

Avskrift

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WAR CABINET.

Stoppage of traffic in Norwegian territorial waters.

Memorandum by First Lord of the Admiralty.

1. It has been very painful to watch during the last two months the endless procession of German oreships down the Norwegian territorial waters carrying to Germany the materiel out of which will be made the shells to kill our young men in 1941, when all the time the simplest and easiest of motions would bring it to an end. The evident partiality with which through fear the Norwegian authorities are using their neutrality in favor of German calls for redress. This partiality reached its climax in the attempt of the Norwegian Government and Naval Officers to curry favor with the German bully by smuggling the ALTMARK and her prisoners safely into German hands. The action which we have taken undoubtedly constitutes the most flagrant breach of neutrality of a technical character which could be imagined. The plunge has been taken, and taken with an enormous measure of world sympathy.

2. Why then should we stop here? Far from excusing ourselves to Norwegian protests we should adopt and pursue the policy of moral counter-attack initiated by the Foreign Secretary in his conversations with the Norwegian Minister.

We ran what seems to be a grave risk in defying the Norwegian torpedo boat whose torpedo tubes were trained upon our ships. Personally I never had the slightest apprehension that they would fire upon us on this occasion, but the risk of clash with loss of Norwegian life had plainly to be faced, and was faced by the Foreign Office and the Admiralty. We do not want this kind of thing to go on. At any time the attempt to pass German arms to the Russians to help them against the Finns may force us to arrest another ship in Norwegian territorial waters. It may well be that under the furious hectoring of Berlin a Norwegian gun-boat will fire a shot, or far more dangerous, a torpedo, in which case a bloody incident might occur, with every evil repercussion all over the world.

3. The simplest and surest way of avoiding all this is to lay a small declared minefield as originally proposed by the Admiralty at some point in Norwegian territorial waters which will force enemy traffic into the open sea. There are three or four such points, and therefore even when very tardily one minefield has been swept up by the Norwegian Navy, we can declare others and also relay mines in the channel they have swept. At no point in the process would there be any danger of armed collision with Norwegian warships which could not be discreetly avoided. On the other hand the remedy would be instantly effective and would probably bring the whole traffic to an abrupt end.

4. Now while we are justly indignant at the abuse of Norwegian neutrality to which we have been subjected now is the time to act. Strike while the iron is hot ! In three days from the moment of sanction by the Cabinet the minefield can be laid. This will also cover the imperative need which will arise to close the gap when the big barrage is completed.

5. Naturally, such action must be judged in its relation to the large project. Will it make it more likely that the Norwegian will refuse passage to our troops. I have not the slightest doubt that it will improve our prospects such as they are. The Norwegians would loathe coming into the war on

the side of Germany. It therefore they realise that they are going to be forced to chose one side or the other, and have no chance of stopping out, they are more likely to come down on our side than otherwise. If we allow them to continue under the delusion that mere words and protests will deter us from necessary action, they will supply these in endless and copius flow. At present it is perfectly certain they will refuse passage, but if they feel in their bones that we are inflexibly resolved, I personally believe the chances of their physical resistance are remote or at least greatly reduced. Therefore I believe that the larger prospect will be helped, so far as it can be helped, rather than hindered by particular action required.

6. But there is always the chance that our arresting ore traffic by a further breach of Norwegian neutrality will stir the German into precipitate action. They may commit overt act upon the soil of Norway. This, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer has already pointed out, would entitle us to regard Norway as a battlefield in which we should be bound to fight for necessary positions.

7. I should be glad therefore if Naval action, for which permission is requested, acted as a provocation. At any rate it would be much better to try out the Norwegian reaction and the German reaction upon a small operation which we certainly achieve, than run the risk, which now from telegrams appears almost certainty, of our arriving with an Armada, and having the door shut in our faces.

8. Finally I do not hesitate to say that if the worst came to the worst and Norway and Sweden joined Germany and invited German troops into their country to protect them, a step which would be fatal to their independence and also extremely unpleasant for them at the time, even so a state of war with Norway and Sweden would be more for aivantage than the present neutrality which gives all aivantage to German for nothing, and imposes all dissadvantages upon us. Germany

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would then have to defend and victual the Scandinavian peninsula, thus diverting her strength and consuming her straitened supplies. Our blockade would become far more effective, and using sea-power we could easily supply ourselves with varying temporary bases on the Norwegian coast.

On all grounds therefore proximate and ultimate, particular and generell, I ask that the Navy shall be allowed to act forthwith in sense requested.

February, 1940

W.S.C

Kilde: Bjørn Bjørnsen. NARVIK 1940, s.352-355.