Cabinet conclusions on control of the entrances to the Baltic, 3 January 1946

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C.M. (46)

2nd Conclusions

3 January, 1946

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3. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum on this subject by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (C.P.[[1]](#footnote-1) (45) 352[[2]](#footnote-2)).

*The Foreign Secretary* said that M. Molotov and M. Stalin had raised with him at Moscow the question of the control of the entrances to the Baltic. He had not been in a position to discuss the question fully, but had told M. Molotov that, according to his information, control was at present in the hands of the riparian States, as it had been for many years, that they provided any services required, and that both merchant vessels and warships of all States, whether neutral or belligerent, had been able to pass freely in and out, both in peace and war.

In subsequent conversation, M. Stalin had expressed doubt whether Russian shipping was in fact entitled to free passage. He had seemed to be trying to discover what the British reactions would be to a proposal that a Russian base should be established in this area. When, however, the Foreign Secretary had said that His Majesty’s Government would oppose such an idea, M. Stalin had said that he was not referring to bases at all.

In view of probable future developments in regard to the Bosphorus [*sic*], the Foreign Secretary thought it very desirable to give international recognition as soon as possible to the principle of free passage through the entrances to the Baltic. For this purpose he had in mind declarations by the Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States and Russia, and he sought approval to explore this suggestion with Mr. Byrnes[[3]](#footnote-3) during his forthcoming visit to London and subsequently with the Russians.

*The First Sea Lord*[[4]](#footnote-4) said that the Chiefs of Staff were in agreement with this proposal. The riparian States could themselves offer no threat to Russia, Germany was under control and a threat could therefore come only from the United Kingdom. The Chiefs of Staff thought that the proposed declaration would be useful.

After discussions, the Cabinet –

1) Approved the line taken by the Foreign Secretary in his conversations on this subject in Moscow.

(2) Authorised him to approach the United States Government on the lines proposed in C.P. (45) 352.

[TNA, CAB 128/5]

Keywords: post-war Eastern Europe, post-war order

1. This stands for “Cabinet Paper” – a document used by the British Cabinet. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The memorandum entitled “Suggested International Control of Entrances to the Baltic” was distributed by Bevin to the members of the Cabinet on 31 December 1945. It presented a short summary of discussions of this issue since 1941, paying particular attention to discussions on this topic with Molotov and Stalin that took place at the meeting of Foreign Ministers in Moscow. As is evident from the memorandum, Bevin was not convinced of the Soviet disinterest in the question of bases on the Denmark Straits that Stalin had wanted to convey to him in a conversation of 24 December: ‘Despite the Generalissimo’s reply, it appears that the Russians may be angling for some sort of special position in regard to the Baltic entrances.’ Bevin asked Cabinet to approve the position he had taken on this issue in Moscow, but also for permission to agree a position with the USA ‘with a view to our two Governments pursuing a common line in any future discussions on this subject, and to place on record an agreed communication to the Soviet Government’ (C.P. (45) 352, Memo by Bevin, 31/12/1945 // TNA, CAB 129/5). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Byrnes, James Francis (1882 - 1972) - US politician. US Secretary of State (1945 - 1947). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cunningham, Andrew Browne (1883 – 1963) – Admiral of the Royal Navy Fleet, Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet (1943), First Sea Lord (1943 – 1946). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)