

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

TO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

241

It is requested that special care may be taken to ensure the secrecy of this document.

S E C R E T.

W.P.(40)156.
(Also C.O.S.(40)357).

COPY NO. 23

15TH MAY, 1940.

WAR CABINET.

ALLIED MILITARY ACTION IN THE EVENT
OF WAR WITH ITALY.

Report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

The War Cabinet at their Meeting on the 30th April
(W.M. (40) 108th Conclusions, Minute 13) agreed -

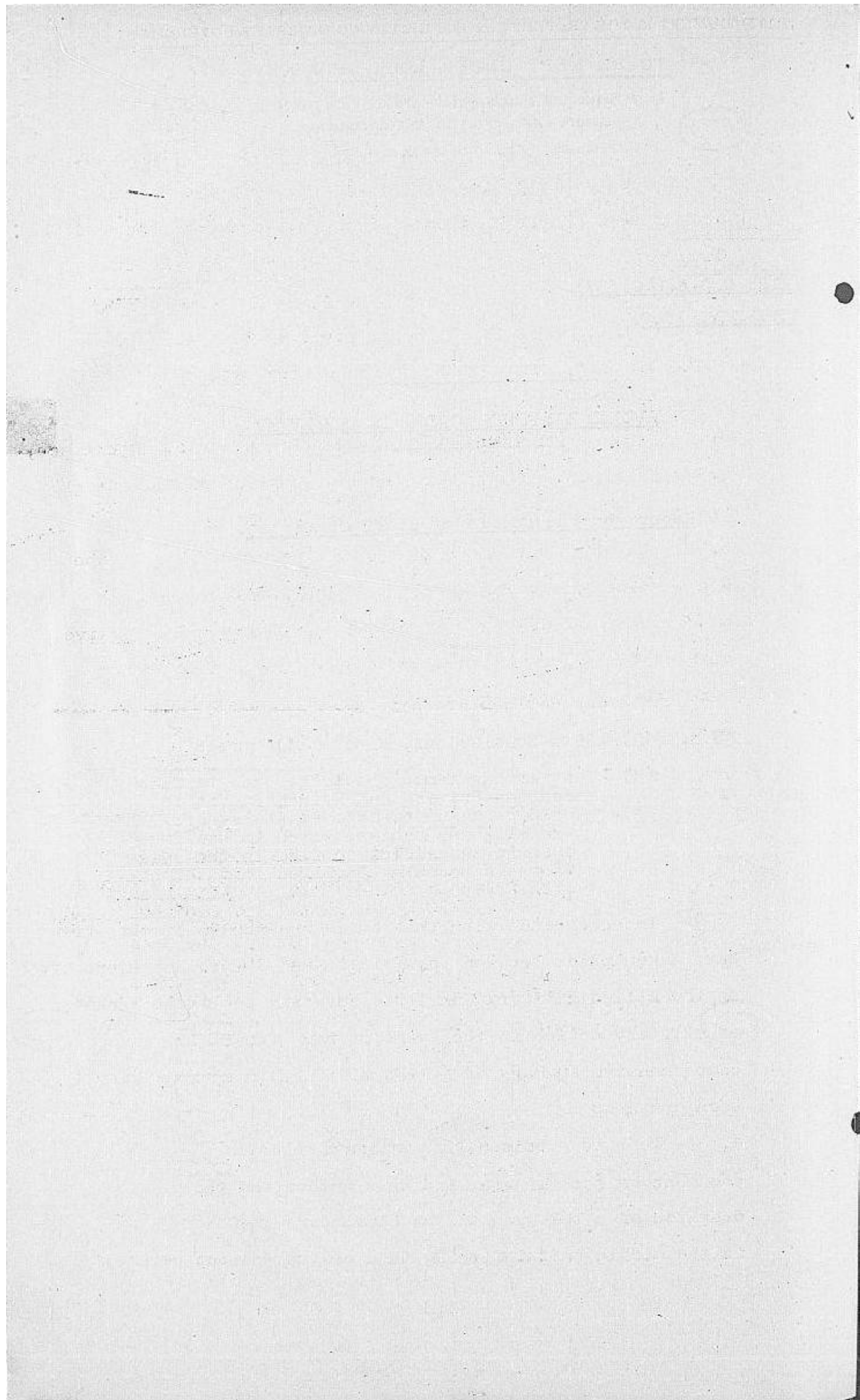
"(3) That arrangements should at once be made for the British and French Staffs to prepare an up-to-date statement of the military action, which it would be open to the Allies to take in the event of their becoming involved in a war with Italy".

2. In accordance with the above conclusion discussions have taken place between the British and French Representatives on the Allied Military Committee covering the whole range of military action in the event of war with Italy, and a comprehensive summary of Allied military intentions has been drawn up.

4. We have examined this summary^x, which is a document of some length, and have authorised the despatch of a telegram to the Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East informing them of the salient points,

-1-

^x COS (40) 351.



and instructing them to concert plans with the French on the basis of the policy agreed upon between the French and British Staffs. A copy of the telegram⁺ to the Commanders-in-Chief is attached. We have thought it right to issue these instructions to the Commanders-in-Chief in anticipation of the approval of the Cabinet, owing to the rapid deterioration of the situation vis-a-vis Italy.

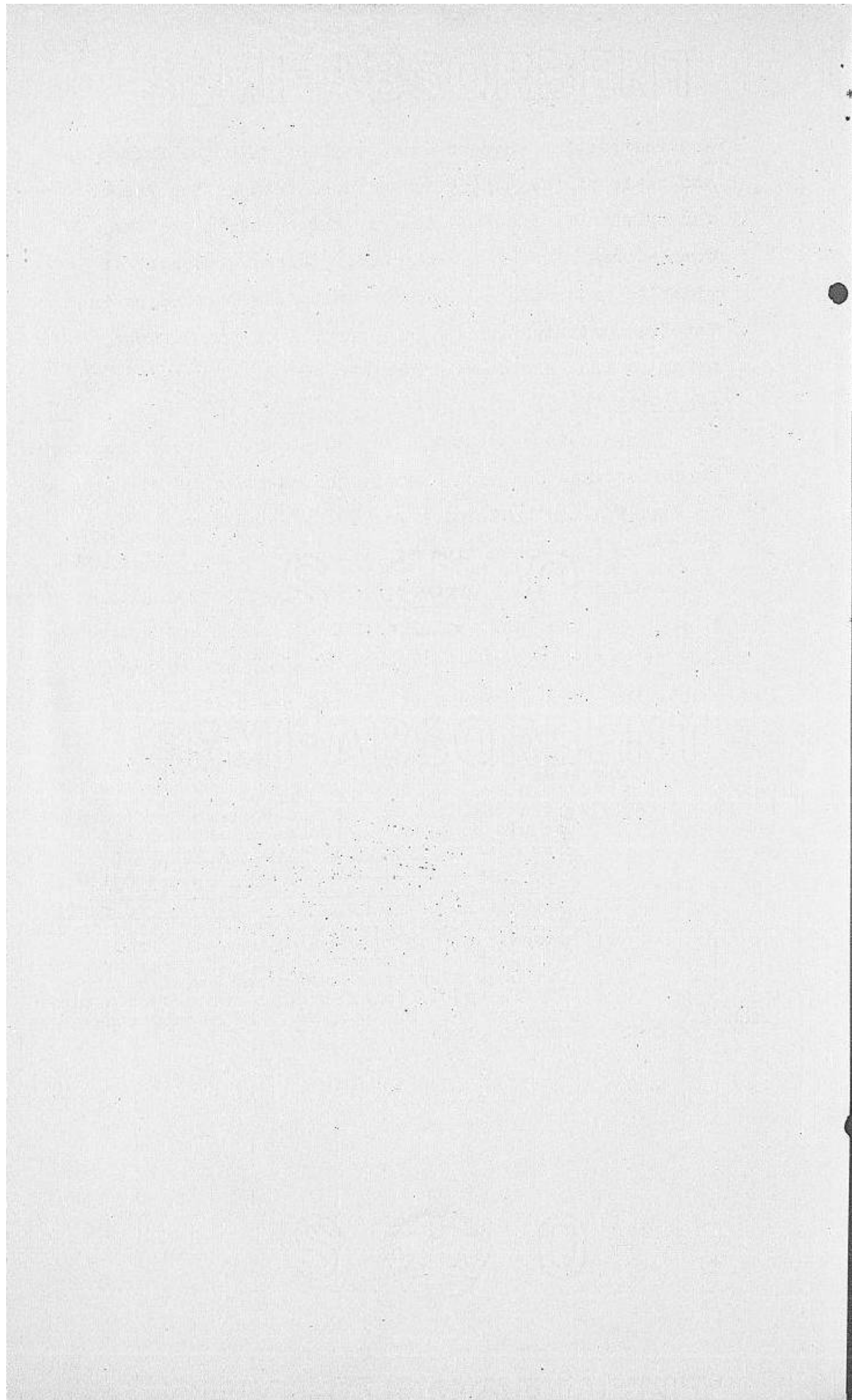
5. There is one outstanding question of great importance, which requires decision, namely the question of air attack against Italian industries in North West Italy.

6. In this connection it will be recalled that, at the 9th Meeting of the Supreme War Council, discussion took place as to the best way of striking a sharp and effective blow at Italy, and it was agreed that air attack on her industries in the North West offered the best means to this end.

The supreme War Council: -

"(2) Agreed that the French and British Governments should consider the question whether, if the Allies found themselves at war with Italy as a result of either (a) an Italian attack against them or (b) an Italian act of aggression which they felt bound to resist, military objectives in North West Italy should immediately be attacked by the air from aerodromes in France; and that, as a preliminary step, the French and British Air Staffs should consider what aerodromes would be used for this purpose, and should concert a plan".

+ Annex.



7. Discussions between the French and British Air Staffs have been carried out, and plans were in course of preparation when the present offensive on the Western front opened. It is unlikely that British squadrons could be made available in present circumstances, and the French have said that they will not undertake these operations except by way of retaliation, although this attitude may have been changed by recent events.

8. We suggest that this is a matter which should be taken up with the French Government as a matter of great urgency.

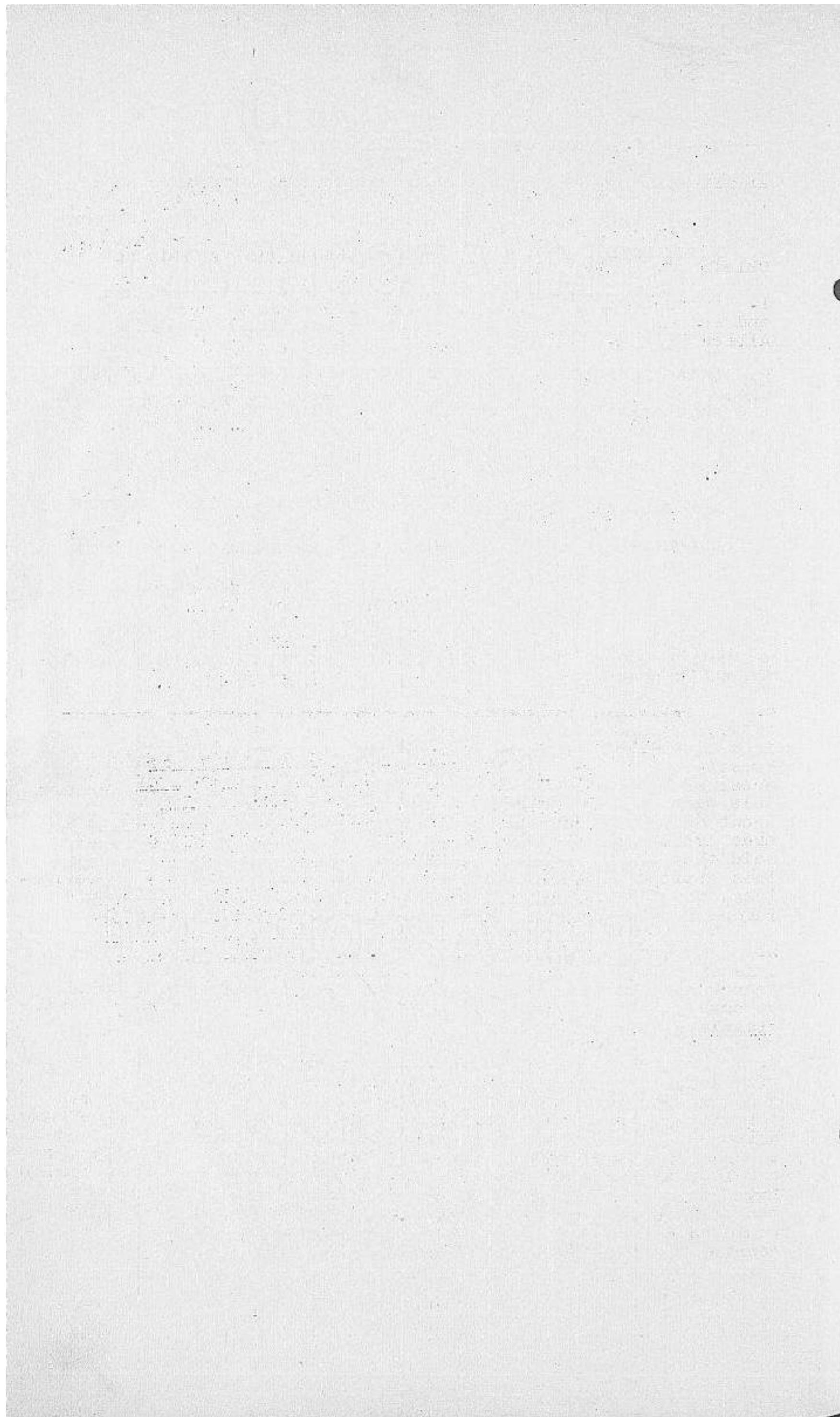
(Signed) G.L.N. NEWALL.

" DUDLEY POUND.

" EDMUND IRONSIDE.

NOTE - At the request of the Chief of the Air Staff certain amendments have been made to paragraph 4 of the telegram to the Commanders-in-Chief and this paragraph as now shown in the annex incorporates these amendments. The Chief of Naval Staff and Chief of the Imperial General Staff have not had an opportunity, in the time available, to concur in paragraph 4 as now drafted and the right is reserved for them to suggest such modifications as they may wish to put forward.

Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1.



ANNEXTELEGRAM TO COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF FROM CHIEFS OF STAFF.

Following for three Commanders-in-Chief from Chiefs of Staff.

1. Following is summary of concerted views of British and French High Commands based on discussions with French on Allied Military action in the event of war with Italy.

2. In general, French agree with British intentions, which have been communicated to you from time to time, but the French proposals go further, in particular they suggest:-

(a) Occupation of Melos and if possible Salamis, Navarino and Argostoli;

(b) Landing of limited forces at Salonika;

(c) Early operations against Dodecanese, although they regard recapture of Balearics as prior requirement if Italians occupy latter, about which they express much concern.

3. Both High Commands agree as to paramount importance of denying Crete to Italians and affording maximum practicable support to Turkey.

4. Principal outstanding question which requires decision between two Governments is air attack on Italian war industries from south east France. Apart from other considerations we consider that air attack on Italy should materially relieve air pressure in Eastern Mediterranean. Plans and preparations for this were in hand when the present offensive on the Western Front opened. It is unlikely that British squadrons could be made available in present circumstances, and the French have said they will not undertake it except in retaliation, though this attitude may have been changed by recent events. Nevertheless, we will keep possibility of such operations in view and inform you of any further developments.

5. Discussions have made it clear that large-scale French offensive from Tunisia is not intended in early stages, and French have stated that even local offensive operations would be conditional on direct British air support. This support will clearly be impracticable.

6. Salonika. If Italy attacks Yugoslavia but is not at war with Allies, French propose to land advanced guard with aircraft and A.A. defences, size of force not stated. They appreciate that this might itself lead to war with Italy, in which case they envisage force living on country with help of overland or coastwise supplies through Turkey. In last resort, force would be withdrawn overland to Turkish Thrace. If Allies are already at war before force lands, French propose landing a token force of few thousand men at Salonika, although they have not made it clear how this would be effected. They also state that force would live on country without supplies from outside.

[The page contains extremely faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the document. The text is scattered across the page and is not readable.]

7. French would themselves supply troops for Salonika, also fighter aircraft and A.A. guns, although latter are still in France. They state British support would be welcome, and ask us at least to provide R.D.F. facilities.

8. French hold strongly that presence of Allied force at Salonika in above circumstances would have such important political consequences that it should be attempted despite risks. From military point of view we consider project unsound, but we recognise that it would be mainly a French commitment.

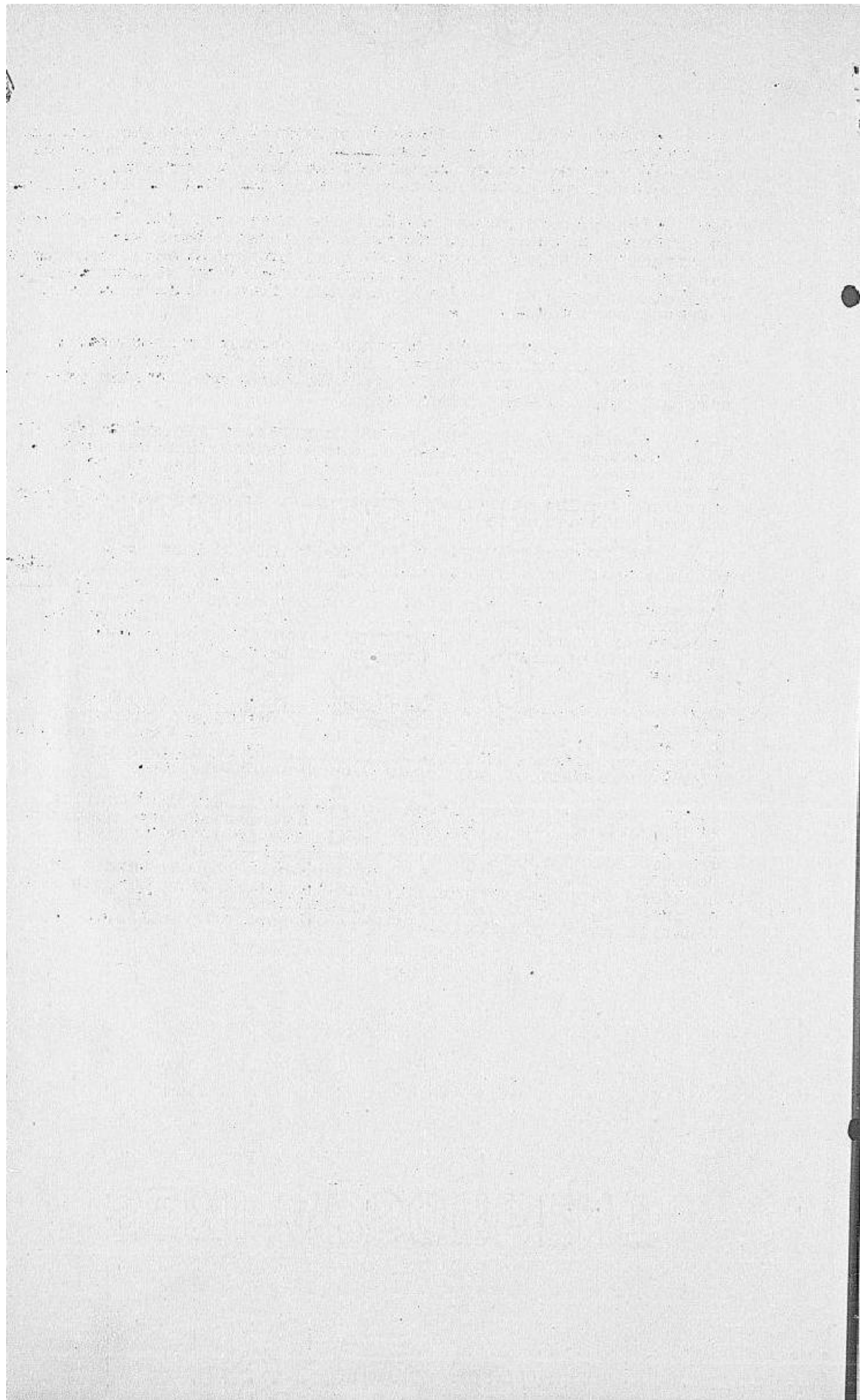
9. Support of Turkey. French undertake to provide troops over Anatolian railway, but consider we should supply tanks, A/T units and artillery, and greater part of aircraft and A.A. defences.

10. Similarly, they ask us to contribute aircraft and A.A. defences for occupation of Greek Islands and bases. We understand landings would be effected from French cruisers, possibly before Italy declared war if Greeks consented. The political advisability of doing this has not yet been discussed.

11. Same limiting factor has constantly arisen in discussions; namely, availability of resources in relation to Allied intentions. We feel there would be grave danger in dispersing limited Allied resources to extent involved in full French proposals, and it is abundantly clear that no resources involving aircraft or A.A. guns can be made available from France or United-Kingdom at present juncture.

12. We consider that Commanders-in-Chief are in best position to judge what risks can be accepted and to assess how resources in Middle East can best be used. You should, therefore, discuss whole position with Weygand, concert plans and report broadly your proposed action.

13. In this connection we invite your special attention to support of Turkey in the event of German advance combined with Italian hostility. This would appear to be the greatest danger with which Allied interests in the Mediterranean may be faced. Under these circumstances we consider defence of Turkish front must turn very largely on provision of air security, without which it seems doubtful whether Turks could hold forward of Straits.



246



