  
proposal or not.



The Prime Minister pointed out that at the time when Locarno was signed the Government had felt that the commitments could be accepted without undue risk owing to the strength of the French forces and the fact that Germany was totally disarmed. When the Disarmament Conference failed and Germany started to re-arm, the Government here started to do the same. In a democratic country, however, a good deal of time was taken to educate public opinion and get a plan accepted, and consequently <sup>we</sup> were now caught at a disadvantage. All that was perfectly well known to the French Government, and it seemed very unfriendly of them to put us in the present dilemma. People would take a long time to forget it. He himself had said at the Election that he was never going into sanctions again until our armaments were sufficient. He felt that the French ought to welcome our coming re-armament rather than expose us to the present embarrassments.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer recalled that the Prime Minister had said in Parliament that it was the task of this country to try and bring France and Germany together.

The Cabinet agreed:

To approve the suggestion of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that he should send for the German Ambassador that very evening and indicate to him the suggestion set forth on pages 3 and 4. In doing so he should be careful to make clear that this was our own spontaneous suggestion and that it had not been discussed in Paris. He should also ask that if Herr Hitler adopted the suggestion at all, he should do it well.



THE NEXT  
MEETING OF  
THE CABINET.

2. After the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had informed the Cabinet that M. Flandin would be arriving in London late that evening, the Cabinet agreed:

That a further meeting of the Cabinet should be held on the morrow, Thursday, 12th March, at 11.0 a.m.

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2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.,

11th March, 1936.