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Personalities, Politics and Power: the British Chiefs of Staff Committee in the Phoney War, 1939-1940

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Chiefs of Staff Committee's (COS) decision-making and policy-making influence on Britain during the September 1939 to May 1940 period of the Second World War, commonly known as the Phoney War. To date, the actions of the COS during the Phoney War have come under little scrutiny. Historians have included only passing reference to the committee's actions during the Winter War and the Norway Campaign, and have argued that its conduct was mired in error and misjudgement. As a consequence there is both confusion and debate over the COS's contribution to Britain's conduct in the Phoney War.

This thesis contains the first systematic analysis of the influence of the COS on Britain's course during the Phoney War and it advances the argument that the inadequacies of the committee had a major impact on the planning and conduct of the Phoney War. This study places the COS in the context of Britain's wider decision-making and policy-making machinery during the Phoney War, where it was answerable to the War Cabinet and responsible for Britain's defence. It argues that the COS was inadequate as a committee and that it failed to recognise its own limitations and to acknowledge the wisdom of its advisers. While on some occasions the COS provided good advice to the War Cabinet, it failed to press its opinions with sufficient force, particularly when the War Cabinet overlooked its recommendations. Individually, the Chiefs were dominated by both Churchill and Ironside, a factor which consistently undermined the COS's effectiveness in policy-making and decision-making; Chiefs of Staff Newall and Pound were too easily influenced by Ironside and were insufficiently forceful in exerting their positions. This thesis also proposes that Britain's organisation for the higher management of the war was weak and that this hindered the effectiveness of the COS; the committee structure during the period September 1939 to May 1940 was overly bureaucratic and this occupied too much of the COS's time. It concludes that the COS demonstrated inadequacies as a decision-making and policy-making committee, however, while found to be wanting, there were mitigating factors which impinged upon its ability to perform.

This thesis's examination of the COS provides a better understanding of a little documented committee, which, although often overlooked, had a profound influence on Britain's course during the Phoney War. Through archival research of the COS and War Cabinet papers this study will appraise the COS's contribution to the unfolding of events between September 1939 and May 1940.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMC – Allied Military Committee

BEF – British Expeditionary Force

BMR – British Military Representative

CAS – Chief of the Air Service

Chiefs– The individual Chiefs of Staff members

CIGS – Chief of the Imperial General Staff

COS – The Chiefs of Staff Committee

FMR – French Military Representative

JIC – Joint Intelligence Committee

JPC – Joint Planning Committee

MCC – Military Co-ordination Committee

MEW – Ministry of Economic Warfare

SWC – Supreme War Council

VCIGS – Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff

INTRODUCTION

Speaking to the House of Commons on the work of the British Chiefs of Staff Committee, Winston Churchill said:

> I do not, of course, conduct this war day to day myself; it is conducted from day to day, and in its future outlook, by the Chiefs of Staff Committee… They give executive directions and orders to the Commanders-in-Chief in the various theatres. They advise me, they advise the Defence Committee and the War Cabinet, on large questions of war strategy and war policy… I do not think there has been ever been a system in which the professional heads of the fighting Services have had a freer hand or a greater or more direct influence.[1]

The British Chiefs of Staff Committee (referred to hereafter as the COS) was founded in 1923 and during the Second World War its members established themselves as the directors of Britain's course in the war.[2] The COS, comprising the heads of the three Armed Services, had as its function then, as today, corporate responsibility for the day-to-day direction of military operations as well as for expressing a joint military opinion on all matters affecting Britain's security. Given the importance of the Committee's responsibilities to Britain's course in the war, how well the COS planned, prepared and waged war, merits further examination.

In some respects, our understanding of British policy during the period of 3 September 1939 to 23 May 1940, known as the Phoney War, is still deficient.[3] For example, although most accounts make passing statements about the activities of the Prime Minister, Foreign Office or Chiefs of Staff, there exists no systematic analysis of the influence of the COS on Britain's policy-making. During this period the COS is usually only remembered for leading Britain into the fiasco of the Norway Campaign, which is seen as a 'textbook example of how not to plan and conduct a military campaign.'[4] In general there is both

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[1] Hansard, 'Ministerial Changes' 24 February 1942, Vol 378 cc42-43.
[2] In this thesis, when discussing the three service Chiefs individually, their titles of 'Chiefs of the Imperial General Staff,' 'First Sea Lord' and 'Chief of the Air Staff' are used.
[3] Also known as the 'Twilight War or 'Stizkreig.' In this thesis, the period September 1939 to June 1940 is referred to as 'the Phoney War.'
[4] John Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign: The British Fiasco in Norway, 1940*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press [hereafter CUP], 2017) p.299.

confusion and argument over the COS's contribution to the policies that determined Britain's course in the Second World War. This is partly inevitable, as such disastrous campaigns as Scandinavia and France are easily used as case studies on British incompetence. However, it may also be due to the fact that no-one has carried out a specific analysis of the COS and its contribution to policy-making and decision-making during the Phoney War. Despite early advocacy by D.C. Watt and Christopher Hill, an analysis of decision-making has, to a large extent, been overtaken by the writing of chronological studies, whether in the form of detailed day-to-day descriptions of events like the Norway Campaign, or explanations of the broad themes of British policy.[5]

A focus on the COS's policy-making and decision-making is necessary - not only for its own sake, but because it complements the historiography in three ways. Firstly, it concentrates on the process by which decisions emerged, rather than on the impact of the decisions and their repercussions on the war. Few historians take the institutions of government at face value; the majority are sceptical of claims that a government committee or legislative assembly is working as smoothly or effectively as intended.[6] It is, therefore, important to establish how the machinery of war works in practice. In the case of the Phoney War, this can only be done through an analysis of the COS; it is insufficient to draw conclusions from research generated from analysis of campaigns.[7] A large amount has been written concerning British foreign policy and governmental policy in the 1930s and during the Phoney War. Similarly, there is a large historiography on the overall course of events and on the various campaigns. However, there has been no systematic analysis on how the COS and their administrators behaved when gathering information, formulating alternatives, and taking or implementing decisions. In the social sciences, *how* organisations or committees *exist to* take action, whether in politics or industry, is an important topic;[8] thus, the COS's ability to make policies and decisions that directed Britain's course in the war from 1939 to 1940 is certainly important enough to merit scholarly attention.

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[5] D. C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies; Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century*, (London, Longmans, 1965) and Christopher Hill, *Cabinet Decisions on Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, CUP, 1991).

[6] The exceptions are Christopher Hill and D.C. Watt and Eliot Cohen, 'War Planning,' in John Ferris and Evan Mawdsley (ed.) *The Cambridge History of the Second World War: Volume 1, Fighting the War*, (Cambridge, CUP, 2015).

[7] For the importance of this kind of analysis into decision-making see J. N. Rosenau, *The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy*, (New York, The Free Press, 1971), Chapters 5 and 9; R. C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck and Burton Sapin (eds.), *Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, (New York, The Free Press, 1962).

[8] R. J. Audley, *Decision-Making* (London, BBC 1967), and F. G. Castles, B. C. Murray and D. C. Potter (eds.) *Decisions, Organisations and Society* (Harmondsworth, 1971).

Secondly, a COS policy-making perspective can help us understand the history of the Phoney War by clarifying the issue of responsibility. The doctrine of collective responsibility tells us that members of the War Cabinet were ultimately answerable for foreign policies that were enacted. Historians are naturally interested in identifying who precisely was responsible for wartime decisions, and whether there were alternative actions available that may have led Britain in another direction. Thus, scholars continue to detangle the different stances, responsibilities and powers of those involved. At present, a little is known about the COS's involvement in operations, however it is unclear whether there were differing opinions within the COS, whether one Chief's opinions prevailed over the others, how the COS related to the War Cabinet, and whether the Committee made a significant or insignificant contribution.[9] Were Chamberlain and the COS like-minded, responding unanimously as a collective body to the dilemmas imposed by Hitler's actions? To what extent was the War Cabinet influenced in its foreign policy decisions by individuals, such as the forceful character of Chief of the Imperial General Staff Ironside? Was the COS satisfied with the decision-making process, or lobbying for reforms during the 1939 to 1940 period? What was the contribution of the COS to Britain's policy during this period? Why did it pursue the strategy it did? What impact did COS decisions have on the course of the war? What real alternatives did the COS have, given the nature of the Phoney War and its own structural and strategic position within it? Answers to these questions will show that the COS was a much more significant committee in determining Britain's course in the Second World War than has hitherto been recognised.

The third justification for analysing the COS is to examine to what extent it performed its mandated role towards the War Cabinet, as laid down in the 1923 Salisbury Committee's Report. According to this report, the COS's primary functions were:

> To keep the defence situation as a whole constantly under review so as to ensure that defence preparations and plans and the expenditure thereupon are co-ordinated and framed to meet policy.

[9] The COS conduct in the Winter War and the Norway Campaign has been discussed in Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign* and Bernard Kelly, 'Drifting Towards War: The British Chiefs of Staff, the USSR and the Winter War, November 1939-March 1940', *Contemporary British History*, 23 (September, 2009) pp. 267-291.

> In addition to the functions of Chiefs of Staff as advisers on questions of sea, land or air policy respectively to their own Board or Council, each of the three Chiefs of Staff will have an individual and collective responsibility for advising on defence policy as a whole, the three constituting, as it were, a Super-Chief of a War Staff in Commission. In carrying out this function they will meet together for the discussion of questions which affect their joint responsibilities.
>
> The Committee (subject to any directions by the Cabinet) will consider such questions in the light of the general defence policy of the Government, and of the strategical plans drawn up to give effect to that policy in time of war.[10]

Thus, the COS's mandate was to tender collective advice to Britain's War Cabinet on defence matters, and to prepare long-term military plans and objectives. In the present historiography on the subject of civil-military relations there has been a concentration on the role of Churchill as Prime Minster; no study has assessed the relationship between the COS and the War Cabinet. To what extent did the War Cabinet influence the COS's position towards policy? Cabinet members did have a responsibility for the direction and conduct of the war and had every right to involve themselves in COS decision-making. That is not disputed. However, did the COS allow themselves to be seduced by the diplomatic and political momentum for action without taking due responsibility for the practical feasibility of the operations? In other words, did the COS simply accept War Cabinet guidance without questioning the feasibility of a strategy or proposing an adjusted policy? Although the COS was responsible to the War Cabinet it was also its role and duty to confront extreme thinking with realism and 'to speak truth unto power.' This thesis will examine to what extent the COS carried out this function effectively.

This thesis will conclude that the COS was ineffective as a policy-making and decision-making body, with the committee's failings having a major impact on the planning and conduct of the war. The study will examine how, on occasions, the COS provided good advice to the War Cabinet, such as regarding the long-war strategy and the economic war of attrition against Germany. However, the COS failed to press its position with sufficient force, and it displayed a complacency regarding its approach to decision-making and

[10] The National Archives, Kew [Hereafter TNA] CAB 24/162, CP 461 (23), 'The Salisbury Report,' 15 November 1923, p.12, para. 36(8). The Cabinet decision on the Salisbury Memorandum is at CAB 23/46 Cabinet Conclusions 31 July 1923.

policy-making. Other factors which hindered the committee's performance will be assessed, such as the burdensome committee structure of the British War Machinery. Furthermore it will be shown that the COS was dominated by the personalities of Chief of the Imperial General Staff Ironside and Winston Churchill, with Ironside consistently failing to represent the thinking of the COS in face-to-face negotiations with the War Cabinet and the French, and Newall and Pound both succumbing to the influence of Ironside and Churchill. The study further proposes that the COS failed to recognise its limitations as a decision-making body and did not acknowledge the wisdom of its advisers in the Joint Planning Committee or the Allied Military Committee. Overall, this thesis will demonstrate that the COS can be judged to have been ineffective in fulfilling its stated mandate during the Phoney War.

I: THESIS RATIONALE, AIMS AND LIMITATIONS

The Phoney War was a significant period in the Second World War. During this time Britain, which was allied to France, experienced a range of major strategic setbacks such as the Winter War, the Norwegian Campaign, the invasion of the Low Countries and the Battle of France. The Chiefs of Staff, in their position of advising Britain's course in the war, were key figures in these events.

Conventionally the Phoney War has been presented as an epilogue at the end of studies of the 1930s,[11] as the continuation of an appeasement strategy against Germany,[12] or else as preliminary to the real conflict, which is usually seen as beginning with the German Western Offensive of May 1940.[13] Rarely is the Phoney War treated as a separate and

[11] See, for example, Maurice Cowling's, *The Impact of Hitler* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975) and Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1936-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[12] See Peter W. Ludlow, 'The Unwinding of Appeasement,' Lothar Kettenacker (ed.), *Das 'Andere Deutschland' im zweiten Welkrieg* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1977), p.9-46; Frank McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War* (Manchester, Manchester Univ. Press 1998); R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement* (London, Selinsgrove 1993); Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth, Chamberlain, Appeasement, and the Manipulation of the Press* (New York, Weidenfeld and Nicolson1989); and John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (London, Faber and Faber,1989).

[13] See, for example, M. Cowling *The Impact of Hitler* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975) and W. Murray *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1936 - 1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); George Peden, *Arms, Economics and British Strategy: From Dreadnoughts to Hydrogen Bombs* (CUP, Cambridge 2007) p.199-205; Christopher Hill, *Cabinet Decisions on Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, CUP, 1991); John Lukacs, *Five Days in London: May 1940* (London, Yale University Press 1994); Phillip M. Bell, *A Certain Eventuality: Britain and the Fall of France* (Farnborough, Saxon House, 1974); David Reynolds, 'Churchill and Britain's Decision to Fight on in 1940,' in Richard Langhorne (ed.) *Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985); and Brian P. Farrell, *The Basis and Making of British Grand Strategy 1940–1943: Was There a Plan?* (New York, Mellen Press 1998).

distinct period of history.[14] The exceptions have largely centred on Allied activity in Scandinavian countries between December 1939 and April 1940, with an assessment of the COS being limited to that theatre, and not to the whole Phoney War period.[15] However, as this thesis seeks to illustrate, more significant events took place during the Phoney War than its sobriquet suggests, despite this period being considered only 'peripheral' or treated simply as a diversion to the main events of the war.[16] It follows that the COS, in its position of advising Britain's course, was heavily involved in these events. Subsequently, these Scandinavian theatres are critical to understanding the COS's influence on British strategy between September 1939 and May 1940 and to carrying out a study of decision-making and policy-making at this early stage of the war.

Apart from brief mentions in operational histories of the period, the COS remains elusive. Retired Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Jackson, and Field Marshall Lord Bramall's 1992 study on the COS is the only published work on the committee, and it contains only one chapter focusing on the Second World War.[17] Elsewhere in the literature, there is only passing mention of the COS's role during the Second World War, although its influence on Scandinavian operations has received some examination from John Kiszley and Bernard Kelly.[18] Both authors are critical of the COS's conduct and this thesis adds to the analysis carried out by these historians by placing the behaviour of the COS within the

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[14] The only exceptions to this, at least as far as full-length studies are concerned, are Talbot Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*: *Strategy, Politics and Economics in Britain and France, 1938-1940* (Oxford, Oxford University Press [Hereafter OUP] 2003); Nick Smart, *British Strategy and Politics During the Phoney War: Before the Balloon Went Up* (Westport, Prager, 2003); Andrew Lambert, 'The Only British Advantage: Sea Power and Strategy, September 1939 – June 1940,' in Michael Clemmesen, and Marcus Faulkner, *Northern European Overture to War 1939–1941. From Memel to Barbarossa* (Leiden, Brill, 2013); the rather whimsical E. S. Turner *The Phoney War on the Home Front* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1961), and, to a certain extent, R. Douglas *The Advent of War 1939 - 1940* (London: Macmillan, 1978). Sir Llewellyn Woodward *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War Volume 1* (London: H.M.S.O., 1970).

[15] For works that mention the COS see Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign*; Kelly, 'Drifting Towards War'; T. Munch-Peterson *The Strategy of Phoney War* (Stockholm: Militärhistoriska Förlaget, 1981); Nigel de Lee , 'Scandinavian Disaster: Allied Failure in Norway in 1940,' in Gary Sheffield and Geoffrey Till (eds.), *The Challenges of High Command. The British Experience* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Patrick Salmon, 'British Plans for Economic Warfare Against Germany 1937–39: The Problem of Swedish Iron Ore,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16 (1981), 53–72; Patrick Salmon, *Deadlock and Diversion: Scandinavia in British Strategy during the Twilight War* (Bremen, Hauschild, 2012) and Wesley Wark, 'Beyond Intelligence: The Study of British Strategy and the Norway Campaign, 1940', in Michael Graham Fry (ed.), *Power, Personalities and Polices: Essays in Honour of D.C. Watt* (London, Cass, 1992).

[16] See Glen St J. Barclay, 'Diversion in the East: The Western Allies, Scandinavia, and Russia, November 1939-April 1940', *Historian*, xli (1979), 483-98; Eleanor M. Gates, *End of the Affair: The Collapse of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1939-40* (Berkeley, CA, 1981), pp. 32-35; 4; Gerhard L. Weinberg, A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II (Cambridge, CUP I994), p. 73.

[17] General Sir William Jackson and Field Marshal Lord Bramall, *The Chiefs: The Story of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff* (London, Brassey 1992). The book details the COS from 1868 to 1989.

[18] Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign* and Kelly, 'Drifting Towards War', *CBH*, 23 (September, 2009) pp. 267-291.

context of their wider actions during the Phoney War. Thus, this thesis is the first academic study focusing solely on the COS, and more specifically, during the Phoney War. A study of the COS offers an original investigation into one of the committees that had the greatest influence on Britain's course at the start of the war.

Research into the COS contributes to our understanding in several important areas. The COS oversaw British strategy and policy during the fall of Poland, Russia's invasion of Finland, the German invasion of Norway, the Wehrmacht's invasion of the Low Countries, and the Fall of France. Thus, the COS's position at the centre of Government meant that they were involved, in some capacity, in almost all of the decisions relating to the prosecution of the war against Germany. This thesis helps to reveal the British defence policy during the Phoney War and the extent to which Allied strategy evolved from being defensive to offensive in character.

Apart from being the first analysis of this kind, this study offers several further significant benefits. First, by examining the Phoney War as a whole, it sheds light on the Franco-British decision-making process. For example, the COS met with its counterparts in the French High Command to formulate the strategy of the Franco-British Alliance. However, as this thesis argues, inter-allied relations between the COS and the French High Command were fraught, with the COS reticent to listen to French demands and to foster a closer union. Furthermore, the COS used the Allied Military Committee (AMC) to liaise and co-ordinate between the Committee and the French, and this relationship has hitherto only been investigated in a fragmentary fashion.[19] Thus, one aim of the present study is to investigate the COS's relationship with the French High Command and the effectiveness of the AMC in liaising between Britain and France.

This thesis will also examine the civil-military relationship between the War Cabinet and the COS. This research underscores how the COS's military decisions were hindered by the complicated nature of the military decision-making process. It assesses the role of the War Cabinet in ratifying and deliberating COS assessments, as well as that of Churchill as First Sea Lord, and later Prime Minister. Finally, the study will seek to illustrate, as far as

[19] Only passing references are made in the historiography with the committee's memorandum often only used. See Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, p. 107. Also from primary sources, General James Marshall-Cornwall, *Wars and Rumours of War: A Memoir*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1984) and Henry Colyton, *Occasion, Chance and Change: A Memoir 1902-1946* (Wilby: Michael Russell, 1993).

possible, the COS's influence on shaping British strategic policy. In other words, the thesis will demonstrate that the COS had influence over Britain's decision to move towards an offensive strategy from December 1939, shifting British interests away from the Western Front to Scandinavia. This research therefore has implications for the ongoing debate about Britain's role in the Phoney War and the abandonment of the defensive long-war strategy. Historians, such as Talbot Imlay, have ably assessed the Franco-British shift to an offensive strategy, and this thesis contributes towards this reassessment.

There are two primary elements to this study: on the one hand, an analysis of the COS's views, policies, successes and failures, and on the other, an examination of how the COS assisted the War Cabinet in directing British strategy and policy. This relationship guided Britain's course between 1939 and 1940, illustrating that power-political interpretations of the period are more useful than explanations which point solely to economic causes.

II: HISTORIOGRAPHY

The COS has been less studied by historians than other Second World War committees, namely the Joint Intelligence Committee, MI5 and the Secret Intelligence Service.[20] Indeed, it is rare to find a study of military leadership between 1939 and 1945 that focuses entirely on the COS. Historians have only examined the COS's conduct in the war when analysing specific incidents that fell under their remit.[21] Indeed, the majority of existing literature which has been undertaken by historians Mark Stoler, David Rigby and Alan F. Wilt, only examines the COS after American entry into the war, when the COS became members of the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee.[22]

There are, however, a few exceptions. The most important of these is found in *The Chiefs: The Story of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff*, written some twenty-five years ago by retired COS members General Sir William Jackson and Field Marshal Lord Bramall. This

[20] Michael Goodman, *The official history of the Joint Intelligence Committee. Volume I, From the approach of World War II to the Suez crisis,* (London: Routledge, 2014); Christopher Andrew, *Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009); Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* (London: A&C Black, 2010).
[21] See Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign*, which discusses the COS and the Norway Campaign and Kelly, 'Drifting Towards War' in *CBH* which discusses the COS and the Winter War.
[22] Mark Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2000); David Rigby, *Allied Master Strategists*: *The Combined Chiefs of Staff in World War II* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2012); Alan F. Wilt, *War from the Top: German and British Military Decision-making During World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

is the only published work to consider the history of the COS from its inception in 1868 to the end of the Cold War.[23] Although it is a significant source for study of the COS, only 80 pages are devoted to the Second World War; much of these paraphrase the official history of the War by J.D. Butler, and even less focus on the Phoney War.[24] This current thesis is based on primary research at the National Archives rather than secondary sources, thus enabling a fuller analysis of the COS's role and conduct during the Phoney War. In addition, Jackson and Bramwell's book provides a narrative of events, whereas this thesis will draw conclusions as to the effectiveness of the COS.

A good example of how the COS has been examined through the lens of a specific operation is Dr Bernard Kelly's 2009 article for Contemporary British History, entitled 'Drifting Towards War: The British Chiefs Of Staff, the USSR and the Winter War, November 1939–March 1940.'[25] Kelly highlights in his research that historians such as Upton,[26] Nevakivi[27] and Talbot Imlay[28] have concluded that: 'the Chiefs are depicted as being on the margin of British policy during the period.'[29] In other words, the influence of the COS on British policy was minor. Kelly's work and this thesis challenges this viewpoint, arguing that the COS's contribution has been overlooked in the historiography and needs to be reassessed. The influence of CIGS Edmund Ironside, Winston Churchill's Operation Catherine, and the War Cabinet's support for action in Scandinavia are not fully accounted for in Kelly's analysis of the COS's change of British policy. This thesis addresses this, with Chapter Three focusing on Operation Catherine's influence on the Winter War. Chapter Three also disagrees with Kelly's conclusion that the 'Chiefs failed in their primary duty to provide clear and coherent guidance to the Cabinet.'[30] Instead, this section will argue that the COS, and in particular CIGS Ironside, provided clear, although reckless, advice, and that, along with the War Cabinet, it was at the centre of British decision-making regarding Scandinavia.

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[23] Jackson and Bramall, *The Chiefs*.
[24] J. R. M. Butler (ed.) *Grand Strategy - British History of the Second World War* (London, HMSO, 1956).
[25] Bernard Kelly, 'Drifting Towards War: The British Chiefs Of Staff, the USSR and the Winter War, November 1939 – March 1940,' *Contemporary British History* (2009).
[26] Antony Upton, *Findland in Crisis 1940-41: A Study in Small Power Politics* (London, Faber and Faber, 1964)
[27] J. Nevakivi, *The Appeal that was Never Made: The Allies, Scandinavia, and the Finish Winter War 1939-1940* (London: Hurst & Company, 1976).
[28] Talbot Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*: *Strategy, Politics and Economics in Britain and France, 1938-1940* (Oxford, OUP, 2003).
[29] Kelly, 'Drifting Towards War,' *CBH* (2009), p.268.
[30] Ibid, p. 286.

John Kiszley has most recently researched and written an in-depth critique of the COS's action in the Norway Campaign in his 2017 *Anatomy of a Campaign: The British Fiasco in Norway, 1940*.[31] Kiszley's assessment was published while this thesis was in its final stages. His argument is that the COS 'were not of the highest quality, and they made a poor team', and that from inception to the conclusion of the operation the campaign 'was mired in error and misjudgement.'[32] This research agrees with many of Kiszley's assertions, namely that the Norway Campaign was an ignominious failure that was poorly planned and conceived, and that Ironside was a driving force behind the campaign. Kiszley's analysis of the COS as a committee is fair, yet not extensive. This thesis agrees with Kinszley that the COS had its failings and was often ineffective, but argues that the COS was not solely responsible since there was an institutionalised complacency towards intelligence and an overly bureaucratic decision-making process which hindered its conduct. Kiszley underestimates the influence of Churchill's Operation Catherine on Ironside's change of policy. Moreover, his conclusion that the COS was weak and inadequate is overly simplistic, as his research concentrates solely on matters pertaining to the Norwegian campaign. This thesis differentiates itself from Kiszley's work by analysing the COS not just in one campaign but in many different contexts, namely the Winter War, policy towards the Low Countries, the Battle of France, Anglo-French relations, and the British War Machinery. Whereas Kiszley concentrates on January to late April 1940, this thesis examines the COS over a wider period from September 1939 to May 1940.

Aside from the above, the COS is typically only mentioned as part of broader analyses on British strategy or civil-military relations. One text that is notable for its discussion of the COS is Franklin Johnston's *Defence by Committee: the British Committee of Imperial Defence 1885-1959*, however its main focus is on the Committee of Imperial Defence, a much older military committee.[33] Johnston was first to document the history of the COS, and his work remains a key study on the direction of the war. Although his analysis of the COS covers only three pages, and is now dated (it was published before the whole COS archive had been released) it nonetheless provides a solid context for the COS and the relationship between the armed services and Whitehall. In particular, it details how the COS worked, and its importance in Britain's higher organisation for planning and co-ordinating

[31] Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign.*
[32] Ibid, p.297-98.
[33] F.A. Johnson, *Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence, 1885–1959* (Oxford, OUP, 1960).

a response to Germany. However, it is only an overview of the constitutional history of the COS and not an analysis of the committee's actions.

Alex Danchev's chapter entitled 'The Central Direction of War, 1940-41', in John Sweetman's *Sword & Mace: Twentieth Century Civil-military Relations in Britain,*[34] considers the relationship between the COS and the Government during the Second World War. Danchev focuses on the role of Churchill in reforming the decision-making process by appointing himself Minister of Defence, describing Churchill as a 'delinquent genius.'[35] The Churchillian reforms reduced the influence of the War Cabinet on decision-making, with Churchill sitting in on COS meetings to agree policy. The COS features in this study, although his assessment is focused on the COS from late May 1940 to 1941; as a consequence, Danchev does not analyse the role of Ironside, Pound and Newall during the Phoney War, as this thesis does.

The vast majority of contemporary leadership literature focuses on an individual, and there is a plethora of biographies of some military leaders. For instance, there are 30 published works on Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig.[36] However, there have been no biographies of Ironside or Newall, and only one of Pound: *Churchill's Anchor: Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound* by Robin Brodhurst.*[37]* Although Pound's biography provides a solid overview of his life as First Sea Lord, it is written in a narrative style and does not analyse or evaluate the role he played in the Phoney War.

Testimonies on Ironside's performance as CIGS are largely negative. Ironside's conduct of the Norwegian campaign has attracted much criticism in the historiography, but the role he played in forming British strategy has been almost entirely neglected. No biography of Ironside exists; his memoir was left unfinished on his death in 1959. Historians Wesley Wark and Brian Bond have sought to re-evaluate Ironside as a skilled commander whose tenure encompassed setbacks few generals would have been better able to cope with.[38] In

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[34] Alex Danchev, 'The Central Direction of War, 1940-41' In John Sweetman, ed., *Sword and Mace: Twentieth Century Civil-Military Relations in Britain,* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).
[35] Danchev, 'The Central Direction of War, 1940-41,' p.76.
[36] See the British Library search for Sir Douglas Haig, http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?mode=Basic&vid=BLVU1&vl%28freeText0%29=Douglas%20Haig&fn=search&tab=local_tab& [accessed 26th Oct 2015].
[37] Robin Brodhurst, *Churchill's Anchor*: *Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound* (Barnsley, Pen and Sword, 2000)
[38] Brian Bond, 'Ironside', in *John Keegan* (ed.), *Churchill's Generals* (London, Cassell, 1991) and Wesley K. Wark, 'Ironside: The Fate of Churchill's First General' in Brian Bond (ed.), *Fallen Stars: Eleven Studies of Twentieth Century Military Disaster* (London, Brassey, 1991).

John Keegan's *Churchill's Generals*, Bond devotes thirteen pages to Ironside's early career, but only focuses on two incidents in Ironside's tenure as CIGS – the bombing policy to target German industry in the Ruhr valley, and the Norwegian Campaign – both of which have been the subject of analysis by others. Wark provides a detailed overview of Ironside's actions during the Phoney War from his appointment in September 1939 to his dismissal in May 1940. Like Bond, Wark concentrates on the Norwegian Campaign and acknowledges that 'any CIGS of 3 September 1939 faced a fall' due to a lack of resources and the unpredictable nature of the war. Wark is critical of Ironside's conduct; he argues that he was unable to resist Churchill's influence on Scandinavian operations and showed weak strategic oversight of British decisions in Norway to target Narvik. This thesis agrees with Wark's analysis, but provides a deeper assessment of Ironside's influence on the Allied decision to assist Finland in the Winter War. Ultimately, this thesis can be differentiated from Bond's and Wark's assessments by its focus on the wider COS, not simply on CIGS Ironside.

No biographies of Newall exist. As with Ironside, Newall retired from his role under criticism, and his management of the RAF has been the focus of historical analysis.[39] Newall did not leave any personal memoirs, diaries or letters, therefore his personal thoughts on many issues are almost impossible to assess. This thesis addressed this weakness by seeking mention of Newall in COS minutes and Air Staff records.

Since little historical investigation has been made of Ironside, Pound and Newall, this thesis seeks to readdress the imbalance. By analysing the COS we are able to gain insight into the character and mindset of these three members.

While few personal records of Pound or Newall remain, Ironside left diaries which were published; these were edited by Denis Kelly with the help of Ironside's military assistant during the war, Colonel Roderick Macleod.[40] The original unedited diaries are owned by Ironside's descendants, who upon inquiry declined a request to view them. Nevertheless, the published diaries are an important source for this thesis as they are a good source of Ironside's personal reflections and opinions, written as events happened from 1918 until

[39] Sebastian Ritchie, 'A Political Intrigue against the Chief of the Air Staff: The Downfall of Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall' *War & Society*. 16 1998 (1): 83–104.
[40] Colonel R. Macleod & D. Kelly (eds.), *The Ironside Diaries* (London: Constable, 1962) [Hereafter refereed as Ironside, *Diaries*].

his death. They were written for his own use and not as a political diary to portray himself in a favourable light; in them he openly recounts his unsuitability for the role of CIGS, and his failures in the Norway Campaign. Ironside's diaries have been scrutinised as a source material and compared alongside official documents to assess their veracity. They have been shown to provide a fuller picture of Ironside and are useful alongside official documents in revealing the personal struggles and opinions not just of Ironside but other members of the COS.

This thesis is primarily based upon the holdings of the National Archives. The records available for analysing the COS's activities are the CAB 79 COS minutes and CAB 80 COS memoranda. These files contain the minutes of every COS meeting, which are an important window into how the COS arrived at decisions. In addition, these files contain the internal memoranda which reveal the COS's views on defence, Anglo-French relations and foreign policy. However committee minutes were rarely complete versions of the discussion that took place, and the opinions of individual Chiefs are not recorded. Instead, the minutes typically set the context of the discussion with the words, 'A discussion took place on' and minute what was agreed. If the discussion of a topic produced a question which required further study, the minutes record the question and who asked it, with a corresponding statement by a named committee member. As the official records reveal little of the personal thoughts of the Chiefs, the diaries and unofficial sources are consequently important sources. In this respect, the diary of CIGS Ironside is invaluable and it is unfortunate that the unedited edition was unavailable to the researcher. However, the Imperial War Museum also houses a file containing private letters from Ironside to a Canadian, General Lindsey, during the Second World War. This document reveals Ironside's various views on military policy and the War Cabinet in a non-official communication.

Other collections, such as papers held at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at Kings College, contain the diary and letters of Colonel Macleod, General Sir John Burnett-Stuart and General Alan Brooke. These papers uncover views of the COS. The published Diaries of General John Kennedy and Lt-General Henry Pownall, both of whom worked closely with the COS, have also been used.[41] Used in isolation, private papers would present a misleading representation of events, but when used in conjunction with other sources they

[41] General John Kennedy, (ed.) B. Ferguson, *The Business of War*, (London, Morrow 1957) and Henry Pownall, and Brian Bond, (ed.), *Pownall Diaries*, (Leo Cooper, London, 1972).

are indispensable. Between them, the sources remind us that policy-making and decision-making is about personal beliefs and prejudices, as well as departmental briefs and overall governmental policy.

There are a number of secondary texts and edited works which contain accounts that are directly pertinent to the COS. *Churchill and Sea Power* by Christopher Bell is a recent study that touches on the relationship between Churchill and his First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, Dudley Pound.[42] In Bell's judgement, Pound was 'inclined to interfere in operations at sea and may bear at least as much responsibility as Churchill, if not more.'[43] Meanwhile, Stephen Roskill's *Churchill and the Admirals* from 1978 is still a standard work in detailing Churchill's relations with the Navy and his Chiefs.[44] Wesley Wark's chapter 'Beyond Intelligence: The Study of British Strategy and the Norway Campaign, 1940' discusses the complacency within British Intelligence to take the German invasion of Norway seriously.[45] A section on Ironside's contribution to Intelligence is an important source as Wark argues that while the War Office intelligence system was superior in relation to other service intelligence branches, its assessment of Intelligence was weak throughout the Phoney War. This thesis will explore this argument in Chapter Five.

Scholarly works on the nature, application and consequences of Britain's strategy during the Phoney War are few in number, as most historians focus on particular operations such as the Norwegian Campaign, or strategic policies. Exceptions to this include Thomas Munch-Peterson's *The Strategy of Phoney War*, a detailed and comprehensive account of Britain's policy in Northern Europe from 1939-1940.[46] Standard accounts of British foreign policy are Sir Llewellyn Woodward's *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War, Volume I* and J. R. M. Butler's *Grand Strategy, Volume II*, both of which provide an important overview of British policy, although neither contains a detailed assessment of the COS's role during the Phoney War.[47] Other works that are of use in researching the Chiefs include *Strategy for Victory: The Development of British Tactical Air Power, 1919-1943* by David Hall and the posthumously-published *Churchill and his Airmen* by Vincent

[42] Christopher Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power* (Oxford, OUP 2012).
[43] Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power*, p.192.
[44] Stephen Roskill, *Churchill and the Admirals* (New York: Morrow, 1978).
[45] Wark, 'Beyond Intelligence' in Fry (ed.) *Power, Personalities and Polices.*
[46] See Munch-Peterson, *The Strategy of Phoney War.*
[47] Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War Volume 1* (London: H.M.S.O., 1970).

Orange, both of which provide strategic analyses and understanding of the dynamics between the Chiefs and the War Cabinet on the one side and the RAF on the other.[48]

Recent studies have reassessed British strategy throughout this period. Joe Maiolo's chapter '"To Gamble All on a Single Throw": Neville Chamberlain and the Strategy of the Phoney War' defends Neville Chamberlain's war policy, arguing that his strategy for a long-war where economic pressure would force the Nazi regime to collapse would provoke Hitler to gamble on a 'final throw' that would fail.[49] The strategy failed, as Maiolo observes, not because of military superiority, but due to chance. Maiolo's work is valuable as it covers the whole period of the Phoney War and seeks to redress assumptions about British inactivity during this period. However, Maiolo's chapter only assesses Chamberlain's strategy in relation to Hitler and does not analyse in detail the contribution of the COS on the formation of the strategy.

Finally, Talbot Imlay, in his well-regarded analysis of strategy, politics and economics in Britain and France between 1938 and 1940, *Facing the Second World War*,[50] argues, like Maiolo, that both countries agreed to a long-war strategy with the French leaders demanding an end to defensive war and the opening of a second front in 1940. Imlay concentrates, however, on Anglo-French preparedness for war in 1939-40 and does not assess the British War Machinery or the COS in particular. Consequently, there is a gap in the literature for analysis of the COS's effectiveness during the Phoney War.

III: THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis adopts a chronological approach to examining the Phoney War period from September 1939 to May 1940, beginning with the outbreak of the Second World War and concluding with the start of the Battle of France. A chronological structure allows the development of the COS's views to be charted over this period. Moreover, this approach shows any continuity or alteration in the COS's views, as well as any deviation from their policies from September 1939 to May 1940.

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[48] Vincent Orange, *Churchill and his Airmen* (London, Grub Street, 2013) and David Hall, *Strategy for Victory: The Development of British Tactical Air Power, 1919-1943* (London, Praeger Publishers 2008).
[49] Joseph A. Maiolo, 'To Gamble all on a Single Throw': Neville Chamberlain and the Strategy of the Phoney War,' in Christopher Baxter, Michael L. Dockrill and Keith Hamilton (eds.), *Britain in Global Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 220-41.
[50] Imlay, *Facing the Second World War.*

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter One assesses the role of the COS and its supporting committees in the formulation of policy. In order to evaluate the COS's function in Britain's policy-making and decision-making processes, it is relevant to analyse the British War Machinery as the committee structure within which the COS operated. The second section of Chapter One adds to this context by profiling the individual Chiefs of Staff who comprised the COS during the Phoney War period. Chapter Two begins an analysis of the Phoney War period by assessing the actions of the COS at the start of the war between September and November 1939. It examines the actions of the COS in fulfilling its obligations as a committee in pursuing a long-war strategy for Britain and in conducting inter-allied discussions with the French High Command. The COS's performance in relation to French interests in offensives in the Balkans and French plans for the Low Countries will be assessed to determine whether the committee demonstrated strategic foresight and good inter-allied relationships. Chapter Three examines the COS's decision-making with regard to Finland, evaluating the COS's recommendations regarding the Russo-Finnish War from November 1939 to February 1940 as a pretext to stop iron ore resources reaching Germany. Chapter Four examines the COS's involvement in the decision-making process towards the Norway Campaign between March and April 1940. The intention of this chapter is to assess how the War Cabinet and the COS conducted themselves in planning and policy-making. Chapter Five is concerned with the decision-making process in Britain's War Government from September 1939 to May 1940. The first section of the chapter considers the COS's use of the Allied Military Committee, while the second section assesses the reasons for the COS's ineffectiveness within Britain's War Machinery. The chapter will end with a brief resume of Churchill's reforms to the COS at the end of May 1940, since the reasons for these highlight the deficiencies of the system. The final chapter, Chapter Six, discusses the Battle of France in May 1940 from the viewpoint of the COS and the French High Command's doctrine and tactics. The Arras decision of May 1940 is analysed as a case study in order to assess the COS's effectiveness at the end of the Phoney War. This chapter ends by examining the COS's decision-making processes regarding air support to France. The thesis ends with a summary of the findings and the conclusions drawn from them.

This opening section has explained why an analysis of the COS will increase our understanding of the Phoney War period, and more particularly, why detailed case studies of events are necessary to understand the policy-making and decision-making processes that took place. The period from September 1939 to May 1940 is sufficiently self-contained

to constitute a good penetrative analysis of complex decisions. The existing literature does not offer a comprehensive account of the COS's work, thus there is need for a study of the COS; this thesis significantly contributes to the scholarly record on the committee and its operations. The direction of the analysis is towards the process of policy-making and decision-making within the COS, Whitehall and the Alliance, although assessment is also made of the responsibility and accountability of the COS and the extent to which it performed its mandated duty.

1. THE WAR MACHINERY: ITS ORGANISATION

The primary task of this chapter is to assess the role of the COS and its support committees in the formulation of British policy during the period of the Phoney War. Any decision to go to war is taken by the Government. Once that decision has been made, each armed service becomes part of the national war machine, joining together all the resources of the State, both civil and military. As the diagram below shows, the COS was therefore an important conduit between the War Cabinet and the Armed forces.

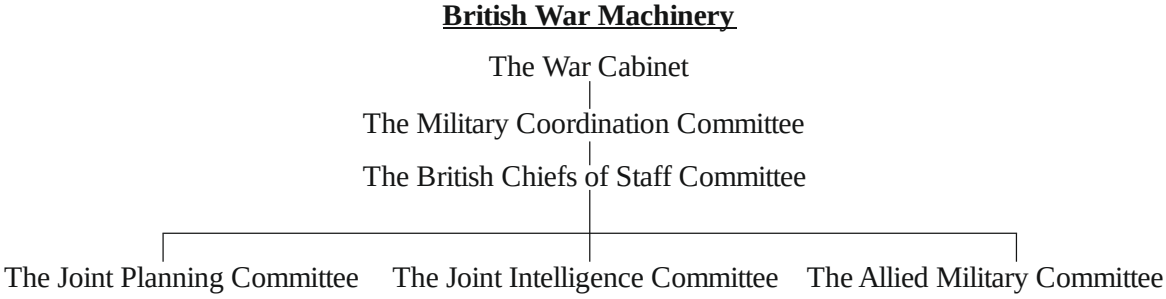

Figure 1: Map of British War Machinery

In A.J.P. Taylor's opinion, the establishment that led Britain during the Second World War was like a 'war machine' in that a series of committees worked together to formulate and decide Britain's policy in a way that 'resembled an expensive motor car, beautifully polished, complete in every detail, except there was no petrol in the tank.'[51] The COS was an integral component in Britain's policy-making and decision-making processes. Therefore, it is relevant in assessing the effectiveness of the COS to consider the committee's function within the wider War Machinery during the Phoney War period.

The COS demanded mutual co-operation, strong leadership and clear-cut channels of command. However, the COS did not work in isolation, as it was surrounded by military support committees that were a crucial component of the War Machinery. As Taylor's vehicle analogy suggests, this War Machinery did not always function smoothly. This chapter will propose that the COS was hampered by a lack of co-operation between the Joint Planning Committee and Joint Intelligence Committee, as well as a cumbersome

[51] A.J.P Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (London, Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 456.

decision-making process involving not only the COS but the Military Co-ordination Committee and the War Cabinet. An analysis of the Joint Intelligence Committee, the Joint Planning Committee, the Military Co-ordination Committee and the War Cabinet will help us understand how the COS functioned. This chapter uses biography and analysis to provide the context of the COS and its supporting committees, thus illustrating the roles they performed. Since this thesis has as its focus the COS, we will now examine the committee, its membership and its remit.

I: THE CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE (COS)

The COS, along with the Prime Minister, ran the war. To be more precise, although the COS was able to express an opinion, the War Cabinet and the Prime Minster ultimately made the final decisions. The official position of the COS was that:

> They are responsible collectively to the War Cabinet for the strategic plans and individually for their execution. They have to advise the War Cabinet sometimes individually, but in most cases collectively, and keep them informed of developments. In their individual capacity they are responsible for transmission to Commands of orders to carry out the policy and plans for dealing with problems that arise at the shortest notice.[52]

Chiefly responsible for executing COS decisions was the Prime Minister, who was advised by the War Cabinet on whether to agree or disagree with the COS's proposed strategy. Thus, the War Cabinet was tasked with approving British policy and operations while the COS's function was to co-ordinate feasibility studies for operations, liaise with Britain's Allies, and formulate strategy. To what extent the COS carried out this function effectively will be assessed in subsequent chapters. More specifically, the COS had a duty for the day-to-day direction of military operations, as well as being required to express a joint opinion on all military matters and the national security of the country in general. However, the Prime Minister did not act as the mouthpiece for the COS, as the committee was always invited to present its case directly to the War Cabinet.[53]

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[52] TNA WO 193/215, 'Relations of the War Office with the Cabinet, the Machinery of the Committee of Imperial Defence,' 5 September 1940, p.4.
[53] Ronald Weeks, *Organisation & Equipment for War*, (Cambridge, CUP, 1950) p.5-6.

The COS met daily, and sometimes more than once a day, at 10.00am in the underground Central War Cabinet Rooms in Great George Street, London.[54] Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir Cyril Newall, acted as Chairman from September 1939 to October 1940. The Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) was joined by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), the First Sea Lord and by two secretaries, General Hastings Ismay and General Leslie Hollis.

As Deputy Secretary to the Chiefs, Ismay 'spent the whole war in the middle of the web.'[55] In his memoirs, he states he had:

> … three sets of responsibilities. I was Chief of Staff Officer to Mr Churchill; I was a member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee; and I was head of the Office of the Member of Defence.[56]

Ismay never advised the COS or the Cabinet on strategy; his role was to ensure the smooth running of the committee. This involved supporting the COS administratively and practically, so he organised where they met, occasionally took minutes, ensured they had the relevant paperwork for the day's business, and answered queries on their behalf. He acted as a liaison between the COS and the War Cabinet.

The other secretary, Hollis, attended no less than 6,000 meetings of the committee during the Second World War, an average of three every day.[57] Privy to all the significant decisions, Hollis ensured that paperwork was produced for meetings and that decisions made by the COS were forwarded. However, Hollis, in his own words, noted that he 'had no direct responsibly for the plans made or the decisions reached.'[58] Nevertheless, as secretary, Hollis fulfilled an important role in transcribing the COS's conversations and turning these into formal records. The way Hollis recorded minutes was decided by the COS, who advised Hollis that 'as far as possible discussions will not be recorded in detail.'[59] The extent to which Hollis had to summarise proceedings is revealed in his

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[54] The National Archives, Kew [Hereafter TNA] CAB 80/1, COS (39) 1, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Memoranda' 2 September 1939, p.1.
[55] Hastings Ismay, *The Memoirs of General Lord Ismay* (New York, Viking Press, 1960), p.168.
[56] Ibid, p.168.
[57] James Leasor and Leslie Hollis, *Man at the Top*, (London: M. Joseph, 1959) p.34.
[58] Ibid, p.9.
[59] TNA CAB 80/1, COS (39) 1, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Memoranda' 2 September 1939, p.1.

memoir, where he records a COS meeting in a fuller narrative format. This private record of the COS meeting of 9 September is illuminating:

> I've decided to send the Fleet to Scapa Flow instead, he [Pound] said,
> 'We're making the best provisions we can for boom defence.'…The news did not cheer the other members of the Committee, because no proper defence existed at Scapa… Something of the sort was said and the First Lord replied:
> 'Well, I must have some air protection for my Fleet. All I've *got* is one antique flight based on Wick, the northernmost part of Scotland.'
> He turned to Newall.
> 'Can't I have any modern aircraft to defend my Fleet in Scapa?' he asked in desperation.
> Newall shook his head… 'Sorry,' he replied. 'I just haven't got any modern aircraft to spare. I didn't even know you were moving the Fleet to Scapa, anyway.'
> Ironside was sitting next to Pound… At this news he laid his huge hand on Pound's shoulder in sympathy, and beating it up and down for emphasis… [spoke] 'Newall, here is this poor wretched *whale* Pound sitting in his harbour with his ships, and you won't darn well help him! It's *disgraceful!*'[60]

This stands in contrast to the official minutes, recorded by Hollis below:

> Sir Dudley said that the Admiralty had reviewed the problem of harbours for the capital ships of the Home Fleet. Their ultimate policy was to make the defence of Scapa extremely powerful, which they hoped to be able to do by Christmas. As an alternative to Scapa, they would like to use Rosyth, provided the defences of the anchorage were improved… He thought that, if a gun density of 72 could be arranged at Rosyth, and if extra squadrons could be disposed in the neighbourhood, the enemy's losses in attacking would be so great that the Fleet would be able to anchor there in safety.
>
> There was some discussion as to how the defences of Rosyth could immediately be strengthened.[61]

[60] Hollis, *Man at the Top*, p.68.
[61] TNA CAB 79/1, COS (39) 51 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes' 18 October 1939, p.2.

Such a comparison demonstrates that COS minutes were largely summaries of business. Hollis turned into 'a few crisp sentences what had taken others hours or days to try to resolve.'[62] The resulting documented record is formal, concise and conveys only the topic debated and recommendations or resolutions; an accurate record is kept, but the atmosphere of the meetings is lost. Therefore, while the COS minutes are a key source for this thesis, other documentation – such as letters, diaries and memoirs – have also been consulted to provide a fuller picture of the COS.

Each morning throughout the war, individual service Chiefs were briefed by their departments for the business of the day. The COS would then gather for a meeting, the object of which was:

(a) To hear reports and consider the situation
(b) To decide day-to-day problems concerning operations
(c) To consider any special matters which may, from time-to-time, be remitted to the Sub-Committee by the War Cabinet.[63]

Agendas for the meetings were varied and complex. Items included strategy, troop movements, manpower, intelligence, and consideration of plans, technical problems, and the chain of supply. However, the COS did not write reports. These were written by staff officers who took their direction from the Chiefs; the drafts were then amended by the COS as a committee.

The COS directed British strategy, but did not deal with the day-to-day running of the theatres of war. For example, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was recommended by the CIGS but was 'appointed by the Government… [and] only answerable to the Government.'[64] The COS delegated the direction of campaigns to subordinate generals on the field of battle, but advised them by issuing orders and directives, although these seldom dictated their execution in detail.[65]

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[62] Hollis, *Man at the Top*, p.42.
[63] TNA CAB 80/1, COS (39) 1, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Memoranda' 2 September 1939, p.1.
[64] TNA WO 216/48, 'Issue of Cabinet Instructions to B.E.F' 18 March 1940, p.1.
[65] TNA WO 216/48, 'Observations on CIGS Memorandum on the method of issue of orders to Commanders in the Field' 26 February 1940 para.2.

Members of the COS had two responsibilities: first, to provide military advice to the Cabinet on all aspects affecting Britain, and secondly, to act appropriately as heads of the different parts of the armed service, including managing the daily running of their section. These responsibilities, combined with the remit of determining overall strategy, co-ordinating with Allies and working alongside the War Cabinet, set a pattern of long hours and exhausting work. Their role was demanding. At the start of the Phoney War their Deputies, later named Vice-Chiefs, often sat on the COS in their place when they were engaged in duties pertaining to their armed service, or were in France on inter-allied business.[66] In 1940 the Vice-Chiefs of Staff Committee (VCOS) was founded and the running of the armed services was delegated to them, although they met every afternoon with the COS.[67] Although Field Commanders exercised control over their subordinate airmen, sailors, and soldiers, the conduct of the war remained in the hands of the COS, their respective service council and the War Cabinet.[68] For the most part, centralised control was maintained by the COS throughout the war. To what extent the COS worked well will be assessed in the following chapters..

I.I: MEMBERSHIP OF THE COS

Edmund Ironside, Cyril Newall, and Dudley Pound held the position of Chiefs of the Imperial General Staff, Chief of the Air Staff and First Sea Lord during the Phoney War period and as such, they formulated and advised upon Britain's strategy and course in the war. Although their names appear here and there in various official histories and operational studies, generally our knowledge of these men is uneven. For example, we have no in-depth analysis of how any of these men commanded, and how they functioned together as a committee. A brief biographical summary is therefore helpful in contextualising the members of the COS. Table one below details their service record on the COS

Unfortunately official service records were unable to be obtained for this thesis, due to the fact that access is limited to family members. To counter this, the Army lists and naval records and Oxford National Biography have been consulted. Newall, Ironside and Pound

[66] TNA CAB 80/1, COS (39) 1, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Memoranda' 2 September 1939, p.2.
[67] TNA CAB 79/3, COS (39) 95, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes' 25 April 1940, p.2.
[68] TNA WO 216/48, 'Observations on CIGS Memorandum on the method of issue of orders to Commanders in the Field' 26 February 1940 para.1.

feature throughout this thesis, and in assessing their effectiveness as a combined committee it is useful to gain some knowledge of who they were, and why and how they came to be appointed to serve on the COS.

The Members of the Chiefs of Staff Committee

Chief of the Air Staff	**Date Appointed**	**Date Retired**	**Age When Appointed**
Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall	September 1939	October 1940	51
Chief of the Imperial General Staff			
Field Marshal Sir Edmund Ironside	September 1939	May 1940	59
First Sea Lord			
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound	June 1939	September 1943	62

Table 1: The members, rank, age, appointment and retirement date of the COS.

MARSHAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE SIR CYRIL NEWALL, CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF (CAS)

Newall served as Chairman of the COS. Prior to his appointment as Chief of Air Staff, he had held a series of successful commands. After Sandhurst he was commissioned into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1905 and saw active service against Pathan raiders on the Northern West Frontier in 1908.[69] Newall learned to fly in 1911 and then gained a commission in the Royal Flying Corps, becoming an instructor in 1913 at the newly formed Indian Central Flying School. In 1914 he returned home and undertook a series of successful squadron commands.[70] On one occasion, Newall led a party of airmen to extinguish a fire in a large bomb store, thus preventing a catastrophic explosion. He was awarded the Albert Medal, the then equivalent of the George Cross.[71] In 1918 Newall became commander of the VIII Brigade.[72] The subsequent actions resulted in Newall

[69] Vincent Orange, 'Newall, Cyril Louis Norton, first Baron Newall (1886–1963),' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35208, accessed 15 May 2015].
[70] See appendix for full service record.
[71] Vincent Orange, 'Newall, Cyril Louis Norton, first Baron Newall (1886–1963),' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35208, accessed 15 May 2015].
[72] Henry Probert, *High commanders of the Royal Air Force* (London, HMSO, 1991) p.15.

becoming a specialist in bombing and he was appointed to the rank of Brigadier-General and deputy to Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Trenchard.[73]

For the next twelve years Newall held three major appointments in the RAF. He served in the Air Ministry as Director of Operations and Intelligence and Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, thus carrying out a particularly wide range of responsibilities. From 1931 to 1934 he was in Cairo as Air Officer Commanding Middle East, responsible for the Air Forces in Egypt, Sudan, Palestine and Transjordan. In January 1935 he was given the newly established appointment of Air Member for Supply and Organisation, taking over the responsibilities of Hugh Dowding.[74] Newall was now back at the centre of affairs for the start of the RAF's expansion, with a key role in the organisation and provisioning for the service and its building programme. Newall, therefore, not only understood how far the RAF had progressed, but also appreciated the immense work that lay ahead when he was appointed as Chief of the Air Staff in September 1937.

Newall's appointment as CAS was a surprise to his contemporaries in the Royal Air Force, who had seen Hugh Dowding, Head of RAF Fighter Command and more senior in rank, as the natural heir. The appointment was a political decision on the part of the Minister for Air, Viscount Swinton, and made without the consultation of the retiring Chief, Sir Edward Ellington.[75] Newall held the position of CAS through some of the RAF's most turbulent times, but was amply qualified to do so by his service experience. When Newall took office the RAF had acquiesced the Fleet Air Arm to the Royal Navy.[76] It was under his leadership that the RAF expanded, and his greatest achievement was as 'the prime architect of the wartime Air Force', as stated by his contemporary, Sir John Slessor.[77]

In the COS Newall confined himself, as did Pound, to matters pertaining to his own service, and in his position as Chairman of the COS he represented the views of the committee to the War Cabinet rather than attempting to offer advice or take the lead.

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[73] Probert, *High commanders of the Royal Air Force*, p.15.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Robert Wright, *Dowding and the Battle of Britain*. (London, Corgi 1970), pp. 60–63
[76] John Terraine, *Right of the Line*, (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Military 2010), p.251.
[77] Sebastion Ritchie, '*A Political Intrigue against the Chief of the Air Staff: The Downfall of Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall*', *War & Society*, 16 (1998), pp. 83–104 and John Slessor, *The Central Blue*, (London, Cassel, 1956), p.241.

FIELD MARSHAL SIR EDMUND IRONSIDE, CHIEF OF THE IMPERIAL GENERAL STAFF (CIGS)

Representing the Army on the COS, General Sir Edmund Ironside was appointed CIGS in September 1939. Ironside's career – a mix of battle command, work for British Intelligence, routine peacetime posting, and high command in war – had taken him from South Africa to Russia, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, to Europe east and west, and to Whitehall. Commissioned from Woolwich Military Academy, Ironside's career began in the South African War as Second Lieutenant with the Royal Field Artillery.[78] Staff and command skills made Ironside's reputation; he was appointed DSO in 1915, mentioned in dispatches six times, and appointed Brigadier General to the Allied expedition to Archangel in 1918. Promoted in 1919 to General Officer Commanding in Northern Russia, the rank of Major-General soon followed. This positioned him among the youngest Major-Generals in the Army.[79] The postings that followed, such as Commandant of the Staff College and an appointment to Eastern Command in 1936, gave Ironside more experience of senior command than almost any other serving Army officer.[80]

This rapid rise through the ranks gave Ironside a diverse set of skills and an overview of the Army both administratively and in combat. However Ironside was not first choice for the role of CGIS in 1939, this being General John Dill. Ironside's appointment came about for two reasons. Firstly, there was his evident wide-ranging command experience. Secondly, his appointment stemmed from the political machinations of the Secretary of State for War, Leslie Hore-Belisha, who used the outbreak of war as a pretext to remove Ironside's predecessor, Lord Gort. In addition, Winston Churchill, newly recalled to the Admiralty and a member of the War Cabinet, lobbied heavily in Ironside's favour, overcoming opposition in support of General John Dill.

In the end, Ironside's days as CIGS were numbered when General John Dill was brought back from France in late April 1940 as Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

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[78] John C. Cairns, 'Ironside, (William) Edmund, first Baron Ironside (1880–1959),' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2007 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34113, accessed 15 May 2015].
[79] John C. Cairns, 'Ironside, (William) Edmund, first Baron Ironside (1880–1959),' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2007 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34113, accessed 15 May 2015].
[80] Bond, 'Ironside,' Keegan, *Churchill*, p.19.

Commanders Gort and Pownall had lost confidence in Ironside due to his conduct with the BEF and on 27 May 1940, Dill replaced him as CIGS.

Reviewing the Ironside Diaries in 1962, A.J.P. Taylor concluded: 'Few men have been less successful as CIGS and none had been more conscious of it.'[81] This will be assessed in subsequent chapters.

ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET
SIR ALFRED DUDLEY POUND, FIRST SEA LORD

In June 1939 Dudley Pound was appointed First Sea Lord and joined the COS. Pound had been in the navy since he was 13 and by 1939 he had been in the service for 48 years.[82] Pound's reputation was built during the First World War, when in 1915 he was transferred to the Grand Fleet to become Naval Assistant to the First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher.[83] In 1915, during Pound's tenure in the service of Admiral Fisher, Winston Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty. Like Ironside, Pound had combat experience, having served notably as Captain of the battleship HMS Colossus at Jutland in May 1916.

Pound's experience in the inter-war years had enabled him to gain experience in many of the top positions in the naval service. As Assistant Director of Plans and later Director of Operations in 1917 he was involved in overseeing the Zeebrugge Raid. His appointment in 1933 as Chief of Staff of the Mediterranean and later, in 1936, Commander of the Mediterranean Fleet gave Pound experience of managing Britain's most important Fleet.[84] Pound was greatly respected by his service. He was reported to dislike wide-ranging general discussion and he had 'an obsession with detail.'[85]

Pound was almost sixty-two years old on his appointment to First Sea Lord in 1939 and was not in full health, suffering from osteoarthritis and deafness. Pound's physical deterioration during the Second World War is described in all the sources. Ironside, on recalling his first committee meeting as CIGS, describes the First Sea Lord's contribution: 'Pound is very deaf and hardly says anything except on naval subjects.'[86] Despite his

[81] Bond, *Ironside*. p.30.
[82] Brodhurst, *Churchill's Anchor*, p.11.
[83] See Brodhurst, *Churchill's Anchor*, p.27.
[84] See the Appendix for a service history of the First Sea Lord Dudley Pound.
[85] Brodhurst, *Churchill's Anchor*, p.96.
[86] Colonel R. Macleod & D. Kelly (eds.), *The Ironside Diaries* (London: Constable, 1962) September 4 1939 p.101. [Hereafter refereed as Ironside, *Diaries*].

frailties, he worked tirelessly as First Sea Lord. During the Phoney War, Pound's major challenge would be in his relationship with Churchill. Pound chose his fights with Churchill carefully. Instead of trying to derail a Churchillian proposal directly, Pound would have his staff conduct a formal study and then commission a comprehensive report showing in an even-handed fashion, the logistical and strategic impact it would have on other ongoing operations. As an officer who worked on his staff commented,

> He was always patient in listening to other people stating their views, whether he agreed with them or not. He was patient in getting all the facts on which to base his opinion. He was patient in working out and deciding what line he should take for whatever he considered to be the right course.[87]

Pound, like all the Chiefs, had served as an operational commander as well as a staff officer. He had tactical knowledge gained from experience at sea as well as administrative capabilities suited for a committee like the COS. He worked hard at finding common ground with his fellow Chiefs, as he believed it to be vital that the three service Chiefs cooperated and were willing to compromise to achieve results.[88] As a manager, however, Pound appears to have had some difficulty in delegating responsibility and throughout his career he took too much work upon himself as 'the supreme centraliser.'[89] The result of this was that Pound tended to confine himself to navy matters and his contribution to COS debate was sparing.

I.II: COMMON GROUND

These biographical sketches have shown that Newall, Ironside and Pound shared some common ground. They were all intelligent men who had progressed through the ranks by virtue of their actions and experience. Research also shows that there was a social and cultural homogeneity between them, with all three having come from a similarly middle to higher middle class background, attended service training colleges and given distinguished service in the First World War. Newall and Ironside were born into military families with a long heritage of service and Pound's father was a barrister. On the basis of the data presented above it can be argued that members of the COS – at least during the Phoney

[87] Anon, 'Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound,' *The Naval Review*, xxxi, 4 (Nov. 1943), p.284.
[88] Peter Kemp, 'Admiral of the Fleet: Sir Dudley Pound,' in *Men of War: Great Naval Leaders of World War II*, (ed.) Stephen Howarth (New York: St Martin's, 1992), p. 20.
[89] Arthur Marder, *Winston is back: Churchill at the Admiralty, 1939-40* (London, Longman, 1972), p.29.

War period – were more alike than dissimilar. As such there should be have been a greater ability to work together.

However, each armed service had its own unique identity and sub-culture which mitigated against a close working relationship between the Service-Chiefs. Officers within a service would have known one other, either personally or by reputation. Brigadier General Philip Howell noted to his wife during the First World War that 'the old Army was a small family affair', in which an officer could 'seem to know everyone and everyone me', and this was still true during the Second World War.[90] By attending a particular school, such as Sandhurst or Woolwich, by belonging to a particular regiment, or by having participated in certain campaigns together, each officer had acquaintances with whom he remained intimate throughout his career. Ironside spent the First World War attached with the Canadians at Vimy Ridge and made close acquaintances there that he kept for the rest of his life. Writing to one such contemporary during the Second World War, he noted how he had 'just been down amongst the Canadians and found many old friends, including Louis Keene.'[91] This close fellowship within the Army, navy and RAF fostered an insularity which led to Ironside, Newall and Pound thinking primarily about how any policy would first of all affect their service, rather than Britain as a whole. The subsequent chapters will illustrate this in more detail.

The COS had significant responsibilities for decision-making and policy-making, however it did not act alone. Superior to the COS was the War Cabinet, and the Military Co-ordination Committee. Subordinate to the COS, and in a supporting role, were the Joint Planning Committee, the Joint Intelligence Committee and the Allied Military Committee. Each of these will be examined in turn, and will be referred to throughout this thesis as they were a vital part of the British War Machinery.

II: The War Cabinet & The Military Co-ordination Committee

There are two superior decision-making bodies that must be referred to when discussing the COS, these being the War Cabinet and the Military Co-ordination Committee. The War

[90] Cited in Simon Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front, 1914–18* (London, Routledge, 2006), p.9.
[91] Imperial War Museum [IWM] 92/40/1, Ironside Letter, 10, 'Letter from Ironside to Lindsay' 29 June 1943.

Cabinet was the most important of all the committees. It consisted of a small group of ministers, varying in number between eight and nine, until May 1940. The role of the War Cabinet was modelled on the 1917 decision that,

> The supreme direction of the war was entrusted to a small War Cabinet, freed from all administrative duties, and yet in the closest touch with all departmental duties.[92]

Formed by Neville Chamberlain on 3 September 1939, the War Cabinet consisted of a small cohort of Conservative Party ministers, with no participation from the Labour Party, who had declined the invitation.[93] On 7 December 1936 Chamberlain noted in a cabinet meeting that on the outbreak of war 'the only practical course' would be to 'institute a War Cabinet of the kind suggested with supreme powers and responsibilities.'[94] When war came, Chamberlain's position did not change and he wrote to his sister that his 'sole purpose was to find a Cabinet that would work.'[95] However, since no opposition party was included the War Cabinet members who formed Chamberlain's 'inner executive machine' were all individuals the PM had led the country with before the war.[96] These ministers were calm, logical, and reasonable people Chamberlain knew he could manage, with the exception of Churchill who held the post of First Lord of the Admiralty.[97] The War Cabinet was good at 'working together very harmoniously and successfully' in its formation of British policy during the war.[98] The relationship between the COS and the War Cabinet was that:

> (i) The COS were to be regarded as the collective advisers of the organ of supreme control [the War Cabinet] on military matters.

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[92] Parliamentary Papers, CD. 9005, 'War Cabinet Report for the Year 1917,' 1918 in Parliament, *Sessional Papers*, 1917-1918, Vol. XIV, p.379.
[93] TNA PREM 1/384, 'Letter from Gilbert Yates Esq to Sir Arthur Rucker [PM Principal Private Secretary]: the War Cabinet' 3 September 1939, p.2.
[94] TNA PREM 1/384, 19/10/19, 'Supreme Control in War' p.3 January 1939.
[95] Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 8 October, in Robert Self (ed.), *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters: Volume 4: The Downing Street Years. 1934-1940* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005), p.457.
[96] TNA PREM 1/384, 'Position of Leading Ministers outside the War Cabinet,' 4 September 1939.
[97] For more information see D. J. Dutton, 'Power brokers or just 'Glamour boys'? The Eden group, September 1939-May 1940', *English Historical Review*, 118 (2003), pp. 412-24; Larry L. Witherell, 'Lord Salisbury's 'Watching Committee' and the fall of Neville Chamberlain, May 1940', *English Historical Review*, 116 (200 1), pp.1134-66.
[98] Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 8 October, in Self, *Chamberlain Diary Letters*, p.457.

(ii) It was to be accepted as a conduct principle that no decision in regard to the initiation or conduct of operations should be taken without the COS being consulted.[99]

The COS was invited to meetings at the War Cabinet's discretion, as Chiefs had no particular right to attend or to decide upon policy. The COS would present its appreciations and assessments to the War Cabinet, who subsequently formulated decisions on British policy. In terms of the higher direction of the war, only the Supreme War Council – which was comprised of both British and French ministers – was superior.

The War Cabinet, September 1939 to May 1940

Prime Minister	Neville Chamberlain – May 1937 to May 1940 Winston Churchill – May 1940 to May 1945
Foreign Secretary	Edward Halifax – Feb 1938 to Dec 1940 Anthony Eden – Dec 1940 to July 1945
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Sir John Simon – May 1937 to May 1940
Home Secretary	Sir Samuel Hoare – Sept 1939 to April 1940 Sir Kingsley Wood – April 1940 to May 1940
Minister without Portfolio	Maurice Hankey – April 1940 to May 1940
Minister for Co-ordination of Defence	Ernle Chatfield – Feb 1939 to April 1940
First Lord of the Admiralty	Winston Churchill – Sep 1939 to May 1940 A. V. Alexander – May 1940 to July 1945
Secretary of State for War	Leslie Hore-Belisha – Sept 1939 to Jan 1940 Oliver Stanley – Jan 1940 to May 1940
Secretary of State for Air	Sir Kingsley Wood – March 1938 to April 1940 Sir Samuel Hoare – April 1940 to 1945

Table 2: The War Cabinet Members during the Phoney War period.

Military advice was submitted to the War Cabinet by the COS in written or oral form. The Government Ministers in charge of the Army, navy and RAF and the Military Co-ordination Committee (MCC) also presented military advice to the Cabinet.

The MCC was founded in October 1939 by the War Cabinet under Chatfield's chairmanship. The MCC discussed most of the COS's reports before their submission to the War Cabinet. It comprised the following members:

[99] TNA PREM 1/384, 883-B, 'Notes of Procedure in Regard to the Establishment of a War Cabinet.' 26 January 1938, p.8.

The Standing Ministerial Committee for the Co-ordination of Defence

The Minister for Co-ordination of Defence (Chairman)	Ernle Chatfield – Feb 1939 to April 1940
The First Lord of the Admiralty	Winston Churchill – Sep 1939 to May 1940[100] A. V. Alexander – May 1940 to July 1945
The Secretary of State for War	Leslie Hore-Belisha – Sept 1939 to Jan 1940 Oliver Stanley – Jan 1940 to May 1940
The Secretary of State for Air	Kingsley Wood – March 1938 to April 1940 Samuel Hoare – April 1940 to May 1940
The Chief of the Imperial General Staff	General Edmund Ironside Sept 1939 to May 1940
The First Sea Lord	Dudley Pound June 1939 to Sept 1943
Marshal of the Air Force	Cyril Newall Sept 1937 to Oct 1940

Table 3: The Military Co-ordination Committee members.

The MCC's remit was to review the 'strategic situation and the progress of operations.'[101] In other words, the MCC was founded to review military policy at a draft stage in order to discuss the assessments and amend them before their submission to the War Cabinet. As the table above shows, it members were qualified to do this. However, despite the MCC being founded to lessen the number of times revised policy had to appear before the War Cabinet, the committee proved to be a further layer of bureaucracy. As the COS secretary later recalled:

> The Chiefs of Staff, after considerable discussion of a problem, would report their conclusions or differences, to the Ministerial [sic] Co-ordination Committee. There the whole ground would have to be gone over again, and perhaps a new set of conclusions or differences would be reached. The matter would then go to the War Cabinet, and once more the process of explanation or disputation would have to repeated.[102]

A theme of this PhD is that Britain's decision-making processes hampered the ability of the COS during the Phoney War, and the MCC contributed greatly to this. As civil-servant John Colville wrote at the time,

[100] Became chairman of the committee on Chatfield's resignation in April 1940. Ismay, *Memoirs*, p.110.
[101] Hansard, House of Commons Debate, 'War Time Duties' 1 February 1940, Vol 356, cc 1264. [http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1940/feb/01/war-time-duties#column_1264] Last Accessed 04/08/17.
[102] Ismay, *Memoirs*, p.109.

> When Winston presided over the Military Co-ordination Committee, his verbosity and recklessness make a great deal of unnecessary work, prevented any real practical planning to be done and generally caused friction.[103]

In the fast-moving events of the Phoney War, discussing and editing appreciations for the MCC and the War Cabinet made demands on the COS's time and slowed down the policy-making process. Churchill, as First Sea Lord and Chair of the MCC from April 1940, came to dominate the committee as he used his knowledge of military matters to contradict and overrule other members.[104] Although the War Cabinet was the channel for turning appreciations into decisions, the MCC was in many ways a hindrance to the COS, as appreciations were often questioned and sent back for revision. As Ironside recorded in January 1940: 'A long day. Actually eight and a half hours in Conference and Meetings. You cannot make war like that.'[105] To what extent Ironside's assertion is correct will be assessed.

III: THE JOINT PLANNING COMMITTEE (JPC)

An important adjunct to the COS was the Joint Planning Committee, which became the Joint Planning Staff (JPS) in 1940. Founded in 1927, its objective was to work out the feasibility of projects remitted by the COS, to initiate plans of its own, and to be at the service of the COS. All plans produced by the JPC had to be referred to the COS for approval.[106] General Ismay summarised the JPC's duties as being:

> (i) To assemble all the relevant factors affecting a plan, i.e. the terrain, the climate, the forces required and available, the opposition likely to be met and so forth;
> (ii) To deduce thereupon the various courses of action open to us, together with the advantages and disadvantages of each;
> (iii) To make recommendations as to which of these courses should be adopted, and suggestions as to how difficulties may be overcome.

[103] John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street Diaries, 1939–55* (New York, Norton, 1985).
[104] Ismay, *Memoirs*, p.74 and p.109.
[105] Ironside, *Diaries*, 2 January 1940, p.191.
[106] TNA CAB 120/49, 'The Organisation for Joint Planning.'

> The decision on the above recommendation rests with higher authority, i.e. the Chiefs of Staff in the first instance.[107]

The JPC comprised a Director of Plans from each of the three service departments, who (with their necessary assistants) had an individual responsibility to their own Service Vice-Chief and also a collective responsibility to the COS.[108] In other words, the members of the JPC directed all future planning for their own service and were, therefore, fully conversant with its existing state of affairs. This meant that the Joint Planners proposed policy which they knew would not stretch the manpower and resources of their service. Hence they were vital for the COS in preventing the British armed services from being overexposed. The JPC consisted of selected officers, ranked Captain R.N., Brigadier and Air Commodore, who divided their time between their own Ministries and the Joint Planning Offices.[109] Three sub-committees, namely the Strategical Planning Section, the Executive Planning Section, and Future Operational Planning Section, kept the military situation under review and produced recommended actions.[110] Table three below details the service record of the JPC members.

The Members of the Joint Planning Committee

Director of Plans, War Office	**Date Appointed**	**Date Retired**	**Age When Appointed**
Brigadier John N. Kennedy	September 1939	December 1939	46
Brigadier Ian S.O. Playfair	December 1939	May 1941	46
Director of Plans, Admiralty			
Captain Edward Bellars	April 1939	March 1942	45
Director of Plans, Air Ministry			
Air Commodore William F. Dickson	July 1942	April 1942	41

Table 4: The members, rank, age, appointment and retirement date of the JPC Members.

The Joint Planning Committee was an extremely productive committee, whose working practices in relation to the COS needs to be assessed. The Directors of Plans attended a meeting of the COS once a week to discuss JPC papers or matters of policy affecting the

[107] TNA CAB 120/49, 'Letter from General Ismay to the Prime Minister,' 27th April 1943, pp.1-2.
[108] TNA CAB 120/49, 'The Organisation for Joint Planning.'
[109] Ibid.
[110] TNA WO 193/215, 'The Machinery of the Committee of Imperial Defence,' 5 September 1940.

preparations of plans.[111] On some occasions the Directors of Plans would also be present at the COS meeting to receive instructions and to hear the preliminary discussion. So, for example, if the COS required an appreciation of the situation in Italy, the matter would be discussed at a meeting of the COS and the terms of reference framed upon which the JPC would work. The junior assistants to the Directors of Plans would then start researching information which the Joint Planners would use to write their report. Information that the Joint Planners were interested in researching was 'for example, the comparison of force, the facts about possible theatres of operations, possible courses open to the enemy, etc.'[112] Next, the assistants of the Joint Intelligence Committee and any other departments concerned, such as the Ministry of Economic Warfare, would be consulted to ascertain if there was any conflict or issue with the report. The assistant to the Directors of Plans would then prepare a first draft of the paper, 'consulting each other's branches of their own departments whose view should be given weight', before submitting this to the Directors of Plans.[113] A meeting between the Directors of Plans especially for the purpose of discussing and finalising the appreciation would be arranged, and finally the appreciation would be brought before the COS. Thereafter, any doubts and differences in opinion were reviewed by the Directors of Plans and resubmitted to the COS.[114]

A number of people were consulted by the JPC in the course of the preparation of such a paper. As a result, an appreciation would have taken into account any difficulties and dangers which may have arisen. However, circulation of the JPC's appreciations was usually limited to the COS. As General Ismay stated in a letter to Churchill:

> May I with respect point out that the Chiefs of Staff have a rule that papers by the Joint Planning Committee go to no-one except the Chiefs of Staff themselves until, or unless, they have been approved by them.[115]

JPC appreciations could, if requested, be circulated to internal ministries and committees. However circulation was restricted and consequently collaboration between the JPC and other committees faltered. 'Loose and disjointed staff work' was how the head of the Allied

[111] TNA DEFE 11/540, 'The History of the Joint Planning Staff 1927 to 1960: section on 1939 to 1940' 13 July 1961 p.5.
[112] TNA CAB 120/49, 'Notes on the Joint Planning Committee and Its Organisation,' p.2.
[113] Ibid, p.3.
[114] Ibid, 'Joint Planning Arrangements: Note by the Prime Minister.'
[115] TNA CAB 120/49, 'Notes on the Joint Planning Committee and Its Organisation,' p.2.

Military Committee General Marshall-Cornwall described the JPC in May 1940.[116] Part of the problem was the number of projects the JPC had to contend with. For instance, during the month of May 1940, the JPC was involved in a number of what General Marshall-Cornwall described as 'half-baked projects', which included air attacks against Italian industry, occupation of Tangier and the seizure of the Balearic Islands.[117] Furthermore, alongside analysis of the feasibility of such projects, the JPC also had to engage in appreciations of the German invasion of the Low Countries. Therefore, the breadth of the JPC's remit restricted the influence of the committee. As the Directors of Plans wrote in a report compiled by the JPC in April 1940 on the state of the whole planning organisation:

> Under the stress of war the various Joint Planning Committees do not seem to be working as smoothly and efficiently as they might be. There seems to be confusion and duplication in dealing with four main requirements i.e. operations, ad hoc planning, short-term planning and long-term planning… the difficulties could be obviated and a suitable organisation gradually evolved if a senior officer could be appointed to… co-ordinate the work of the Joint Planning Organisation.[118]

The joint planning system was over-stretched during the Phoney War, as the citation above illustrates, and by April 1940 it was clear that the situation needed to change. A flaw in the system was that the JPC had little close liaison with the other committees, such as the JIC. For example, the Directors of Plans had a meeting once a fortnight with the Deputy Directors of Intelligence who gave them the latest appreciation of enemy movements and intentions.[119] Integration between the JPC and the JIC was important as it determined the speed at which relevant information was passed on, so it was decided to station the committees in 'adjoining accommodation in order that they may keep in far closer touch with each other.'[120] However, integrating the two committees proved a challenge and, despite the April 1940 report, it was not possible for the JIC and JPC to be accommodated side by side until January 1943.[121]

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[116] TNA CAB 21/1284, Anglo-French Liaison Organisation: AMC General Marshall-Cornwall's File No. 1A, 'Letter from Marshall-Cornwall to Dill,' 27 May 1940.
[117] Ibid.
[118] TNA CAB 21/1284, Anglo-French Liaison Organisation: AMC General Marshall-Cornwall's File No. 1A, 'Direction and Control of COS Staff Organisation,' 24 April 1940.
[119] TNA DEFE 11/540, 'The History of the Joint Planning Staff 1927 to 1960: section on 1939 to 1940' 13 July 1961 p.5.
[120] TNA PREM 3/119/10, 37 'Ismay to the Prime Minister,' April 1940.
[121] Ibid, p.4.

The function and actions of the JPC were wide-ranging, and sources show that the committee was over-stretched during the Phoney War. The amount of research needed to be undertaken for appreciations and the number of inquiries forwarded to the committee by the COS meant the Joint Planners were overworked. Directors did not last long, partly due to the position being a rung in the ladder for promotion, partly due to the long hours and great physical strain of the appointment. One extreme example of this is William Porter, who after ten months collapsed very suddenly at work and died within a few hours.[122] The intense workload was recorded by Director of Plans for the War Office John Kennedy, who noted that 'to cope with this routine, I had a bed put into my room in the basement of the War Office.'[123] Kennedy survived the appointment by living in the War Office six days a week.

The problems faced by the COS and its supporting committees resulted in a series of reforms of the JPC, which came into play at the end of the Phoney War. In May 1940, an Inter-Service Planning Staff was formed and more assistants added to the JPC. The addition of the Inter-Service Planning Staff enabled the Directors of Plans to delegate certain projects to the team, thus freeing the Directors for more immediate projects.[124] Further reforms followed in August 1940 which are outwith the time frame of this thesis.

IV: THE JOINT INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE (JIC)

The Joint Intelligence Committee also assisted the COS. In its early stages, it consisted of the three Directors of Intelligence of the three Services, a representative of the Foreign Office who acted as Chairman, and a representative of the Ministry of Economic Warfare.[125] Foreign Office (FO) input was important. It provided 'political intelligence', since the Foreign Office oversaw the Secret Intelligence Service. This was the first major step in making the JIC an inter-departmental committee.[126] Previously the Military had viewed intelligence as a purely military matter, however, with the FO representative as

[122] 'Memoir of Brigadier W. Porter C.B.E' *The Royal Engineers Journal*, Vo. 58, 1944. p.129.
[123] General John Kennedy, (ed.) B. Ferguson, *The Business of War*, (London, Morrow, 1957), p.60.
[124] TNA DEFE 11/540, 'The History of the Joint Planning Staff 1927 to 1960: section on 1939 to 1940,' 13 July 1961. p.3.
[125] TNA CAB 120/49 'The Organisation for Joint Planning: The Joint Intelligence Committee,' p.3.
[126] See Michael Goodman, *The official history of the Joint Intelligence Committee. Volume I, From the approach of World War II to the Suez crisis,* (London: Routledge, 2014) pp.23-25.

Chairman, military and political intelligence were integrated.[127] The three service directors comprised a Major-General, a Rear-Admiral and an Air Vice-Marshal (all the same rank). Table five below details their service record on the JIC members.

The Members of the Joint Intelligence Committee

Chairman of the JIC	**Date Appointed**	**Date Retired**	**Age When Appointed**
Lord Victor Cavendish-Bentinck	September 1939	1945	42
Director of Military Intelligence			
Major-General F. Beaumont Nesbitt	September 1939	May 1940	46
Director of Naval Intelligence			
Rear-Admiral John Godfrey	September 1939	1942	51
Director of Air Intelligence			
Air Vice-Marshal Archie R. Boyle	September 1939	March 1941	52

Table 5: The members, rank, age, appointment and retirement date of the JPC members.

These officers worked in the same way as the Directors of Plans, i.e. spending part of their time in their own ministries and part of their time as a committee.[128] It was the responsibility of the JIC:

> To collate and assess all information about the enemy and, in particular, to prepare appreciations of the most likely course of enemy action from time-to-time.[129]

The JIC's function was to collate intelligence and keep the COS informed, improve the country's intelligence service as a whole, and make such other investigations as might be referred to them. From the outset, the JIC set a high benchmark, with intelligence reports immediately being forwarded to the Joint Planners and the COS. The main committee met two or three times weekly, but with no set time and date.[130]

[127] Goodman, *The official history of the JIC*,p.23-25.
[128] Ibid, p.4.
[129] TNA CAB 120/49 'The Organisation for Joint Planning: The Joint Intelligence Committee,' p.3.
[130] Goodman, *The official history of the JIC,* p.90.

However, at a strategic level, the JIC was weak as an organisation during the Phoney War. Other bodies existed, such as the Secret Intelligence Service, which were tasked with collating information and analysing.[131] During the Phoney War the system for co-ordinating intelligence through different departments and bodies was still in its infancy. The weak standing of the JIC during the Phoney War is evident in that the three Directors of Intelligence were never all at the same JIC meeting until 1940, instead sending their deputies in their place.[132] As a consequence, the Joint Planning Committee was more important and influential to the COS during the Phoney War. This is evident from the fact that on the declaration of war the COS moved the JPC's staff next door, so that they could 'always be at hand.'[133] However, as they had few staff, no similar relocation of the JIC was carried out.[134] As discussed earlier, the JIC and JPC were supposed to collaborate, but this did not occur in all cases. For instance, appreciations of the Joint Planners for the COS were not shown to the JIC until March 1940.[135] Furthermore, between September 1939 and May 1940, the JIC only attended one COS meeting, in April 1940, to discuss the establishment of an Inter-Services board to collate and co-ordinate irregular projects and to ensure there 'was no danger of overlapping or of one project interfering with another.'[136] However, the first words recorded from this meeting were from First Sea Lord Dudley Pound, who questioned 'whether such machinery was really necessary.'[137] The co-ordination of the JPC and JIC was crucial for the COS's successful prosecution of the war, since in order to make the correct decisions the COS needed to be in possession of all the facts and the limitations regarding policy. The inadequacy of the intelligence will be shown in Chapter Four to have had a major impact on the planning and conduct of the Norway campaign.

The importance of intelligence to the COS was recognised as early as September 1939. At the first COS meeting on 3 September 1939 JIC Chairman, Ralph Skrine Stevenson, pledged,

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[131] For more information see Goodman, *The official history of the JIC*, p.63.
[132] Ibid.
[133] TNA CAB 79/1 COS (39) 2, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes,' 2 September 1939.
[134] F.H .Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, (London, 1979), p.93.
[135] See TNA CAB 81/87, JIC (40) 14, 'Joint Intelligence Committee: Minutes,' 15 March 1940 and TNA CAB 84/2, JP (40) 17, 'Joint Planning Committee: Minutes,' 16 March 1940.
[136] TNA CAB 79/3, COS (40) 62, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes,' 1 April 1940, p.2.
[137] Ibid.

> To provide the COS with up-to-date intelligence, both of a political and of a military character in time for the daily meeting at 10 a.m.[138]

Significantly, it was agreed that raw intelligence would be submitted to the COS, which meant that the COS received unassessed intelligence from all the relevant departments.[139] Following this pledge, before the start of the 10.00am COS meeting, Chiefs were appraised individually of the political and military intelligence relevant to their particular service by their respective Director of Intelligence.[140] Added to this was a Daily Situation Report, issued at 5.30pm. In addition, the Chairman of the JIC could be called to attend a COS meeting to provide further briefing.[141] Thus, whilst it can be argued that the JPC was more influential during the Phoney War, the JIC was not completely divorced from the COS system.

During the Phoney War the JPC produced a large number of appreciations on an array of topics. By contrast, the JIC did not consider anything unless directly instructed to do so. From September to December 1939, 37 assessments were produced by the JIC and 18 meetings held, with the first proper assessment for the COS being produced in early October 1939 on the resources gained during a German invasion in the Low Countries.[142] During 1940, the JIC saw an increase in the nature, depth and demand for assessments and reports from other governmental departments, such as the Ministry of Economic Warfare. However, there was no such increase in the number of reports required by the COS. In March 1940, it was agreed that the JPC and JIC would exchange papers. However, it would take the occupation of Norway and Winston Churchill's reforms of the JIC before the committee played a more central role in Britain's War Machinery. This area is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, but the fall of Norway, and in particular the failure of British intelligence to foresee or forestall it, had implications for the JIC. Churchill's reforms resulted in the JIC being made

[138] TNA CAB 79/1, COS (39) 2, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes,' 3 September 1939, p.1.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] TNA CAB 80/3, JIC (39) 15 'Measures to be taken in the event of Germany overrunning Holland or Belgium or Both' 4 October 1939 and JIC (39) 18, 'German Secret Weapon,' 9 October 1939.

> Responsible for taking the initiative in preparing, at any hour of the day or night, as a matter of urgency, papers on any particular development in the international situation.[143]

Consequently, the JIC was given the remit of identifying what was deemed a threat. Prior to May 1940, the JIC would only carry out assessments when it was deemed necessary by the COS.

In comparison to the JPC, the JIC's influence on the COS was limited. Although it was recognised by the COS that intelligence was central to military planning, the JIC was under-resourced during this period and subsequently contributed little. However, lessons were learned from the minimal role played by the JIC during the Phoney War and the period saw the foundation of an intelligence organisation that would become integral to the COS system post-May 1940.

V: THE ALLIED MILITARY COMMITTEE (AMC)

The Allied Military Committee, or AMC as it became known, was founded in September 1939, and was associated with the COS organisation, not the Supreme War Council.[144] It was founded to co-ordinate Allied military plans and responses, and consisted of three British officers of flag rank representing the three Chiefs of Staff, who met daily with their opposite numbers on the French side representing Gamelin, Darlan and Vuillemin.[145] It was agreed prior to the war that the committee would normally sit in London, with the 18th century Gwydyr House, designed by William Adam, designated the new Anglo-French Liaison Section's home, with Captain A.W. 'Nobby' Clarke and Civil Servant Henry Colyton running it.[146] Franco-British Liaison representatives, as well as staff officers, were always on duty at Gwydyr House.[147] British representatives on the committee represented the COS in dealings with French representatives of the High Command, and they acted as a sub-committee of the COS organisation to handle military policy on the Allied plane.[148]

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[143] TNA CAB 80/11, COS (40) 360, 'Urgent Intelligence Reports,' 17 May 1940.
[144] Ibid.
[145] TNA CAB 21/1302, 24A, 'Functions of the Allied Military Committee' [date unknown] p.1.
[146] Colyton, *Occasion, Chance and Change*, p.148.
[147] Ibid, p.148.
[148] TNA CAB 21/1320, 'Future Organisation of the Allied Military Committee: Summary of Points' p.1.

It is the committee's function as representative of the COS that is of the greatest interest. The duties of the British Representatives (BRs) were:

> …to represent the views of their own service staffs when submitting proposals to the COS; and to represent the views of the COS collectively when dealing with the French.[149]

The AMC's function was to discuss and co-ordinate future military policy prior to decisions being taken at the higher level of the COS. In many ways, its true purpose was to act as a joint planning organisation, which was a mandate that would lead the AMC to come into conflict with the Joint Planning Committee and the Directors of Plans. Nonetheless the AMC was essential, as it enabled the COS and the French High Command to exchange policy documents and co-ordinate efforts.

British and French Members of the Allied Military Committee

British Members

British Military Representative	Major-General Sir Richard Howard-Vyse, KCMG, DSO *Acting Head: 6 September to 9 September 1939*
	Major-General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall
British Air Representative	Air Vice-Marshal Douglas Evill, DSC, APC
British Naval Representative	Vice-Admiral William S. Chalmers CBE, DSC

French Members

French Military Representative	General Albert Lelong, CVO
French Air Force Representative	Colonel Paul Rozoy
French Naval Representative	Vice-Admiral Jean-Ernest Odend'Hal, DSC

Table 6: The members of the Allied Military Committee.
Source: TNA WO 193/834, 41A MR (40) 18, 'Members of the French Military, Naval and Air Missions in London,' 11 April 1940, p.1.

Table six above details the core members of the AMC, showing that the representatives were senior commanders in their service, with a typical meeting including a rotation of representatives from the respective service departments. What is interesting about the French members is that while Vice-Admiral Odend'Hal and General Albert Lelong were both senior officers in their service, Colonel Rozoy was junior in rank. One reason for this could be that *L'Armée de l'Air* was only founded in 1934 and was a small organisation in 1939.[150] Secondly, in comparison to the Military and Navy, *L'Armée de l'Air* was the junior service in Franch; Arthur Harris, later of Bomber Command, commented that French

[149] TNA CAB 21/1302, 24A, 'Functions of the Allied Military Committee' p.1.
[150] See Robin Higham, *Two Roads to War: The French and British Air Arms from Versailles to Dunkirk* (Naval Institute Press, Maryland 2012) p.258-264.

planners regarded their Air Force purely as a form of long range artillery for the Army.[151] The scale of the organisation can be seen in appendix one, which has been produced from an examination of the Anglo-French Liaison and AMC minutes.[152]

Importantly, neither French nor British representatives were in a position to co-ordinate Allied policy without reference to Paris or the War Office.[153] French representatives differed from the British, as they were stationed in London at a distance from their own High Command and they acted not only as French Naval, Army and Air representatives, but also as the heads of the French Naval, Army and Air missions in London.[154] In this latter capacity they had direct access to the British Service Departments. As Admiral Odend'Hal said to a representative from the Polish Military, this meant that:

> Apart from its main task of maintaining contact between the two High Commands, the committee had shown itself a useful clearing house for settling questions of Allied concern affecting the work of several Government Departments on either side of the Channel.[155]

This was one of the crucial reasons why the AMC was considered necessary. One of its founding principles was to counter any tendency in the Anglo-French Alliance for each side to think in terms of one country only, instead of in terms of the Alliance. This will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

CONCLUSION

The COS was part of a hierarchical committee structure and did not work alone in advising the Government of military matters and formulating strategy. It was an integral component of a wider machinery of committees whose combined function was policy-making and decision-making. The military leaders who comprised the COS were senior military commanders who had wide-ranging experience and expertise in their particular service. A

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[151] Arthur Harris, *Bomber Offensive, Marshal of the RAF Sir Arthur Harris*, (London, Greenhill Books, 1998), p.52.
[152] See appendix one at the end of the thesis.
[153] TNA WO 193/834, 23A, 'Position and Function of the Permanent Military Representatives at Gwydyr House, Document from the DMO to DCIGS' 2 December 1939.
[154] TNA WO 193/834, 39A, 'Record of a meeting between the AMC and Colonel Mitkiewicz of the Free Polish Forces' 1 April 1940, p.2.
[155] TNA WO 193/834, 39A, 'Record of a meeting between the AMC and Colonel Mitkiewicz of the Free Polish Forces' 1 April 1940 p.3-4.

close working relationship should have been possible given the similarity of their background, however in some regards loyalty to a particular service was bound to influence the decisions they made. The following chapters will assess how they worked together and how effective they were both individually, and as a body. As has already been alluded to, however, in assessing the effectiveness of the COS during the Phoney War period its relationship with each of the above committees has to be taken into consideration. The COS did not work in isolation and in analysing the committee the strengths and weaknesses of the British War Machinery also has to be assessed.

2. HONOURING OBLIGATIONS: SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER, 1939

During the period September to November 1939, the COS undertook to fulfil its obligations as a committee in securing a Grand Strategy for Britain and in conducting inter-allied discussions with the French High Command. This chapter will examine these two areas of COS activity during this period in order to assess how well the committee functioned as a decision-making and policy-making component of the British War Machinery. The first part of the analysis will concentrate on the long-war strategy agreed by the COS and the French High Command that was implemented in September 1939. To what extent the COS displayed strategic vision, as well as the degree of its commitment to the Grand Strategy, will be assessed. The second part of the chapter will explore the talks between the COS and the French High Command in September and October 1939 over tactics in the Low Countries should a German invasion occur. The 'Belgian problem' plagued the Allies throughout the Phoney War, exerted a decisive influence on the operational plan that was eventually adopted, and critically affected the outcome of the campaign in May 1940. Convention casts Ironside as weak-willed and the COS as complacent at best, and complicit at worst, in presenting to the War Cabinet an *operational fait accompli*.[156] To what extent this is true will be the subject of the final section of this chapter.

The events of 1-3 September, when the Cabinet declared war, have understandably attracted a good deal of attention from historians. There is, therefore, no need in this thesis to assess at length the Cabinet's seeming indecision over the declaration.[157] The COS played little part, apart from advising the Cabinet on the procedure of declaring war.[158] Similarly, historians have comprehensively assessed the fate of Poland in September

[156] Brian Bond, 'Gort' in John Kennedy ed. *Churchill Generals* (Abacus, 1991) p.40 and Brian Bond, *Britain, France and Belgium 1939-1940* (London, Brassey 1990) p.24.
[157] See Christopher Hill, *Cabinet Decision on Foreign Policy: the British Experience, October 1938 -June 1941* (Cambridge, CUP, 1991); Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (London, Heinemann, 1989) and Nick Crowson, *Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators 1935–40* (London: Routledge, 1997).
[158] TNA CAB 80/1, Chiefs of Staff Committee: Memoranda 'The Declaration of War Report' C.O.S (39) 2, 2 September 1939. p.1.

1939.[159] The COS played a minimal role and gave little discussion to assisting Poland, since the Allies had foreseen this invasion. When Poland was attacked, the COS's outlook can be described as resolved, and they showed little or no hesitation: Britain would not conduct a land war in Poland.[160] Thus, instead of assessing these areas of interest again, this chapter will concentrate on arenas where the COS had significant obligations in terms of strategy, policy-making, and Anglo-French relations.

The long-war strategy implemented by the COS in September 1939 has been the subject of scholarly scrutiny and of contending interpretations.[161] One school of thought, which includes Liddell Hart, John Mearsheimer, and John Keegan, regards the COS's defensive strategy as illogical, ceding the initiative to Germany and creating complacency and over-confidence in no action.[162] Other scholars, such as Williamson Murray, do not criticise the long-war strategy but rather its execution, critiquing the British and French for not having had the initiative to undertake military operations.[163] Supporters of the strategy, on the other hand, have argued that the realities of military and economic conditions during the Phoney

[159] See Elisabeth du Reau, 'Edouard Daladier: The Conduct of the War and the Beginnings of Defeat' in Blatt, Joel (ed.), *The French Defeat of 1940: Reassessments* (New York, Berghahn Books, 1997), C.L Mowat, *Britain between the War* (London, Methuen, 1968), p.648; Anna Cienciala, 'Poland in British and French Policy in 1939' in P. Finney (ed.), *Origins of the Second World War*. (London, Arnold, 1997); Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*.

[160] For the COS 'the fate of Poland will depend upon the ultimate outcome of the war,' in TNA CAB 80/2, Chiefs of Staff: Memoranda, 'The Possible Future Course of the War: Appreciation' 16th September 1939.

[161] For Anglo-French Relations see, Talbot Imlay, 'The Making of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1938-39,'in Martin Alexander and William Philpott (eds.) *Anglo-French Defence Relations between the War* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Martin Alexander, 'Preparing to Feed Mars: Anglo-French Economic Co-ordination and the Coming of War, 1937-40 in Alexander and Philpott (eds,) *Anglo-French Defence*; William Philpott, 'The Benefit of Experience? The Supreme War Council and the Higher Management of Coalition War, 1939-40 in Alexander and Philpott (eds,) *Anglo-French Defence*; Eleanor Gates, *End of the Affair: The Collapse of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1939-40* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981); Robert J. Young, *In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Philip C.F. Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modem France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

[162] Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (New York, Faber & Faber, 1970), p. 41; John Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY, 1983), pp. 90-1 and John Keegan, 'The Historian and Battle,' *International Security* 3 (1978-1979), pp. 140-42.

[163] David French, 'British Military Strategy,' in John Ferris and Evan Mawdsley (ed.) *The Cambridge History of the Second World War: Volume 1, Fighting the War*, (Cambridge, CUP, 2015); Martin Alexander, 'French Grand Strategy and Defence Preparations,' in Ferris and Mawdsley, (ed.) *Cambridge History of the Second World War*; Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939: The Path to Ruin* (Princeton, NJ, 1984), pp. 309-31; and Williamson Murray, 'The Strategy of the "Phony War": A Re-Evaluation', *Military Affairs*, xlv (1981), pp. 13-18; and Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, CUP, 2000), pp. 44-66. Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power*, p. 284. For critics see Elizabeth Kier, *Imaging War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.4 and, to a lesser extent, David Reynolds, 'Churchill and the British 'Decision' to Fight On in 1940: Right Policy, Wrong Reasons,' in *Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War*, ed. Richard Langhorne (Cambridge, CUP, 1985).

War rendered a more proactive approach impossible.[164] These scholars, such as Robert Young, argue that the Allies had good reason to appear confident about the future course of the war, and that the defensive strategy was an effective way to mobilise the Allied Army and increase the production of armaments.[165] German success, they conclude, stemmed not from erroneous strategy, but from short-term mistakes and miscalculations on the field of battle.[166] In recent years, Talbot Imlay has further developed these views by arguing that both countries agreed to a long-war strategy.[167] Imlay, however, only provides an overview of British strategy; his analysis is part of a larger examination of the financial, economic, political and military health of both Britain and France. Subsequently, this chapter adds to the historiography by assessing the COS's advice and actions during September 1939.

Many of the studies cited above mention the Anglo-French strategy and tactics in the Low Country; however, in general, the COS's actions have been treated only as the background to analyses of wider topics. What is lacking in these works, to a greater or lesser extent, is a consideration of the COS and its deliberations in the context of British foreign and political strategic policy – in other words, the usefulness of the COS in assessing Britain's capabilities for war, and the COS's relationship with the French High Command. In this chapter, the COS will be revealed as the arena in which British strategic foreign policy was discussed among competing interests and limitations and, most importantly, as the body whose decisions determined British defence policy. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the COS in this context and assess its role as part of the thesis's larger analysis of the committee's decision-making and policy-making influence on Britain's course in the Phoney War, in order to highlight that the significance of the COS has previously been overlooked.

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[164] See François Bédarida, *La stratégie secrète de la Drôle de guerre: Le Conseil suprême interallié, Septembre 1939-avril 1940* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1979); R. A. C. Parker, *Struggle for Survival: The History of the Second World War* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 21-4; Robert A. Doughty, *The Breaking Point: Sedan and the fall of France, 1940* (Hamden, CT, 1990); Martin S. Alexander, *The Republic in Danger: General Maurice Gamelin and the Politics of French Defence, 1933-40* (Cambridge, CUP 1992).

[165] Robert J. Young, "'La Guerre de longue durée": Some Reflections on French Strategy and Diplomacy', *General Staff and Diplomacy Before the Second World War*, (ed.) Paul Preston (London, Rowan and Littlefield, 1978) and idem, *In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-1940* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), pp. 246-58 and Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace: Intelligence and Policy-making, 1933-1939* (Oxford, OUP, 2000).

[166] Jeffery A. Gunsberg, *Divided and Conquered: the French High Command and the Defeat of the West, 1940* (Westport, CT, 1979).

[167] Talbot Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*.

I: THE LONG-WAR STRATEGY: A DEFINITION

The strategy executed at the outset of the Second World War by the COS and the French was termed 'the long-war strategy.' The COS decided upon this long-war strategy after a series of talks and strategical appreciations during the inter-war period, which are beyond the scope of this thesis.[168] However, before undertaking an analysis on the COS's decision to support the long-war strategy, it is worth briefly defining what was intended by this approach.

In the view of the COS, the Second World War should be fought by relying on Britain's economic, financial and naval strength, rather than large-scale military manoeuvres similar to those of the First World War. In April 1939, the COS's strategical appreciation assumed several general considerations about future war with Germany: namely that,

> Germany and Italy cannot hope to increase their resources appreciably in the course of the war: they will therefore stake their chances of success on a short war…
> The time factor will have considerable bearing on all these factors. It seems clear that it will work in favour of the Allies, who will be able to count on an increasing British strength, and possibly the assistance of American industry.
> Anglo-French strategy should therefore be adapted to a long-war, implying:–
>
> (i) A defensive strategy at the outset, at least on the continent, while executing the greatest measure of economic pressure.
>
> (ii) The building up of our military strength to a point at which we can adopt an offensive strategy.[169]

Central to the COS's position was the assumption that Germany would aim at a short war and, to this end, 'she would employ her numerical superiority in the air and on land in decisive action at an early stage.'[170] Britain would not be in a position to engage in land

[168] For more information on British military policy see, Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World War*, (Oxford, Clarendon, 1980); Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, Wesley Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* (London, Tauris 1985).
[169] TNA CAB 53/7, COS 876, 'The Broad Strategic Policy for the Allied Conduct of the War,' 11 April 1939, p.3 and p.5.
[170] TNA CAB 21/1317, 6A 'Possible German Action in the spring of 1940,' 29 December 1939. p.1

warfare in September 1939 and so a rearmament programme was recommended. Therefore, to counter this presumed German initial onslaught, it was agreed by the COS at the outbreak of war that the Allies would deploy the French Army and a small BEF force of four divisions.[171] Although the long-war strategy was defensive, it favoured an economic war of attrition to weaken Germany.

> We have seen, however, that in the economic field Germany has three major weaknesses in lack of commodities which are at present supplied by neutrals… which now would have an important effect upon her ability to prosecute the war :-
>
> 1) The most important – the iron ore from Sweden, of which a stoppage would, it is understood, be decisive in about a year.
> 2) Romanian Oil.
> 3) Lubricating oils and fats imported through neutrals…
>
> So effective will this action be strategically that it should be carried out if it is found on full examination to be in any way politically and physically possible.[172]

It was assessed that the German economy and morale would be undermined by naval blockade, supplemented by the bombing of industrial centres and intensive propaganda, until Britain and France were deemed ready for an offensive.[173] The 'European Appreciation, 1939-40',[174] written by the JPC and the COS in January 1939, provided an agreed statement of Allied policy:

> To sum up, we should be faced by enemies who would be more fully prepared than ourselves for war on a national scale, would have superiority in air and land forces, but would be inferior at sea and in general economic strength. In these circumstances, we must be prepared to face a major offensive against either ourselves or France. To defeat such an offensive we should have to

[171] TNA WO 193/147, 1A 'British Strategy: Memo by the CIGS' 7 September 1939, p.1.
[172] TNA WO 193/147, 'A Brief Review of the General Strategical Situation,' Date Unknown, p.18-19.
[173] TNA CAB 16/183A, DP (P) 44, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: European Appreciation,' 20 February 1939, paragraphs 27-37, 267-8.
[174] TNA CAB 53/44, COS 831 (JP) 331, 'European Appreciation, 1939-1940,' January 26, 1939.

> concentrate all our initial efforts, and during this time our major strategy would be defensive.
>
> Our subsequent policy should be directed to weakening Germany and Italy by the exercise of economic pressure and by intensive propaganda, while at the same time building up our military strength until we can adopt an offensive major strategy. Command of the sea would then confer freedom of choice in striking at the enemies' most vulnerable points. Once we had been able to develop the full fighting strength of the Empire, we should regard the outcome of the war with confidence.[175]

The strategy formed by the COS and the JPC, therefore, was for a long-war in which the 'major strategy would be defensive.' The COS had assessed that Britain's defences were weak and that once the resources of the empire had been marshalled an offensive strategy could begin. From the perspective of the 1939-1940 period, these predictions were robust and demonstrate that the COS had a strategic plan for Britain.

II: COMMITMENT AND CONSENSUS: THE COS'S POSITION TOWARDS THE LONG-WAR STRATEGY AND THE BALKAN QUESTION

Many previous assessments have focused on the poor state of the British armed services at the start of the war and the lack of investment that had caused this.[176] As the focus of this chapter is September to November 1939, an examination of the COS's appreciations on strategy in the inter-war period is outwith its focus. However, historians of the inter-war

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[175] TNA CAB 53/44, COS 831 (JP) 331, 'European Appreciation, 1939-1940,' January 26, 1939, paras 267 and 268.

[176] For Anglo-French Relations see, Eleanor Gates, *End of the Affair*; Robert J. Young, *In Command of France*. For State of the Armed services see George Peden, 'Financing Churchill's Army,' In Keith Neilson and Greg Kennedy (eds.), *The British War in Warfare: Power and the International System, 1856-1956* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Martin Alexander and William Philpott, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1928–39,' in *Knowing Your Friends: Intelligence Inside Alliances and Coalitions From 1914 to the Cold War*, (ed.) M. Alexander (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 53–84; M. Alexander, 'Fighting to the Last Frenchman'? Reflections on the BEF Deployment to France and the Strains in the Franco-British Alliance, 1939–1940,' *Historical Reflections* 22 (1996): 235–62; R. Young, 'La guerre de longue durée: Some Reflections on French Strategy and Diplomacy in the 1930s," in *General Staffs and Diplomacy before the Second World War,* ed. A. Preston and T. Imlay, 'A Reassessment of Anglo-French Strategy during the Phony War, 1939–1940', *English Historical Review*, 119, (2004).

period have rightly assessed that it was the COS's 'worst case situation' analysis of the military balance, combined with Chamberlain's 'best case' appreciation of Hitler's motives that fuelled appeasement in 1938.[177] The historiography correctly shows that prior to September 1939 the COS failed to correctly assess Britain's military preparedness and financial and economic ability to sustain a long-war.[178] Although the COS have been judged lacking pre-September 1939, the focus of this chapter will be to assess whether the COS was similarly lacking in strategic insight following the declaration of war. To achieve this, the long-war strategy and the extent to which the COS was committed to its implementation will be examined.

II.I: WHY DID THE COS SELECT THE LONG-WAR STRATEGY?

The COS implemented the long-war strategy in September 1939 for several reasons. Firstly, it was an obligation that had been agreed with France pre-war. During the inter-war period, the COS and the French High Command had undertaken numerous appreciations on the correct course to be taken against a belligerent Germany. The conclusion was that the long-war strategy, as detailed above, was the favoured course of action should war break out. It is important to recognise that the COS was not a passive member in these discussions, but had actively encouraged a defensive stance at the start of the war and, as a committee, had ratified the long-war strategy. Consequently, in view of the fact that the strategy had been agreed by both Britain and France, the COS had obligations to implement it.

However, the long-war strategy was not simply implemented by the COS out of diplomatic duty. The COS believed in this strategy as it was assessed to be to Britain's advantage militarily. When war broke out, the COS acknowledged that Britain had no prospect of

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[177] See Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939*; Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, p.202-11; and Paul Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War,' in W. Murray and A. Millett, eds. *Calculations* (New York, Free Press, 1992) p.19-59.

[178] See George Peden, *Arms Economics and British Strategy: From Dreadnoughts to Hydrogen Bombs* (Cambridge, CUP 2009); Joseph Maiolo, *Cry Havoc: The Arms Race and the Second World War 1931-1941* (London, John Murray 2010); and Passim, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* (London, Macmillan, 1998).

[178] For more information on the strength of the navy during the Phoney War see Andrew Lambert, 'The Only British Advantage: Sea Power and Strategy, September 1939 to June 1940' in Michael H. Clemmesen, Marcus S. Faulkner ed. *Northern European overture to war, 1939–1941: from Memel to Barbarossa*, (Boston, Brill, 2013) and Christopher Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power* (Oxford, OUP 2012).

staging a successful major land offensive in the west because militarily the country was weak. It was clear that

> …except in the economic field our [British] action is at present confined to countering moves by the enemy… [Because Britain's] inferiority in Army and air strengths, the long-term nature of our economic weapon… dictate a defensive strategy.[179]

The COS, therefore, could not advise Britain to assist France in launching a major offensive. CIGS Ironside was particularly aware of the Army's deterioration. Writing to a fellow commander in June 1939, he recounted:

> We fell into disrepute in the Army… Never again must this be allowed. And to the politician stands the idea that an Army was not necessary. …When the Cabinet began to examine the plans made by the Admiralty and Air Ministry they were horrified to find that they were all leading up to a war in which the main part was borne by the Army. And they hadn't got one. They were disillusioned and could find no way out.[180]

Britain could only send to France 160,000 Army personnel, 23,000 vehicles and an array of equipment and supplies.[181] Although a small force in comparison to the French, this was a major commitment from Britain: 'the greater part of our regular Army has been sent to France.'[182] In September 1939, the COS was faced with a British Army which was small, dispersed across the empire, incapable of rapid expansion, and unprepared for anything more than a token commitment to the war.

The German invasion of Poland in September 1939 strengthened the COS's belief that the long-war strategy was correct. On 16 September, the COS provided the War Cabinet with its strategic appreciation on Britain's 'possible future course of the war.' Constitutionally the COS could have decided to abandon the long-war strategy at this point, but it did not.

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[179] TNA WO 106/1685, 'CIGS Memorandum: Our War Strategy' 7 September 1939, p.10.
[180] IWM 92/40/1, Ironside Letters, 2, 'Letter from Ironside to Lindsay' 22 June 1939.
[181] Bond, *British Military Policy*, p.319-320.
[182] TNA CAB 21/1317, 2A 'Germany's Next Move' 2 November 1939, p.1 For more information on this topic see Brian Bond, 'Preparing the Field Force, February 1939 – May 1940' in Brain Bond and Michael Taylor ed. *The Battles for France & Flanders: Sixty Years on* (Leo Copper, 2001).

The COS assessed the military might of the German Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht to be 'instrumental in restraining us [the Allies] from offensive action on an appreciable scale.'[183] The COS reasoned that the armed services, due to their size, could not engage in a long-term land war and that Belgium and France would not be able to secure their frontiers until the British Army had been fully rearmed and strengthened. Therefore, the long-war strategy was ratified by the COS as the only means of defeating Germany.

In the same assessment to the War Cabinet, the COS advised that the only offensive contribution Britain could make to the Anglo-French war effort was through blockade, the success of which would emerge in the future. As Oliver Harvey, a civil servant at the time, wrote in his diary:

> All German weapons – superiority in man-power and in aircraft, in tanks, etc. – are designed for quick success. All ours – blockade, sea power and world financial and economic resources – are long-term ones. If Germany cannot win a quick success, she cannot hope to win a long-drawn war… The role of our Army, navy and Air Force must therefore be essentially defensive. The blockade is our offensive.[184]

The COS also assessed that Germany – at this stage a single adversary – was too dependent on bulk imports to endure a long economic war of attrition:

> In either event, we should concentrate our initial efforts on securing our positions, particularly in the west, while building up our strength and ensuring the maximum degree of economic pressure.[185]

Ultimate victory, the COS believed, lay not on the field of battle but in defence and blockade. Indeed, economic warfare featured largely in the appreciations and discussions between the COS and the JPC during September 1939 and in the following nine months.

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[183] TNA CAB 80/2, Chiefs of Staff: Memoranda, 'The Possible Future Course of the War: Appreciation 16th September 1939,' p.6.
[184] J Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey,* (London, Collins, 1970), 22 September 1939, p.321.
[185] TNA CAB 80/2, Chiefs of Staff: Memoranda, 'The Possible Future Course of the War: Appreciation 16th September 1939,' p.16.

Therefore, by implementing the long-war strategy, the COS can be seen to have demonstrated strategic foresight. The strategy had been agreed much earlier, but nonetheless, the COS undertook detailed assessments to confirm whether a long-war strategy was still the correct course of action at the onset of war. In so doing, the COS displayed rigour in its decision-making. The COS did not simply stand by the strategy out of obligation to France, or from an unwillingness to change its mind; it judged that it was the correct course of action in September 1939 as Britain was incapable of sustaining an offensive land war with Germany. Furthermore, the COS recognised that the strength of Britain's contribution to the war lay in economic warfare, which had been a vital component of the long-war strategy. The COS's strategic insight would later be ratified, as history has shown that it would be this combination of a long-war with economic attrition that eventually brought victory in 1945.

II.II: TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THERE CONTINUING ALLIED CONSENSUS FOR THE LONG-WAR STRATEGY?

It has been shown that the COS demonstrated a strong commitment to the Allied long-war strategy in September 1939, the principle of which was to remain on the defensive until rearmament had been achieved. However, as September moved into October, France's position shifted, and they redefined the long-war in terms of being simultaneously both defensive and offensive. France argued for remaining defensive on the Western Front, while seeking offensives in Italy and the Balkans. In September and October 1939, proposals for offensive action in Italy and the Balkans were openly discussed between the COS and the French High Command. Historians such as Talbot Imlay have argued that this was the result of France moving away from the long-war agreement.[186] In this section, these offensive operations will be assessed, as well as the COS's response to them, in order to reveal whether the COS similarly begin to depart from its previous commitment to the long-war strategy and how it reacted to France's change of policy.

Initial proposals for the Mediterranean, and particularly Italy, as a theatre where Britain could win the war offensively had first arisen in March 1939.[187] The 'Italy first' strategy decided prior to the outbreak of the Second World War falls somewhat outwith the primary focus of this thesis, however it is worth examining to contextualise the COS's commitment

[186] See Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, pp.99-102.
[187] TNA CAB 55/15, JP. 382, 'Allied Plans against Italy,' 27 March 1939.

to the long-war strategy.[188] After talks with the French in April and July 1939, the COS concluded that an offensive was beyond the means of Britain at the time and that 'Italian neutrality, if it could by any means be assured, would be decidedly preferable to her active hostility.'[189] Yet, Italian hostility guided the French military towards action in the Balkan countries in order to prevent Germany from invading the area and advancing towards the Mediterranean. In subsequent inter-Allied discussions, the French pressed Britain to agree on an Allied landing in the Balkans to unite the divided Balkan countries, thus creating a second front against Germany.[190] These discussions began within a month of the outbreak of the war, and the COS's response to these proposed offensives reveals its level of commitment to the long-war strategy.

The COS's position towards Italy and the Balkans in September evolved directly from assessments made before the war, namely that it was in Britain's interests to remain on the defensive and not to engage in the arena. On 2 September 1939 First Sea Lord Dudley Pound suggested that Britain should aim for Italian neutrality to secure and enhance Britain's Atlantic trade routes, on the basis that the Mediterranean Fleet could be deployed.[191] The Chief of the Air Staff Cyril Newall agreed with Pound and argued that 'if Italy were definitely neutral, the air resources at present in Egypt would be available for use elsewhere.'[192] This position was based on reports from Middle East Command, who had concluded that due to a lack of anti-aircraft defences and an insufficient number of troops, it would 'not be difficult for the Italians to carry out effective attacks on aerodromes, communications and ground troops.'[193] Ironside, who had written to a friend

[188] For more information on the topic see Lawrence Pratt, *East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean Crisis, 1936-1939* (Cambridge, CUP 1975), p.167-77; Murray, *Change in the European Balance of Power*, Williamson Murray, 'The Role of Italy in British Strategy,' *JRUSI*, 124 (1974) and Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, p.99-102 and Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital Crossroads: Mediterranean Origins of the Second World War, 1935–1940* (Ithaca and London, 2002).
[189] TNA CAB 55/18, JP 470, 'The Attitude of Italy in War and the Problem of Anglo-French Support to Poland,' 12 July 1939.
[190] For more information see TNA WO 106/1701, 'CIGS: The Situation in the Balkans,' 23 September 1939, TNA CAB 65/3, War Cabinet minutes, 21 September 1939. Also see Frank Marazari, 'Projects for an Italian led Balkan Bloc of Neutrals, September-December 1939,' *Historical Journal* 13 (1970), p.767-88; Brock Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance: Anglo-Turkish Relations, 1934-1940* (Montreal, 1998), p.221 and Talbot Imlay, 'A Reassessment of Anglo-French Strategy during the Phony War, 1939-1940,' *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 119.
[191] TNA CAB 79/1, COS (39) 1, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes,' 2 September 1939.
[192] TNA CAB 66/4, WP (39) 159, 'The Balkan Problem: Record of a meeting at the Headquarters of General Gamelin on Monday 11 December,' p.7
[193] TNA Air 23/755, 'Letter from Middle East Command to Air Chief Marshal Cyril Newall' 2 December 1939.

in June 1939 that '[t]he Achilles heel is Italy and I hope we will attack there with certain success,' [194] had concluded by September that:

> It seems to me that we want to have Italy neutral at the moment and nothing we do in the Balkans should irritate her into coming in against us… I would call to mind the fact that no expedition once it has started, ever gets smaller. There is always a call for more and more strength.[195]

Ironside had not dismissed the importance of the Balkans as an arena of war, but had rightly assessed that there was a danger of mission creep in the operation. As he wrote in a report for the COS on 7 September, 'we may be led into a repetition of the unfortunate Salonika expedition of the late war.'[196] In other words, the commitment would escalate, similar to Allied intervention in the arena during the First World War. As CIGS, Ironside was engaged in strategic planning and he had evaluated that the Army was ill-equipped to engage in offensive action as 'no war can be won without an offensive and no offensive is possible without an Army.'[197] Ironside changed his thinking regarding action in the Mediterranean between June and September, from a position where he had fervently hoped for offensive action to one where he lobbied for Italian neutrality. Such a volte-face reveals his capacity to think strategically and with foresight, as he correctly judged that Britain was not militarily ready for conflict in the Balkans. However, Ironside was not alone in this assessment. The COS was united in the belief that,

> In the view of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, it was not to our advantage at present that the war should be extended to the Balkans. In reaching this conclusion they had been largely influence by the problem of Italy… the view of the COS was reinforced by our experience in the last war.[198]

The understanding of the COS was that it would not be in Britain's best interests to engage in offensive operations in the Balkans at this stage of the war.

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[194] IWM 92/40/1, Ironside Letters, 2, 'Letter from Ironside to Lindsay' 22 June 1939.
[195] TNA WO 106/1701, 'CIGS Report: The Situation in the Balkans,' 23 September 1939.
[196] TNA WO 106/1685, 1A 'British Strategy in the War,' 7 September 1939.
[197] IWM 92/40/1, Ironside Letters, 2, 'Letter from Ironside to Lindsay' 22 June 1939.
[198] TNA CAB 65/3, WM (39) 22 12, 'War Cabinet: Confidential Annex' 21 September 1939.

The French High Command held the opposite viewpoint. During September and October, the senior commanders of both France and Britain lobbied their respective governments to support their particular stances. The COS confronted the crisis of consensus in a series of Supreme War Council Meetings. At these the COS proposed the creation of a neutral Balkan block rather than an offensive engagement in the Balkans.[199]

> It is however, at present to our advantage to keep the war out of the Balkans and to consolidate the Balkan states into a benevolently neutral 'bloc.'[200]

The COS advised that diplomatic initiatives should begin in order to persuade countries such as Turkey, Yugoslavia and Romania to sign neutral agreements, thereby preventing the Germans from advancing further. The COS's assessment that an offensive would endanger Britain is evidenced in a report to the War Cabinet on the possible future course of the war on 16 September:

> [T]he hostility of Italy would necessitate the withdrawal of certain light forces now employed… This would virtually mean that all operations by land and air would have to be conducted in two widely separated theatres.[201]

As the COS would state to the French High Command in December 1939, 'they felt, in fact, that for the moment our activities should be confined to unostentatious preparations.'[202] In other words, during the following months they believed it was best to adhere to the agreed long-war strategy of rearmament as 'our general defensive strategy is based on sound reasoning and should not be lightly discarded.'[203] At the end of October the French High Command accepted the COS's proposals regarding a Balkan block of neutral countries, however the Balkan proposals remained an issue for discussion between the COS and the French High Command throughout the rest of the Phoney War.

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[199] TNA CAB 84/7, JP (39) 'Near East and the Balkans', 2 September 1939; TNA CAB 80/1, COS (39) I5, 'Balkan Neutrality', 9 September 1939 1939

[200] TNA WO 106/1685, 'Our General Strategy,' para 18. September 1939.

[201] TNA CAB 80/2, Chiefs of Staff: Memoranda, 'The Possible Future Course of the War: Appreciation 16th September 1939,' p.13.

[202] TNA CAB 66/4, War Cabinet: Memoranda, 'The Balkan Problem: Record of a Meeting held at the Headquarters of General Gamelin,' 11 December 1939, p.8.

[203] TNA WO 106/1685, 'Our General Strategy,' para 27. September 1939.

In the face of France's drift away from a completely defensive long-war strategy, the COS held firm in its belief that this was the correct course of action.

II.III: TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THERE WIDER BRITISH CONSENSUS FOR THE COS'S STANCE?

Following the above assessment of the contrasting opinions between the COS and the French High Command, it is important to next assess whether there was complete consensus within the wider British War Machinery to maintain the original long-war strategy. Indeed, relevant for this study of collective decision-making and policy-making, beyond the COS and Chamberlain there existed much dissent. French proposals for military operations found support from the Commander of the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Cunningham, but not from his superior, First Sea Lord Dudley Pound. Also opposing CIGS Ironside was the Military Commander in the Middle East, General Wavell. Cunningham believed that Italy would 'keep the Allies guessing' regarding its neutrality and that deployment of naval and military forces to the Atlantic and Western Front would weaken the forces facing Italy, resulting in Italy declaring for Germany.[204] Wavell, stationed in the Western Desert, shared Cunningham's belief that Italy would side with Germany and as Commander of the Middle East he was duly 'anxious about the threat from the west.'[205] Wavell would be proven correct when Italy invaded Egypt and Libya in 1940.[206] The Desert Commander also viewed it as desirable to cut German communications in Yugoslavia and to defend both Salonika and Thrace.[207] The COS was aware of the opinions of Cunningham and Wavell, although their arguments did not change the committee's position. Both these commanders evaluated the Balkan policy from the perspective of their own sphere of command, whereas the COS viewed it through a wider lens. Cunningham and Wavell's position, while sensible, was to bring their opinion to the COS but not to impose it. But Ironside did listen to Wavell, whose recommendations for increased reinforcements formed the basis for the deployment of more troops in the Middle East, with

[204] See Roskill, *The War at Sea*, Vol.1, p.48 and p.548; British Library, Cunningham Papers, 52558, 'Cunningham to Doddles,' 10 September 1939.
[205] TNA WO 105/5706B, 'Wavell to Ironside,' Minutes 7 and 8, 8 September 1939.
[206] For more information see Steven Morewood, *The British defence of Egypt, 1935-1940: conflict and crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean*, (London: Frank Cass, 2005).
[207] See Kennedy, *Business of War*, p.41-2, for a record of a discussion in the War Office between Ironside and Wavell 8 December 1939. See also, Ironside, *Diaries*, 7 September 1939, p.105 and Connell, *Wavell*, p.216-17 for Ironside's letter to Wavell, 11 September 1939.

the British garrison in Egypt increasing by 20,000 men, the equivalent of two divisions, during the first few months of the war.[208]

First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill was an important figure in the War Cabinet and he similarly supported intervention. In contrast to Cunningham and Wavell's acceptance of the COS's decision, however, Churchill actively lobbied against it. As early as 7 September 1939, Churchill proposed the sending of ships to Gibraltar to intimidate Italy to the War Cabinet, believing that the Navy's defeat of Italy would have an impact on the war against Germany.[209] Although Pound objected, Churchill's dominant personality overrode his arguments and he presented his proposals to the War Cabinet on 18 September – the War Cabinet thereby assuming that it was a fully endorsed Admiralty policy.[210] On 21 September, Churchill expressed his desire,

> To see all the Balkan Countries and Turkey also brought into the war… and it was not at all to our interest that the Balkans should be kept in a state of quiet.[211]

Churchill was forceful in his opinion. As will be seen in Chapters Three and Four, Churchill's desire for action often built momentum and it was also infectious. Indeed, Churchill acted against Pound and the COS during September by petitioning for action despite their position being clearly the opposite. For example, on 16 September, Churchill wrote a letter to the Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, to try and persuade him towards Bulgaria's participation in the Balkan plans.[212] As this thesis is concerned with decision-making processes, it should be noted that Liddell Hart commented at this time that:

> There has been too much wishful thinking in our foreign policy. And in our attitude to the military conditions underlying it. We need to approach these problems not with the desire to suit our conclusions to our interests, but in the spirit, and with the method of the scientist – whose predominant interest is to discover the truth.[213]

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[208] Martin Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East: Strategy and Diplomacy, 1936-42*, (Macmillan, Basingstoke 1999) p.102.
[209] TNA CAB 65/1, WM (39) 7, 'War Cabinet: Minutes,' 7 September 1939.
[210] TNA ADM 205/2, 'Report of the First Lord of the Admiralty to the War Cabinet,' 18 September 1939.
[211] TNA CAB 65/3, WM (39) 22 12, 'War Cabinet: Confidential Annex' 21 September 1939.
[212] See Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Vol. VI: *Finest Hour*, (London, Minerva, 1991) p.30-31.
[213] Kings College London [Hereafter KCL] LHC, LH/11/1940/23, Liddell Hart, 'Notes' 11 April 1940.

Churchill was lobbying out of a desire to see offensive action, rather than being convinced that the Balkans was the correct arena for this to take place. He was seeking an operation that would suit his conclusion that offensive action was needed and so was disinterested in the COS's rational assessment. In the end, Churchill conceded that he was in the minority over the Balkans, but concluded in the War Cabinet that the desire for offensive action 'was a dilemma which it would be necessary to face.'[214] Churchill's warning was correct, with the Balkan policy resulting in Anglo-French differences from January to March 1940.[215]

In this environment, the COS's hard-headed ability to make and stick to a decision could easily be overlooked. For example, during discussions over the Balkan policy, the Allied Military Committee (AMC), founded to liaise between the British and French High Commands, was a strong proponent for action. The AMC's arguments echoed those of the French and in February 1940 it would conclude that the policy 'seems the logical one and, moreover, the only one which has virtue of a forward policy.'[216] As will be illustrated in Chapter Four through an examination of the Norway Campaign, the momentum for offensive action overrode the COS's strategy. However, in September and October 1939 the majority of the War Cabinet members and the Foreign Office were similarly opposed to a Balkan Front. Chamberlain's assessment of the situation reflected his conviction that Britain's survival was dependent on winning 'a waiting war.'[217] Subsequently, the Balkan question did not gain momentum within the British establishment. At the Supreme War Council on 22 September Chamberlain stated that Britain would not authorise action in the Balkans.[218] Nonetheless, the Balkan question remained open during the Phoney War and, in the long-term, the AMC would encourage British planners to reconsider their strategic assumptions about the long-war, a process that originated with the AMC's interest in the Balkans.[219] Fortunately, the consensus in the British establishment was for a defensive strategy and the compromise, a neutral Balkan Federation, matched the COS's strategic assessments.[220]

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[214] TNA CAB 65/3, WM (39) 22 12, 'War Cabinet: Confidential Annex' 21 September 1939.
[215] See Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, p.109-114.
[216] TNA CAB 21/1180, 'Letter from Marshal-Cornwall to Ismay' 11 February 1940.
[217] Birmingham University Library [Hereafter BUL], NC 18/1/1123, Neville Chamberlain to Hilda, 1 October 1939.
[218] TNA CAB 99/3, SWC (39/40) 2, 'Supreme War Council: Minutes,' 22 September 1939.
[219] For more information see. Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, p.106-109.
[220] TNA WO 193/134, 'Ironside Memorandum: Note on Strategic Situation in Europe,' 16 September 1939.

The above analysis reveals that within the decision-making and policy-making processes the COS had to press its position with some force. Although the ultimate decision lay with the War Cabinet, the COS had to face questions within Whitehall and justify its position. Nevertheless, the COS did listen to the opinions of others. Service commanders Cunningham and Wavell had a duty to discuss strategy that affected their arena with the COS, and, while they were of the opposite point of view, the COS did listen to their positon. Churchill's intervention was more dangerous, as the First Sea Lord might have encouraged the War Cabinet into action in the Balkans despite the advice of the COS. On this occasion, however, Chamberlain and the Foreign Office stood firm in their position.

During September and October 1939 it has been shown that the COS was effectively engaged in strategic military planning and decision-making. In September 1939 the COS accepted that to counter long-term German intentions a long economic defensive war would have to be undertaken throughout 1939 and 1940. Despite France's shift of position in favour of an offensive front, and the commanders and Churchill maintaining conflicting opinions, the COS held its ground. Moreover, the COS had strategic foresight in assessing that actions had consequences, as the invasion of the Balkans could have led to Italy joining Germany and then the Wehrmacht invading the Balkans. It can therefore be asserted that the COS performed strongly during the opening month of the Second World War, demonstrating cohesion in its commitment to the long-war strategy and refusing to be deflected from this path.

III: DISCUSSION AND DEBATE: THE COS, THE FRENCH HIGH COMMAND AND THE LOW COUNTRIES

After concluding above that the COS functioned well in its policy-making and decision-making role with regards to the long-war strategy and the Balkan question, this section will examine whether the COS performed as strongly in debates with the French High Command over the Low Countries. This section firstly examines French proposals for a plan to be undertaken in the event of a German invasion of Belgium and the Netherlands, before assessing the COS's contribution to the Allied discussions between September and December 1939, which formulated and confirmed the course to be taken. A more complex

and nuanced series of impressions of the COS is revealed by assessing their response to the two plans proposed: the Scheldt, or Escaut, Plan (Plan E), and the Dyle Plan (Plan D).

The chosen Plan D had a disastrous result, and has long been regarded by military historians as one of the greatest errors of command that took place during the summer of 1940. According to Brian Bond, 'none of the British military experts spoke out against a project' that would go on to become a debacle.[221] This section will examine to what extent the COS acceded to French demands and what factors influenced its policy-making. As Bond has characterised the COS's ratification of the French plans for the Low Countries as 'acquiescence [and a]… dereliction of duty,'[222] we will consider whether this is a fair assessment of the actions of the COS in September to December 1939. This area merits reconsideration in order to reveal whether the COS can be regarded as returning to its pre-war record of poor judgement and incorrect assessment of the right course of action, particularly after having been acquitted of such mistakes in the discussion of the Balkans above.

Some detailed studies have examined the German breakthrough on the Meuse in May 1940 and the state of Anglo-French relations throughout the Phoney War.[223] However a focus on the COS's conduct in September to December 1939 merits study, particularly as it illuminates the state of Allied relations in the early months of the Second World War. It also aids our assessment of the COS as an effective decision-making and policy-making body, and seeks to question whether the COS misguided Britain's course at this point in the Phoney War.

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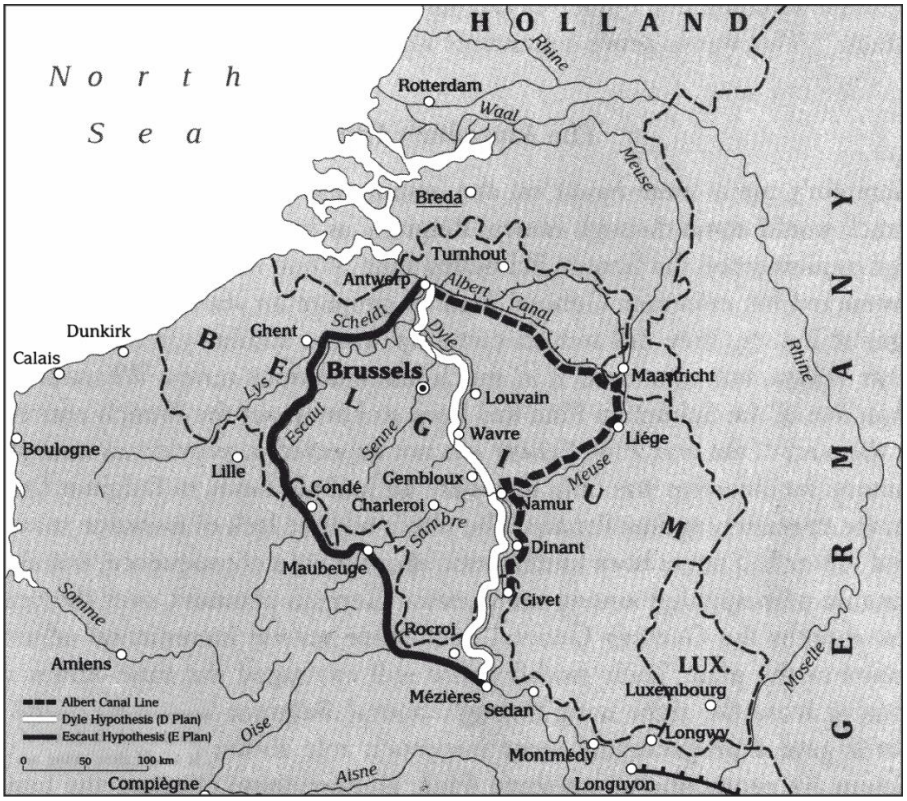
[221] Bond, *Britain, France and Belgium, 1939-1940*, p.29.
[222] Bond, 'Gort' in Kennedy ed. *Churchill Generals*, p.40.
[223] See Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Robert A. Doughty, *The Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France, 1940* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1990), Brian Bond, *France and Belgium 1939-40* (London: Davis Poynter, 1975); Brian Bond, 'Arras, 21 May 1940: A Case Study in the Counter-Stroke' in C. Barnett, *Old Battles and New Defences* (London, Brassey 1986); R.H.S Stolfi, 'Equipment for Victory in France in 1940' in *History*, February 1970, pp. 1-20; Alistair Horne, *To Lose a Battle*, (London Macmillan, 2013); Blatt, ed. *The French Defeat of 1940*; William Philpott and Martin S. Alexander, 'The French and the British Field Force: Moral Support or Material Contribution,' *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 71, No.3, 2007, pp.743-772.

III.I: THE CONTEXT: FRENCH PROPOSALS FOR THE LOW COUNTRIES



Map 1: The Escaut Plan and Dyle Plan.
Edited from an original map in Jackson, *The Fall of France,* p. 29.

In September 1939 the French were concerned about Belgian neutrality. The French frontier with Belgium lacked heavy fortification of the type at the Maginot Line. During the inter-war period France had enjoyed a military convention with Belgium. However, the convention ended after 1936 and the Belgians became neutral.[224] Consequently, in September 1939 the Allies faced a difficult decision over how to defend Northern France and protect Belgian sovereignty if the Wehrmacht invaded. One option was to position themselves along the Belgian border, but this was quickly dismissed due to the region's estuary conditions, rendering it unsuitable for heavy defences. Nonetheless, northern France contained vital industry, including the coal mines, steel works and armament factories of Lille, Douai and Valenciennes, which required defence.[225] Thus, debate between the COS and the French High Command centred on two plans: an advance of the

[224] TNA CAB 80/6, COS (39) 162 (S), 'Notes of a meeting held at the Headquarters of General Gamelin, November 9, 1939, p.20; See also J.M Hughes, *To the Maginot Line: the Politics of French Military Preparation in the 1920s* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p.223.
[225] See Martin S. Alexander, 'In Defence of the Maginot Line: Security policy, domestic politics and the economic depression in France,' in Robert Boyce, (ed.) *French Foreign Policy and Defence Policy, 1918-1940* (London, Routledge, 1998) p.175-185.

Allied position to the River Scheldt (or Escaut), termed Plan E, or a bolder intervention, termed Plan D, to the River Dyle.

From September to early October 1939 Plan E dominated inter-Allied discussions. If the Germans attacked it was proposed that the Allies would await them on the French frontier, except to the north-west, where Gamelin intended to advance the Seventh Army to the Breda Estuary in Holland, joining the Dutch Army and securing the estuary of the Escaut.[226] As a result Plan E proposed that the Allies should advance to the River Escaut and hold the line, thus linking the French frontier defences at Maulde with the Belgian defences covering Ghent and Antwerp (see Map 1 above).[227] In September 1939 plans for an advance to the Escaut, pending favourable circumstances, were approved by the French General Gamelin and the COS as the agreed Allied strategy.[228]

In November 1939 General Gamelin and the French High Command revealed to the COS a revision of Plan E, which was the Dyle Plan, or Plan D.[229] This was a more ambitious strategy, which proposed that Allied Forces should push forward to the Dyle River and advance into the Netherlands toward Breda. In so doing the Allies could retain the ten Dutch divisions, secure North Sea communications, and deny the Germans the Dutch ports for launching an offensive against Britain.[230] Moreover, an advance into southern Holland would prevent the Germans from pushing north of Antwerp, which meant controlling the Escaut estuary and not just the river. This advance towards Breda was soon known as the 'Breda Variant', whereby the French Seventh Army would move along the Albert Canal and pivot east into Holland. The operation would depend on French and British forces only, but it was envisaged that the Belgian forces would fall back from the Albert Canal and occupy the river line between Antwerp and Louvain.[231] In this scenario the British Expeditionary Force would be in the favourable position of defending the river line between Louvain and Wavre, a distance of about twenty kilometres, with nine divisions,[232] while

[226] TNA CAB 65/2, 20 (39) 5, 'War Cabinet Conclusions' 19 September 1939, p.1. See also, Donald Alexander, 'Repercussions of the Breda Variant,' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1974, pp. 459–488.
[227] Bond, *France and Belgium*, p.44.
[228] Ibid.
[229] TNA CAB 80/6, COS (39) 162 (S), 'Notes of a meeting held at the Headquarters of General Gamelin, November 9, 1939, p.20.
[230] See Robert A Doughty, *The Breaking Point: Sedan and the fall of France, 1940*, (Mechanicsburg, Stackpole Books 1992), p.12 and Donald Alexander, 'Repercussions of the Breda Variant,' *French Historical Studies 8* (1974), p.464.
[231] TNA CAB 80/6, COS (39) 162 (S), 'Notes of a meeting held at the Headquarters of General Gamelin, November 9, 1939, p.19.
[232] Doughty, *The Breaking Point*, p.17.

the advantages to the French were similar to those that had guided the earlier Plan E. Furthermore, in comparison to waiting on the French frontier, the second plan offered better natural obstacles against the Germans and it would shorten the Allied line by some 70-80 kilometres.[233] France's northern industrial bases would be protected by an advanced line, meaning that this position offered superior offensive possibilities for the future. This new Breda variant proved critical to the events that unfolded in May 1940.

III.II: HOW DID THE PLAN GO WRONG?

In order to assess why the COS came under such criticism for the Dyle Plan, its outcome must be briefly outlined. When the Wehrmacht invaded Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg in the early hours of 10 May 1940, Allied assistance was called for and Gamelin launched Plan D.[234] The Seventh Army advanced into Holland, reaching Tilburg on 11 May, but the main force did not reach Breda due to the swift advance of the Wehrmacht, who attacked the French as they moved northeast towards Breda. The French did not really establish contact with the Dutch, who had been overwhelmed and retreated into the peninsula of Rotterdam, Utrecht and Amsterdam.[235] The weakness of the Allied advance was the sending of a significant portion of mobile reserves through northern Belgium to Breda while the Germans broke through the Ardennes into France in the south. The 'Breda Variant' meant that vital reserves of tanks and men who had been designated to ward off a German invasion were moved northwards towards Breda as the German armoured units moved on the Meuse.[236]

The Breda Variant was meant to secure the battle deep inside Belgian territory, however it has been regarded by historians as an egregious command and an extension of Gamelin's long-term strategy to transpose the defence of France into the Belgian quadrant.[237] The Battle of France in 1940 was effectively decided in favour of Germany after their successful crossing of the Meuse River in the Ardennes region of France and Belgium. The Fall of France came about not through a lack of weaponry, but as a result of a lack of French operational planning to counteract a German breakthrough on French soil. From this point

[233] Gates, *End of the Affair*, p.53.
[234] Bond, *Britain, France, and Belgium, 1939-1940*, p.58.
[235] Doughty, *The Breaking Point*, p.18.
[236] See Donald Alexander, 'Repercussions of the Breda Variant,' *French Historical Studies 8* (1974).
[237] Donald Alexander, 'Repercussions of the Breda Variant,' *French Historical Studies 8* (1974), p.459-488 and Jordan, 'Strategy and Scapegoatism: Reflections on the French National Catastrophe, 1940,' in Blatt (ed.), *The French Defeat*, p.13-38.

on the Wehrmacht concentrated on advancing into France, thereby sowing confusion and disorganisation within the Allied command, control and communication structure.[238]

III.III: WAS THE COS DEFICIENT IN RATIFYING THE DYLE PLAN?

Between September and October 1939 the COS faced a dilemma regarding what action to take in Belgium: 'the invasion of Belgium by the Germans would constitute a very serious threat to Great Britain and France,' and Britain could 'not shrink from using all that we have got if enemy action against either France or ourselves looks like being decisive.'[239] Offensive action would have to be called for if Germany invaded, but the COS had to rationalise Britain's obligation as an ally to France against its reticence towards advancing into Belgium. Therefore, the COS questioned French proposals for the advance into the Low Countries with a series of reports and discussions. From these it is possible to detect some reluctance within the COS towards the plan. As early as 16 September in their report on the 'future course of the war', the COS's opinion towards undertaking an offensive was that 'it would not be sound policy to advance into Belgium.'[240] This reticence was stated again in a report on the French plan to move from the Maginot Line:

> We should not take British troops from prepared positions in France and commit them to Belgium, even to the Western part of the country, unless defensive positions had been thoroughly prepared beforehand.[241]

Thus, in official reports to the War Cabinet the COS displayed a reluctance to engage offensively in Belgium. One reason for this was that the COS assessed that the moving of the BEF from a secure defensible position to the Escaut, and later to Dyle, would open the BEF to attack from the Wehrmacht. The CIGS's diary for September 1939 contains an entry concerning the folly of allowing the BEF to advance into Belgium:

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[238] For more information see. Gates, *End of the Affair*; Michael Glover, *The Fight for the Channel Ports: Calais to Brest, 1940* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985).
[239] TNA CAB 80/4, Chiefs of Staff Memoranda, COS (39) 115 'Memorandum for Communication to the French' 11 November 1939.
[240] TNA CAB 80/2, Chiefs of Staff: Memoranda, 'The Possible Future Course of the War: Appreciation 16th September 1939,' p.6.
[241] TNA CAB 80/2, COS (39) 33, Chiefs of Staff Memorandum, 'Staff Conversations with Belgium' 16 September 1939

> I have not been at all easy over the French project of our going forward to the Scheldt [Escaut] … Even if we only go to the Scheldt, it means coming out of our good prepared positions and going into others which are quite unprepared.[242]

The COS were not alone in this assessment. The War Cabinet, Head of the BEF General Gort, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, and Winston Churchill, all shared the COS's anxiety about an advance into Belgium.[243] The BEF was weak in comparison with the Wehrmacht, so a push into Belgium would result in,

(i) The hasty occupation of a weak and ill-prepared position in the face of an enemy advancing with armoured and motorised formations.
(ii) The occupation of a position in which the Force may become isolated and its communications severed by enemy penetration on its flank.
(iii) The main defensive position for the BEF [therefore] should be based on the existing defences on the Franco-Belgian frontier.[244]

Furthermore, as Ironside told the War Cabinet on 19 September: 'I will not agree to the British Army being out in the position of sitting on the Scheldt [Escaut] facing east.'[245] However, in May 1940 the BEF would find itself in the very positon Ironside had wanted to avoid. From an operational viewpoint the COS's dissatisfaction with Plan D in September 1939 was entirely justified, as the BEF was not large. As historians have noted, there was a profound gulf between the British and French Army in terms of number of troops and equipment in the autumn of 1939.[246] The proposal that the BEF defend the line of the Escaut was, therefore, a gamble that the COS were extremely wary about.

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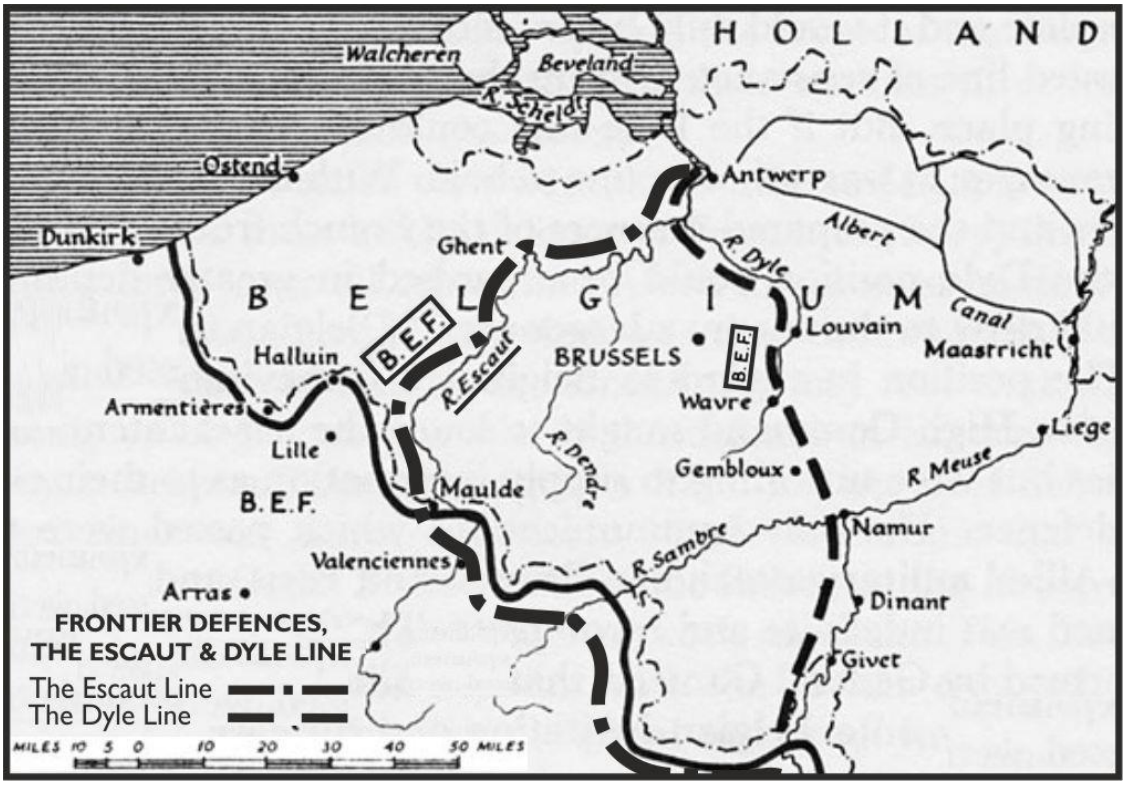
[242] Ironside, *Diaries*, September 23 1939, p.113.
[243] See TNA CAB 65/3, (39) 19, 18 September 1939; TNA CAB 65/3, (39) 20, 19 September; TNA CAB 65/3, (39) 29, 27 September; TNA CAB 66/1, WP (39) 33, 18 September; Harvey, *Diaries*, p.319 and Brain Bond (ed.) *Chiefs of Staff: the Diaries of Lieutenant General Sir Henry Pownall*, 20 September 1939, p.236.
[244] TNA WO 193/ 744, 'Action of British Expeditionary Force: The Event of a German Attack through the Low Countries,' 17 September 1939.
[245] Ibid, September 19 1939, p.112; TNA CAB 65/1, WM (39) 19 5 'War Cabinet Conclusions,' 19 September 1939.
[246] See David French, *Raising Churchill's Army*: *The British Army and the War against Germany 1919–1945*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 2000).



Map 2: The Escaut Plan and Dyle Plan. Escault line not in original map.
Source: L. F. Ellis, *The War in France and Flanders, 1939–40* (London, 1953), p. 23.

One reason for the COS's reticence was due to a desire not to replicate the conditions of the First World War, whereby the BEF awaited the advance of the Germans in prepared positions. For the COS, this would have echoed the trench warfare of the First World War only 25 years earlier. Indeed, this concern was a recurring theme in the COS's appreciation of Plan D. For example, Ironside informed the War Cabinet on 18 September that the BEF would face,

> heavy German mechanised forces… [and that] the Expeditionary Force would be faced with a similar situation as in 1914, which was the thing we most wished to avoid.[247]

The COS, as well as the majority of senior military personnel on both sides of the Channel, had established their careers in the First World War. Lessons had been learned and the COS was reluctant to recreate the stalemate of 1914 in the Low Countries. The British military in particular did not want to recreate trench warfare in Belgium. The sentiment of General Pownall, writing in his diary in September 1939, echoed this fear of miring the BEF along the River Scheldt:

[247] TNA CAB 65/2, WM (39) 19 5, War Cabinet Conclusions, 18 September 1939, p.1.

> None of us are too keen on that idea… we had a pretty fair bellyful last time of fighting in the Flanders plain with all its mud and slime, not to mention its bad memories.[248]

It was assumed that the BEF would become irrevocably committed to the Belgian battlefield, as in the First World War. Furthermore, from a British perspective,

> There was a risk that if a German attack was made through Belgium, the British Commander would receive orders from the French Commander-in-Chief to advance from his prepared lines to help the Belgian Army. Faced with the risk of a second Mons, the British Commander-in-Chief would feel bound to protest against any such order.[249]

Pownall, like Ironside, had experienced the brutality of trench warfare first hand.[250] The COS had no desire to duplicate the perceived strategic mistakes of the First World War. As Ironside wrote in September 1939,

> It is absolutely necessary not to have any encounter battles such as Mons and Le Cateau in the last war in the centre of Belgium.[251]

In relation to the proposed French plans therefore, the COS's perspective was coloured by the legacy of the First World War. The COS dreaded a war of attrition, so instead of blindly agreeing with the French it seriously questioned how the French Plan D would affect the BEF. The COS considered how the strategy would work in practice, and its risks and rewards were weighed up.

The COS, moreover, was sceptical over the benefits of advancing and securing South-Eastern Holland, which was central to the Dyle plan. The JPC evaluated the French plans to occupy the mouth of the Scheldt:

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[248] Pownall, *Diaries*, 18 September 1939, p.235.
[249] TNA CAB 65/3, WM 39 29, 'War Cabinet Conclusions' 27 September 1939, p.1.
[250] See Brian Bond, 'Ironside' in John Kennedy ed. *Churchill Generals* (Abacus, 1991); Bond, (ed.), *Chief of Staff: the Diaries of the General Sir Henry Pownall* (Leo Cooper, 1972).
[251] TNA WO 106/1701, 'Note on Strategic Situation in Europe,' 16 September 1939, p.5.

> We do not consider that the occupation of the islands of Walchren and South Develand could have any effect in reducing the scale of naval or air threat to this country, consequent upon the German occupation of Holland… We feel sure that the French High Command is fully alive to the time factor and will not commit the BEF forces to an encounter battle.[252]

The JPC and the COS agreed that Britain could do little to assist the French in their advance to south-east Holland and that no British troops would be deployed.[253] The minutes and memoranda of the COS and the British War Cabinet in the first three months of the war critically evaluated the French plans to advance into Belgium and Holland. As a result of these evaluations the COS agreed to both Plans, but with the caveat that the BEF would be deployed only to certain locations and with French support on either side. The COS won ground and the French agreed to this concession. As a result the BEF would be limited to an offensive at the Louvain-Wavre section of the line (see Map 2).

To a certain extent the COS showed foresight in their appreciation of the French plans. For example, COS reports considered the possibility of the BEF being attacked from the air whilst advancing, and recognised the importance of prepared positions in Belgium. While this is true, however, the COS's foresight was limited. What does not appear to have been carefully appreciated was whether the BEF could be extricated from Belgium should the line be breached, as happened. If the COS or the JPC did realise that the Germans would advance through the Ardennes or that the Meuse could be crossed, this insight is not reflected in their discussions and appreciations. Equally, although the JPC was critical of the advance to the Scheldt estuary, it did not assess that the decision would deprive France of her central reserve of troops - an oversight that would prove fundamental to the failure of the Dyle Plan.

A failure of the COS was that it set aside its reluctance towards Plan D for diplomatic reasons rather than strategic ones. Despite reservations and concerns over how the plan would unfold, it was ratified and Allied obligations to support the French frontier won over. Between October and November French intelligence correctly reported that Germany was

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[252] TNA CAB 80/5, COS (39) 117 (JP), Chiefs of Staff: Memorandum, 'German Invasion of Holland,' 10 November 1939.

[253] The COS approved the report in a memorandum dated 18 November. TNA CAB 66/3, COS (39) 136, Chiefs of Staff: Memorandum, 18 November.

planning to attack Belgium, however due to poor weather conditions on 7 November, the German attack was postponed.[254] The most important consequence of this false alarm was that it focused the COS's attention on the likelihood of Germany attacking the Low Countries and subsequently France. Prior to this, Ironside had predicted that such an attack would not be likely until the spring of 1940. Thus, the immediacy of the threat put pressure on the COS to ratify the French plan.

There may have been disagreement between the COS and the French High Command over plans for the Low Countries, but the COS was not oblivious to the importance of the arena to the war. As the COS stated in an official memorandum to the French High Command on 11 November 1939,

> We consider that a German invasion of Belgium would constitute action which looks like being decisive, and therefore we should not shrink from using all that we have got to defeat it.[255]

Furthermore, the Air Ministry had concluded that the securing of the Low Countries was important for preventing the Germans from establishing air bases from which their bombers and fighters could attack Britain, while, at the same time, an advance would bring the RAF closer to the Ruhr.[256] This was an added incentive to ratifying the plan, as it complemented the economic war policy agreed by the COS of targeting German industry in the Ruhr valley.

Despite reservations, the COS was also not in a strong position to dictate the actions to be taken in the Low Countries. Britain was the weaker partner militarily, and the COS and the French High Command both recognised that the Low Countries presented the clear possibility of early, quick and complete defeat for France. Nonetheless, the plan was ratified due to Britain's sense of obligation to France. It behoved the COS to think of its ally instead of making unilateral decisions. By committing less than ten divisions to France, Ironside believed Britain must tread carefully, as 'the French count nothing as a British contribution which is not actually to be seen in France.'[257] The COS had

[254] See Bond, *Britain, France and Belgium,* p.27.
[255] TNA CAB 80/4, Chiefs of Staff Memoranda, COS (39) 115 'Memorandum for Communication to the French' 11 November 1939.
[256] See Gates, *End of the Affair*, p.53.
[257] Ironside, *Diaries*, 30 December 1939, p.191.

reservations over the Dyle Plan, but were receiving reports that encouraged their acceptance of it, such as this one from Brigadier Spears, the British Liaison Officer in France, who observed,

> Exasperation in the countryside at the fact that France and France alone appears to be bearing the main brunt… Many French people… argue… [that] they have perhaps been duped and are fighting for England.[258]

French discontent was also made known at inter-allied service meetings. At an Allied Military Committee meeting on 12 November 1939, ten pages of minutes reveal a lively debate.[259]

The COS correctly identified the failings of the Dyle Plan, namely the advance towards South-Eastern Holland by the French. Yet these appreciations were internal and the COS failed to communicate its reservations or attempt to change the plan; in this regard, the COS can be judged lacking. However, the COS did not display poor judgement, but rather quite the opposite. Instead, the problem was the COS's lack of forcefulness in pressing its opinion.

In the end, Britain's obligation was to support her ally and this consideration superseded the doubts of the COS. However, in doing so, it must be considered whether there was a resulting dereliction of duty. The COS's primary duty was to the War Cabinet and Britain's defence. In this function, the COS undertook rigorous assessments over the Dyle Plan and the committee was reluctant towards its ratification. The COS's secondary duty was to consider her ally, supporting the French militarily and upholding the security of the French frontier. In many respects the COS could not abandon France to its fate. The COS therefore did acquiesce, not out of a dereliction of duty, but out of a sense of duty to its ally.

[258] TNA CAB 63/83, 'Letter from Spears to Hankey,' 26 September 1939.
[259] TNA CAB 85/1, MR (39) 68, Anglo-French Liaison Committee, 'Sixty-Eighth meeting,' 12 November 1939.

III.IV: WHAT DOES THE COS'S INTERACTION WITH THE FRENCH REVEAL ABOUT THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS?

In view of the COS's reticence for any advance into Belgium, it might have been anticipated that it would strongly object to Plan D. Instead, the plan was ratified. An analysis of the meeting at which this happened provides insight into the failings of the COS in making decisions and formulating policy. The decision to action Plan D was made at a meeting between the COS and the French High Command on 9 November 1939. This meeting was attended by Newall, Ironside, Gort and Pownall, on behalf of Britain, and Gamelin, Georges and Vuillemin for France. Only two, Newall and Ironside, represented the COS. Gort and Pownall represented the BEF.

Prior to the start of the meeting, the COS's position was that it would accept an advance into Belgium if Germany invaded, as this would be considered 'a decisive event, and that we should use all means in our power to stop it,' but they had reservations about French proposals for the Seventh Army to advance into Holland.[260] On 2 November, the JPC had recommended against supporting the operation, concluding that 'such action would be expensive in casualties and would have no effect in the long run.'[261]

Newall as Chairman, alongside Ironside, were delegated representatives of the COS and should have communicated the COS's position to the French. However, they did not. Instead, discussions reveal that Ironside steered the conversation towards topics such as the BEF deployment and French Command over the BEF, both areas that were under his remit as Head of the Army. The CIGS did not press British concerns towards the advancement of the Seventh Army. Indeed, when the topic arose, Ironside almost dismissed the COS's reservations over an advance to Holland with a one-sentence response,

> At present it seems very doubtful whether this difficult and complicated operation is worth taking on.[262]

[260] TNA CAB 79/2, COS (39) 71, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes,' 7 November 1939, p.2.
[261] TNA CAB (39) 108, Chiefs of Staff: Memorandum, 'Military Implication of a German Invasion of Holland,' 2 November 1939.
[262] TNA CAB 21/1310, 10A, 'Brief Note of a Conference at General Gamelin's Headquarters on 9 November 1939,' p.4.

Ironside failed in his duty as a member of the COS by not communicating the assessments made by the JPC. Archival sources reveal a duplicity between Ironside's public and private thinking. An insight into Ironside's opinion can be gained from the notes made by Air Vice-Marshal Evill at the COS meeting the following day:

> At this morning's COS Meeting, it was quite clear that the CIGS supported the French that the occupation of the island to the north of the Scheldt would be a most important corollary of any plan to counter German aggression against Holland. [263]

These notes may explain Ironside's failure to interrogate the French proposals. According to Evill, Ironside appears to have believed in the advance towards Holland since he believed that the occupation of this and other islands was vital in denying Germany a base to engage naval and air attacks against Britain. Yet, at the previous day's meeting between the two High Commands, Ironside did not reveal his agreement with the French proposals – which, if he had stated these, would have gone against the official position of the COS. Thus, if Ironside harboured any private support for an advance to Holland, he kept this to himself and there is no record in the COS minutes of this opinion.

However, it was also the responsibility of Newall, as Chairman of the COS, to dictate the course of the discussion with the French High Command. It is interesting to note that it was not Ironside's responsibility, but Newall's, to formally agree with the French proposals and critique them. In the minutes of the meeting, in which questions and their answers are recorded, Ironside is noted to have spoken five times and Newall only once.[264] Newall should have carried some authority as Chairman of the COS, particularly in communicating the views of the committee. As Air Vice-Marshal Evill noted at the COS meeting the following day,

[263] TNA CAB 21/1310, 9A, 'Air-Vice-Marshal Evill: Record of 10 November COS meeting' 10 November 1939.
[264] TNA CAB 21/1310, 11A, 'Notes of a Conference at General Gamelin's Headquarters on 9 November 1939.'

> I am certain CAS [Newall] does not agree with these views, but is naturally diffident about querying a plan upon which so much emphasis is laid by the French.[265]

Newall clearly had an opinion and it was his role as Chairman to steer the discussions in order to bring the COS's viewpoint to the table. His diffidence and tendency to defer to those with superior knowledge, in this case Ironside's knowledge of the military, weakened the COS's influence over the Dyle Plan. Consequently, the meeting ratified the plan with no dissent from the COS. This is significant for this study of the COS as a decision-making body, as clearly Newall and Ironside failed to represent the thinking of the COS in these face-to-face negotiations.

On a subsequent return to France the following day, when all members of the COS were present, the failings of Ironside and Newall were made clear by the COS's decision to instruct the JPC to draft another report on the advance to Holland. [266] It was decided that 'more information was required as to the reasons underlying the French plan' and that this should be obtained through the AMC.[267] However, the process towards ratifying the plan had begun, with the War Cabinet approving the BEF's advance to a forward position. Subsequently, the policy was formally endorsed by the Allies at the Supreme War Council of 17 November.[268]

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the COS between September and November 1939 reveals its successes and failures as a decision-making and policy-making body. Its reassessment of the long-war strategy, which had been agreed prior to the war, led to a realistic appreciation of the armed services and an endorsement of Britain's previously decided defensive course. Therefore, throughout September 1939, the COS can be judged to have worked effectively in fulfilling its obligation of determining a Grand Strategy, which contrasts with their pre-war record of inaccurately analysing Britain's capabilities.

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[265] TNA CAB 21/1310, 9A, 'Air-Vice-Marshal Evill: Record of 10 November COS meeting' 10 November 1939.
[266] TNA CAB 79/2, COS (39) 74, Chiefs of Staff: Minutes, 'The Low Countries,' p.2.
[267] Ibid.
[268] TNA CAB 99/3, SWC (39/40) 3, 'Supreme War Council: Minutes,' 17 November 1939.

It has been shown that between September and October 1939, despite France's move towards favouring an offensive front in the Balkans, the COS demonstrated rigour in standing its ground and in continuing to support the defensive long-war strategy. Moreover, the COS displayed strategic foresight in assessing that the invasion of the Balkans could have led to Italy joining Germany and the Wehrmacht invading the Balkans. The COS performed its duty by quantifying the fact that Britain could not afford the expenditure of manpower and resources required for an offensive at this time, and it demonstrated cohesion as a committee in its commitment to the long-war strategy.

Between October and November 1939, it has also been revealed that, despite obvious reservations, the COS acquiesced to French demands for a planned assault into the Low Countries instead of rebutting the proposals. The historiography of the period has cast the COS as weak-willed and complacent in approving Plan D. However, the analysis undertaken in this chapter has shown that the COS was not complacent and did in fact carry out rigorous appreciations of the Plan, and that the British Military were reticent towards it due to a desire to avoid First World War battlefield conditions. By undertaking such analysis, the COS fulfilled its duty in assessing the consequences for Britain's Armed Services. However, it was the COS's duty as an ally to France that ultimately guided their decision to endorse the Plan. The COS's acquiescence, therefore, was not simply, as claimed by Bond, out of a dereliction of duty, but as a consequence of obligation and sense of duty to France.

Finally, an investigation into the Dyle Plan as a case study of the COS as a decision-making and policy-making body has revealed weaknesses within the COS. The COS had correctly assessed that the despatch of the Seventh Army to South-Eastern Holland was a dangerous proposal. However, the COS failed to impress its views on the French or attempt to change the Plan. In particular, an evaluation of Ironside and Newall's meeting with the French High Command on the day of the plan's ratification demonstrates their lack of forcefulness in communicating the opinion of the whole committee. Indeed, the meeting reveals that Ironside dominated over Newall and the proceedings as a whole. This is significant for our study of the COS as a decision-making body, as it can be seen that both Newall and Ironside acted as individuals at a crucial point rather than as representatives of the COS. At this point in the Phoney War, the COS can, therefore, be judged lacking as a united decision-making body, and so the next chapter will assess whether this imbalance was an anomaly, or the norm.

3. THE LURE OF THE NORTH: OPERATION CATHERINE AND FINLAND

The primary task of this chapter is to assess the role the COS played in the formulation of decisions made by the British Government to pursue an offensive action in Finland between October 1939 and February 1940. Although an account of this period reveals confusion, procrastination, and failure, this does not detract from its importance. This chapter illustrates why the COS chose to focus on Finland, namely that it offered immediate strategic and political goals for the Allies in Scandinavia. Most of these revolved around the question of Swedish iron ore and the extent to which this vital commodity could be denied to the German war machine. This chapter will concentrate upon the deficiencies of co-ordination between the COS and Winston Churchill, COS and the War Cabinet, and between individual Chiefs of Staff, all of which contributed to the inactivity of Allied response. Particular attention will be paid to the role Winston Churchill - and later CIGS Ironside - played in shifting British strategy. Three main areas of interest will be examined to evaluate COS conduct during the Winter War: political interference in the planning and conduct of the operation, divergence of military policy, and the influence of Ironside.

There are several excellent monographs on British and French responses to the Winter War, ranging from histories dealing specifically with Britain's preoccupation with Finland to analyses on the influence of the Foreign Office's Northern Department.[269] There are also useful studies on Norway and British interests in Scandinavia throughout the Phoney War.[270] The verdict in the historiography is overwhelmingly one of folly and incompetence.

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[269] Craig Gerrard, *The Foreign Office and Finland 1938-1940: Diplomatic Sideshow*, (London: Frank Cass, 2005); Max Jakobsan, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War* (Cambridge, CUP 1961).; Patrick Salmon, 'Great Britain, The Soviet Union and Finland at the beginning of the Second World War,' in J. Hiden and T. Lane (eds.) *The Baltic and Outbreak of the Second World War* (Cambridge, CUP 1992); Markku Ruotsila, *Churchill and Finland: Winston Churchill's Thoughts and Actions regarding Finland, 1900 -1955* (Helsinki: Otava, 2000); Douglas Clark, *Three Days to Catastrophe* (London: Hammond, 1966) and Jukka Nevakivi, *The Appeal that Was Never Made* (London: Hurst & Co, 1976).

[270] The most relevant histories are: John Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign* (Cambridge, 2017); T. K. Derry, *The Campaign in Norway* (London: HMSO. 1952), W. N. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade* (London: HMSO, 1952), David Dilks, 'Great Britain and Scandinavia in the Phoney War', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2 (1977), Patrick Salmon, 'British security interests in Scandinavia and the Baltic 1919-1939' in in J. Hiden and A. Loit (eds.) *The Baltic in International Relations between the Two World Wars* (Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988); R A. C. Parker, 'Britain, France and Scandinavia, 1939-1940', *History*, 61 (1976)

Analysis by Imlay of British and French relations reveals British intervention to be a product of increased reliance on French Allies, who were becoming increasingly interested in Scandinavia as a theatre for war.[271] The view taken in this chapter, which Bayer also supports, is that economic considerations were the central motivation, but that this strategy ultimately failed due to a lack of military capability.[272]

The COS's impact in the Winter War and Operation Catherine has, to some extent, been assessed by the aforementioned historians, however, this has taken place on the basis of very limited documentary material; thus, most scholars have deemed the COS worthy of only passing inclusion in their studies.[273] In fact, there are only two scholarly studies on the COS's interactions during the Winter War – Dr Bernard Kelly's 2009 article and John Kiszley's history of the Norway Campaign.[274] Kelly's landmark study provides a solid analysis of the Committee and rightly argues that the COS's

> …confidence in a Scandinavian expedition was ill-founded and that their frustration with the perceived political inaction of the Cabinet drove them to suggest reckless action.[275]

Kelly's research and analysis of the COS's memos and papers provide a template which this thesis seeks to emulate. However the influence of CIGS Edmund Ironside, Winston Churchill's earlier planned Operation Catherine, and the War Cabinet's support for action in Scandinavia are not fully accounted for in Kelly's analysis of the COS's change of British policy, as they are here. This thesis also disagrees with Kelly's conclusion that the 'Chiefs failed in their primary duty to provide clear and coherent guidance to the Cabinet.'[276]

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and Francois Bedarida, 'France, Britain and the Nordic Countries,' *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 21 (1977); Kersaudy, *Norway 1940* (London: Collins, 1990).

[271] Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, p. 357.

[272] J. A. Bayer, 'British Policy Towards the Russo-Finnish War 1939-40,' *Canadian Journal of History,* 16, no.1 (April 1981) pp. 27-65.

[273] For example, in the J. A. Bayer's article on the change in British policy, the Chiefs of Staff's contribution is portrayed as minimal.

[274] Bernard Kelly, 'Drifting Towards War: The British Chiefs of Staff, the USSR and the Winter War, November 1939-March 1940', *Contemporary British History*, 23 (September 2009) pp. 267-291 and John Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign.*

[275] Ibid. pp. 268-69.

[276] Kelly, 'Drifting Towards War,' p. 286.

More recent research, published as this thesis was being submitted, is John Kiszley's *Anatomy of a Campaign*, which focuses on the Norway Campaign but concludes that the:

> Political leadership and direction were weak; neither the War Cabinet nor the Chiefs of Staff were thinking strategically… [And that the COS also] appeared to be wedded to their plan, come what may.[277]

Kiszley's account is a strong addition to the historiography and one of the few that rightly includes the COS at the centre of the Norway fiasco. This chapter agrees with and adds to Kiszley's analysis that Ironside dominated the COS, and that leadership and direction from War Cabinet was weak. However, the conclusion that individual COS were weak and inadequate is simplistic, judging the COS on the actions of a catastrophic campaign and failing to appreciate the COS within the context of the Phoney War. As this chapter argues, through November to February 1940 Scandinavia offered a theatre of war away from France and crucially enabled the denial of iron ore to Germany. This chapter concludes, like Kiszley, that the campaign failed due to weak leadership and an inept decision-making process.[278]

In this chapter the COS and the Winter War are each given due weight, however due to Dr Bernard Kelly's analysis of the topic, particular emphasis is placed on CIGS Edmund Ironside and the COS's place within the war administration. The intention is that British and COS interest in operations in Scandinavia must be seen within the dual context of Winston Churchill and Edmund Ironside. Indeed, this study suggests that Ironside dominated the COS and made operational and policy-making errors.

I: Context: The COS's Interest in Scandinavia

Scandinavia had featured in British strategic planning well before the Second World War and did so increasingly from September 1939. On 4 September 1939 the COS, on the instigation of the Foreign Secretary, provided the War Cabinet with an appreciation of British response to a German attack on Norway.[279] In the report the Joint Planners noted that,

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[277] John Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign*, p.46.
[278] Ibid.
[279] TNA CAB 66/1, COS (39) 7, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Memorandum' 'Norwegian Neutrality' 4 September 1939.

> On balance, the importance of Norway as a wartime source of supply and facilities to Germany will probably be greater than her importance as a source of supply and facilities to Britain and her Allies. In particular Germany must necessarily obtain the greater proportion of her essential supplies of Swedish iron ore through the Norwegian port of Narvik. A refusal by Norway to continue exporting iron ore from Narvik would have a very large economic effect on Germany.[280]

Nonetheless, despite an appreciation as early as September 1939 that iron ore would become important, there was no contingency planning and within the COS there was no forethought as to the direction of British policy regarding an offensive in Norway. For example, the appreciation acknowledged that a German invasion of Norway by sea would carry 'very serious risks' for Britain. The report also concluded that any German operations 'against Norway's western seaboard can be dismissed as *impractical for this reason*.'[281] However this assumption was wrong, and would be the course Germany would take in the invasion of Norway. It is an interesting illustration of British policy-making in this period that although such a major event as the Norway Campaign had been foreseen, little had been done to cater for the eventuality. The War Cabinet agreed to the COS recommendation that Britain would come to Norway's assistance and this support was duly communicated to the Norwegian Government. However, the COS paper with its flawed assumptions went unchallenged and would, according to the official historian of the Second World War J.R.M Butler, turn out 'to be a miscalculation of critical importance.'[282]

The realisation that a new policy towards Scandinavia would be necessary emerged slowly for the COS and was in large part the result of a combination of Churchill and Ironside driving it forward as well as events which were unfolding. The Russian invasion of Finland on 29 November concentrated Allied interest in the theatre although assistance to Finland was quickly limited to material support. The Ministry of Economic Warfare played an important role in persuading the COS of the importance of Scandinavia as a theatre of war. Between September and December 1939 ore shipments to Germany from Lulea in Norway

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[280] TNA CAB 66/1, COS (39) 7, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Memorandum' 'Norwegian Neutrality' 4 September 1939, p.1
[281] Ibid, p.1-2.
[282] James Butler, *Grand Strategy*, Vol.2, (London, HMSO 1971) p.93.

were more than double the same period in 1938 and from Oxelosund almost double.[283] On 27 November 1939 the MEW produced a memorandum on the economic consequences of stopping the exportation of iron ore. The MEW supported this action by arguing that it would cause Germany to suffer 'acute industrial embarrassment' by the spring of 1940 and importantly

(a) A complete stoppage of Swedish exports of iron ore to Germany now would, barring unpredictable developments, end the war in a few months.
(b) Germany must import in the first year of war at least 9 to 12 million tonnes of Swedish iron ore, if she is not to risk an industrial breakdown, whether military activity increases or not.[284]

The MEW was unable to guarantee decisive results from the stoppage of iron ore. However, in these circumstances, Finland seemed to offer many possibilities; on the periphery, yet not remote, it provided potentially major gains for waging both economic and naval warfare against Germany – areas where the Allies thought they had the advantage. It was hoped that through this initiative Britain might gain more time for rearmament and so be able to significantly weaken the German capacity for war-making. From this point onwards, Scandinavia dominated British strategy until May 1940. In February 1940 the British and French Governments decided to send an expeditionary force to Scandinavia, ostensibly to help Finland. They planned that this force would land at Narvik in Norway and seize the iron ore mines in northern Sweden before providing any military support to the Finns.[285] Such a plan required, at the very least, the acquiescence of the Norwegians and Swedes, which was extremely unlikely given the two countries' determined neutrality. Nonetheless, British preparations went ahead until they were halted by the Finnish acceptance of an armistice on 13 March 1940, the Finns having rightly concluded that aid from Britain would have been of extremely limited value.[286]

[283] Patrick Salmon, 'Churchill, the Admiralty and the Narvik Traffic September-November 1939', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 4 (1979), p.320.
[284] TNA FO 371/23659, 1/81/1, MEW 'Supplies of Swedish Iron Ore,' 27 November 1939, para.2.
[285] See Kersaudy, *Norway 1940*.
[286] Ibid.

II: Powerful Personality: Churchill and Scandinavia

One of the reasons that the COS's decision to propose intervention in Scandinavia proved a fiasco was the lack of a strong structure of decision-making and planning which made COS policy vulnerable to political pressures. This prevented the COS selecting and maintaining a consistent policy, and also distorted planning and disrupted the conduct of the operations. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, exercised a major influence over the planning and conduct of the COS as regards operations in Scandinavia. Churchill held that offensive action was essential for winning the war. From September 1939 to the spring of 1940 a majority of the COS and Joint Planners were sceptical of the feasibility of Churchill's schemes for operations in Scandinavia.

To fully understand the COS's ventures in Scandinavia, it is important to examine Churchill's proposed operation. Although it was never ratified, it was the first serious attempt to change the COS's defensive policy and it focused attention on Scandinavia as a front to conduct operations. The link between Operation Catherine, as it was later known, and future British interests in Scandinavia has never been discussed, even although it provides a case study of Churchill's interactions with the Chiefs and, in particular, First Sea Lord Dudley Pound. Therefore, it is necessary to provide some brief context to the operation and the Chiefs of Staff Committee's response to it.

A proclivity for independent operations characterised Winston Churchill's position as First Lord of the Admiralty and later his Premiership. His particular concern at the Admiralty during the Phoney War was for action in Scandinavia. Churchill was an important figure in the conduct of the COS as he was a member of the Military Co-ordination Committee and was also First Lord of the Admiralty. Through these positions Churchill was able to cultivate the Baltic as an arena for future operations. In March 1939 Churchill first mentioned the project by outlining a scenario in which Russia would be at war with Germany and in which the British Navy could use Kronstadt as its chief base.[287] He stated that,

[287] For more information see Ruotsila, *Churchill and Finland*, p.73.

> Scandinavian supplies, Swedish ore, and above all, protection against Russian descents on the long, undefended northern coast-line of Germany… make it imperative for Germany to dominate the Baltic.[288]

On 25 July Ironside added to these Churchillian objectives the ability to 'paralyse the Germans and immobilize many German divisions.'[289] Appointed First Lord of the Admiralty on 3 September 1939, Churchill was now in a position to translate his ideas into reality, and he moved quickly. Three days after his appointment, on 6 September, he instructed the Naval Planning Staff to formulate 'a plan for forcing a passage into the Baltic,'[290] and then, on 12 September, he issued a long minute about an operation, which he dubbed Operation 'Catherine', after Empress Catherine the Great of Russia.[291]

Churchill's detailed memorandum, outlined over seven pages, reveals how he proposed for disrupting German sea communication with Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Soviet Union. As Churchill wrote in his memorandum, 'It is the supreme naval offensive open to the Royal Navy. The isolation of Germany from Scandinavia would intercept the supplies of iron ore, food and all other trade.'[292] Churchill's operation had four broad objectives. Firstly, it would force Germany to concentrate her Navy in the Baltic and consequently relieve pressure on British merchant shipping and escorting naval vessels. Secondly, he assessed the Baltic as a strategic arena for offensive operations and feared that the Royal Navy would through the long-war strategy become defensive minded, and that 'the search for a naval offensive must be incessant.'[293] Catherine offered the possibility to 'influence neutral opinion in our favour' while strengthening British morale.[294] Thirdly, the operation could influence Russia's stance in the war, or as Churchill expressed in his memoir, Catherine would 'hold out a hand to Russia in a manner likely to be decisive upon the whole Soviet Policy and strategy.'[295] However, during the war he observed that the operation on Russia 'would be far reaching, but we cannot count on this.'[296] Fourthly, the 'isolation of

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[288] Chatfield Papers, CHT/6/4, 'Churchill to Chatfield,' 31 March 1939.
[289] Ironside, *Diaries*, 25 July 1939, p.84.
[290] Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm,* (London, Harper) p.363.
[291] TNA ADM 205/4, First Sea Lord's Personal War Record, File no.2, 'Catherine,' 12 September 1939.
[292] Ibid, p.4.
[293] TNA ADM 205/4, Winston Churchill to Pound, 20 September 1939, 'handwritten after Pound's 'Notes on 'C.'
[294] TNA ADM 205/4, First Sea Lord's Personal War Record, File no.2, 'Catherine,' Minute by Churchill, 20 September 1939.
[295] Churchill to Admiral Pound, 20 September 1939, in Martin Gilbert (ed.), *the Churchill War Papers*, vol. I: At the *Admiralty*, *September 1939–May 1940* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), p.127.
[296] TNA ADM 199/1928, Minute by Churchill, 29 October 1939.

Germany from Scandinavia would intercept the supplies of iron ore and food and all other trade.'[297]

What is striking is that in September 1939 Churchill placed no emphasis on iron ore exports as the primary reason for carrying out Operation Catherine. It was one of several motives, but not the primary one. Neither did Churchill describe the stoppage of iron ore as decisive or as a way of concluding the war quickly. The argument that the interruption of iron ore supplies was the road to victory only emerged in December. It would not therefore be incorrect to attribute iron ore as the overriding reason for Operation Catherine's inception. It would not be until November and December 1939 that Churchill would see the desirability of Catherine in terms of iron ore. As Churchill wrote on 23 November: 'May is quite early enough for stopping the ore, and also may fit in better with operations of the armies and Air Force.'[298] Thus, Operation Catherine can be seen as an attempt by Churchill to change British offensive policy. Churchill wanted to use the naval operation to erase the impression of Britain's weakness, to stop – either through diplomatic arrangement or by force – shipments of Scandinavian iron ore, and to persuade the Soviet Union to end their pact with Nazi Germany.

Churchill's policy had to be brought in the first instance to Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord. How they interacted is illuminating in comprehending the decision-making process. Anticipating opposition, Churchill ordered his own appreciation on Operation Catherine. On 21 September, the recently retired Admiral of the Fleet, the Earl of Cork and Orrey, was made Commander-in-Chief designate of the operation and was brought into the Admiralty to plan the operation in detail.[299] An offensively-minded Commander, Cork could be relied upon to produce the assessment Churchill wanted; he did not disappoint. On 26 September Cook assessed Operation Catherine as a 'military undertaking' and concluded that it was '…perfectly feasible – hazardous no doubt but, for that very reason, containing the germ of a great triumph.'[300] Churchill bypassed Dudley Pound and the naval staff by ordering his own report, even though it had been agreed in the first meeting between the two that 'on no account should this [an operation in the Baltic] take place until we have

[297] TNA ADM 205/4, First Sea Lord's Personal War Record, File no.2, 'Catherine,' 12 September 1939, p.4.
[298] TNA, ADM 199/1928, First Sea Lord Papers, Churchill to Pound, 23 November 1939, p.2.
[299] See Arthur J. Marder, *From Dardanelles to Oran: Studies of the Royal Navy in War and Peace 1915-1940*, (London, Oxford University Press 1974) p.141-142.
[300] TNA ADM 205/4, First Sea Lord's Personal War Record, File no.2, Cork memorandum, 'Catherine,' 26 September 1939, p.1.

taken up all possible Norwegian shipping.'[301] Churchill had pre-empted any discussion, and had put the onus on Pound and his colleagues to disavow the action.

Against this background, in September 1939 the Ministry of Economic Warfare drew attention to two target areas for the Allies: Germany's supply of oil from Romania and its import of iron ore from Scandinavia. The French were also arguing that operations should be considered in the Baltic. The COS were wary of involvement in Scandinavia. On 4 September the COS had recommended to the War Cabinet that despite the importance of iron ore to Germany, Britain's 'assistance could only be indirect.'[302] In other words, no operations in Scandinavia. Furthermore, in 'Our Strategic Policy' produced on 31 October the COS envisaged that 'immediate aims' for Britain would be 'in two separate theatres – in the West and in the Middle East.' [303] No mention was made in the appreciation, produced only a month before the Winter War began, of Scandinavia and the importance of iron ore. This exclusion is important, as on 23 October 1939 the COS were asked by the War Cabinet to advise what Britain's position should be in the light of Soviet aggression against Finland, following a telegram from the Finnish Government seeking assistance. That the COS were complacent regarding the likelihood of a Soviet invasion of Finland is shown in the minutes:

> In the discussion which took place the Chiefs of Staff were unanimous that, owing to geographical and weather conditions, it would be out of the question for Russia to attempt to invade Norway and Sweden through Finland during the winter months with any hope of success.[304]

The COS's response echoes the conclusion presented by the Joint Planning Committee on 6 October 1939: the main Soviet threat was to Iran, Iraq, and India, and Russian submarines might join the German counter blockade of the British Isles.[305] Subsequently, the COS underestimated the threat to Finland and were more concerned that any action against the

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[301] TNA ADM 205/4, First Sea Lord's Personal War Record, File no.1, Mintues of Meetings in First Lord's Room: 1st Meeting,' 28th September 1939, p.3.
[302] TNA CAB 80/1, COS (39) 7, 'Chiefs of Staff: Memorandum' 4 September 1939, p.4.
[303] TNA CAB 80/4, COS (39) 102, 'Chiefs of Staff: Memorandum' 'Review of the Strategical Situation' 31 October 1939, p.10.
[304] TNA CAB 79/1, COS (39) 64, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes' 31 October 1939, p.2.
[305] TNA CAB 80/3, 'Appreciation of the Situation created by the Russo-German Agreement' Note by the Joint Planning Sub-Committee, 6 October 1939, COS (39) 66 (J.P). and TNA CAB 80/3, 'Soviet Aggression Against Finland or Other Scandinavian Countries,' 27 October 1939, COS (39) 104 (J.P). p.4.

Soviet Union could weaken Allied interest in the Far East.[306] Overall, the main opinion of the three service Chiefs was that: 'any advantage which might accrue from the support of neutrals…will outweigh the disadvantage which we should incur.'[307]

In the report that was submitted to the War Cabinet the COS suggested that a small British force based in Narvik could 'have an effect out of all proportion to its size.'[308] However the COS were against British intervention in Scandinavia and argued that,

> The invasion of Finland, itself, however, would involve no military threat to the Allies… In our view we and France are at present in no position to undertake additional burdens and we cannot, therefore, from a military point of view, recommend that we should not declare war on Russia. On the contrary, we should endeavour to postpone the issue until we are stronger.[309]

The opinions of the COS were more predictable than the actions of Churchill, but they too constituted a form of external pressure on the sorts of conclusions the Cabinet might reach. The COS in October 1939 were wrong in their conclusion that Russia would never invade Finland, and the Joint Planners were mistaken in their assessment that 'a land invasion would be a long and difficult operation for the Russians.'[310] Such scepticism expressed in the COS minutes shows that Britain's military advisers had underestimated Russia. The JPC minutes are vague as to the source of the Joint Planners' intelligence and why they drastically underestimated Russian might, simply stating 'discussion on the intricate problem presented took place.'[311] However, the JPC and JIC did receive a report from Captain H. Clanchy, British naval attaché in Moscow, stating that:[312]

> The USSR would in no circumstances be fit to undertake an offensive war… any form of active warfare prosecuted on land, in the air or at sea would bring about a breakdown in the internal economy… Apart from this vital aspect, the

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[306] TNA CAB 80/3, 'Soviet Aggression against Finland or Other Scandinavian Countries,' 27 October 1939, COS (39) 104 (J.P). p.5.
[307] Ibid.
[308] TNA CAB 80/4, COS (39) 105, 'Chiefs of Staff: Memorandum' 'Soviet aggression against Finland or other Scandinavian Countries, 31 October, p.1.
[309] Ibid, p.1 and 6.
[310] TNA CAB 84/8, JP (39) 69, 'Joint Planning: Memorandum' 'Assistance to Norway and Sweden' 25 October 1939 p.4.
[311] TNA CAB 84/1, JP (39) 8, 'Joint Planning: Minutes' 26 October 1939, p.1.
[312] Naval Attaches to Embassies and Legations, *The Navy List*, July 1939, p.548. [http://digital.nls.uk/92694226] Last Accessed: 05/08/17.

> 'High Command' and 'Staffs' of the fighting forces are incapable of conducting real war… If the USSR decides to declare against Great Britain, it will take NO ACTIVE PART and confine itself to supplying Germany with foodstuffs, etc. and to any form of military effort which would place no undue strain on the internal economy of the country.[313]

In short, it was assessed that Britain was in no danger and the Soviets were unlikely to initiate hostilities with the Allied powers. When the War Cabinet met on 1 November to discuss the Finnish crisis, the consensus was not to intervene in Finland. Lord Halifax, who agreed with the COS's assessment, argued strongly that 'we must take first things first. The only argument that carried any weight was the one made… in the Chiefs of Staff Report.'[314] At the conclusion of the meeting the War Cabinet was confident that 'the Russians were not out for adventures' and rejected the idea of declaring war on the Soviet Union.[315]

As the example above illustrates, the process of policy-making and decision-making between the COS and the War Cabinet worked as it was designed to. The COS presented their reply to Cabinet's request, and argued that Britain's finely balanced resources were regrettably insufficient to wage war in Scandinavia. However, the report lacked detailed arguments and the COS added an element of subjectivity by suggesting that if 'the War Cabinet decides that we must take a stand' the military will comply.[316] This suggestion reveals internal disagreement between the Chiefs in the COS as to the correct course. CIGS Ironside was: 'not at all in favour of sending either a military mission or land forces to Norway in any circumstances', even to cut off Germany's supplies of iron ore at Narvik. [317] It is clear that Ironside was fearful of what is now known as mission creep – the expansion of a mission's goals after its initial success. If a small military brigade was successful, it would 'lead to ultimate commitment on a large scale.'[318] This would inevitably have led to a larger military involvement, for which the CIGS judged the armed services were not prepared 'to spare for such adventures.'[319] During the meeting Admiral

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[313] TNA ADM 1/9863, 'Naval Aspects of the Possibility of a War Between the USSR and Great Britain, NAM to DNI, 5 November 1939; also cited and discussed in more detail in Brock Millman, 'Toward War with Russia: British Naval and Air Planning for Conflict in the Near East, 1939-40,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.29, No.2 (April, 1994) p.261-83.
[314] TNA CAB 65/2, WM (39) 67 9, War Cabinet: Minutes, 1 November 1939.
[315] Ibid.
[316] TNA CAB 80/4, COS (39) 105, 'Chiefs of Staff: Memorandum' 'Soviet aggression against Finland or other Scandinavian Countries, 31 October, p.6.
[317] TNA CAB 79/2, COS (39) 81st Meeting, Minutes of COS Meeting, 16 November 1939, p.1.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Ibid.

Pound argued that the Royal Navy was capable of stopping the export of iron ore. Although only one line is recorded, there would unquestionably have been some debate over this matter; the Chiefs agreed to change their decision and concluded that an expedition to Scandinavia was 'unsound from the military point of view,' subtly highlighting that there was disagreement between the members.[320] Contrary to the wishes of the First Sea Lord Dudley Pound, the Committee ratified Ironside's opposition to sending an Expeditionary Force to Narvik, informing the War Cabinet that:

> It might be extremely difficult to limit our commitment and that, once British troops had landed in Norway, a commitment of a small force might rapidly grow into something far larger… we consider it would be undesirable and we are therefore unable to recommend it.[321]

Ironside, Pound, and Newall, concluded by agreeing that if

> We felt obliged on political grounds to go to war with Russia in consequence of her aggression in Scandinavia, our assistance to the Scandinavian Countries must be limited to naval action for the maintenance of Norwegian Sea Communications and the protection of that country against Russian sea-borne attack.[322]

This case illustrates well how the COS dealt with conflicting stances presented by the various armed services. When military opinion was canvased, the initial feeling was that the invasion of Finland and British assistance could preclude action elsewhere. As the COS would clarify during the 2 December War Cabinet meeting, if Russia invaded the Balkan region, Britain 'might be forced to declare war on her whether we liked it or not.'[323] At this stage of the war, when Russian intentions in the Baltic were not apparent, this statement reveals that Ironside thought the Soviet Union still posed little or no strategic threat to Britain. Whereas, the Navy – influenced by Churchill – argued that maritime action could be conceived of. As a consequence there was no outright commendation for Allied action in Finland and the topic remained open to debate.

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[320] TNA CAB 79/2, COS (39) 81st Meeting, Minutes of COS Meeting, 16 November 1939, p.2.
[321] TNA CAB 80/5, 'Assistance to the Scandinavian Countries in the Event of Russian and/or German Aggression,' 21 November 1939, COS (39) 127.
[322] Ibid, p.3.
[323] TNA CAB 65/4, War Cabinet Conclusions, 2 December 1939, 101 (39).

On 27 November, due to his own strong views on the subject, Churchill used the COS's decision to order the Ministry of Economic Warfare to assess 'Germany's position in the event of complete stoppage of the export of Swedish iron ore.' [324] The following report's conclusion was that halting Swedish iron ore exports to Germany would 'end the war in a few months.'[325] Churchill used this report to order Operation Catherine plans to be advanced, writing to Pound the same day the report was published that,

> We must arrive at clear ideas about the Swedish iron ore for Germany. Doubt has been thrown on whether it is important to stop this or not. I am informed by M or EW that, contrary nothing would be more deadly.[326]

Churchill's letter was influenced by the MEW and he was beginning to view Operation Catherine almost entirely in terms of interdiction of iron ore. In October 1939 ore shipments to Germany from Narvik were only 6% of the amount in the same month the previous year. However, shipments increased after October and the corresponding figures for November and December were 25% and 27%.[327] This data prompted Churchill to argue in Cabinet on 30 November that the initiative should be taken and 'a few small mine-fields, each of perhaps three or four miles square' should be instigated.[328] This was a modification of Operation Catherine and its suggestion raised concerns from Halifax on the legal and ethical violation of Norwegian neutrality. The COS was instructed to study the matter. These concerns over neutrality were the same concerns that Dudley Pound had used to argue against Operation Catherine. In this instance Churchill had ignored Pound and presented the operation to the War Cabinet. Churchill's opinion, as recorded in his memoirs, was that the Winter War brought 'a means of achieving the major strategic advantage of cutting off vital iron ore supplies of Germany.'[329]

The ensuing discussion provides a good case study of Churchill's relationship to a member of the COS and the effect that consequently had on British policy-making. In this case the

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[324] TNA FO 371/23659, MEW, 'Supplies of Swedish Iron Ore' 27 November 1939.
[325] Ibid, para 1.
[326] Churchill paper 19/3, 'First Lord Personal Minute 30' Winston Churchill to Admiral Pound, Admiral Philips 27 November 1939 in Gilbert (ed.), *the Churchill War Papers*, vol. I, p.431.
[327] Cited in Thomas Munch-Petersen, *The Strategy of the Phoney War: Britain, Sweden and the Iron Ore Question 1939-1940*, (Stockholm, Militärhistoriska förlaget, 1981), p.75.
[328] TNA CAB 65/2, WM (39) 99, 'War Cabinet: Minutes' 30 November 1939, p.264.
[329] Churchill, *The Gathering Strom*, p.489.

First Lord of the Admiralty provided the initiative, set the tone and engineered an explicit decision on the issue. The only obstacle to the plan, after Pound's reasoned arguments, was inertia. Churchill easily overcame this by building a tide of support for operations in Finland, gradually increasing interest in the idea among the French and within the War Cabinet. As Churchill wrote on 25 December 1939:

> The great question of 1940, as for 1915, is whether and how the Navy can make its surplus force tell in shortening the war, and of course the amphibious operations to seize Narvik and the great iron field present themselves in a light of decisive action. I have been very glad to see the astonishing harmony of thought which prevails in Government circles on this theme.
>
> All that we have done about Catherine may now be accounted pre-vision.[330]

The Cabinet also gave approval to operations in Scandinavia due to French endorsement of the proposals. At the Supreme War Council Meetings on 22 September, 17 November and 19 December 1939, the French leader Edouard Daladier had argued for Allied troops in the Baltic and this pressure was continued by French minister in London, Charles Corbin.[331] Clearly by December 1939 Churchill's memo was calculated to encourage the War Cabinet into giving support to action in Scandinavia – and in particular to show that his initiative of preparations of Operation Catherine 'seem to have acquired a far greater measure of strategic relevance and urgency.'[332] Furthermore, Churchill's belief that future policy would be to instigate war in Scandinavia, and that Britain had the right to participate in it, was difficult to resist, for both tactical and psychological reasons. By asserting that the restriction of iron ore exports would prove 'decisive action', which tallied to MEW forecasts, and that the operation was feasible despite difficulties, Churchill was placing the onus on his colleagues in the Cabinet and the COS to challenge his prejudgement of the issue, while at the same time drawing their attention away from any balanced consideration of the pros and cons.

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[330] Churchill Memorandum, 'A Note on the War in 1940,' 25 December 1939, Churchill, Gilbert (ed.), *Churchill War Papers*, vol.1, p.568.
[331] For more information see T. Imlay, 'A Reassessment of Anglo-French Strategy during the Phony War, 1939–1940', *English Historical Review* 119.481 (2004), p.341.
[332] Churchill Memorandum, 'A Note on the War in 1940,' 25 December 1939, Churchill, Gilbert (ed.), *Churchill War Papers*, vol.1, p.568.

The decision to engage in Scandinavia raised many concerns. The MEW was unable to guarantee decisive results from a stoppage of iron ore from Narvik, with a revised report by Harry Sporborg admitting that the positive effects of the stoppage had been over-emphasised since this was the only way of making the War Cabinet appreciate the issue and of overcoming objections from the supply department.[333] The minutes of the MEW state that, 'The stoppage of the Narvik exports alone would produce only a limited effect – perhaps an embarrassment for a period of a few weeks by about May 1940.'[334] The Ministry of Supply and the Board of Trade argued that the MEW had overstated the effect on Germany of the denial of Narvik iron ore, and underestimated possible German retaliation.[335] Added to this was the violation of international law, the impact on neutral countries such as Sweden to war with Germany, and the threat of war with Russia.

By presenting his opinion as facts and moral imperative, Churchill created a momentum for his interpretation of British policy that would have required major confrontation by the COS, Ministry of Supply and Board of Trade to stop. By implying that argument was unthinkable, Churchill had pre-empted the COS policy on Finland and the Government's decision on the issue. Research suggests that when decision-makers perceive external threats to be severe, they tend to fall back on conviction rather than logic, thereby resolving some of the anxiety that might otherwise paralyse decision.[336] During the Phoney War Churchill enjoyed not only the power given him as First Lord of the Admiralty, but in the force of his ideas.

Of course the progress of the war, Russia's invasion of Finland, France's desire to assistant Finland and many other factors outside Britain's control were the determinants of the history of this period. Put in a wider perspective, Churchill's Operation Catherine seems of only passing significance. The assumption behind any analysis of decision-making, however, is that external forces continually influence subjects to produce choices whose character and outcomes are far from being pre-determined. There will always be a variety of ways in which the COS may have reacted to the Winter War, according to the

[333] TNA FO 837/802, 'Minute by Sporborg,' 10 December 1939.
[334] TNA CAB 83/1, MC (39) 9 'Military Co-ordination Committee Minutes,' Minister of Economic Warfare, 19 December 1939.
[335] TNA FO 371/23660, N7524/64/63, 'Beer to Reilly,' 15 December 1939 and N7575/64/63, 'Ministry of Supply to Reilly,' 14 December 1939.
[336] See O. Holsti, 'Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy' and R. North, 'Perception and Action in the 1914 Crisis', both in J.C. Farrell and A.S. Smith (Eds.), *Image and Reality in World Politics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1968).

personalities of the Chiefs and the politics of the government at the time. In the case under review, hindsight has tended to distort our understanding by making the path the COS did follow in 1940 seem obvious and inevitable.[337] COS records make it clear that the policy-makers did not, of course, regard it thus. Uncertainty and speculation abound in the minutes and memoranda, seen in the COS's assertion that nothing could be taken for granted about the war. In these circumstances choices were especially crucial and problematical, and the decisions which did emerge are worthy of the closest attention. In the event, the way the war unfolded during its first three months conformed to Churchill's preferences.

Churchill had effectively managed to impose his strategy of Scandinavia upon the COS and the Cabinet. The COS position at the start of the War was, as described, resistant to action in Scandinavia and Dudley Pound thought that such an operation as Catherine would 'never take place.'[338] The COS and Pound had come to a decision to continue in a defensive position and wait on events. As discussed previously, the COS regarded it to be in the British interest to 'endeavour to postpone… until we are stronger.'[339] Despite this, Churchill as an executive decision maker influenced the COS and exercised a dominant influence in the making of major policy.

III: Influence of Ironside on The Chiefs of Staff Committee

Churchill invested a great deal into his recommendation for Scandinavian intervention, although the contribution made by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, and in particular CIGS Ironside, now appears to be missing from the literature. Ironside's contribution was at least similar to Churchill's and, in terms of implementing planning for action, was more influential. Surprisingly after his comments in mid-December that he was 'not at all in favour of sending either a military mission or land forces to Norway in any circumstances', Ironside became a lobbyist for action. Regarding the Winter War, CIGS Ironside is an important case study, as it is possible to trace his trajectory from opposition to enthusiasm to feeling himself 'harried from pillar to post over this Scandinavian business.'[340] A study

[337] See Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign*, Chap 2.
[338] John Godfrey, *The Naval Memoirs of Admiral J.H. Godfrey*, Vol.7 pt.2 (London, Everybodies Secretarial Service, 1964) p.223-5.
[339] TNA CAB 80/4, COS (39) 105, 'Chiefs of Staff: Memorandum' 'Soviet aggression against Finland or other Scandinavian Countries, 31 October, p.1.
[340] Ironside, *Diaries*, 27 January 1940, p.211.

of Ironside offers insight into how the COS worked as a committee, to what extent Ironside dominated other members, and also provides an understanding of the COS interest in Scandinavia between December 1939 and March 1940, which has too often been dismissed by history as an 'epidemic of mid-winter madness.'[341] Focusing on Ironside's actions during these 'months of havering' aims to move discussion on from the usual analysis of Churchill's influence.[342]

III.I: IRONSIDE'S INFLUENCE ON SCANDINAVIAN POLICY

On 17 December 1939 Ironside summed up his views of intervention in Finland: 'we shall have no side-shows – if I can prevent the starting of them.'[343] He had signed the COS report outlining reservations about Allied action in Scandinavia on 21 November 1939.[344] However, Ironside had a change of view and quickly became an ardent advocate for intervention. On 21 December, a month after signing the appreciation and three days after his diary entry chastising the opening of a new theatre, he noted:

> I told them that if the iron ore was vital to Germany, then a small expedition in Northern Sweden would be more than desirable. It was quite possible and could be of limited scope… I told them that here was a legitimate side-show.[345]

Why did Ironside change his mind? Historians John Kiszley, Wesley Wark and Bernard Kelly have suggested that Ironside was persuaded by Churchill and that he was in some way beholden to the First Lord of the Admiralty for his section as CIGS.[346] This argument is certainly correct. Ironside was a commander who was obligated to listen to his superiors. For example, Ironside was summoned to Churchill's office at the Admiralty at 7pm on 12 December, not to discuss strategy or military co-operation: the sole purpose was that the First Lord 'wanted to show me his 'cultivator'… a machine that would go through the earth at a good pace.'[347] Ironside was wise enough to frame his views in accordance with his

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[341] John Colville, *Man of Valour: The Life of Field Marshal the Viscount Gort,* (London, Collins 1972), p.172.
[342] See Correlli Barnett, *Engage the Enemy More Closely: The Royal Navy in the Second World War*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992) p.100.
[343] Ironside, *Diaries*, 17 December 1939, p.186.
[344] TNA CAB 80/5, COS (39) 127 'Assistance to the Scandinavian Countries in the Event of Russian and/or German Aggression,' 21 November 1939, p.3.
[345] Ironside, *Diaries*, 21 December 1939, p.186.
[346] For this argument see Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign*, p.26-27; Wark, 'Ironside' in Bond (ed.), *Fallen Stars*, p.144-145 and Kelly, 'Drifting Towards War.'
[347] Ironside, *Diaries*, 12 December 1939, p.171.

political superior's demands, but he had to reckon with the difficulties – diplomatic and military – of planning and execution. Whereas Churchill viewed the big picture with little thought of the practicalities of invading a neutral country,[348] Ironside as a decision maker was responsible for its execution, planning an expedition that could land in Narvik, reach Gallivare and establish itself before the Baltic conditions changed in the spring. However they both recognised that Britain could not assist Finland to a great extent and they used the war as a technical justification for British offensives to secure iron ore.[349] Both men were dominant personalities on the COS and Ironside was no great admirer of Churchill's judgement. Therefore, CIGS Ironside was not going to support the First Sea Lord's strategy, which, in Ironside's view, 'smack[s] all too alarmingly of Gallipoli.'[350]

Although opposed to Churchill's Baltic expedition, Ironside was persuaded by the Joint Planning Committee's arguments concerning Scandinavia. Similar to Ironside, the JPC had evolved in its position towards the stoppage of iron ore exports to Germany. The JPC had concluded on 16 December in the light of the Ministry of Economic Warfare's report, that

> Although a stoppage of iron ore imports from Narvik during the next four months would gravely embarrass German industry, there is no certainty that it would be decisive.[351]

However, the JPC gathered more information from the MEW and under the assumption that the MEW's information was accurate, 'there was a strong prima facie case to suppose that' the curtailment of German steel production would have 'an extremely seriously repercussion on German industrial output.' [352] The JPC thus endorsed military action in Scandinavia, officially presenting the turnaround in their thinking in a report to the War Cabinet on 22 December:

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[348] TNA CAB 83/1 'Military Co-ordination Committee: Minutes' 20 December 1939.
[349] Ibid, p.186.
[350] Pownall, *Diaries,* 9 February 1940, p.282.
[351] TNA CAB 84/9, JP (39) 101, 'Joint Planning Committee: Memorandum' 'Precis of a draft report by the Ministry of Economic Warfare on the economic aspects of certain proposals to stop Swedish iron ore imports to Germany,' 16 December 1939. Point 7.
[352] TNA CAB 84/9, JP (39) 101, 'Joint Planning Committee: Memorandum' 'Precis of a draft report by the Ministry of Economic Warfare on the economic aspects of certain proposals to stop Swedish iron ore imports to Germany,' 18 December 1939. Point 7. For the conclusion that it might have a 'decisive effect' see TNA CAB 84/9, JP (39) 104, 'Joint Planning Committee: Memorandum' 'Note by the Joint Planning Sub-Committee,' 18 December 1939. Para. 3.

> It must be realised that to embark on an offensive in Scandinavia in the spring of 1940 represents a fundamental change in our policy… We accordingly recommend the adoption of a policy aimed at stopping the export of all Swedish iron ore to Germany, provided that Scandinavian co-operation is first obtained.[353]

This stance was supported by the other members of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. It was presented to the War Cabinet on 31 December and received commendation by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Halifax, who held 'against reducing the larger project for the sake of the smaller.'[354] Like any decision-maker Ironside had weighed up the arguments and made a decision based on evidence presented. He changed his position due to the full military implications of stopping iron ore supplies, which had been examined by a committee founded to appreciate the risks and the rewards. Since the JPC had recommended military action to secure iron ore mines in southern and northern Sweden, he judged the project therefore to be worthwhile. Furthermore by December 1939 the situation had changed in Finland with Russians making little headway and the anticipated 'Russian threat to Scandinavia was therefore unlikely to develop before the winter broke.'[355]

Ironside was also influenced by the change in mindset over the long-war strategy during the winter of 1939, questioning whether a defensive strategy was, in the longer term, correct. The CIGS's viewpoints are best expressed in his response to the French High Command's appreciation on strategy to be taken forward in 1940. Writing on 30 December 1939 in a document on Britain's War strategy, he stated:

> I think the moment has arrived… [to] escape from our position of passive waiting with all its alarms and doubtful advantages of increasing strength… I put forward the following strategical idea:
>
> (i) An attempt to stop his supplies of iron ore from Sweden… It has many advantages and may be decisive. It will make the Germans react

[353] TNA CAB 84/9, JP (39) 111, 'Joint Planning Committee: Memorandum' 'Military implication of a policy aimed at stopping the exports of Swedish iron ore to Germany,' 31 December 1939, para. 103 and 104.
[354] TNA CAB 65/4, WM (39) 129, War Cabinet Meetings, 'Scandinavia,' 22 December 1939.
[355] TNA CAB 79/2, COS (39), 114, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes,' 26 December 1939.

> immediately. It will make him disperse his forces and engage in overseas operations… It will effectively prevent him from taking the offensive elsewhere.[356]

Ironside was convinced that an Allied offensive strategy in a theatre outwith the Western Front would be productive. He rejected demands from the BEF and Gamelin to build up Allied military strength on the Western Front.[357] Instead, the CIGS seized upon proposals for military action in Scandinavia, describing the theatre as '…the only opening likely to be available in the near future which might lead to decisive results.'[358] In January 1940 Ironside argued in a report entitled 'The Major Strategy of the War' that it was time to discuss:

> …the main object of the War [as it] will become obscured unless it is clearly stated. The object for which we are fighting is the overthrow of Germany.[359]

The CIGS asserted that an offensive strategy was the wrong course and argued for a major military operation in Scandinavia aimed at denying Germany iron ore resources. However, Ironside's assessment had several flaws. Firstly, Ironside's confidence that Germany would react immediately and prevent an offensive elsewhere was based not on JIC or JPC appreciations but his own beliefs and instinct. Secondly, the appreciation did not consider to what extent the Allies had the ability to successfully achieve the operation, with Ironside hoping that 'now is the moment, however ill-prepared we are in trained troops.'[360] Ironside's bias towards an offensive operation over-elevated the ability and resources of British armed services and overlooked the fact that Germany had three divisions of specialised mountain troops that could be deployed to wintry Scandinavia.

To Ironside, his plan was better than Churchill's more limited scheme and, importantly, it would include the War Cabinet. Initially his idea, possibly based on his experience in the Baltic, was for Narvik to become a base for 3,000 to 4,000 men, where they could advance on skis or along railway lines quickly into Sweden and secure the ore fields. Norway had limited significance in this operation, while Sweden, he judged, would welcome an

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[356] Ironside, *Diaries*, 30 December 1939, p.176.
[357] TNA CAB 79/3, COS (40) 15, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes,' 25 January 1940.
[358] Ibid.
[359] TNA CAB 80/104, COS Memoranda, 'The Major Strategy of the War,' 23 January 1940. COS (40) 216.
[360] Ironside, *Diaries*, 27 January 1940, p.213.

expedition, being: 'much more frightened of the Russians than of the Germans.'[361] As discussed in chapter two, Ironside had fought in the Baltic in 1918 so his early opinion that an operation in Gallivare through Narvik had 'many advantages and may be decisive if properly planned and prepared', was formed from experience.[362] On the other hand, Churchill's plan, discussed previously, was to instigate action by naval operations first. Ironside, as Head of the Army and with responsibility for land operations, was reluctant to support this plan before the major part of the operation – the land advance into Sweden – was ready.

Accordingly, British strategy towards the Winter War took a methodical approach, with careful preparation and attention to specialised training. Significant commitments of rear bases, supply dumps, airstrips and lines of communication were planned.[363] Ironside, in particular, was determined that the axis powers should not seize the Gallivare ore fields first. To this end he was prepared to face and ignore criticism (and halt the expansion of the British Expeditionary Force in France) to recall a regular division of III Corps to land and establish a credible Scandinavian expeditionary force by his deadline of 20 March.[364] Any start date later than this, he argued, would be too late.[365] However, it was this approach that, following Finland's collapse in March 1940, would lead to Ironside being blamed for a lack of British intervention and, from January 1940, would lead to the British Chiefs of Staff taking the opposite viewpoint from the War Cabinet and Churchill.

III.II: IRONSIDE'S INFLUENCE ON THE COS

In December 1939 the COS's initial plan was to send a small brigade force to Narvik.[366] By February 1940, Ironside's thinking had developed to such an extent that a major expedition of four or five divisions landing at five different points on Norway was envisaged.[367] It was judged in February that 100,000 men and 11,000 vehicles would need to be employed, although the French commitment amounted to around two brigades and

[361] Ironside, *Diaries*, 19 December 1939, p.186.
[362] Ibid, 30 December 1939, p.176.
[363] TNA CAB 84/10, COS (40), 'Joint Planning Committee: Memorandum,' 'The Chiefs of Staff and Scandinavia: Plans and Preparations.'
[364] Ironside, *Diaries*, 15 February 1940, p. 217.
[365] Ironside, *Diaries*, 15 February 1940, p. 217.
[366] TNA CAB 84/9, JP (39) 111, 'Joint Planning Committee: Memorandum' 'Military implication of a policy aimed at stopping the exports of Swedish iron ore to Germany,' 31 December 1939, para. 103 and 104.
[367] Butler, *Grand Strategy*, p.109.

CAS Cyril Newall viewed that air support would be 'totally inadequate.' [368] In this short section we will consider to what extent Ironside pushed his vision forward and dominated the COS.

Ironside's confidence in an offensive action in Scandinavia was not unanimously supported by his fellow Chiefs of Staff, however to what degree is hard to qualify. Cyril Newall and Dudley Pound are elusive figures in the historical record with no memoirs or diaries to give insight as to their thinking. Similarly, Air Ministry and Naval records are carefully written and reveal no clear disapproval. However, from analysing the minutes of the COS meetings and memoirs of contemporaries, disquiet is observed.

Ironside was content to make enemies of his fellow Chief Cyril Newall and the RAF in his demands for air defence, with RAF Director of Plans John Slessor recalling the expedition 'a triumph of wishful and entirely unpractical thinking.'[369] In fact, Ironside was alone among members of the COS in his full commitment to an expedition in Scandinavia. At the COS meeting of 24 January 1940, Newall's Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, Air Vice-Marshal Peirse, raised the RAF's concerns that 'the air assistance which we could offer them was very limited indeed' and stated that bombing objectives in the Ruhr would 'upset Germany's industrial capacity just as well, and perhaps more quickly, than if we undertook a campaign to stop her supplies of iron ore.'[370] Ironside dismissed these concerns, arguing that the 'operation of seizing the Gallivare ore fields was not difficult and we could be quite certain of the effect.'[371] This demonstrates Ironside's conduct and power as CIGS, in that he was able to dismiss these concerns, confident that this was the end of the matter. The exchange is a rare insight into the differing service assessments of where the war would develop, with the Army purporting the theatre of Scandinavia, and the RAF focussing on the Ruhr valley. However it should be noted that the RAF's reluctance for Scandinavian operations was not unconnected to the fact that they faced a problem of supply and demand. As the Joint Planners noted, 'it would require the whole of the resources of the Metropolitan Air Force to provide adequate protection.'[372] However, Ironside too often glossed over the problems faced by his colleagues and his own service. The statement that the operation to

[368] Ironside, *Diaries*, 16 February 1940, p. 218 and Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p.251.
[369] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p.273.
[370] TNA CAB 79/3, COS (40) 14, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes,' 24 January 1940, p.2.
[371] Ibid.
[372] TNA CAB 84/10, JP. (40) 12 'Joint Planning Committee: Memorandum' Annex 1A 'War Office Appreciation,' 18 January 1940, p.14.

Scandinavia was 'not difficult' was drawn from little intellectual rigour on Ironside's part, poor analysis of the information provided and a failure to draw logical conclusions about the feasibility of the operation.

Ironside's own service held increasing reservations about the strategy, which they viewed as ambitious and ignoring several real and potential difficulties. Major-General Richard Dewing, Director of Military Operations and Plans, argued that the priority was the defence of Britain and France, 'and we ought not to cut our resources below the level necessary of these areas, as defeat in either would mean the loss of the war.'[373] He also argued in a memorandum to Ironside that forty-five new lines of Communications units, and the withdrawing of around forty others from the British Expeditionary Force would be required for an operation in Scandinavia.[374] These concerns were listed by JPC in a report which cautioned 'there can be no question of our holding a defensive line in the sense familiar on the Western Front.'[375] The Joint Planning Committee had concluded that 'in our opinion, a military expedition inland from Narvik… is not a feasible operation.'[376] However, the COS dismissed these risks in their report to the War Cabinet, stating that despite the odds 'we do not, however, consider that undue weight should be given to the inherent difficulties of the enterprise. The stakes are high, but the prize of success is great.'[377] It is difficult to assess whether this rather optimistic conclusion was unanimous in the COS. However, Ironside's influence over the COS had grown over the winter of 1939 and the conclusion resonates with the stamp of his authority.

The evidence suggests that Ironside dominated the other two Chiefs of Staff, Dudley Pound and Cyril Newall. Sir John Slessor, Director of Plans at the Air Ministry and a member of the Joint Planning Committee, wrote that two of the Chiefs were 'reluctant to override the opinion of the third' because he had 'more experience and better information that they.'[378] Of course, this is not to suggest that Dudley Pound or Cyril Newall were unable to stand up for themselves; as we have earlier discussed, First Sea Lord Pound was capable of

[373] TNA WO 193/722, 'Briefing Note,' 21 February 1940.
[374] TNA WO 193/772, 'Memorandum: Director Military Operations and Plans to Director Staff Duties,' 24 February 1940.
[375] TNA CAB 84/10, JP. (40) 12 'Joint Planning Committee: Memorandum' Annex 1A 'War Office Appreciation,' 18 January 1940, p.12 and TNA CAB 84/10, COS (40) (draft) 'Scandinavia: Plans and Preparation' January 1940, p.2.
[376] TNA CAB 84/10, JP. (40) 20 'Joint Planning Committee: Memorandum' Scandinavia: Capture of the Northern Ore Fields in the Face of Scandinavian Opposition,' January 1940, p.1.
[377] TNA CAB 66/5, COS (40) 218, 'Intervention in Scandinavia: Plans and Implications,' 28 January 1940, p.6.
[378] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p.268.

standing his ground and fighting for what he believed was the correct course. Newall too was not afraid of challenging consensus, having been involved in fierce disputes in the inter-war period within the Air Ministry over whether to concentrate on building fighters or bombers.[379] Differences of opinion between the Chiefs are evident in the memoir of John Kennedy, Chief of Staff to Major-General Mackesy, who records after a Chief of Staff meeting on 11 March 1940:

> As we walked out, Newall said to me, 'I think the whole thing is hare-brained.' Ismay agreed with him. So did I.[380]

Ironside's drive for an offensive strategy coupled with his belief that the stoppage of iron ore would have decisive results, enabled him to succeed in imposing his views on his fellow Chiefs. Newall, as Chairman of the COS, exercised little strong leadership over the committee as he limited himself to the role of official spokesman for the COS. Why this was the case is difficult to understand. Partly, because Newall as Chief of the RAF lacked knowledge on the subject of military operations, and partly because Ironside was similar to Churchill in his single-minded enthusiasm for the operation and in his impatience towards those who disagreed with him. Pound's position on the operation is not known, as he seems to have concentrated on naval operations during this period and no objections are recorded by him in COS minutes. However, these operations were similar to Churchill's original Operation Catherine which Pound thought would 'never take place.'[381] While it is difficult to assess why the Chiefs of Staff did not challenge Ironside, it can be assumed that to have done so would have required greater resolve and strength of character and conviction than either the First Sea Lord or the Air Marshal possessed.

One of the reasons for this inability to withstand the CIGS was almost certainty due to Ironside's ability to call upon his military experience in Archangel in 1918, which the others lacked.[382] His Arctic knowledge led him to pronounce what was and was not feasible in Arctic conditions, and he seems to have had confidence that, with the Baltic Sea and lines of communication secure, Britain could prevent Germany seizing and holding the ore fields. With the inclusion of British territorials and the French elite mountain infantry, les

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[379] See Orange, *Churchill and his Airmen*, p.104-5.
[380] Kennedy, *Business of War*, p.48.
[381] Godfrey, *Naval Memoirs*, Vol.7 pt.2, p.223-5.
[382] See Ironsides memoir on this period, Edmund *Ironside, Archangel 1918–1919* (London: Constable, 1953) and Andrew Souter, *With Ironside in North Russia*, (London: Hutchinson, 1940).

Chasseurs Alpins, in the expedition, Ironside believed he would be able to secure, defend and maintain a presence in Gallivare, thereby forcing Germany to delay its attack on the west.[383] Indeed, Ironside's self-belief in the operation is chronicled in his diary, where he remarks how he is 'almost frightened at the boldness of the plan.'[384] However, senior commander in the BEF General Pownall records disquiet in the Army, with Quartermaster-General at the War Office Venning informing him,

> …that the administrative sides of this venture were definitely not taken into account before a snap decision was taken by the Allied War Cabinet, or indeed during the consideration by the Chiefs of Staff. It fact the whole thing was done *wrong*.[385]

Ironside's manner was positively Churchillian, as can be seen in his drive to override protests from the British Expeditionary Force Commander Finlayson and Quartermaster General Venning at the requisitioning of men and materials for the Scandinavian operation.

> Venning and Finlayson [Adjutant-General] formed up and told the CIGS that they were very unhappy about the whole business – but got no change by doing so. It seems that nobody is able to control that man who is behaving as if he were Commander-in-Chief of everywhere and has no more circumspection than a bull in a china shop…[386]

Ultimately, Ironside failed to listen to the cautions and warnings of his fellow Commanders, Chiefs and the Joint Planners. The CIGS overruled or rejected advice and either did not advise the War Cabinet of warnings, or watered them down. An assessment of Ironside and the Winter War reveals incremental, ad hoc decision-making. Instead of a careful battle plan, British strategy from November 1939 to March 1940 can be seen as a series of single campaigns which were related as they were within a given theatre, but which were independent and disjointed operations. Ironside overestimated the strength of Finland to resist renewed Soviet offensives. His assessment of Norway and Sweden's fear of USSR aggression was also mistaken, believing that a Finnish collapse would convince

[383] TNA CAB 80/104, COS (40) 253 (S) 'Chief of Staff Committee: The Employment of Allied Land Forces in Scandinavia and Finland,' 21 February 1940.
[384] Ironside, *Diaries*, 5 February 1940, p. 216.
[385] Pownall, *Diaries*, 22 February 1940, p.285. [Italic in original]
[386] Ibid, 22 February 1940, p.285.

Scandinavian neutrals to invite an Anglo-French expeditionary force. Ironside did not react to the changing political climate in Scandinavia that an invasion of Finland was acceptable. In December 1939, this might have been possible. But, by February 1940, Norway and Sweden hoped for Finland's capitulation, accepting the Soviet's limited territorial gains. Above all, they did not wish to enter into an agreement with the Allied Forces on a military intervention. Nonetheless this ultimately came to pass, with Sweden acting as an intermediary to secure peace in Finland on 13 March.

The reaction of Ironside and his advisers to the cancellation of the expedition is unsurprising. The CIGS was naturally disappointed at the outcome, blaming the Foreign Office, War Cabinet, and singling out the Prime Minister as having an 'appallingly unmilitary brain.'[387] Major John Kennedy, however, claimed that the assault on Scandinavia could have had a greater chance of success 'if we had not been guilty of letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would'.'[388] Kennedy went so far as to regard himself 'better employed'digging his garden than assuming the duties of Chief of Staff for Scandinavia.[389] Relief was widespread, if not uniform. For example, John Slessor of the Air Staff thought Ironside's plan had become 'unbelievably remote from the squalid facts of life.'[390] The Chief of General Staff for the British Expeditionary Force Henry Pownall, who had endured the withdrawal of BEF resources, was even more scathing in his view of Ironside, writing of him in his diary 'we shall never get order out of chaos till he goes' and 'if the war is to continue to be conducted on these lines, God help us!'[391] The view according to Harvey and the evidence discussed in this section was that the Scandinavian operations had been, from the first to the last, 'a mistake.'[392] In Britain, the number of those that were 'secretly relieved' that the Scandinavian operations were, for the moment, closed was considerable. [393] Chamberlain easily defended himself against accusations of inactivity and 'completely demolished the case against him.'[394] In France, the political fallout of Finland's capitulation was bitter and dramatic and the end of the Winter War provided the setting for Daladier's political opponents to force him from office.[395]

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[387] Pownall, *Diaries*, 14 March 1940, p.229.
[388] Kennedy, *Business of War*, p.51.
[389] Ibid. p.50.
[390] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p.273.
[391] Bond (ed.), *Pownall Diaries*, 13 March 1940, p.290.
[392] J Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, (London, Collins, 1970), 3 March 1940, p.339.
[393] James Rhodes (ed.), *'Chips': The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984), 13 March 1940, p.290.
[394] Ibid.
[395] See Elisabeth du Réau, *Edouard Daladier* (Paris, Fayard, 1992).

CONCLUSION

The COS's conduct during this period reveals serious shortcomings in the policy-making and decision-making progress. The Joint Planners' appreciations on possible German pre-emptive action and their concern at the lack of feasibility of the operation did not seem to concern the Chiefs of Staff. Instead, as the records show, Churchill and Ironside focused only on a positive outcome, believing that the operation would be decisive in denying iron ore; they rarely focused on German intentions and capabilities. Both argued from essentially speculative evidence on the economic impact of the stoppage of iron ore, which they presented as indisputable objective facts. In this they were aided by the fact that France sought to assistant Finland, and a prevailing attitude that the Allies should become more offensive. It is noted with hindsight that hopes for Scandinavia were wildly unrealistic, and indeed demonstrate that Ironside displayed ignorance of, and disdain for, logistics in planning. This was dangerous for the effectiveness of the COS as a policy-making body. Ironside and Churchill's strong personalities also steered Allied reaction to the Winter War and disrupted the planning process. However, the other two Chiefs of Staff were not without fault. They failed to press with sufficient force their hesitations about the operation and as a committee they failed to recognise or acknowledge the quality and advice of the Joint Planning Committee.

Although no shots were fired by the Allies during the Winter War, the actions of Churchill, Ironside and the COS can be assessed to have been ragged and ineffective. Failures of command and co-ordination characterised Ironside's and the COS's planning of the operation. The COS paid scant regard to sensible and realistic advice from the JPC and senior commanders. Strong personalities placed their stamp on the planning and execution of strategy. In conclusion, structural, conceptual, personal and unforeseen factors contributed to the COS's weak response to the Winter War.

As a consequence after the Russo-Finnish peace, there was, as Sir Alexander Cadogan noted, 'the levity and stupidity of our Gen[eral] staff' to take the blame for the folly.[396] Ironside was duly embarrassed, realising that 'all our weeks of work [have] come to

[396] Alexander Cadogan; David Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan Diaries*, (New York, Putnam 1976) March 1940, p.259.

nothing.'[397] Ironside was left hoping that Germany would make 'some false step.'[398] He then turned his attention to Churchill's minor Narvik plan, which he had previously opposed.

[397] Ironside, *Diaries,* 13 March 1940, p.228.
[398] Ibid, 2 March 1940, p.222.

4. RUBICON: THE COS AND NORWAY, 1940

In 1941, the United States Minister to Norway, Florence Harriman, wrote:

> Hindsight is all we seem to have. But it is fantastic that none of the things which happened in the week preceding the fatal daybreak of April 9th awakened us to danger. A hundred incidents should have prepared us. Instead we were transfixed, still watching the war in Finland.[399]

Indeed, one of the great enigmas of the Phoney War was the almost uniform inability of the Allies to understand the warning signals regarding Norway, which were not only overlooked by the British Chiefs of Staff Committee, but also missed by the French, Danish and the US ambassador. Only the Swedish authorities realised what was going on, but they chose to do nothing.

The Norway Campaign was a disaster for the Allies. Although, compared to other campaigns in the Second World War, the overall number of casualties in the land war was very low, it was nonetheless significant as it caused losses which could be ill-afforded. In the land battle against the Germans, the official casualty figures, including wounded and missing, totalled 1,869 British personnel and around 530 French and Polish soldiers.[400] British lives lost at sea totalled around 2,500.[401] This chapter is concerned with the decision-making process in Britain's War Government during March and early April 1940, at which time the COS approved the disastrous operations in Norway. As this thesis is assessing the COS during the whole period of the Phoney War, the Allied failure in the Norwegian Campaign will not be discussed in detail. Instead, the chapter will examine the planning of the Norway Campaign to assess the role of the COS in Britain's decision to launch the campaign. This will include an analysis of whether the COS or the War Cabinet had command and control over the direction to be taken and whether they were complacent

[399] Florence Harriman, *Mission to the North*, (New York, Lippincott, 1944) p.246.
[400] Thomas Derry, *The Campaign in Norway*, (London, HSMO, 1952).p.230.
[401] Hendrik Lunde, *Hitler's Pre-emptive War*, (Newbury, Casemate, 2009) p.542.

regarding Allied prospects in Norway. The chapter will end by analysing how the COS conducted themselves when faced with the German deployment to Norway on 7 April.

The Norwegian Campaign of 1940 is well documented. Thomas Derry's official history, *The Campaign in Norway*, provides a solid account of British military involvement.[402] There are a number of other books written in the 1950s and 1960s that provide histories,[403] such as Donald MacIntryre's 1959 account of the naval campaign, *Narvik.*[404] Another series of publications appeared on the Norwegian Campaign's fiftieth anniversary, which included the best all-round history, Francois Kersaudy's *Norway 1940*.[405] Kersaudy's book, based on archives from Britain, France, Norway and Germany, is an excellent account of military and political manoeuvrings by the major participants in the campaign and it contains a reasonable amount of analysis on the COS. *Britain and Norway in the Second World War*, edited by Patrick Salmon, similarly covers a wide range of issues from the Phoney War period and the campaign, including the Anglo-Norwegian Alliance, intelligence, resistance and Special Operations to the Liberation.[406] However, it is not a detailed examination of British military policy towards Norway, rather an overview of Allied actions in Norway. Geirr Haarr's 2010 *The German Invasion of Norway* is equally important as a detailed examination of British and Germany military operations in Norway.[407] Although not an academic historian, Harr's detailed research and analysis makes it easily the best modern account of the Norwegian Campaign. Similarly, Wesley Wark's 1992 chapter 'Beyond Intelligence: The Study of British Strategy and the Norway Campaign, 1940*'*, provides excellent analysis of the intelligence and its use by Ironside.[408] However, it is not a detailed examination of British military policy towards Norway. Yet, as Wark notes, the Norwegian Campaign 'stands out as a perfect case study in the overlapping roles of decision-maker and intelligence analyst', requiring further study.[409] *Anatomy of a Campaign: the British Fiasco in Norway* by John Kiszley, goes some way in answering Wark's call.[410] Kiszley account of Norway is one of the few works that

[402] Derry, *The Campaign in Norway*.
[403] See Bernard Ash, *Norway 1940*, (London: Cassell, 1964), JL Moulton, *The Norwegian Campaign of 1940: A Study of Warfare in Three Dimensions*, (London: Eye and Spottiswoode, 1966) and Johan Waage, *The Narvik Campaign*, (London: Harrap,1964).
[404] Donald MacIntyre, *Narvik*, (London, Evans, 1959).
[405] Francois Kersaudy, *Norway 1940*, (London: Arrow, 1990).
[406] Patrick Salmon (ed.), *Britain and Norway in the Second World War*, (London, HMSO, 1995).
[407] Geirr Haarr, *The German Invasion of Norway: April 1940*, (Barnsley: Seaforth Books, 2009).
[408] Wesley K. Wark, 'Beyond intelligence: the study of British strategy and the Norway campaign, 1940', in Michael G. Fry (ed.), *Power, Personalities and Policies*, (London, Frank Cass, 1992).
[409] Ibid, p.244.
[410] Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign.*

concentrates on the COS's role in the campaign. Published as this thesis was in its final stages, this chapter agrees with Kiszley's conclusion that the COS misjudged Norway. However, the COS are not the central analysis in Kiszley's work and this chapter argues that the Ironside's role in the Norwegian Campaign is fundamental in understanding the COS' conduct at this time.

Consequently, there is a gap in the literature for analysis of the COS' impact on the British Government's activities in Norway. The effect the COS had on the British War Cabinet's decision-making process, and vice versa, has never before been extensively examined. Unlike the Special Operations Executive, for example, a specific scholarly history of the COS' influence in the Norwegian Campaign has not been published.[411] Although there are several publications that mention the COS' actions towards Norway,[412] they consist of either a short narrative of aspects of COS activities, such as the naval actions,[413] or an outline of some of their many meetings,[414] and, therefore, do not contain detailed and wide-ranging analyses. While studies of the Chamberlain government and the rise of Churchill have examined the impact of Norway upon the downfall of the Chamberlain Administration, they do not impart much information about Churchill and Chamberlain's wider influence on the British War Machinery and the COS.

Whole histories have been written about the Norwegian campaign and this brief summary does not do the complexity of this operation justice. However, the conclusion of many of the detailed studies has been that this campaign was a classic example of: 'divided counsels, contradictory orders, muddle, and improvisation.'[415] It is this that this chapter will next discuss, specifically considering to what extent this conclusion accurately describes the COS and its role in the Campaign.

I: Norway Campaign Overview

By the spring of 1940, Scandinavia had come to dominate the strategic deliberations of the British War Cabinet and its French colleagues. The COS, on instructions from both the

[411] Charles Cruickshank, *SOE in Scandinavia*, (Oxford: OUP, 1986).
[412] See Derry, *The Campaign in Norway*, Kersaudy, *Norway 1940*, Haarr, *The German Invasion of Norway.*
[413] For example, Stephen Roskill, *The War at Sea, 1939-45*, Vol.1 (London, HSMO, 1976).
[414] For example, Haar, *The German Invasion of Norway*, chapter two provides a narrative overview of the chiefs meetings within the wider context of Norwegian, French and British political discussions.
[415] Cited in Arthur Marder, *Winston is Back: Churchill at the Admiralty, 1939-40*, (London, Longman, 1972) p.44.

Chamberlain and Daladier Governments, turned its attention to Scandinavia for two reasons. One was a growing belief that Swedish iron ore was the Achilles heel of the German War Machinery. The hope was that depriving supplies from Sweden could end the war in a matter of months.[416] The other reason was the Soviet invasion of Finland, and the possibility that an Anglo-French expeditionary force ostensibly going to Finland's assistance, could gain control of the northern Swedish iron ore fields and possibly even open up a new 'front of attrition' against Germany in the north.[417] Finland's decision to sue for peace in March 1940 ended this vision. However, the Allied leadership remained transfixed by Scandinavia.

Although the 12 March 1940 armistice between Finland and Russia put pay to the Allied pretext for intervention, there was a startling development: the decision to continue with Winston Churchill's Narvik/Gallivare scheme. On 28 March, the Supreme War Council decided that mine-fields should be laid in Norwegian territorial waters.[418] On 1 April, the War Cabinet confirmed that Operation Wilfred would begin on 5 April, thus named by Churchill because 'by itself it was so small and innocent.'[419] The decision was taken that should the German reaction to the mine-laying of the Norwegian coast-line be to invade Norway, Operation Wilfred would be supported by the landing of Anglo-French troops at Narvik.[420] The objective was to seize the port and advance to the Swedish frontier in preparation for the seizure of the northern ore fields. Furthermore, the Allies planned a small force to seize Stavanger on 5 April and, as soon as possible afterwards also Bergen and Trondheim, in order to deny the Germans these strategic bases.[421] This military operation, known as R4, was similar to Operation Avonmouth, examined in the last chapter and rescinded on 14 March, and, like the previous operation, it was expected that the Norwegians would not oppose the landings.

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[416] See TNA CAB 66/6, WP (40) 103, 'The Grand Strategy of the Allies' by Hankey, 23 March 1940; HNKY 11/2 'The Grand Strategy of the Allies,' 18 March 1940, Patrick Salmon, 'British Strategy and Norway 1939-40' in Salmon (ed.), *Britain and Norway in the Second World War*, p.3.
[417] Ibid.
[418] TNA CAB 99/3, SWC (39/40) 28 March 1940, p.6. TNA CAB 65/6 WM (40) 83, 'War Cabinet Minutes 28 March 1940'.
[419] TNA CAB 66/6 WP (40) 115 Annex, 'Certain Operations in Norwegian Territorial Waters' Directive by the Chiefs of Staff, 30 March 1940; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.552.
[420] For more information on Anglo-French discussions and relations regarding Operation Wilfred see Munch-Petersen, *The Strategy of Phoney War*, pp.194-205.
[421] TNA CAB 66/6 WP (40) 115 Annex, 'Certain Operations in Norwegian Territorial Waters' Directive by the Chiefs of Staff, 30 March 1940; TNA WO 193/773, 'Operations in Scandinavia'.

However, a fatal flaw occurred on 3 April 1940 when the War Cabinet postponed the start of Operation Wilfred so that the French could be persuaded to support the Royal Marine's operation.[422] The delay proved to be serious, since, unknown to the British or French, the German Army planned to invade Denmark and Norway on 9 April. On 5 April, the British War Cabinet approved proceeding with the mining operation independently from the French, with mines being laid on the morning of 8 April on the outer approach to Narvik.[423] However, the force that was supposed to lay the southern minefield was recalled because of German activity in their vicinity. On 9 April, Germany began landing her troops in various Norwegian ports: Oslo, Stavanger, Kristiansand, Bergen, Trondheim, and Narvik. By the next day, the German Army was in control of all the major ports. As Churchill later recalled: 'It was obvious that Britain had been forestalled, surprised, and… outwitted.'[424] A notable casualty of the Norway Campaign was Ironside who was replaced as CIGS by General Dill 27 May 1940.[425]

The COS' decision-making process with regards to Norway has largely been overshadowed by events on the Western Front and the Fall of France. However, there is no doubt that the invasion of Norway and the subsequent campaign had a significant influence on the Second World War. Germany's invasion of Norway was a move of great strategic significance, breaking the Royal Navy's blockade of the North Sea and opening a route to strike out towards the Atlantic. However, in reality, the German Navy's lack of resources meant that the gains were not fully capitalised upon. Instead, the conquest became a burden, with insufficient resources available to develop the full potential of the Norwegian bases – as compared to the French coast, where strategic gains became available very shortly after Norwegian ones. Nevertheless, for Hitler and the German High Command, Operation Weserübung (the German invasion of Denmark and Norway) consolidated the Führer's power over the armed forces, paving the way for campaigns in the West and in Russia. Indeed, the true strategic value of Norway did not become clear until 1941, when northern Norway was used for air and naval attacks on the Russian supply route to Murmansk – something the COS had not considered. [426]

[422] TNA CAB 65/12, WM (40) 80.5, 'Conclusions' 3 April 1940.
[423] TNA CAB 65/12, WM (40) 82.6, 'Conclusions,' 5 April 1940.
[424] Churchill, The Gathering Storm, p.541.
[425] Ironside, *Diaries*, 26 and 27 May 1940, p.334-341.
[426] Haarr, *The Battle for Norway*, p.1.

For the COS, the loss of Norway and her territorial waters in itself was not catastrophic. Ironically, iron ore, which from November 1939 to May 1940 was the most persuasive argument on both sides of the Channel for action in Scandinavia, subsequently became almost irrelevant as German industry found supplies elsewhere. Therefore, the strategic importance of the Norwegian iron ore mines diminished with the seizure of the Lorraine mines shortly thereafter.[427]

II: Command and Control: The Approach of the COS and the War Cabinet to the Norwegian Campaign

The Norwegian Campaign provides a good case study for an examination of the link between the COS and the War Cabinet in terms of policy and plans. The doctrine of collective responsibility means that the members of the War Cabinet were ultimately responsible for decisions on foreign policy. The COS' corporate responsibility was for the expressing of their joint military opinion on Britain's course in the war to the Cabinet. This section will examine the British Government's policy-making and decision-making process in what would become known as the Norwegian Campaign, in order to evaluate the civil-military relationship between the COS and the War Cabinet. A series of questions will be considered: what was the COS' position towards Scandinavia following the winter war? To what degree did the COS influence the War Cabinet's foreign policy decision in Scandinavia? What impact did the War Cabinet's decision have on the COS? And, to what extent did the COS do their duty towards the War Cabinet? By analysing their relationship, and particularly the different personalities involved and the part they played, it is possible to gain a more complete understand the COS' policy-making perspective.

II.I: WHAT WAS THE STANCE OF THE COS TOWARDS SCANDINAVIA FOLLOWING THE WINTER WAR?

At the signing of the peace treaty between Finland and Russia on 12 March 1940, the first reaction of the COS and the British Government was one of relief: 'I'm secretly relieved. Our plan was amateurish and half-hatched by a half-backed staff' was the response of Sir

[427] For more information see Klas Amark, 'Sweden: Negotiated Neutrality' in *The Cambridge History of the Second World War: Volume 2, Politics and Ideology*, (Cambridge, CUP, 2015). pp. 349-374.

Alexander Cadogan.[428] However, this meant it was necessary for an immediate reassessment of British Grand Strategy. The Joint Planners were commissioned by the COS on 16 March to produce a strategic appreciation on the Allied course in the next phase of the war.[429] This was duly followed, on 18 March, by a COS meeting with the Joint Planners, during which both committees discussed the present strategical situation.[430] The report produced the next day provided clear strategic thinking, showing that the events of the Winter War had resonated with the JPC and the COS. The appreciation reminded the Chiefs of Staff that despite the opportunities that arose from 'the Scandinavian project' this 'did not involve departure from the fundamental policy', which was to remain on the defensive while building up resources.[431] The Joint Planners stressed to the COS that 'we are still in this phase of the war, and [that] we cannot organise for a long-war and try and win a short one at the same time.'[432] They noted that neither the Army nor the RAF were in a position to engage in offensive operations and agreed:

> We must therefore be careful to avoid being rushed by events or forced by uninformed public opinion into courses of action which would be unsound from the military point of view. In particular, we should not be led into any enterprise "for the sake of doing something."[433]

The JPC qualified this with the caveat that if opportunity arose for 'enterprises' that would offer results at very 'small expense' these should be carried out, provided the resources were available. Nevertheless, for the Joint Planners it was 'clear [that] we are in no position to take the offensive and should avoid being forced to undertake operations which are militarily unsound.'[434] The COS read the report and agreed to its statement, presenting it to the War Cabinet.[435]

This evidence suggests that the JPC and COS were not considering abandonment of the long-war strategy or action in Scandinavia. When Winston Churchill raised the possibility

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[428] For Whitehall's reaction see Butler, *Grand Strategy*, p.11. Quote from Dilks, *Cadogan Diaries*, 13 March 1940, p.263.
[429] TNA CAB 84/2, JP (40) 17, 'Joint Planning Committee: Minutes,' 16 March 1940.
[430] TNA CAB 79/3, COS (40) 56, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes,' 18 March 1940, p.2.
[431] TNA CAB 84//11, JP (40) 61, 'Review of the Present Strategical Situation,' 19 March 1940, p.2.
[432] Ibid.
[433] Ibid, p.2-3.
[434] Ibid, p.3.
[435] TNA CAB 80/9, COS (40) 270, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Memorandum,' 'Certain Aspects of the Present Situation' 26 March 1940.

of occupying Narvik on 14 March, Ironside was hesitant, recording in his diary that the venture would 'put ourselves diplomatically very much in the wrong were we to violate Norwegian territory.'[436] The British had learned lessons from the Winter War, with Allied Military Committee RAF representative Air Commodore Medhurst concluding in his report on future British strategy that '[i]t was the absence of a guiding strategic principle rather than any material limitation which determined the programme.'[437] Therefore, the COS position towards Scandinavia in mid-March was that Britain should retain its grand strategy of a defensive mode of warfare.

II.II: TO WHAT DEGREE DID THE COS INFLUENCE THE WAR CABINET'S FORIGN POLICY DECISION IN SCANDINAIVA?

The power of decision-making ultimately remained with the War Cabinet. However, the advice of the COS was one of many factors the Prime Minster and his Cabinet had to consider. Before analysing the Cabinet's response to the COS report, it is important to distinguish the two other factors that influenced foreign policy: political and diplomatic.

Following the Winter War, there was political pressure from within the Conservative Party and in the press for a more active and vigorous prosecution of the war.[438] This pressure to take the initiative is best illustrated in a statement made to Chamberlain during a House of Commons debate by the Leader of the Liberals, Sir Archibald Sinclair, on 19 March:

> We must seize the initiative, and hold it both militarily and diplomatically. It is time we stopped saying, "What is Hitler going to do?"… It is time we asked, "What is Chamberlain going to do?"[439]

Chamberlain's war policy is an area of research that has been overlooked in the past and this thesis adds to the revisionist literature by showing that the Prime Minister's policy

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[436] Ironside, *Diaries*, 14 March 1940, p.228.
[437] TNA CAB 21/1313, 'Allied Strategy, 1940,' 14 March 1940, para 1 and 15.
[438] See Aaron Krishtalkia, 'Loyalty in Wartime: The Old Tories and British War Policy 1939-1940,' in Brian Farrell (ed.), *Leadership and Responsibility in the Second World War* (Quebec, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), p.50-51.
[439] Hansard, House of Commons, 19 March 1940, Vol 358, Col 1860.
[http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1940/mar/19/progress-of-the-war] Last Accessed: 19/08/17.

directly influenced the COS.[440] On the whole, the Cabinet tended to follow and reflect the Prime Minister's view and leadership. Chamberlain, like Churchill, came to view a Scandinavian operation as a chance for an easy and early victory. The occupation of the Swedish ore fields would strengthen the blockade decisively and give Nazi Germany a 'real hard punch in the stomach', which Chamberlain had come to regard as a prerequisite for a *putsch* in Germany.[441] Chamberlain's foreign policy is often overlooked in the historiography, however the PM had his own vision of economic warfare against Germany. As Ironside noted in his diary, after observing Chamberlain at the Supreme War Council argue for mining in Norwegian waters: 'These old ruśes politicians like Chamberlain have a strategy of their own.'[442] Yet Ironside and the military were quick to criticise the War Cabinet's lack of strategic understanding. As Ian Jacobs (Military Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet, 1939-1945) observed, Chamberlain 'was always out of his depth in military matters,' or, in the CIGS's words, 'hopelessly unmilitary.'[443] As Prime Minister, he bore responsibility for managing and directing the war. Yet Chamberlain ruled by compromise and consensus and his unfamiliarity with military matters was not conducive to agreeing coherent strategy. Chamberlain, therefore, failed to keep the War Cabinet focused on the Grand Strategy of a defensive war. Instead he allowed enthusiasm for Norway to build.

Strong diplomatic pressure was another factor in building momentum towards Norway, with growing French support towards seizing the initiative. Daladier was forced to resign on 21 March 1940, as a result of criticism over his perceived inaction over Finland. Paul Reynaud, who replaced Daladier, urged Chamberlain to 'seize the initiative' with a more 'energetic and daring conduct of the war.'[444] Reynaud's proposals were that the Allies not only stop German shipping in Norwegian waters but also launch 'decisive operations' in the Caspian and Black Sea to stop the supply of oil to Germany.[445] This allowed the momentum to build regarding action in Norway.

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[440] One scholar who has explored this area is Joseph Maiolo, 'To Gamble All on a Single Throw': Neville Chamberlain and the Strategy of the Phoney War.' In (ed.) C Baxter, M Dockrill, K Hamilton, *Britain in Global Politics, Volume 1: From Gladstone to Churchill* (London, Springer, 2013) pp.220-242.
[441] NC 18/1/1133A, Chamberlain to Ida, 3 December 1939.
[442] Ironside, *Diaries*, 28 March 1940, p.237.
[443] Lieutenant General Sir Ian Jacob in John Wheeler-Bennett (ed.), *Action This Day: Working With Churchill* (London, Macmillan, 1968) p.163; Ironside, *Diaries*, 7 April 1940, p.247.
[444] Cited in Kersaudy, *Norway 1940*, p.53.
[445] Ibid, p.54.

Added to this was the desire of the majority of the members of the War Cabinet to proceed with an expedition through Norway. On 20 March, the War Cabinet had been advised by Halifax of intelligence that had come from Herr Thyseen, the exiled German steel magnate, informing that the Ruhr Steel plants were now closed three days a week due to a shortage of iron ore.[446] This was later found to be due to the severe winter freezing of German canals.[447] In all, political willpower for seizing the initiative, coupled with France's desire for action, emboldened the Cabinet to reconsider the stoppage of iron ore.

The degree to which the COS influenced the War Cabinet's planning for an expedition in Norway can be seen in the treatment of the Chiefs of Staff report on the future course of the war. As discussed above, this report was written by the Joint Planners on 18 March, with the conclusion that Britain should remain defensive as 'we have not yet reached the stage, and are unlikely to reach it this year, when we can adopt a general offensive strategy except at sea and in the economic sphere.'[448] However, due to the Easter break, the COS did not submit the report until 27 March 1940, the day before the Supreme War Council. During these nine days, between 18 and 27 March, momentum had built for action in Norway, with Chamberlain and Reynaud coming to favour 'decisive operations.'[449] The COS presented its strategic appreciation on Britain's course in the next phase of the war against this political and diplomatic background. The report was, therefore, overtaken by events on the ground and so was barely discussed.

In the War Cabinet meeting of 27 March, at which the appreciation was presented, Newall argued that Britain should not be 'stampeded into undertaking unprofitable military projects offering little prospect of decisive success, merely for the sake of doing something.' However, the Prime Minister dismissed the argument by pointing out that nothing was no longer an option.[450] 'The appetite of the public,' he said,

[446] TNA CAB 65/6, WM (40) 73, 'War Cabinet: Conclusion,' 20 March 1940.
[447] See Salmon, *Deadlock and Diversion*, p.177.
[448] TNA CAB 80/9, COS (40) 270, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Memorandum,' 'Certain Aspects of the Present Situation,' 26 March 1940.
[449] Communication de M. Paul Reynaud au Gouvernement Britannique, 25 March 1940, Commission d'Enquete Parlementaire, T. II, (Paris, 1952), p.351 quoted in Kersaudy, *Norway 1940*, p.54.
[450] TNA CAB 65/6, WM (40) 76, 'War Cabinet: Conclusion,' 27 March 1940.

> For spectacular operations remained, and this psychological factor could not be ignored. Any blow which we could deliver at Germany would encourage our own people and would be admirable for propaganda purposes.[451]

The War Cabinet agreed to approach the French the next day at the Supreme War Council with a proposal for Operation Royal Marine – mining the Rhine – and, subject to discussion and approval, Operation Wilfred – mining the sea off Norway. Ironside wrote about the exchange that evening in his diary: 'everyone [in the War Cabinet] expressed themselves in favour of a stronger policy, but nobody had the slightest idea of how this should be attained.'[452] Thus, the COS and the JPC, in many regards, fulfilled their duty by assessing the situation and arriving at a logical conclusion. The British armed services were not fully ready for combat in Norway except at sea. However, the COS were overruled by the War Cabinet, influenced by diplomatic relations with France and the political will for action.

As their superiors, the Cabinet had a right to overrule the COS. Nonetheless, could the COS not have done more? When the War Cabinet desired to proceed with Operations Royal Marine and Wilfred, the COS went to work to provide a plan for enacting the operations rather than warning them that the necessary ways and means were inadequate. When the COS' advice was ignored and the risks that the Norwegian Campaign would have on the British military further increased, the COS did not assert themselves and press home their opinion that Britain was ill-prepared for the Norwegian Campaign. This can be seen from the War Cabinet minutes, which do not record any member raising caution on the COS' advice.

The Chiefs of Staff, thus, were weak and ineffective. It was their role and duty to confront extreme thinking with realism and 'to speak truth unto power.' However, this did not seem to happen. Instead there was complacency. When the COS met the French High Command the next day, Gamelin warned Ironside that 'the politicians' had not studied the outcomes of any of the French High Command's proposals and he asked Ironside to make sure that the British interrogated Reynaud on their feasibility. As Ironside recorded, 'I told him they need have no fear, our Government would do nothing for the sake of doing it only.'[453] But Ironside was wrong. The Supreme War Council meeting on 28 March was less about

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[451] TNA CAB 65/6, WM (40) 76, 'War Cabinet: Conclusion,' 27 March 1940.
[452] Ironside, *Diaries*, 27 March 1940, p.236.
[453] Ironside, *Diaries*, 27 March 1940, p.237

strategy than about tactics and politics over the future direction.[454] As Hoare later wrote, 'Wilfred and Royal Marine. We bartered one for the other.'[455] In the discussion that took place, almost no examination was made of the German reaction, nor to whether the Germans were planning a similar operation. However, it was decisive: *Wilfred* would start on 5 April, and *Royal Marin*e commence the day before.[456] The British delegation had agreed to the risky Operation Wilfred, for which the COS had advised Britain was singularly unprepared and which had little strategic benefit.[457] The War Cabinet gave little analytical thought to the consequences of the decision and, to an extent, the COS were placed in a difficult situation by the unexpected decision.

II.III: HOW DID THE COS RESPOND TO THE WAR CABINET'S DECISION?

On 28 May 1940, the War Cabinet had committed Britain to two operations against Norway: Operation Royal Marine and Wilfred. The COS were unprepared for this decision and had not considered how to achieve these operations, as can be seen in the COS minutes the day after the Supreme Council:

> For example, should it be assumed that landing at Norwegian ports would be in face of opposition? Again, in the case of an expedition to Narvik, would the object be to get through to Lulea, or merely to reach Gallivare? Another question would arise over the employment of French troops. Were the Chasseurs Alpins and the French Foreign Legion still available; and, if so when could they sail? As time was short, he [CIGS] suggested that the Joint Planning Sub-Committee should be instructed to study the whole question as a matter of urgency.[458]

Such questions reveal a flurry of panic within the COS, who were now under pressure to make plans a reality. The resulting reports were produced hastily over the next two days by the JPC. Their recommendations were for the reconstitution, on a smaller scale than

[454] TNA CAB 99/3, SWC (39/40) 6, 'Supreme War Council,' 28 March 1940.
[455] Templewood Papers, XI/2, quoted in Salmon, *Deadlock and Diversion,* p.177.
[456] TNA CAB 99/3, SWC (39/40) 6, 'Supreme War Council,' 28 March 1940.
[457] TNA CAB 65/6, WM (40) 76, 'War Cabinet: Conclusion,' 27 March 1940.
[458] TNA CAB 79/85, COS (40) 60, 'Chiefs of Staff: Confidently Minutes,' 29 March 1940, p.1.

Avonmouth and Stratford, of five British battalions and a French contingent.[459] Neither air support nor air defence would be provided, except at Narvik.[460] Considering this was the third planned operation since December 1939, the War Office should have been able to implement the plan quickly. Unfortunately, operational planning for Scandinavia had been disbanded a fortnight earlier.[461] The result was frantic preparation, exacerbated by the War Office decision, during the previous fortnight, to destroy all secret plans for previous operations.[462] As General Dewing, Director of Operations, wrote:

> Avonmouth and Stratford plans have been reconstituted hurriedly, without thorough consideration of the consequences which may follow through implementation. This immediately becomes apparent when we start drawing up instructions for the commanders of the various forces.[463]

Dewing's scepticism was voiced in a letter to Ironside's deputy Chief of Staff, John Dill, and it was shared by many in Whitehall. The COS did not have methodical control over the planning of the campaign, which was rushed. Furthermore, they had no operational headquarters and there was no tactical and strategic thinking over important details, such as the provision of interpreters, liaison between the Allies and proper mapping. Furthermore, the COS failed to inform the War Cabinet that after the Winter War the expedition had been disbanded, that the necessary detailed planning had been stopped and that it would, therefore, take weeks rather than days to prepare a force. The COS allowed ministers to be seduced by the diplomatic and political momentum for action without taking due responsibility for the practical feasibility of the operations.

The COS, thus, failed to recognise or acknowledge the wisdom of the JPC. Rather than giving their report careful consideration and taking heed of the warnings, they ordered preparations to begin. Instead, the COS should instead have raised concerns with the War Cabinet and proposed an adjusted policy.

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[459] TNA CAB 84/11, COS (40) 268 (JP) (S), 'Certain Operations In Norwegian Territorial Waters,' 29 March 1939.
[460] TNA CAB 84/11, COS (40) 269 (S), 'Certain Operations In Norwegian Territorial Waters,' 31 March 1939, p.3.
[461] TNA WO 165/48, M.O.2 (C), 'MO2 War Diary,' 29 March 1940.
[462] TNA WO 168/83, 'War Office to GOC in C Commands,' 16 March 1940.
[463] TNA WO 106/1969, 'DMO to DICGS,' 1 April 1940.

II.IV: PERSONALITIES AND THE PART THEY PLAYED

The COS' response was mitigated by the presence of Ironside on the Committee. As was discussed in the last chapter, the influence of Ironside in persuading the COS of the benefits of a Scandinavian campaign was significant. His desire to gain the initiative in the conduct of the war, despite the risks, is revealed in his decision to mobilise the 49 Division and withdraw up to three of the five regular divisions from the BEF for Operation Wilfred. Ironside accepted that 'there were strong military arguments against this plan, [and] that the Germans might achieve a decisive victory on the Western Front.'[464] Nevertheless, he rationalised this logic by the assuming that the reduction of the BEF was 'very unlikely to govern the outcome on the Western Front.'[465] In many ways, Ironside's strategic comprehension was detached from the reality of the war. It overlooked the fact that the Allies would, as a consequence of his actions, deprive the Western Front of resources. General Pownall's conclusion of the decision was that 'the troops are untrained, and if they did get into a scrap with the Germans they would surely get eaten', adding that 'the perils of amateur strategy are all with us again.'[466] The CIGS in the rush of the moment had not strategically or tactically assessed the situation.

It appears that the opinions of other members of the COS were subsumed by those of Ironside. For example, the findings of the JPC on 15 April about Trondheim as a possible location for direct landings was that: 'A direct attack upon Trondheim would be costly in execution and would be unlikely to result in the capture of Trondheim.'[467] The COS dismissed these warnings, arguing that 'it was essential on political, as well as military grounds, to recapture this port from the Germans.' Air Commodore Slessor, RAF Director of Plans, dissented from this opinion, and:

> Drew attention to the risks involved from air attacks in relation to the importance of the object. While realising the political necessity for an attempt on Trondheim he considered that this port could not subsequently be used to maintain large forces to keep Norway in the war for long, or to supply Sweden.

[464] TNA CAB 80/9, COS (40) 276 (S), 'Memorandum by the CIGS: Certain Operations,' 3 April 1940.
[465] Ibid.
[466] Pownall, *Diaries,* 4 April 1940, p.296.
[467] TNA CAB 84/12 JP (40) 105, 'Examination of the Possibility of a Direct Attack on Trondheim.'

> He felt that the Chiefs should be aware of the scale of air attack of which Trondheim is liable, in order that they could assess the risked involved.[468]

Ironside's responded that:

> I told him that he argued the wrong way. We were considering how to attack it, not whether we should or not. That politically we had been ordered to attack it and that it was the only way to save Norway.[469]

From this response, it is possible to gain an insight into Ironside's view that the COS existed to implement orders from Cabinet, not to formulate policy. Ironside's subsequent diary entry for the 15 April meeting further reveals his strength of character over the other Chiefs:

> We went on to make the plan: two landings north and south and a dash up the fiord with a battleship as at Narvik… I was pretty forceful in what I said and I forced the Committee to continue planning. We are now at the critical moment of the war from a morale point of view and we must expect to suffer casualties.[470]

Ironside clearly took charge, however in many respects it was the weakness of Newall and Pound that allowed this to happen. As Chairman, it was Newall's responsibility to lead the COS, not Ironside's. After reading the report, it was Slessor alone who raised questions as to the feasibility of Trondheim, while Newall and Pound remained silent. Discussions moved on without further dissension.

Churchill was another dominant personality who influenced the COS. As Chamberlain noted of Churchill, he

> …believes so earnestly in his own idea (for the moment) that he puts more intense pressure on his staff than he realises. The result is apt to be that they are bullied into a sulky silence – a most dangerous position in war.[471]

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[468] TNA CAB 79/85, COS (40) 80, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes,' 15 April 1940.
[469] Ironside, *Diaries*, 15 April 1940, p.262.
[470] Ibid.
[471] 'Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain,' 20 April 1940, Self, *Chamberlain Diary Letters*, p.520.

The First Sea Lord imposed his personality on the COS as the new Chairman of the Military Co-ordination Committee. In this role, and as an influential figure in the War Cabinet, Churchill generated fervour towards the project and also optimism that the operation was without risk. On 3 April, four days before the German invasion, Churchill told the War Cabinet that he 'personally doubted whether the Germans would land a force in Scandinavia.'[472] In his role as Chairman of the MCC, the COS reported to Churchill to discuss plans before their presentation to the War Cabinet. This enabled Churchill to steer policy and closely examine the COS' proposed course of action. As Chamberlain remarked, 'in his enthusiasm [Churchill] put more intense pressure on his advisers than he realised, and reduced them to silent acquiescence.'[473] Ironside's reaction to Churchill's involvement in COS policymaking can be seen in his diary entry for 14 April 1940:

> We cannot have a man trying to supervise all military arrangements as if he were a company commander running a small operation to cross a bridge. How I have kept my temper so far I don't know.[474]

The atmosphere between the COS and Churchill was strained and acrimonious during the Norway Campaign, and it was not only Ironside who clashed with Churchill. For example, the COS meeting of 16 April was disrupted when members became heated over Churchill's interference in the plan for a direct attack on Trondheim, otherwise known as Operation Hammer. It is recorded that COS Secretary General Ismay:

> Cleared the room… and implored the Chiefs of Staff to exercise the most rigid self-control over themselves and at all costs to keep their tempers. He told them that, if there was a row at the meeting, he was afraid of a first-class political crisis.[475]

Yet the decision-making process necessitated a close working relationship between Churchill, as Chair of the MCC, and the COS. Plans had to be passed to the MCC before being presented to the War Cabinet. This system was set up to lessen the load on the War

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[472] TNA CAB 65/6 WM (40) 80, 3 April 1940 'War Cabinet Minutes'.
[473] Quoted in Butler, *Grand Strategy*, p.130.
[474] Ironside, *Diaries*, 14 April 1940, p.262.
[475] TNA CAB PREM 1/404, 'Minute by Bridges,' 25 April 1940.

Cabinet, although it hindered the COS. For example, in the month of April alone, the COS attended thirty-two War Cabinet meetings, twenty-one Military Co-ordination Committee meetings, and forty-two COS meetings. As a result, Chiefs who sat on all three committees attended a staggering ninety-four meetings that month. As John Slessor, Director of Plans, would record of the COS during this period, they were 'exhausted men, ready to succumb to Winston's pressure.'[476] These statistics and quotes paint a very human picture. Discussions, decisions and plans were often influenced as much by the strength of character and personality of individuals as by the physical weakness and struggles of others. Therefore, it is important not to overlook the stress and mental strain placed upon the COS and those who were responsible for determining Britain's course in the war during this time.

This section concludes that the War Cabinet paid insufficient attention to the warnings of the COS against action in Scandinavia. Without due consideration of the COS's position, policy became separated from reality. For example, Norwegian intervention involved facing risks that were overlooked. Furthermore, the COS did not seriously question the feasibility of the proposed campaign, which grew to be a major military commitment. The powerful personalities of Ironside and Churchill allowed the War Cabinet and the COS to be seduced by operations in Norway without taking due diligence, meaning that enthusiasm for the campaign developed a momentum of its own. The resulting political pressure exercised a major influence over the COS' planning and conduct of the operations. In many regards, the COS acted recklessly as a committee by failing to recognise or acknowledge the wisdom of their advisers.

III: Complacency: The Response of the COS to Intelligence and Planning

Churchill wrote in his draft of *The Second World War* that '[h]istory will ask the question whether the British Government had any right to be surprised', by the German invasion of Norway.[477] In April 1940, the COS were surprised by the German invasion. In this short section we will investigate whether the COS had any right to be. To achieve this the role

[476] TNA CAB 140/98, 'Official History Comments to TK Derry.'
[477] This quote was omitted from the published version and is quoted in David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London, Allen Lane, 2004) p.123.

intelligence and policy-making held in the COS's conduct during the Norwegian Campaign.

One of the central reasons that the COS underestimated the German invasion of Norway and supported Allied operations was their lack of regard for intelligence. Throughout March and early April 1940, there were several cases of important operational intelligence being overlooked. For example, on 26 March 1940, the British Embassy in Stockholm reported an increased concentration of aircraft and ships in northern Germany.[478] The same day, the air attaché in Stockholm reported Swedish intelligence that the Germans were concentrating aircraft and ships for the possible invasion of Norway.[479] This intelligence was included in the Joint Intelligence Committee's daily Secret Situation Report on 27 March, which was read by the COS.[480] However, the COS did not take heed of the warnings and no action was taken. On 3 April 1940, the COS was notified that the War Office Intelligence Division had received reports that 'the Germans were reported to be concentrating troops at Rostock, which might portend an invasion of Scandinavia.'[481] However, the COS minutes do not record any comments on the matter. The COS's lack of engagement with the data can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the COS had received a mass of reports about possible German intentions and plans in the previous months that had proven to be wrong. For example, between the end of September 1939 and early March 1940, some thirty reports were received concerning the cancellation or reinstatement of German Army leave, believing these to be a sign of Germany planning an operation.[482] Such an overabundance of reports clouded the COS' judgement. Secondly, the COS's personal judgements impaired their ability to analyse the data. Ironside and those around him were wedded to the assumption that Germany was simply incapable of successfully invading Norway. Ironside writes in his diary of his low opinion of the Wehrmacht generalship and of their inability to adapt and improvise.[483] Thus, it seems that the COS' pattern of consensus decision-making fostered a lack of ability to analyse and question situations independently, which led to critical evidence being ignored.

[478] Hinsley, *British Intelligence* p.116-17.
[479] TNA FO 371/24815, 'Air Attaché, Stockholm to FO for DI Air Ministry, Copy to Oslo,' 26 March 1940
[480] TNA FO 116/4471, 'Hitler's Pre-emptive War,' 27 March 1940.
[481] TNA CAB 79/85, COS (40) 63, 'Chiefs of Staff Minutes,' 3 April 1940.
[482] See TNA WO 208/2257, 'War Office Weekly Intelligence Commentary No.32,' 28 March 1940.
[483] Wark, *Beyond Intelligence,* p.248.

As early as 28 January, the COS recognised the German interest in the Gallivare ore fields, and concluded,

> In our view, Germany is likely to decide to take action continuity of supplies of iron ore and oil… Germany might well attempt to seize the Gallivare ore fields as soon as the Baltic becomes free of ice.[484]

However, events overtook the COS. Their complacency is evidenced by the fact that there was no further assessment on the German state of mind until April 1940, when Slessor – not a member of the COS – suggested that the JIC produce a weekly report on this topic.[485] Ultimately, the COS failed to place themselves in Germany's position or to appreciate that the invasion of Norway was possible. This indicates a pivotal failure in their planning, as this kind of judgement was a basic requirement of military command and one expected of all officers who had graduated from Staff College.

Further complacency can be seen in the COS's inability to question and assess fragmentary reports. The COS was weakened in its ability to formulate an overview of the situation by the fact that daily and weekly intelligence reports were not produced as one combined report, but as separate reports from the different intelligence arms.[486] This problem should have been identified and addressed by the COS, but nothing was done and the status quo continued. The COS, and in particular Ironside, believed themselves to be the best men to interpret and understand the incoming information and decide how to act upon it or not – in most cases without seeking a second opinion from the Director of Intelligence.[487] Consequently, many senior officers, including Newall and Pound, tended to treat the appreciations as second class. Indeed, Kenneth Strong, Intelligence Officer, wrote that the intelligence staff 'did not have any great influence or impact on their departmental decision-makers.'[488] Ironside and the other Chiefs failed to see the larger picture regarding German intentions in Norway and they seem never to have taken the initiative to have incoming signals systematically verified. By acting in this manner, the COS failed to ensure that their

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[484] TNA CAB 80/7, COS (40) 218, 'Allied Assistance to Finland,' 28 January 1940.
[485] TNA CAB 79/3, COS (40) 86 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes' 19 April 1940. See Goodman, *Official History of the JIC*, p.72.
[486] Ibid, p.98.
[487] More information in Wesley Wark, 'Beyond Intelligence: The Study of British Strategy and the Norwegian Campaign, 1940,' in Michael Fry, *Power, Personalities and Policies: Essays in Honour of Donald Cameron Watt* (London, Cass, 1992), p.245.
[488] Kenneth Strong, *Intelligence at the Top: Recollections of an Intelligence Officer* (London, Cassell, 1968) p.18.

services were provided with the intelligence necessary for a successful engagement. This complacent attitude towards intelligence reports can be seen in Ironside's reaction to the German Fleet's movements as: 'a hullabaloo, probably.'[489]

The COS' failure to analyse intelligence reports was not isolated, but institutionalised. For instance, the Joint Intelligence Committee, who provided the COS with collated intelligence, was barely functioning by the spring of 1940. Although formed three years earlier, the three national intelligence agencies – the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), the Security Service (MI5) and the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS) – acted without close liaison and rarely co-ordinated their efforts.[490] Indeed, it was not until February 1940 that all three Directors of Intelligence were present at the same JIC meeting.[491] Furthermore, the JIC did not attend a COS meeting until May 1940, whereas the JPC was in regular attendance from September 1939.[492] In practice, analysis of intelligence from the individual services was often collated by the Joint Planning Committee.[493] Finally, the JIC worked purely reactively and not proactively during this time, and simply responded to requests for appreciations on particular subjects. As a result, the JIC was a weak aspect of the British War Machinery that could have been much stronger.

IV: Conduct: Response of the Chief of Staff Committee to the German Invasion

On Sunday 7 April 1940, the German Fleet, alarmed by British activity in Norwegian waters, was deployed towards Denmark and Norway. On 9 April, the German invasion of Norway began. As this thesis is focused on the COS' actions during the Phoney War, the Norway Campaign itself will not be discussed in detail. However, an assessment of the COS's conduct from 7 April to 9 April in response to the German invasion of Norway is vital for understanding how the COS functioned and liaised with the War Cabinet and for revealing whether they worked as a unified force or as independent service Chiefs.

[489] Ironside, *Diary*, 8 April 1940, p.119.
[490] See Goodman, *The Official History of the JIC*, p.63-65.
[491] Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, p.93.
[492] Goodman, *The Official History of the JIC*, p.64.
[493] Hinsley, *British Intelligence*, p.94-97.

A case study of the 24-hour period of 7 April reveals initial disunity within the COS and the influence of Churchill over the Committee on this day is clear. Churchill dominated the War Cabinet, and, therefore, considerable responsibility for the failure of the campaign falls on him. Churchill acknowledged to Ismay, 'I certainly bore an exceptional measure of responsibility for the brief and disastrous Norwegian Campaign.'[494] His single-minded pursuit of an operation in Narvik would see Churchill overrule the COS in the critical blunder to offload British troops and deploy the Navy. In summary, Churchill, Pound and Phillips shared the view that intelligence reports did not suggest the German Fleet was heading towards Norway, but rather the Atlantic.[495] In fact, this German naval action was intended to distract attention from the full-scale invasion of Norway. On the evening of 7 April, Pound ordered the disembarkation of Army R4 units destined for Norway so that the Fleet could venture instead into the North Atlantic. The results were twofold: the Royal Navy was deployed to engage the German Fleet in a naval battle that did not materialise, and troops, which would have been essential to secure the Norwegian ports before the Germans arrived, were no longer in place. Thus, Germany was able to secure, within forty-eight hours, all the main Norwegian ports. Our interest is in the study of policy-making and decision-making within the COS, and is therefore in the execution of the order given by Churchill and Pound that is of the most interest. The first British response to the invasion was not by the COS, but by Churchill and Pound acting independently, as will be examined next.

Pound did not inform, let alone consult, the other Chiefs of Staff members. Neither was the War Cabinet informed. According to the Deputy CIGS, the COS did not discover what had been ordered until the following morning: 'it came as a thunderbolt to us.'[496] It was also a surprise to the War Cabinet. Ian Jacob, Assistant Cabinet Secretary, recalled that when Churchill announced the departure of the ships without the troops, 'He looked decidedly sheepish. The PM said "Oh", and there was a distinct silence.'[497] This illustrates the weakness of the COS structure, whereby each of the individual Chiefs were responsible for their own service. They were allowed freedom of action, which meant that they were inclined to follow their own interests rather than acting as one body. According to Ismay, Secretary to the COS,

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[494] TNA CAB 127/50, 'Churchill to Ismay,' 26 May 1940.
[495] See Roskill, *The War at Sea*, p.159-60; Lambert, *The Only British Advantage*, p.45; Kiszely, *Anatomy of a Campaign*, p.113-15.
[496] TNA CAB 140/98, Massy to Derry, 'Notes on Official History Comments.'
[497] Jacob, quotes in Roskill, *Churchill and the Admirals*, p.98.

> The Chiefs of Naval Staff and Chief of Imperial General Staff acted with sturdy independence… appointing their respective commanders without consultation… and gave directives without harmonising them.[498]

The Admiralty, under Pound and Churchill, acted independently and with disregard for the opinions of the other COS members. This is surprising, considering that the R4 plan had been a joint COS operation that would have seen the invasion of Norway by the British Army and had been ratified by all services and the War Cabinet. However, when the option of a sea offensive materialised, Churchill and Pound readily dismissed the unified campaign strategy. It is not fully understood why the COS and War Cabinet were not consulted, but given Ismay's statement cited above, perhaps it should not have come as a surprise. The COS was initially confounded by this turn of events, however, rather than pursuing Churchill and Pound and calling them to account, they turned their attention towards the German invasion and how to respond.

A further major flaw in the COS' conduct was their failure to stick to a strategic objective. An example which illustrates this is the COS's position regarding which Norwegian ports the Allies should target. At 6am on 9 April, the COS met with the Joint Planners to discuss what to do following reports of German ships at Oslo, Stavanger, Bergen and Trondheim, but not Narvik.[499] General Dewing, the Director of Military Operations, recalled that, 'Newall, who was chairman, had no grip, and no-one had constructive proposals.'[500] Eventually it was agreed that the strategy to be taken was to stop the Germans consolidating, '1) at Bergen and 2) at Trondheim… [and] to get to Narvik as soon as possible', for which 24 Brigade 'should leave at once.'[501] Therefore, it was agreed that Trondheim and Bergen should have priority over Narvik. However, when the War Cabinet met at 8.30am, Ironside's recommendation was that 'our first immediate action should be to go ahead with our plan for seizing Narvik,' with it being equally desirable to prevent the Germans from establishing themselves at Trondheim.[502] Churchill supported this recommendation, but 'strongly advocated that we should proceed with the operation against

[498] Ismay, *Memoirs,* p.111.
[499] TNA CAB 79/3, COS (40) 70, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes,' 9 April 1940.
[500] KCL LCHMA, Major-General Richard Dewing, 0099 Dewing, 'Diary 1939-1941,' 9 April.
[501] TNA CAB 79/3, COS (40) 70, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes,' 9 April 1940.
[502] TNA CAB 65/6, WM (40) 85, 'War Cabinet: Minutes,' 9 April 1940.

Narvik.'[503] Pound informed the Cabinet that Home Fleet had been ordered to target German ships in Bergen and Trondheim. Newall reported that he advised air action by bomber squadrons to Bergen and Trondheim. The Cabinet agreed that Narvik would be the primary focus, with operations to recapture Bergen and Trondheim to be considered in future.[504] It can be seen, therefore, that the COS reinterpreted the advice of the Joint Planners, who proposed that Trondheim and Bergen were a greater priority than Narvik, although why this happened is unclear. It is likely that Ironside and Churchill's advocacy for Narvik superseded the Joint Planners, Pound and Newall's position on the subject. This notwithstanding, the Chiefs simply dispensed with the JPC's advice altogether. Whatever the motive, this was reckless conduct on the part of the COS. It was the role and duty of the COS to present the Cabinet with impartial information, rather than to conduct their own reinterpretation of the Joint Planner's report.

Furthermore, it can be seen that the COS did not recognise their own weaknesses or limitations. The JPC had been founded for such occurrences as the German invasion of Norway, with the remit of analysing the options, assessing the risks and rewards, and proposing a way forward. The COS seemed to believe that they, by virtue of appointment, knew best, and they failed to acknowledge the remit of the JPC. Following the decision by Cabinet to concentrate on Narvik in the first instance, the COS met at 11am with the Joint Planners. However, although minutes were taken, detailed notes were not made on the discussion that took place. Nevertheless, it is likely that the Joint Planners argued from their earlier position that the clear priority should be the other two ports, not Narvik. The JPC's argument at the earlier meeting had been strong, with the political and strategic importance of Trondheim overwhelming as Norway's second city, possessing a large harbour and well-developed port facilities.[505] It was also a transport centre linking the north and south of the country, further increasing its strategic importance. The JPC left the 11am meeting with instructions to formulate appreciations on actions to be taken at Narvik. However, in their report, written in the afternoon of the same day, the Joint Planners declared:

[503] TNA CAB 65/6, WM (40) 85, 'War Cabinet: Minutes,' 9 April 1940.
[504] Ibid.
[505] TNA CAB 80/105, COS (40) 285 (JP) (S), 'Joint Planning Committee: Scandinavia,' 9 April 1940.

> Of the three possible landing points, Trondheim is best suited to achieve our object. Our immediate available forces should therefore be organised for this purpose.[506]

The JPC were consistent in their warning and reiterated to the COS that Narvik was not the best option. However, yet again, the COS dismissed this advice. Ironside stated emphatically at the Military Co-ordination Committee meeting on 9 April that,

> We must concentrate our attack on Narvik and not until we had succeeded in capturing it should we attempt to expel the Germans from elsewhere.'[507]

The events of 9 April reveal the chaotic nature of the COS' working practice. The COS and the War Cabinet had been carried by the momentum of the day. Instead of focusing on the best option to stop iron ore trade, which was Trondheim, the focus now moved towards assisting Norway repel the German invasion via Narvik. Only the Joint Planners recognised this, but they were not heeded.

The events of 9 April illustrate the ponderous, over-bureaucratic nature of the workings of the COS. Business was not conducted at one meeting, but over several. The COS' day started at 6am with separate meetings with the War Cabinet, their own COS committee, the JPC, the Supreme War Council and the MCC. The last meeting did not begin until 11pm. It was a structure and system unsuited to rapid decision-making. Ironside wrote in his diary that the day:

> Went well… but here we are, the whole day gone and nothing but talk. You cannot make war like this. Sooner or later if we are to win the war we must have proper control.[508]

To a certain extent, Ironside was correct in this view. The existence of the MCC in particular added a layer of management that was actively counterproductive to timely decision-making. In addition to the above committee meetings, each Chief of Staff had responsibilities to his individual service, which meant even more meetings with the junior

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[506] TNA CAB 80/105, COS (40) 285 (JP) (S), 'Joint Planning Committee: Scandinavia,' 9 April 1940, p.4
[507] TNA CAB 83/3, MC (40) 17 'Military Co-ordination Committee,' 9 April 1940.
[508] Ironside, *Diaries*, 9 April 1940, p.250.

ranks. It is important not only to view the Chiefs as an organisational body but also as individuals, and to appreciate the immense physical and mental strain they faced. For example, on 9 April, alongside his COS duties, Pound had to deal with Admiralty business in the form of threats from enemy-held shore batteries and he had to cancel an attack. Pound also had to deal with Churchill, who was observed to be in 'a high state of excitement in the map room' as he directed commanders.[509] Similarly, again on 9 April, Newall was involved in cancelling a proposed attack by Coastal Command on the Stavanger airbase, which went against existing policy on targeting land bases.[510] Ironside too was preoccupied on 9 April with meetings at the War Office. The Director of Military Operations, General Dewing, recorded how he 'tried in vain to persuade him [Ironside] to support operations in the Trondheim area in preference to the Narvik project…[but] I couldn't move him.'[511] Ironside's mind had already been made up, partly because he had moved on to deal with others issues once Narvik had been decided upon. Although the conduct of the COS can be criticised, with hindsight their duties were arduous, and there was enormous pressure on 9 April to quickly resolve the situation they faced. As Slessor recalled, 'I've never seen three men more exhausted and therefore less fit to consider objectively a military problem on which so much depended. Ironside could hardly keep awake.'[512] They were, after all, only human.

In summary, the events of 7 to 9 April 1940 demonstrate several failings of the COS as a committee. It can be seen to be divided, with Dudley Pound and Churchill ignoring the COS and War Cabinet and acting independently in their decision to engage in a naval battle that did not materialise. Indeed, the COS can be considered arrogant in its failure to recognise the value of the JPC's appreciations over the Norway Campaign. On 9 April, the COS left a meeting with the Joint Planners agreeing to the recommended targets of Trondheim and Bergen over Narvik, and subsequently left the War Cabinet agreeing to almost the opposite. The events of 9 April also demonstrate the laborious nature of the decision-making process and the huge toll it took upon individual Chiefs. The COS' conduct is, therefore, open to criticism and it could be labelled ineffective in performing its mandated duty of steering the War Cabinet in response to German invasion.

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[509] See Barnett, *Engage the Enemy more Closely, p.113*; Roskill, *The War at Sea*, p.170. Captain Ralph Edwards quote on Churchill in Barnett, *The War at Sea*, p.114.
[510] Roskill, *The War at Sea*, p.17.
[511] KCL, Dewing, *Diary*, 10 April 1940.
[512] TNA CAB 106/98, 'Slessor to Derry,' 11 April 1950.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the COS performed inadequately during the Norwegian Campaign. However, what is most surprising is the extent to which the War Cabinet influenced the COS' position during the Campaign. Cabinet members had a responsibility for the direction and conduct of the war and had every right to involve themselves in the COS' decision-making. However, the Cabinet's decision was decided by the political and diplomatic momentum for action rather than the COS's opinion. The COS was wrong-footed by the Cabinet's decision to proceed with Operations Wilfred and Royal Marine, yet they did not attempt to question the appropriateness of these commitments. The COS permitted Churchill and Chamberlain to seduce them without taking due account of the feasibility of the operations. Pound and Newall failed to stand up to the overbearing personality of Ironside. As a result, the COS can be judged ineffective during the Norway Campaign. Their failure to appreciate the Joint Planners' reports had a major impact on planning and conduct. From its inception to its conclusion, the Norway Campaign was mired in error and misjudgement. The COS was divided with the JPC over the correct course to take, they faced contradictory orders from the War Cabinet, and they were complacent regarding the German threat to Norway, meaning that they often seemed to improvise in their response. Ultimately, the two factors that decided the outcome of the Norway Campaign – failure of Allied intelligence and the strength of German Air Power – have masked the other weaknesses in the British response, namely the conduct of the COS.

5. FUNCTIONING OR FAILING: THE AMC AND THE COS IN BRITAIN'S WAR MACHINERY, IN 1940

During the Phoney War period, the British Government was presented with the conundrum of how best to meaningfully co-ordinate the COS and the War Cabinet in directing Britain's course in the war. Chapter One outlined the committee structure of the British War Machinery, as it was known, during the Phoney War period. This chapter will evaluate how the British War Machinery worked in practice, and assess whether the system of governance helped or hindered the COS's co-ordination with the French High Command and the War Cabinet.

Towards the end of the Phoney War period in May 1940, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister and instituted reforms in the British War Machinery. These will be explained and an assessment made as to whether they were the result of an ineffective and inefficient decision-making process prior to May 1940. In order to conduct this analysis, this chapter will firstly evaluate the Allied Military Committee (AMC), which was comprised of senior British officers representing the COS's interests alongside representatives of the French High Command. An evaluation of the committee is useful as an inquiry into the British War Machinery as it reveals the deep disquiet that pervaded the British military establishment regarding liaisons with the French. This chapter will argue that the framework for close collaboration existed through the AMC, however, due to complacency mixed with aversion, the British failed to successfully use this. Secondly, this chapter will assess the COS's relationship with the War Cabinet and other committees in fulfilling its purpose as a decision-making and policy-making body. It will be argued that the bureaucratic committee system resulted in slow decision-making, which hindered the COS's effectiveness.

The fall of Chamberlain in May 1940 has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention, focusing mainly on the personalities and immediate circumstances that led to the change of

government.[513] However, the literature largely ignores the change in the British War Machinery that was brought about by the advent of Churchill's new coalition. Although Alex Danchev's *Sword and Mace*[514] and Sheila Lawlor's *Churchill and the Politics of War, 1940-41*[515] touch on this change in Britain's decision-making process, which resulted in the COS being given more power and the addition of Winston Churchill as Defence Minister to the committee, little analysis of the effect this had on the COS itself has been undertaken. Furthermore, this chapter conducts the first in-depth analysis of the Allied Military Committee (AMC) and its role and significance in Anglo-French relations.[516] An evaluation of the AMC is important in understanding how the COS conducted inter-allied liaison and whether the complex committee structure of the British War Machinery limited the influence of the AMC. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints limiting access to the French Archives on the AMC, the AMC will not be analysed from the French perspective. In any regard, this thesis's focus is primarily on the COS and its relationship with others, not the AMC's. However, the AMC will be discussed here as an example of the failings of the British War Machinery.

I: UNDERUTILISED: THE ALLIED MILITARY COMMITTEE (AMC)

On 27 May 1940, a day after his appointment as the new CIGS, General Sir John Dill received a letter from the Anglo-French liaison officer, General Marshall-Cornwall, about the state of collaboration between the Allies. Marshall-Cornwall began by:

> …pointing out that Joint Allied Planning was on a thoroughly unsatisfactory basis…. It has been maddening to watch the shadow of disaster creeping ever closer, without being able to raise a finger to put things right… The reason is

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[513] See Jorgen S. Rasmussen, 'Government and Intra-party Opposition: Dissent within the Conservative Parliamentary Party in the 1930s,' *Political Studies*, 19 (1971), David M. Robert, 'Clement Davis and the Fall of the Neville Chamberlain, 1939-40,' *The Welsh History Review*, 8 (1976), Nick Smart, 'Four Days in May: The Norway Debate and the Downfall of Neville Chamberlain,' *Parliamentary History*, 17 (1998), John D. Fair, 'The Norwegian Campaign and Winston Churchill's Rise to Power in 1940: A Study of Perception and Attribution,' *International History Review*, 9 (1987).

[514] Alex Danchev, 'The Central Direction of War, 1940-41' In John Sweetman, ed., *Sword and Mace: Twentieth Century Civil-Military Relations in Britain,* (London: Croom Helm, 1985) and Alex Danchev, 'Waltzing with Winston: Civil-Military Relations in Britain in the Second World War,' *War in History*, 2, (1995).

[515] Sheila Lawlor, *Churchill and the Politics of War, 1940–41,* (Cambridge, CUP, 1994).

[516] Only passing references are made in the historiography with the committee's memorandum often only used. See Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, p. 107. Also from primary sources, Marshall-Cornwall, *Wars and Rumours of War*, Colyton, *Occasion, Chance and Change*.

> that nobody has laid down who is to give the higher direction about all these operations, their relative priority, or the forces to be allotted to them, and secondly no-one knows who is to command each operation individually… I do beg you to reorganise the whole of our Joint Planning organisation.[517]

It was one thing for the Allies to plan together for war, but quite another to set up effective inter-allied institutions for fighting it. Marshall-Cornwall, speaking in the final days of the Anglo-French Alliance, felt exasperated that the joint political and military organisation had, in his opinion, failed from the outset. This section will investigate the Allied Military Committee and discuss what the actions of the committee reveal regarding the workings of the British War Machinery.

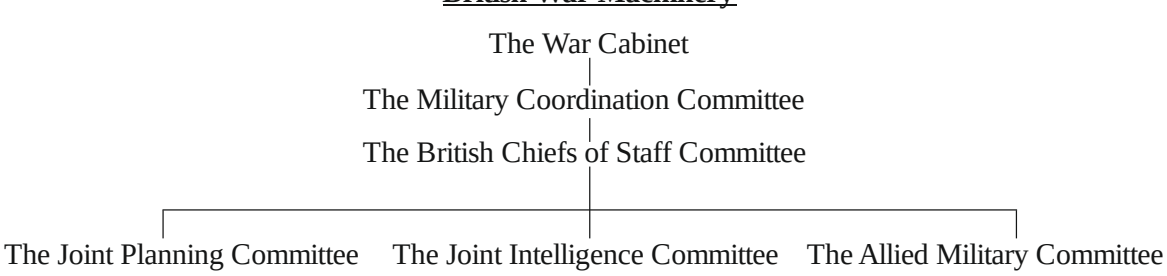

Figure 2: Organisation of the COS.

As outlined in Chapter One, the Allied Military Committee, or AMC as it became known, was founded in September 1939, and a member the COS organisation.[518] The AMC was important in inter-allied discussion as its function was to co-ordinate and discuss future allied policy before decisions were taken at the higher level of the COS and the French High Command.

The members of the AMC were from each of the individual services, both French and British, and, similar to the COS, they represented their service's opinion when discussing matters of strategy or policy. The AMC was essential for communicating the COS and the French High Command's point of view in a committee setting where disagreements could be aired. The committee met daily, typically in London, and proposals drawn up by the AMC and reports received by the French were forwarded to the COS for approval. In many ways, the committee's function of exchanging and discussing future operations resulted in

[517] TNA CAB 21/1284, Anglo-French Liaison Organisation: AMC General Marshall-Cornwall's File No. 1A, 'Letter from Marshall-Cornwall to Dill,' 27 May 1940.
[518] Ibid.

the AMC acting as a joint-planning organisation, which led the committee's responsibility overlapping with the Joint Planning Committee and the Directors of Plans. Nonetheless, the AMC was crucial because it was the only committee that had daily contact with the French, as well as with a core group of set representatives from both sides. This was significant for the unified conduct of the war, as one of its founding principles was to counter any tendency of each country to think in terms of itself rather than the Alliance.

I.I: THE AMC's INEFFECTIVENESS WITHIN THE BRITISH WAR MACHINERY

The AMC provides an important case study for the disorder that characterised the British War Machinery. A report from April 1940 acknowledged the benefits of the AMC in joint planning, although it admitted that it was often disregarded by the COS:

> Recent events have now shown, in this war as in the last, the clear need for a single inter-allied military body, free from all current operational responsibility and ad hoc planning, and charged with the duty of keeping Allied military policy as a whole under review, and of tieing up any loose ends between the Allies in the military sphere.
>
> The machinery for this already exists in the Allied Military Committee; the trouble is that it is seldom used.[519]

In assessing the records of the AMC, it can be seen that the COS and the JPC failed to appreciate the usefulness of the committee due to a combination of myopia towards collaborating with the French, and the duplication of the AMC's planning duties with those of the JPC.

The fundamental cause of the underutilisation of the AMC, was the long-standing British prejudice towards the French military. This is recorded in a paper produced on the future of the AMC by the Directors of Plans:

[519] TNA CAB 21/1302 Notes on Staff Organisation of the High Command, p.3. [Mis-spelt in original].

> In the first place, I do not think it is desirable to have too many contacts with the French on various planning levels.[520]

That such comments were openly postulated and minuted highlights the fact that in the highest British military circles there was xenophobia and an arrogant attitude towards co-operation with France.[521] This was identified as a key reason for the failure of the committee in a report on the future of the AMC from March 1940:

> Is it, in fact, considered possible to plan jointly with the French at all in this war? The true function of the AMC is surely to work as a form of joint planning organisation on the Allied plane, each side briefed by their own High Commands with a view to reaching an agreed policy. There has in the past been a tendency, perhaps not deliberate, to plan on the British side without taking account of the French point of view; to present, in fact, the French with a series of faits accomplis in strategical planning. This is perhaps one reason why the AMC has so seldom been used as it might have been.[522]

A study of this length cannot examine the British perceptions of the French Army before and after war was declared in detail. As historians have discussed elsewhere, traditional prejudices had been reinforced by experiences in the First World War and there was a deep and irrational suspicion of the French.[523] This Major-General, which has been described as the 'British way in warfare', was characterised by a condescending view of the French, the reliability of her command, and the soundness of her strategic planning.[524] As illustrated in the quotation above, the British approach was to present set proposals, rather than to discuss these openly and listen to the French. In other words, to the British, liaison meant the communication of plans that had been formed in isolation. However, both countries were supposed to be responsible for co-ordinating the Allied war effort during the Second World War.

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[520] TNA CAB 21/1284, 6E, 'Letter from Air Commodore J.C. Slessor,' 6 March, p.22.
[521] TNA CAB 21/1302, 24A Functions of the Allied Military Committee 16. 'The future functions of the Allied Military Committee,' p.9. [Underlined in original].
[522] Ibid.
[523] See Joseph Maiolo & Peter Jackson, 'Strategic Intelligence, Counter-Intelligence and Alliance Diplomacy in Anglo-French relations before the Second World War,' *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* Vol. 65, No.2 (2006), pp. 417-61; Martin S. Alexander and William J. Philpott, '*The Entente Cordiale* and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1928–1939', in Martin S. Alexander, ed., *Knowing Your Friends. Intelligence Inside Alliances and Coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War* (London and Portland, OR, 1998), 53–84.
[524] See Alexander and Philpott, 'The Entente Cordiale', in Alexander, (ed.), *Knowing Your Friends*.

The allied victory in 1918 had led to the establishment of the Allied Supreme War Council and the unified command of the Allies under the appointment of General Foch on the Western Front.[525] However, in many cases, the need for this unified command seems to have been forgotten.[526] The entente in 1917 had been described by Field Marshal Douglas Haig as essential:

> We could see Italy and even Russia drop out, and still continue the war with France and America. But if France drops out we not only cannot continue the war on land but our armies in France will be in a very difficult position.[527]

However, this recognition of the importance of Britain's ally seems to have been forgotten by 1939. Although the AMC worked closely with the French, it was marginalised by the wider War Machinery, including the War Cabinet, the JPC and the COS. Rather than fostering closer links with France, the British War Machinery avoided close collaboration, which implied subordination, for as long as possible. The formation of a joint military organisation in the AMC would have been seen by the French as a commitment to a joint military effort, however Britain's view was that the creation of a joint directing machinery did not involve any obligation to actually participate in it.

For a section of the British military elite, the problem with the AMC was that there was already a joint planning organisation, namely the Joint Planning Committee, and they were reluctant to include the French point of view in their current procedures. Although the COS had instructed, as early as 23 September 1939, that the 'modus operandi, should be worked out at a joint meeting between the two bodies',[528] the working relationship between the JPC and AMC quickly collapsed – or, as General Ismay diplomatically stated in a report, 'personal touch has been lacking.'[529] Although the JPC provided papers for them, the British members of the AMC were not brought into JPC meetings when issues

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[525] See William J. Philpott, 'The Making of the Military Entente, 1904–14: France, the British Army, and the Prospect of War' *English Historical Review*, 2013, 128 (534) p.1155-1185.
[526] See William Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1996) and William Philpott, 'Marshal Ferdinand Foch and Allied Victory,' in Matthew Hughes and Matthew Seligman in *Leadership in Conflict: 1914-1918* (Barnsley, Pen and Sword, 2000).
[527] R. Blake (ed.) *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig*, (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952), p.247.
[528] TNA CAB 21/1302, 'Conclusions of the 26th Meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee held on 23rd September,' p.8.
[529] TNA CAB 21/1302, 24A, 'Functions of the Allied Military Committee,' '5. Relations with the Joint Planning Committee,' p.5.

affecting both the British and French were under consideration.[530] That two important committees in the British War Machinery could not co-ordinate effectively is startling, especially as both the JPC and the AMC were founded for the purpose of facilitating the joint Allied war effort.

A further reason for this lack of collaboration was the structure of the British War Machinery's committee system. Each committee functioned separately, and although, in theory, the COS was structurally in charge of the AMC and JPC, in effect the COS exerted little control. Thus, lessons were clearly not learned from the First World War, when unified command under Marshal Foch in 1918 helped the Allies to victory. In Foch's own words,

> There must be a higher organ of command, which can at all times defend the General plan adopted as against personal inclinations and individual interests, and take rapid decisions and get them carried out without any loss of time.[531]

During the Phoney War, the COS was unable to achieve this command over its committees and was unable to create a unified Franco-British Alliance. The French had a voice on the AMC, but not on the JPC, and the AMC and the JPC did not co-ordinate effectively. In addition, the COS used the JPC more than the AMC in the formulation of assessments for future policy. The Joint Planners, however, rarely took into account the French perspective.

The JPC's original purpose was to plan operations and policies of immediate relevance to the war effort. On the other hand, the AMC was seldom concerned with immediate day-to-day problems, focusing instead on long-term planning and integrating British and French viewpoints. A weakness of the British War Machinery was that the JPC, and not the AMC, was often tasked with planning the long-term strategical policy that affected France by the COS, such as plans for the Low Countries in October 1939. The COS preferred to delegate assessments to the JPC and bypassed the AMC's input. One of the possible reasons for this was that the COS wanted to have a British opinion on future policy before presenting plans to the French and, in so doing, the COS could exert some influence and not submit to French

[530] TNA CAB 21/1302, 24A, 'Functions of the Allied Military Committee,' '5. Relations with the Joint Planning Committee,' p.5.
[531] F. Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch* (Trans. T. Bentley Mott), (London: Heinemann, 1931), p.272.

control. This could be seen to go back to the First World War, where the British command felt they had been subordinated to the French. Another possible reason could be that the COS did not wish to dilute its power to formulate future strategic operations down to the level of the AMC. Instead, by using the JPC, the COS could maintain close control over Britain's course in the war. Furthermore, the COS met regularly with the French High Command and, therefore, they had direct contact with those who, like themselves, ultimately made the final decisions.

As a result, the JPC was overworked. By contrast, General Marshall-Cornwall, Head of the AMC, identified a feeling within the AMC that the committee's efforts were undervalued:

> I always felt that the results were hardly commensurate with our efforts, largely because the COS of Staff were usually too busy to pay attention to our reports or advice.[532]

A report from March 1940 noted that there was a 'need to relieve the pressure of work on the JPC.'[533] Meanwhile, the AMC was equally frustrated by the lack of co-ordination and support it received from the COS to fulfil its role. One report of the time commented that 'the working of our present organisation is chaotic.'[534] It was recognised that change was required. In April 1940, the COS commissioned a report on the AMC's function within the British War Machinery. This paper identified the main defects as being:

(a) Over-centralisation through the Chiefs of Staff and the Directors of Plans (to some extent this is a defect in organisation, to some extent a personal factor);
(b) No clear division of work between strategical and operational planning;
(c) No co-ordinating link to direct the work of the existing inter-service planning staffs;
(d) No independent body charged with the primary duty of keeping the war as a whole, present and future, under review (the JPC was created for this purpose, but is often diverted into other channels);

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[532] Marshall-Cornwall, *Wars and Rumours of War*, p.130.
[533] TNA CAB 21/1302, 24A Functions of the Allied Military Committee 16. 'The future functions of the Allied Military Committee,' p.9. [Underlined in original].
[534] TNA CAB 21/1302, 'Notes on Staff Organisation of the High Command,' 24 April 1940, p.1.

(e) No continuous collaboration with the French in the military sphere on a high plane (the AMC was created for this purpose, but is seldom so used)
(f) No permanent Supreme War Council organisation (the AMC could provide this, but has only once been used to prepare the ground before a meeting of the SWC);
(g) Ad hoc methods, as a result of which continuity is often lost and strategical policy is not always related to the war as a whole.[535]

The above report, which included the bracketed comments, clearly conveyed a need for reform and it assessed that the AMC and JPC were not carrying out their designated functions. It also contains recognition that there was 'no clear division' between operational and strategic planning, in other words the setting of objectives and planning the means of achieving these.[536] The AMC's function was strategic planning, and the JPC was responsible for operational planning, however these roles overlapped. An official enquiry later reported that:

> (i) The dispersion of the original Scandinavian forces was effected without relation to the new plans for mining Norwegian waters;
> (ii) We allowed ourselves to be forestalled in Norway through having no forces on the spot ready to land at the first move by Germany.
> (iii) We rushed into a major campaign in Norway without appreciating the possible effects of Italian intervention on our commitments in Scandinavia; as a result, we now find that we could not support large commitments in Scandinavia and the Mediterranean at the same time (this was in part due to the strategical planners being drawn into operational planning).[537]

The failing of the British War Machinery was that the AMC was bypassed in the formation of a joint agreement between Britain and France in operations such as the Norway Campaign. The COS only worked with the JPC in formulating assessments that led to a decision, while no attempt was made at inter-allied discussion, nor any central direction given by the COS. It was the responsibility of the COS to provide an executive function to

[535] TNA CAB 21/1302, 'Notes on Staff Organisation of the High Command,' 24 April 1940, p.1.
[536] For the definition of operational and strategic planning see James Henderson, *Military Logistics Made Easy: Concept, Theory and Execution*, (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2008) p.20.
[537] TNA CAB 21/1302, 'Notes on Staff Organisation of the High Command,' 24 April 1940, p.1.

ensure that the whole organisation was working, that strategical and operational planning were delegated, and that every problem was considered in relation to the strategy as a whole. The system did not work well, and many examples could be cited of cases in which military policy was either not jointly considered by Britain and France, or British and French views became divergent through lack of co-ordination. This could have been avoided if the AMC had been involved at an earlier stage, or indeed at all.

A possible reason for the unsatisfactory state of affairs lies in the fact that the COS consisted of three equal Chiefs of Staff, with no-one Chief in overall charge. There was no independent chair, which was a failing that Churchill identified and remedied in his reforms, as will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. General Ismay, alongside his arduous duties as Secretary to the COS, co-ordinated the JPC and AMC, but had no executive power to direct them. The COS's evaluation of the AMC identified what was required:

> …an executive link to ensure that the whole organisation is worked in the proper way, that strategical and operational planning are kept within their right spheres, and that every problem is related to the strategical policy of the war as a whole – in fact, a Chief of Staff to the Chiefs of Staff.[538]

To some extent, the appointment of a Vice Chiefs of Staff in May 1940 eased the pressure on the COS, although it was the reformation of the military organisation, in May 1940, that fully relieved pressure upon the COS and its committees.

No minutes, letters or diaries explicitly record the COS's views or criticise the AMC. Yet it was on the COS's instructions that in January 1940 a review of the AMC was to be undertaken, thereby suggesting that they were not happy with the status quo. However, there are records of other senior members of the British military establishment not fully comprehending the function or usefulness of the AMC. This is evident in a letter written in January 1940 by General Redman to General Ismay, in which Redman recounted witnessing British Head of the French Mission Howard-Vyse dismiss the importance of the Permanent Military Relations Committee (another name for the AMC):[539]

[538] TNA CAB 21/1302, 'Notes on Staff Organisation of the High Command,' 24 April 1940, p.3.
[539] PMR otherwise known as the AMC.

> I was horrified to see it because it illustrated so definitely that even people quite high up in the War Office still did not appreciate either the width or the limitations of the functions of the PMR and moreover that they should confuse their [the AMC's] functions with that of the Secretariat made things worse. Apart from this it was, of course, another attempt to reduce the PMRs to the level of Liaison Officers.[540]

There is also a record of the French opinion of the AMC and of the chaotic nature of the British committee system. Colonel Redman reported on 18 March 1940 that General Gamelin's *Chef de Cabinet*, Colonel Jean Petibon, 'appeared to have forgotten that such a thing as the Chiefs of Staff Committee existed,' and he 'certainly was not clear to whom the AMC was responsible, individually or collectively.'[541] Therefore, the French High Command equally did not place much value on the AMC. They did not fully brief the French Military Representatives on their intentions and the AMC was dismissed as a 'paper mill' at the French Headquarters.[542]

Clearly the AMC was underutilised, but to the credit of the COS this was recognised by April 1940. However, despite a report being produced by the COS in April, the events of the Norway Campaign and the Battle of France overtook the COS and the report was side lined. As has been outlined above, a combination of aversion towards close liaison with the French and a lack of co-ordination within the British War Machinery contributed to the ineffectiveness of the AMC during the Phoney War.

I.II: THE AMC's EFFECTIVENESS WITHIN THE BRITISH WAR MACHINERY

As has been evidenced, the AMC, although founded for sound reasons, was not used as effectively as it might have been. Yet, on the occasions when it was consulted, the AMC made a worthwhile contribution, meaning that although it was underused, it did have some value. When used correctly, as will be discussed below, the AMC facilitated communication with the French, collaborated with the JPC, and produced important reports

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[540] TNA CAB 21/1284, 7A, 'letter from Captain A.W. Clarke to Colonel Redman,' 3 October 1939, p.1.
[541] TNA CAB 21/1281, 'Letter from Captain Redman, Representation in France of the British COS Organisation,' 18 March 1940.
[542] Cited in John C. Cairns, 'Reflections on France, Britain and the Winter War Prodrome, 1939-1940' in Blatt, (ed.) *The French Defeat of 1940,* p.276.

that aided the COS in making sound decisions. Indeed, its worth was defended by one of its members, Rear-Admiral Chalmers, who stated:

> It is of the greatest importance that we should be in a position to follow the trend of a French policy, and this can only be done by continuous contact such as is maintained by the AMC.[543]

The research undertaken for this thesis has identified that the British and French military leadership consulted the AMC on seven different topics. In each of these, the advice given led to clarity of thought and aided the identification of quick resolutions to issues between the two countries. The AMC, therefore, was useful in aiding the decision-making process. Rather than back-and-forth discussions going through various committees, the AMC was able to examine particular topics and negotiate a unified response. One such AMC meeting was held on a train journey from London to Paris and, by the time they arrived, swift resolutions were agreed.[544] The topics on which the AMC were consulted are detailed briefly in Table 7 below.

Topic	**Outcome**
Joint Appreciation of Allied Policy in the Balkans	This produced an important agreed statement on Balkan policy that was accepted by both High Commands. The AMC was the only body to undertake such a joint appreciation.
The Turkish Armaments Negotiations	Although not strictly within the remit of the AMC, this negotiation was commissioned because no other suitable body was available in London.
1940 Appreciation	An agreed text was only negotiated with the French after protracted discussions, which could have placed an additional heavy strain on the JPC or service staffs.
The Paris discussion on the Petsamo Project	The AMC was sent to Paris to prepare the ground for the COS and the Supreme War Council.
The Balkan discussions in Paris	The complicated problem of future Allied Military Policy in the Balkans was discussed before the SWC meeting.
The Petsamo Appreciation	A special task outside the normal remit of the AMC, but given to the committee due to pressure of other work on the JPC. This was a full and detailed appreciation produced within 48 hours and accepted by the COS.

[543] TNA CAB 21/1320, 18 'Future of the AMC – additional points,' 24 April 1940, p.1.
[544] See TNA CAB 85/3,'Minutes of the Allied Military Committee.' In particular the meeting MR (40) 29, 29th January 1940 between the MRs on a train while they journeyed to Paris and subsequent in-depth meetings at the Ministry of Marine, Paris, MR (40) 30, 30 January 1940 to MR (40) 34, 4 February 1940. The SWC meeting was on the 5 February 1940. See TNA CAB 99/3, SWC (39/40) '5th Meeting of Supreme War Council,' 5 February 1940.

Armament Supplies to Balkan Countries	Examined the military strength and armament supply of the Balkans. Requested by the COS and French High Command.

Table 7: The topic's undertaken by the AMC and their outcome.
Source: TNA CAB 85/3, 'Minutes of the Allied Military Committee.'

Several points can be made concerning the AMC's contribution to the decision-making process at this time. Firstly, the AMC's discussion of Balkan policy is an example of its success in bringing together differing British and French viewpoints: it significantly 'knit[ted] together Allied views as a whole at an early stage.'[545] The AMC's usefulness in enabling debate and in bringing together divergent opinions is exemplified in a series of meetings that took place between 1 and 4 February 1940.[546] In discussion it became apparent that the French High Command viewed possible Allied intervention in the Balkans completely differently from the COS. Whereas the British objective was securing the Turkish bridge-head and assisting Turkey, the French envisaged decisive action against Germany in the Balkans. Having considered the French stance, the British members of the AMC subsequently wrote in their report to the COS,

> We have been much impressed by the French conception of this policy for the Allies in the Balkans, not only because it does appear to offer a possibility of positive action against Germany with a limited expenditure of Allied force.[547]

Balkan strategy was a complex topic, but it was 'fully and frankly discussed on the AMC plane,' and resultantly, for the first time, the COS was fully informed in detail of the French views.[548] As a result, Balkan policy was examined on the British side from a new perspective. Having been a source of contention for several months, over the course of a few days the AMC was able to resolve possible divergences of view before they translated into conflicts of policy between the two High Commands. As Admiral Odend'Hal stated,

> This temporary sojourn of the Allied Military Committee in France had proved of the utmost benefit both as regards the immediate problem under consideration, and as regards their general business.[549]

[545] TNA CAB 21/1320, 14, 'Future Organisation of the Allied Military Committee,' p.1.
[546] TNA CAB 85/3, MR (40) 30 to MR (40) 34, 'Allied Military Committee: Minutes'.
[547] TNA CAB 85/5, MR (40) 10, 'Allied Military Committee: Allied Military Policy in the Balkans' 5 February 1940, p.3.
[548] TNA CAB 21/1302, 24A, 'Functions of the Allied Military Committee,' p.1.
[549] TNA CAB 85/3, MR (40) 34, 'Allied Military Committee: Minutes,' 4 February 1940, p.5

Therefore, the significance of the AMC for the British War Machinery was its strength in bringing the British and French together in face-to-face discussion.

A further benefit of the AMC to the COS's direction in the Allied war effort can be evidenced from assessing the AMC discussions that took place in Paris on the Petsamo Project. In this case, the AMC was sent to Paris to prepare the ground for the COS and the Supreme War Council. The subsequent AMC meetings enabled the COS to be fully prepared and briefed ahead of the Supreme War Council meeting. As a result, Daladier remarked that he had never known the SWC meeting to go so well, 'largely because the ground had been properly prepared in advance',[550] and it was acknowledged that 'it is difficult to see what other body could undertake such discussion.'[551] Without this capacity of the AMC to facilitate joint planning, the only alternative open to the Permanent Military Representatives (PMRs) would have been to refer the French paper to the Joint Planning Committee for recommendation to the COS, followed by a counter-communication to the French High Command. Such a process would have been lengthy and cumbersome, not to mention exceptionally slow.

An examination of the workings of the AMC in this section has been important in evaluating the decision-making process that existed during the Phoney War. The committee provides an important case study for the disorder that characterised the British War Machinery. The AMC was founded to mitigate strategic disagreements, inter-allied disputes and to give the Entente unity of purpose – an important factor for Allied victory. When it was used for such a purpose, as has been evidenced above, the committee worked well. However, as has been demonstrated, the AMC was, as one observer at the time stated, 'seldom used.'[552] The AMC was underutilised for several reasons. As was assessed earlier in this chapter, practical lessons of unified Allied command drawn from the coalition warfare of 1914-18 were offset by the deep psychological scars of that conflict. These scars clouded the judgement and limited the commitment of the British towards using the AMC to further a close Franco-British Alliance. Furthermore, the inadequacies of the British War Machinery committee system led to confusion between the functions of the AMC and the JPC, with the JPC being delegated a larger number of tasks. One further reason for the lack of COS co-ordination with the AMC may have been the COS's unwillingness to delegate

[550] TNA CAB 21/1302, 24A, 'Functions of the Allied Military Committee,' p.1.
[551] TNA CAB 21/1320, 14, 'Future Organisation of the Allied Military Committee,' p.2.
[552] TNA CAB 21/1302 Notes on Staff Organisation of the High Command, p.3. [Mis-spelt in original].

strategic and operational responsibility to the level of the JPC and AMC, preferring instead to discuss inter-Allied matters directly with the French High Command.

The COS's conduct in the British War Machinery will now be assessed in order to evaluate to what extent it hampered the committee's duties. The inadequacies of the British War Machinery will also be further illustrated by carrying out an analysis of the COS's civil-military relationship within Whitehall.

II: Debate, Indecision and Delays: The COS's position in Britain's War Machinery September 1939 to May 1940

Since Oliver Cromwell's time, the underlying principle that has guided the British political-military relationship has been that the political, civilian leadership shall control Britain's military forces. Indeed, while the Armed Services are the main instrument of securing the safety and security of the state against external aggression, major decisions regarding their composition and use rests entirely in the hands of the government of the day. However, during the Phoney War stage of the Second World War, Labour leader Clement Attlee noted that:

> The problem that democratic societies in total war find crucial and may find fatal: relations between the civil and military leaders.[553]

The COS's performance during the Phoney War proved a frustration to those who had expected so much from them. No matter how hard the committee tried – and, as this thesis demonstrates, on a practical level they tried very hard – the COS could not win. Operations in Scandinavia and the Low Countries were mitigating defeats in which the COS was involved in the decision-making and policy-making process. However, there can be no doubt that it was politicians, rather than the COS, who decided the fate of Britain's forces. Yet, although much of the blame for a lack of operational effectiveness rests on the COS, nonetheless the COS was part of a wider War Machinery and the questions remain as to how well supported the committee was by the War Cabinet. This section discusses the difficulties the COS faced in dealing with the War Cabinet's collective responsibility,

[553] Clement Attlee, 'Churchill on Balance,' in Peter Stansky (ed.) *Churchill* (New York, Hill, 1973) p.188.

where consensus was required before a decision could be approved. A bureaucratic decision-making process, powerful personalities, such as Churchill and Ironside, and the COS's lack of assertiveness in its dealings with the War Cabinet all contributed to hindering the committee's effectiveness. This investigation will propose that the COS was hampered in its conduct of its duties by the debate and indecision over policy it endured with the War Cabinet, however the COS also had responsibility for its collective performance.

II.I: HELP OR HINDRANCE: COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

A crucial problem with the relationship between the War Cabinet and the COS was that collective responsibility did not meet the demands of formulating strategy or for managing and directing a war. Chamberlain's predilection for the War Cabinet's decisions to be the product of compromise and consensus were not conducive to producing coherent strategy. Without a continuous and relentless focus on strategy and a central objective, there was a tendency to become fixated on immediate concerns and short-term goals. For example, as we have seen in Chapter Four, the War Cabinet influenced the COS's position towards Norway as an area for operations. The War Cabinet's failure to agree to a decision resulted in twenty-eight long debates between the COS and the War Cabinet over whether to despatch a British Expeditionary Force to Finland in February 1940.[554] This inability to come to a decision and act was frustrating to the COS, as illustrated by Ironside, who wrote in his diary:

> The War Cabinet arrogates to itself the settling of combined strategy, and yet it produces no plan. It calls for a few straggling reports from the Chiefs of Staff as the situations arise, but it does nothing itself.[555]

War Cabinet minutes for the period of 1939 to 1940 continually display this laboured decision-making. The topic of preparations for war in the Middle East, for instance, is a good example of this. The future possibility that the war might extent to the Eastern theatre in the spring of 1940 prompted the COS to undertake a review in October 1939, which was submitted on 5 December 1939. After lengthy debate by the MCC, the plans were approved

[554] See TNA CAB 65/5 'War Cabinet Conclusions,' February 1940.
[555] Ironside, *Diaries*, 28 December p.190.

in principle by the War Cabinet on 15 January 1940, three months later.[556] Although the comprehensive War Machinery structure ensured a close examination of the proposed 'Middle East Strategy', it was bureaucratic and laborious, and occupied too much of ministers and the COS's time. Again, Ironside expressed his frustration at this lack of urgency in his diary:

> It is no 4th Form schoolboy effort now… and I cannot get people to understand that it is serious. The more I look into our strategic position the more serious does it seem.[557]

The benefit of collective discussion was that it allowed the nine members of the War Cabinet to appraise a policy, discuss it openly, and reach a conclusion or recommendation to adjust the policy. Compromise and consensus were at the heart of this process.[558] From this point of view, lengthy War Cabinet discussions enabled ministers to be made aware of the enormity and intractability of the problems facing Britain. However, the effective higher direction of a war demanded a strong managerial style of leadership, with clear direction, drive and with a focus on long-term objectives. The system of collective responsibility hindered decision-making, as it allowed the War Cabinet to postpone difficult decisions, meaning that, in a fast-moving war, often these decisions were overtaken by events.

II.II: HELP OR HINDRANCE: THE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

A major contributor to the poor strategy and decision-making record that characterised the British War Machinery was the committee structure in place for the management of the war. The committee structure was over-bureaucratic and it occupied much of the COS's time, as well as that of other committee members. For instance, in the month of October 1939 alone, the War Cabinet met thirty-three times, the Military Co-ordination Committee

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[556] TNA CAB 79/1, COS (39) 58, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes,' 25 October 1939; TNA CAB 66/3, WP (39) 148 'Review of Military Policy in the Middle East,' 5 December 1939; TNA CAB 66/4, WP (40) 18, 'Military Policy in the Middle East,' 13 January 1940 and TNA 65/5 WM 14 (40), 'War Cabinet: Minutes,' 15 January 1940.

[557] Ironside, *Diaries*, 14 September 1939, p.107.

[558] For more information see Simon James, *British Cabinet Government* (London, Taylor & Francis, 2002) p.178-186.

six times, and the COS thirty-one times. The COS attended all seventy meetings. In October, Ironside recorded:

> One of the worst days we have had. I had two hours in the morning with the War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff. And then we had four and a half hours in the afternoon with the Army Council and the Air Conference. And then I had two hours with the Secretary of State from 11 till 1, having had from 9 till 11 with my own people. That is ten hours of talking and arguing and thinking.[559]

The fact that the COS needed the approval of the collective War Cabinet and the Military Co-ordination Committee added a layer of management that slowed down the decision-making process and, when operations began, was counterproductive to timely decision-making. Military organisations at this time, such as the COS with its supporting committees such as the JPC, JIC and AMC, were not particularly flexible. For example, if revisions were needed on a policy or an operation then these would have to progress through the COS, then be passed to the JPC so that they could produce a draft that the COS would consult and amend before submitting to the MCC for approval. Only after this process did it finally arrive before the War Cabinet.

The heads of the Armed Services in this period were powerful individuals, but they were not given the wherewithal to operate effectively. The Director of Military Operations recorded,

> Tiny [Ironside] himself is on endless conferences, which irritates him, as he feels so many are a waste of time, and leave him little time to do his work in the War Office.[560]

As senior military personnel, the Chiefs, in addition to their COS work, had their own service to manage. The structure of the British War Machinery added a layer of management that accomplished little and, at times, was counterproductive to comprehensive and speedy decision-making. The COS and the War Cabinet's discussions through the winter of 1939 to 1940 regarding sending a division to Finland is a clear example of this. The COS produced, with the help of the JIC and JPC, a good deal of

[559] Ironside, *Diaries,* 16 October 1939, p.125.
[560] KCL LCHMA, Major-General Richard Dewing, 0099 Dewing, 'Diary 1939-1941,' 4 January 1940.

detailed planning relevant to economic warfare, although most of these schemes were to be vitiated by political indecision. In particular, Chamberlain had a tendency to avoid commitment to policies suggested by the COS by referring the matter to other committees and sub-committees, resulting in a cautious and bureaucratic approach to prosecuting the war.[561] As Ironside noted: 'the stupid cabinet is delaying again and again our main "strategy" papers and the aid in Scandinavia.'[562] Throughout the Phoney War, there seems to have been an apparent failure in dialogue between the COS and those in power, with Ironside complaining that: 'you cannot make war with all these Committees. It simply doesn't lead to any decision or constancy'[563]. As David Dilks has argued, Chamberlain believed in preparing for the worst while hoping for the best.[564] However, Ironside lamented that the War Cabinet 'wasted eight months of precious time not realising that the war was serious.'[565] This and other statements come from the CIGS as Newall and Pound's personal opinions are not evident in the source material. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that they too found these endless meetings tiresome, particularly since Ironside was a member of the COS and would have expressed his frustrations to them. As they were all military leaders who were used to a chain of command in their service in which orders were made and passed on quickly, this system of consensus by committee must have been laborious.

II.III: HELP OR HINDRANCE: THE MINDSET OF THE COS & WAR CABINET

The British War Machinery was also impaired in formulating policy by the disconnect in understanding that existed between the War Cabinet and the COS. The War Cabinet consisted of politicians who, for the most part, were civilians, whereas the COS consisted of commanders who had reached the top of their service and had a grasp of warfare and how it should be executed. This mitigated against unity at a grand strategy level in setting objectives and adopting a sound plan. The inability of each side to understand the other's perspective is best illustrated in a scenario from 12 March 1940, when the COS presented

[561] See TNA CAB 127/158 Notes by Sir Horace Wilson on Chamberlain's 'character and temperament,' October 1941.
[562] Ironside, *Diaries*, January 28 1940 p.213.
[563] Ibid. 30 March 1940, p.290.
[564] See David Dilks, 'We must hope for the Best and Prepare for the Worst': The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany, 1937-39' *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LXXIII (1987).
[565] Ironside, *Diaries*, 10 June 1940 p.361.

its plans to invade Narvik to the War Cabinet. 'We had a dreadful Cabinet', a frustrated Ironside noted in his diary that night:

> The Prime Minister began peering at a chart of Narvik and when he had finished he asked me what scale it was on. He asked what effect an 8-inch shell would have on a transport [ship] and finished up by saying that he was prepared to risk a 4-inch shell but not an 8-inch shell. He then asked what the weight of the shells were… The Cabinet presented the picture of a bewildered flock of sheep faced by a problem they have consistently refused to consider. Their favourite formula is that the case is hypothetical and then they shy off a decision. I came disgusted with them all. I have actually taken my Instructions and ordered the General to start off.[566]

Ironside's entry provides us with several important insights into the politico-military relations. Firstly, there was clearly a gap in communication between politicians and the military. Both sides were clearly perplexed by the workings of the other. The COS found the way governmental business was conducted through debates frustrating, the decision to invade Narvik highlights this, with regards to which General John Kennedy noted that:

> Ismay agreed to tackle the Prime Minister and persuade him that he must make up his mind: the ships were loaded, the troops were moving, and a decision was overdue.[567]

For the politicians, it was the speed at which the COS's decisions moved from agreement to action that was bewildering. This is shown by their failure to accommodate the operational commanders who would direct the Narvik campaign during their Cabinet meeting the previous evening. As Ironside noted:

> In the end, the Prime Minister was persuaded to see the Admiral and the General – and he said he could see them to-morrow afternoon. When I explained to him that the men were commencing embarkation [tomorrow], they all seemed surprised. A more unmilitary show I have never seen.[568]

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[566] Ironside, *Diaries*, 12 March 1940, p.227.
[567] Kennedy, *Business of War*, p.50.
[568] Ironside, *Diaries*, 12 March 1940, p.226.

Equally bewildering to the military commanders in the COS was the prevarication and political querying evidenced by the War Cabinet. This disconnect between political and military leaders was also experienced during the First World War, and expressed succinctly by CIGS Sir William Robertson in 1916:

> Where the politician goes wrong… is in wanting to know the why and the wherefore of the soldier's proposals, and of making the latter the subject of debate and argument across the table. You then have the man who knows but who cannot talk discussing important questions with the man who can talk but does not know, with the result that the man who knows usually gets defeated in argument and things are done which his instincts tell him are bad.[569]

As the COS was subordinate to the War Cabinet, there was little the committee could do to take control of the war, despite them having the military knowledge necessary to do so. That said, it was the role of the COS to 'speak truth unto power' and, as such, the COS could have done more to express urgency and communicate its dissatisfaction with the system. Ironside's opinions, as stated above, although honest and clear, were his private thoughts and there is no evidence that these were communicated openly to the War Cabinet. Therefore, this problem continued throughout the war.

II.IV: HELP OR HINDRANCE: POWERFUL PERSONALITIES

It has already been shown that both Ironside and Churchill were powerful personalities who influenced the COS's decisions. Churchill evidenced an ability to overcome opposition through persuading and cajoling both the War Cabinet and the COS. As Churchill wrote, 'All I wanted, was compliance with my wishes after reasonable discussion.'[570] As shown in Chapter Four, Churchill became overly involved in detailed orders at an operational and tactical level in the COS, to the detriment of the success of the Norway Campaign. While Cabinet members had a right to involve themselves in the direction and conduct of the war, during the Norway Campaign his pursuit of Narvik as a stage for battle amounted to an obsession that overrode reason and the objective considerations of strategy.

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[569] KCL LCHMA, Robertson Papers, 1/33/73, 'Letter Robertson to Repington,' 31 October 1916.
[570] Winston Churchill, *The Second World War* (A&C Black, 2013), p.527.

Ironside was equally neither temperamentally nor intellectually equipped to achieve what he wanted, which was action rather than interrogation. After twenty years talking about the importance of active warfare, implementation of offensive operations in 1939 and 1940 proved impossible until the spring of 1940. Contributory to the weak politico-military relationship was the domination of Ironside over the other Chiefs of Staff. As the Director of Plans, John Kennedy recorded, 'Ironside is doing very well; he dominates the Chiefs of Staff… Look at his opposite numbers – nonentities!'[571] Although a dominant voice on the committee, this did not mean that Ironside was intellectually rigorous in his analysis. His advice towards taking the war into Scandinavia to stop iron ore exploration was not the result of careful and objective analysis of the risks and the rewards, rather the seeking of an objective no matter the cost. To what extent the other Chiefs agreed with Ironside or were prepared to acquiesce is unclear from the source material, although Pound and Newall were largely predisposed to focus on their own service and subject knowledge. This hindered the effectiveness of the COS in making decisions. Although the three service Chiefs were all equals, in reality Ironside dominated over the others. This was the case throughout the Phoney War period.

II.V: HELP OR HINDRANCE: THE COS AND CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

A weakness of the COS regarding liaison with other committees was its reluctance to share policies and plans. The elite military commanders had little regard for input from civilians. For example, the COS did not co-operate very well with Desmond Morton, Head of the Ministry of Economic Warfare (MEW).[572] The problem between the COS and the MEW was a lack of communication, as illustrated in a letter by Desmond Morton:

> The trouble was that the military men of those days really dealt with us on a personal basis. They knew Watson or Owen or Clively or Morton as people. They accepted that we were types unlikely to discuss secret war planning with the Daily Mirror, but they could not bring themselves to admit that war was really the concern of men in plain clothes.[573]

[571] Kennedy, *The Business of War*, 9 November 1939, p.38.
[572] For more information on Desmond Morton and his relationship with Whitehall see, Gill Bennett, *Churchill's Man of Mystery*, (London, Routledge, 2007), chapters 10 to 13.
[573] Ibid.

Although Morton is to some extent exaggerating, this marginalisation of the MEW by the COS is supported by evidence from other departments. Hugh Gaitskell, Head of the Enemy Countries section of the Economic Warfare Intelligence Department, complained in December 1939 that the Intelligence Division was not gaining access to foreign official publications with important statistics. Morton himself, although in receipt of regular reports as head of MEW, felt that neither he nor his colleagues were receiving all that they required. This became noticeable in November 1939, when Ian Fleming in Naval Intelligence wrote to Morton asking for his opinion on 'Consular Y' reports being disseminated.[574] Morton replied that he had not received them, but would: 'very much like to do so, as it appears that they might be of considerable value to us.'[575] Although it was unlikely that the COS would give weight to the MEW's views on high policy, it is clear that they were heavy handed with this department.

In retrospect, the COS's lack of co-ordination and consensus can be excused by overwork and the bureaucratic nature of the committee system; however, it is difficult to defend the COS's collective performance in civil-military relations. Members of the COS should have recognised that it was their duty to ensure that other committees in the British War Machinery were informed, such as the MEW. This does not seem to have been the case. Committees which were central to the war effort – such as the JPC, the JIC, and the COS – continued to lead independent lives along with other equally important departments, such as the Board of Trade and the Ministries of Economic Warfare, Food, Labour, Shipping, and Supply.[576] There was no integration.

The root of poor civil-military relations may have been the chaotic state of Britain's wartime administration during the Phoney War. This is exemplified by an incident recorded in the diary of a Foreign Office minister, Hugh Dalton, who recounts one incident in the Phoney War involving the Deputy Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Orme Sargent, and the Special Operations Executive. At a meeting involving Sargent, Cadogan, Halifax and Dalton, an argument started over who had the authority to authorise a sabotage operation in the Balkans. The heated debate, Dalton recorded, led to senior civil servant

[574] TNA PREM 7/1, 'Correspondence between Morton and Fleming,' 16-23 November 1939.
[575] Ibid.
[576] Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, Pimlico, 1982), p.65.

Sargent being 'carried out screaming from Halifax's presence.'[577] During the Phoney War, the British War Machinery had to balance both civil and military personalities and priorities, resulting in a lack of clarity in leadership. Desmond Morton described this situation in a letter on Christmas Day 1939:

> My great difficulty at present is to try and discover who is in charge of what. Having been brought up first of all in the Army for many years, and then under the Committee of Imperial Defence where such issues were always clear, there are elements of nightmare in the present position.[578]

The size of the Britain's War Machinery and the complexity of its structure resulted in difficulties in inter-service co-operation. The COS's response was to minimise the contact it had with other organisations. The COS left its senior staff to liaise with those out with the War Cabinet - the JPC, JIC and other military committees, such as the Military Co-ordination Committee. However, apart from a few senior officers including Hastings Ismay, few of the COS's support staff or the Chiefs themselves had experience of civil-military relations. This affected how the COS acted when placed within the Whitehall committee system of memos, minutes and meetings.

In summary, this section has illustrated a number of reasons for the COS's ineffectiveness within Britain's War Machinery, many of which were outside its control: the need for consensus and collective responsibility; the bureaucratic nature of the committee structure; the lack of close unity between the COS and the War Cabinet; the dominance of powerful personalities; and the failings of the COS itself to co-ordinate with other committees and to work well with civilians. As has been demonstrated, the British War Machinery was weak and ineffective in the politico-military governance of the Phoney War. The campaigns in Norway, the Low Countries and France were mired in error and misjudgement, to which the British War Machinery was a contributing factor.

The COS as a junior committee to the War Cabinet could not reform the British War Machinery on its own without the assistance of a powerful sponsor. It did not find this until

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[577] Ben Pimlott (ed.), *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986) p. 143 and Gladwyn Jebb, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p. 105.
[578] TNA FO 837/146, 'Morton to Rowbottom,' 25 December 1939.

May 1940, when Winston Churchill transformed the decision-making process. The next section will examine the extent to which these reforms affected the COS.

III: Responsibility with Power: Churchill's Reforms and the COS, May 1940

In May 1940, eight months after the start of the Second World War, Neville Chamberlain resigned as Prime Minister after his parliamentary majority was reduced in a vote of no confidence over his government's prosecution of the Norwegian Campaign. Upon his accession, Churchill recognised the failings of the British War Machinery and in his reforms he gave more direct power to the COS and lessened the influence of the War Cabinet. In order to achieve a full analysis of the COS's politico-military relationship during the Phoney War, it is important to outline how changes in Britain's War Machinery implemented by the new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, affected the COS.

In May 1940, collective decision-making about British strategy was effectively handed over to the British COS, with the Prime Minister being appointed to sit on the committee under the new title of Minister of Defence. With this dual role of Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, Churchill thus gained complete political control over the war with the power and authority to execute COS decisions.[579] As Churchill wrote in his memoirs,

> The key change which occurred on my taking over was of course the supervision and direction of the Chiefs of Staff Committee by a Minister of Defence with undefined powers… thus for the first time the Chiefs of Staff Committee assumed its due and proper place in direct daily contact with the executive head of the Government, and in accord with him had full control over the conduct of the war and the armed forces.[580]

The COS's support committees, namely the JPC, JIC and AMC, continued to function as before, but overall responsibility was assumed by the COS instead of the War Cabinet.[581] These reforms addressed the deficiencies in the British War Machinery outlined above. As

[579] For more information see Alex Danchev, 'Waltzing with Winston: Civil-Military Relations in Britain in the Second World War', *War in History*, 2, no. 2 (1995), p.202–30 and Danchev, 'The Central Direction of War, 1940-41' In Sweetman, *Sword and Mace*.
[580] Churchill, *The Second World War*, p.231.
[581] See Ismay, *Memoirs*, p.158-176.

well as the above change to the COS, Churchill's reforms also impacted upon the wider British War Machinery, as is detailed below.

The War Cabinet, May 1940

Prime Minister **Minister of Defence**	Winston Churchill – May 1940 to May 1945
Lord President **of the Council**	Neville Chamberlain – May 1940 to October 1940
Lord Privy Seal	Clement Attlee – May 1940 to February 1942
Foreign Secretary	Edward Halifax – Feb 1938 to Dec 1940 Anthony Eden – Dec 1940 to July 1945
Minister without Portfolio	Arthur Greenwood – May 1940 to February 1942

Table 8: The War Cabinet Members during the Phoney War period.

The War Cabinet still existed, but it was reduced to five members (see Table 8 above) from the previous nine and consisted of members from both Labour and Conservative members. Churchill's War Cabinet, unlike Chamberlain's, did not have considerable influence in directing the war, leading to what the official history has called 'the gradual disappearance of the War Cabinet from the strategic scene.'[582] A official government history was produced in 1942, which concluded that: 'the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the war' rested with the War Cabinet. However, 'ultimate responsibility' differs remarkably from direct responsibility.[583] The War Cabinet continued to exist, although primarily in its capacity as a last court of appeal for strategic matters, while maintaining its supervision over national policy, such as foreign and economic affairs.[584] Military affairs now rested with the COS and the Minister of Defence. The War Cabinet met more infrequently after May 1940, with the number of cabinet sessions held dropping from 312 in 1940 to 176 in 1944.[585] The lack of influence of the cabinet post-May 1940 was attested to by first-time attender to the War Cabinet General Pownall, in June 1941, who observed that:

> Although it is called a War Cabinet he (Churchill) obviously tells them the minimum possible about *future* operations, and certainly told them nothing about possible dates. He does not share strategy with them except that he reports after the event.[586]

[582] John Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol. VI (London, HMSO, 1956) p.324.
[583] TNA AIR 69/558, CMD 6351, 'The Organisation for Joint Planning' HMSO, 1942.
[584] Ibid.
[585] Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol VI, p.330-32.
[586] Pownall, *Diaries, Vol.2*, 4 June 1940, p.19. Emphasis in original.

Churchill's reforms also facilitated the creation of a Defence Committee (Operations) and a Defence Committee (Supply), both chaired by the Prime Minister and with the COS in attendance along with a small group of relevant ministers. These committees circumvented the War Cabinet, disbanded the Military Co-ordination Committee and focused decision-making and policy-making towards the PM, the three service ministers and, most significantly, the COS.

In effect, Churchill, who placed himself at the centre and progressively insulated himself from Cabinet scrutiny, came to dominate the decisions on the central direction of war. In fact, the real check on the Prime Minister's authority came not from his elected peers in the War Cabinet, but from the COS. As Alex Danchev stated: 'If the COS were in thrall to Churchill, Churchill was in his turn in thrall to the COS.'[587] Paul Addison rightly concluded that Churchill harangued the COS because he knew he could not command them.[588] As this thesis has already shown, Churchill dominated the COS regarding the Scandinavian operations and displayed an ignorance of the opinion of the COS at that point in the Phoney War. Nevertheless, it is out with the scope of this thesis to assess to what extent the relationship between Churchill and the COS evolved after the Phoney War. As the Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet, General Sir Ian Jacob, noted: 'It was vital that Churchill should be firmly harnessed to a strong and capable military staff.'[589] If it was vital for Churchill to have a capable military staff, it was equally vital for the COS to have a capable military leader, so Churchill was beneficial to the COS. As Ismay, Deputy Secretary to the War Cabinet, and an additional member of the COS Committee commented:

> For the first time in their history, the Chiefs of Staff were in direct and continuous contact with the Head of the Government, and were able to act as a combined Battle Headquarters – 'a super-chief of a War Staff in Commission' – as had always been contemplated.[590]

[587] Danchev, 'The Central Direction of War, 1940-41' In Sweetman, *Sword and Mace* p.58.
[588] See Paul Addison, 'Winston Churchill,' in J.P. Mackintosh (ed.) *British Prime Ministers in the 20th Century*, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1978) p.21.
[589] Lieutenant General Sir Ian Jacob, 'His Finest Hour,' *The Atlantic*, 215 (1965), p.84.
[590] Ismay, *Memoirs*, p.159.

Thus, post-May 1940, the COS played a more important role in directing Britain's course in the War. The decision-making process was now centralised around Churchill's private office, and significantly, the COS.

One other significant reform for the COS that took effect from May 1940 was the creation of the Vice-Chiefs of Staff Committee and a new position for the Joint Intelligence Committee in the military planning structure. Although the Vice-Chiefs of Staff committee was created on 22 April 1940, before Churchill became Prime Minster, Churchill was responsible for its creation in his role as Minister for Co-ordination of Defence.[591] It was an important addition to the British War Machinery and the decision-making process. The Vice-Chiefs of Staff was, in many regards, a mirror image of the COS. It comprised the deputies of each Chief of Staff, who took on a significant portion of the departmental work, so allowing the COS to concentrate on the Grand Strategy of the War.[592] The COS was released to concentrate on strategic thinking, and, in partnership with Churchill, to guide Britain forward into the next phase of the war.

Finally, as a result of the identification of the weakness of the JIC, intelligence was given a more prominent place in the British War Machinery. As a result, Churchill commissioned General Ismay to write a proposal which argued:

> (1) The JIC and individual Service intelligence directors should be given responsibility for initiating reports.
> (2) Measures should be taken to strengthen the JIC's secretariat in an attempt to 'oil the wheels.' With the recognition that 'the burden of work… is continually increasing.[593]

These reforms were significant, as they gave the JIC independence to conduct investigations without the direction of the COS. As was show in Chapter Four, the COS had been hindered by the lack of accurate intelligence regarding German intentions. By placing the JIC in a central role, it was acknowledged that intelligence was crucial for the successful prosecution of the war.

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[591] Butler, *Grand Strategy*, p.248.
[592] For More information see Johnson, *Defence by Committee*, p. 284-285.
[593] TNA CAB 80/11, COS (40) 352, 'Chiefs of Staff: Memoranda,' 'Urgent Intelligence Reports,' 13 May 1940.

The appointment of Winston Churchill as Prime Minister in May 1940 transformed Britain's War Machinery and ushered in a new distinctive politico-military relationship to the decision-making process, based on close interaction between the Prime Minister and the COS. This radical, personal and informal arrangement between the COS Committee and Churchill gave the COS new power and responsibility for Britain's strategy. However, in this unique, intimate and adversarial relationship, which excluded the War Cabinet, each side found itself in thrall to the other. The result was a succession of changes of personnel in those who held the office of Chief of Staff. Nonetheless, the COS Committee continued to serve, no longer on the periphery, but now at the heart of Britain's War Machinery. This edifice was quickly put to the test with the invasion of France on 10 May 1940.

CONCLUSION

The British COS's performance during the Phoney War from September 1939 to May 1940 proved a disappointment to those who had expected much from the committee. As illustrated, there was a propensity towards distrust of the French within the British War Machinery and this led to the side lining of the AMC and a sense of confusion over the distinct roles of the AMC and the JPC. The COS should have used the AMC better, and it should have expressed its frustration at the slow decision-making process, particularly with regards to the War Cabinet and its desire for consensus. Strong personalities exerted an influence over the committee's conduct, and they did not always operate effectively as a united body. Furthermore, the COS had a military perspective that did not integrate well with other committees.

However, in the face of criticism, the period was similarly frustrating to the COS. The above reforms instigated by Churchill illustrate clearly the deficiencies in Britain's committee system prior to May 1940, and demonstrate that, in many ways, the COS's effectiveness in decision-making was hampered by the lack of a strong independent leader and by the committee's inability to exert complete influence on the decisions made by the War Cabinet. In many ways, the COS struggled to communicate its military tactics to civilians in the War Cabinet and in other committees. Churchill recognised that military leaders needed the power to be able to steer Britain's course in the war and to react quickly to the changing events on the ground. Prior to May 1940, this was not possible as the COS was a subordinate committee with limited power and influence. Therefore, this needs to be

taken into consideration when judging the ineffectiveness of the COS from September 1939 to May 1940. Despite the inadequacies of the COS, its conduct can be regarded as exemplary given the burdensome bureaucratic structure it worked within.

6. War and Defeat: The COS & The Battle For France, May-June 1940

The focus of this chapter is the COS's relationship with France during May and June 1940, examining Allied strategy, politics and inter-service relationships during the Battle of France. This chapter will discuss the Battle of France from the standpoint of the COS, examining the committee's strategic analysis and decision-making ability alongside that of the French High Command. The Arras Campaign in May 1940 will be evaluated as a case study of inter-allied co-operation, as will the assumption that the RAF and the COS effectively abandoned France due to a lack of Air Power. This chapter proposes that as a committee, the COS carried out its designated function well, and abandoned France out of a higher duty to Britain's course in the war.

The Arras Decision and the Air Power question have been selected as case studies as they fall within the purview of the COS in the Phoney War period of September to May 1940. Events surrounding the Battle of France and the Armistice will not be explored since the COS did not exert much influence over them. Moreover, the COS and French High Command did not meet as a combined group after 10 May, delegating direction of the campaign to the Commanders on the field.[594] Finally, it should be noted that between the French High Command and the COS there was an imbalance in authority regarding the Battle of France. The French, since the outbreak of the war, had assumed the leading role in the direction of Allied strategy in France and in shaping the COS's role within it. The day-to-day management of the BEF was delegated to the British Commander Lord Gort, and the French High Command, rather than the COS. As Ironside noted in September 1939, the BEF 'came directly under French Command.'[595] The COS possessed a right to command and control the BEF, but only in a supervisory capacity. The COS's responsibility was therefore for the overall strategy of the Allies, to deal with problems

[594] Instead Churchill, Ironside and Dill undertook separate trips to France. See TNA CAB 79/4, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee Minutes,' 28 April to 10 June 1940; TNA WO 193/173, 'Staff Conversations between the COS and French High Command' 6 September 1939 to 15 November 1940; Ironside, *Diaries*, Pownall, *Diaries*.
[595] TNA WO 106/1685, 1A, 'British Strategy in the War,' 7 September 1939.

which arose between the BEF and the French, and to provide strategic additional guidance when needed.[596] The COS therefore was not an equal partner in the joint planning of strategic operations and assumed the positon of the 'junior partner.'[597] For this reason, the Arras counter-attack was one of the few occasions in which the COS can be seen to have exerted its influence on the course of the Battle of France.

From the abundant existing literature on the catastrophe of May-June 1940, a general consensus has emerged on the conduct of the Allies.[598] The predominant revisionist view is that the defeat of France should be interpreted as a European, rather than a strictly French, military defeat. A combination of German demographic and industrial superiority, Britain's unwillingness to support France, and the effect of international economic crisis, severely affected French policy. The general picture which emerges is that in comparison to Britain, France was the senior partner in the Alliance and exhibited more energy and resolve in combatting the Wehrmacht than the British. Robert Doughty has argued that military defeat was the product of errors in judgement by the French High Command, while Martin Alexander has shown that the British contribution to decisions was minimal and Britain was the deferential partner in the Alliance. German historian Karl-Heinz Frieser successfully demonstrates that the German victory in France was *not* due to superior numbers or equipment, but rather German military doctrine, speed of manoeuvre and the

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[596] See Weeks, *Organisation & Equipment for War*, p.11 and Johnson, *Defence by Committee*, p.294.

[597] See For more information see Young, *In Command of France*; John C. Cairns, 'Great Britain and the Fall of France: A Study in Allied Disunity,' *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Dec, 1955), pp. 365-409 and Alexander, 'Fighting to the Last Frenchman,' Blatt (ed.) *The French Defeat of 1940*.

[598] See Peter Jackson, 'Recent Journeys along the Road Back to France, 1940,' *The Historical Journal*, 39, 2 (1996); P. Jackson, 'British Power and French Security, 1919-1939'. ln Keith Neilson (ed.), Britain, Power and the International System, 1856-1956: Essays in Honour of David French, (London, Ashgate, 2010); J. Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (Oxford, OUP, 2003), Karl-Heinz Frieser, John T. Greenwood (Translator), *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West*, (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Md, 2005); Martin Alexander, 'No taste for the fight? French Combat Performance in 1940 and the Politics of the Fall of France,' in P. Addison and A. Calder (eds.), *Time to Kill: The Soldiers' Experience of War in the West, 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 2007); Martin Alexander, 'The Fall of France, 1940' in John Gooch, (ed.) *Decisive Campaigns of the Second World War*, (London, Routledge, 2012); Martin Alexander, '"Fighting to the Last Frenchman" Reflections on the BEF Deployment to France and the Strains in the Franco-British Alliance, 1939-1940.' In Blatt, (ed.) *The French Defeat of 1940*; John Cairns, 'Great Britain and the Fall of France: A Study in Allied Disunity', *Journal of Modern History* 27 (Dec, 1955), p.365-409; Robert J. Young, *In Command of France*; Bradford A. Lee, 'Strategy, Arms and the Collapse of France, 1930-40', in R.T.B. Langhorne (ed.), *Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War: Essays in Honour of F.H. Hinsley* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), pp.43-67; Philip M.H. Bell, *A Certain Eventuality: Britain and the Fall of France* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1974). William L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry into the Fall of France in 1940* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969); Jeffery A. Gunsburg, *Divided and Conquered: The French High Command and the Defeat of the West, 1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979). François Bédarida, *La Stratégie secrète de la drôle de guerre. Le Conseil Suprême interallié, septembre 1939-avril 1940* (Paris: Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, 1979) and R.H.S. Stolfi, 'Equipment for Victory in France, 1940,' *History 55* (February, 1970) p.1-20.

German High Command's ability to exploit Allied errors.[599] On the whole, a consensus has emerged in the historiography that defeat was not due to the incompetence of the French leadership, but the failure of French operational planning, which was too narrow and inflexible for the mobile war the Wehrmacht imposed on the Allies.[600] Historian Gary Sheffield attests that: 'Superior doctrine and tactics, not superior technology, decided the battle for France.'[601] This chapter is in accord with the revisionist historiography and there is no denying that the Franco-British military Alliance was late in responding to the unfolding events and proved inadequate when put to the test in May and June 1940.

As one historian characterised the Alliance, the capacity 'to misunderstand each other seemed endless.'[602] The purpose of this chapter is to add to the historiography by focusing on the actions of the COS in May 1940 and to assess its performance in relation to supporting its ally. It is concluded that the COS failed to perform adequately in the Franco-British military Alliance, demonstrating a failure to communicate effectively with France, to co-ordinate plans for the Arras counter-attack, and to cohesively unite the resources of Britain and France against the Wehrmacht.

I: Strategy and Influence: The COS, Inter-Allied Relations and The Arras Decision

As mentioned above, whole histories have been written about the Battle of France and it is not the intention of this chapter to provide a detailed history of British conduct and complacency during the conflict. Instead, as this thesis is focused on the decision-making and policy-making influence of the COS, this section will view the Battle of France from the British COS's perspective.

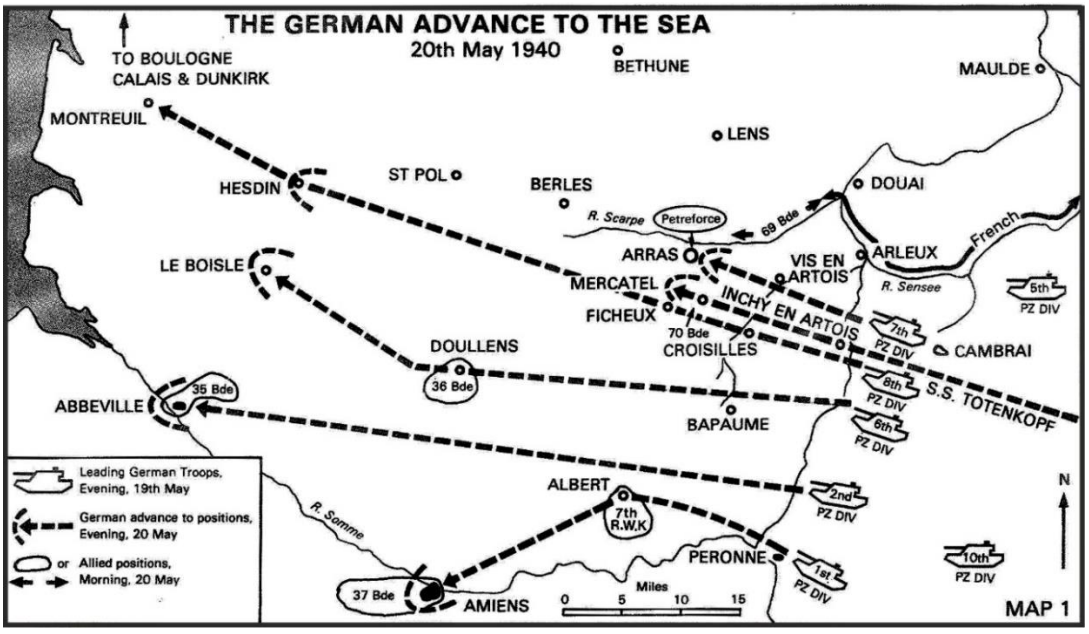
Due to the complexity of the subject matter and the length of the campaign the focus of this section is the Allied offensive at Arras on 21 May, rather than analysis of COS conduct

[599] Frieser, Greenwood (Trans.), *The Blitzkrieg Legend*.
[600] See Peter Jackson, 'Returning to the Fall of France: recent work on the causes and consequences of the 'Strange Defeat of 1940,' in *Modern & Contemporary France*, 12, 4, 2004, p.515.
[601] Gary D. Sheffield, 'Blitzkrieg and Attrition: Land Operations Europe, 1914—45', in Colin Mclnnes and G.D. Sheffield (eds.), *Warfare in the Twentieth Century: Theory and Practice* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p.69.
[602] Anthony Clayton, 'The Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale, 1918-1939,' in Alexander and Philpott (eds.), *Anglo-French Defence Relations*, p.44.

between 10 May and 25 June 1940. This operation has been selected as it was the only real British offensive during the withdrawal to Dunkirk and it exerted an influence on the German decision to halt the advance which enabled the evacuation at Dunkirk. A second reason is that the offensive was one of the few times the COS had a direct influence over the course of events during the Battle of France. At the outbreak of the war, Britain delegated control over its diminutive military force of 4 Divisions of the BEF to the French. Consequently, the COS's contribution to the operational warfare that ensued was minimal. However, during 16-25 May, the COS began to plan and execute a strategy for an offensive against the Wehrmacht. The resulting errors and confrontation which characterised Britain's conduct is important in assessing the COS.

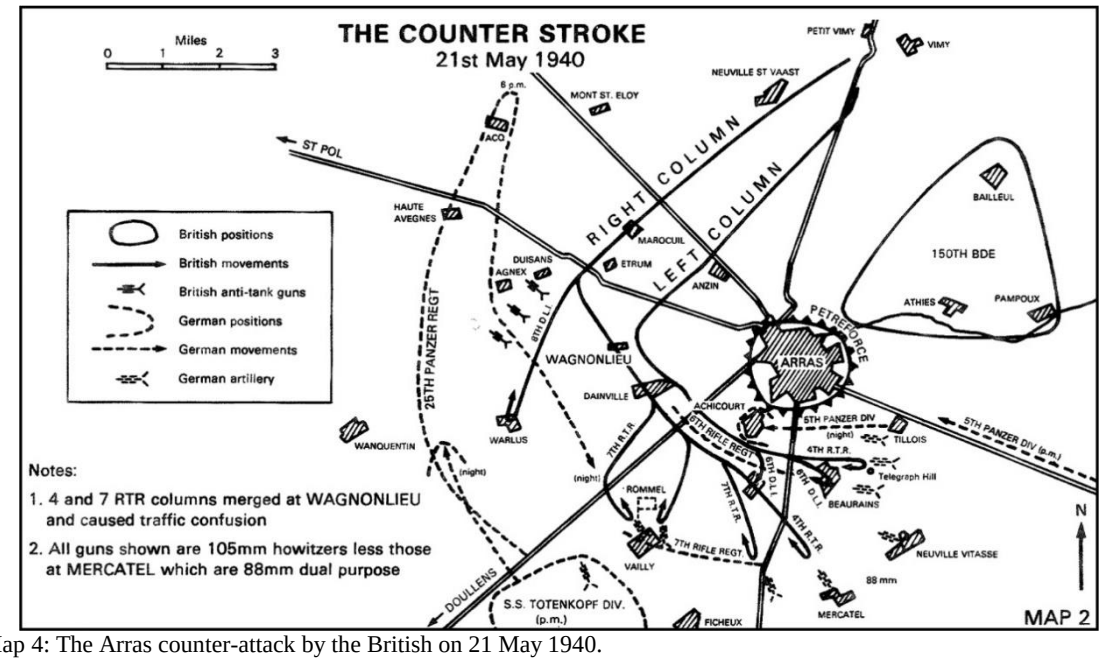
I.I: CONTEXT: THE ARRAS DECISION & THE FRENCH HIGH COMMAND

Before beginning an analysis of the COS's conduct regarding the Arras counter-attack, it is worth briefly outlining the context of the operation and French involvement. The operational background to the manoeuvre was an advance by the Wehrmacht's armoured corps. This thrust threatened to sever the BEF's line of communication with its bases in the Bay of Biscay and, more immediately, endanger the rear area of the BEF's position which contained ammunition and supplies. Moreover, Arras was strategically important if the Allies were to link the 1st Army with the main French forces south of the Panzer corridor. See map 3.



Map 3: The German advance and the position of the Allies on 20 May 1940.
Source: Bond, 'Arras, 21 May 1940' in Barnett (ed.) *Old Battles and New Defences*, p.63.

On 20 May Ironside, on behalf of the COS and the War Cabinet, ordered Gort to withdraw to the south to regain communication. However, as we will discuss later in this section, Ironside was persuaded by Gort to change the plan towards a counter-attack at Arras. The Arras operation was a reinforced brigade action, a very minor counter-attack, with the manoeuvre consisting of the Allied Commanders attempting to cut through the German force that was pushing northwards towards the channel coast, thus entrapping the Allied Forces that were advancing east into Belgium. Although the force initially made gains, the Allies were repelled by German forces and forced to withdraw in order to avoid encirclement.[603] In an attempt to shore up defences against the advancing Wehrmacht, the BEF reinforced the town of Arras where Lord Gort, the Commander-in-Chief of the BEF, ordered a counter-attack in an attempt to delay the Germans and protect British forces from being overrun. Tactically the manoeuvre achieved little, but operationally it caused the German High Command and Hitler concern and it may have been a factor for the surprise German halt order of 24-27 May which allowed the British evacuation.[604] The origins and scope of this manoeuvre were largely misunderstood at the time and have been a source of confusion in the historiography ever since.[605] For the context of this chapter, it provides a good case study of the relationship between the COS and the High Command.



Map 4: The Arras counter-attack by the British on 21 May 1940.
Source: Bond, 'Arras, 21 May 1940' in Barnett (ed.) Old Battles and New Defences, p.68.

[603] For a detailed account of the counter-attack see Brian Bond, 'Arras, 21 May 1940: A Case Study in the Counter-Stroke' in Correlli Barnett (ed.) *Old Battles and New Defences*, (London, Brassey, 1986) pp.61-84.
[604] See H.A. Jacobsen and J. Rohwer, (eds.) *Decisive Battles of World War II: The German View* (New York, Putnam, 1965) p.50.
[605] See Bond, 'Arras, 21 May 1940' in Barnett (ed.) *Old Battles and New Defences*, p.61-84; Horne, *To Lose a Battle*, pp.660-670; Bond, *Britain, France, and Belgium*, Chap.4.

As Brian Bond has produced a history of the Arras counter-attack and numerous historians have discussed the positon of the French Army during this period, it is not the conjecture of this section to provide detailed analysis of the French High Command's movements and directions. Instead, our focus will be on the actions of the COS and of Ironside, since these feature little in the history of these events. Nonetheless, it is important to briefly provide some context on the French High Command during the Arras Campaign.

Firstly, an analysis of the French during this period shows that they recognised the importance of the Arras as an area for counter-attack, as did the British. For example, Gamelin on 19 May issued Directive No.12, noting the gap in the Allied front between Arras and Péronne and proposing a simultaneous counter-attack from both north and south to cut off the German Panzer divisions: 'It seems that for the moment there is a vacuum behind this first echelon.'[606] Gamelin rightly concluded that 'it was a matter of hours' before the German advance cut the 1st Army Group's communication with Amiens, and that by the next day the Germans would reach the Channel at Abbeville.[607] Gamelin's pencilled instruction reveals a sense of urgency and acknowledgement of the importance of countering the German advance. But it came too late. He was relieved of command and was replaced by 74-year-old General Weygand.[608] The new commander brought fresh vigour and confidence to the French Government, however, three days were lost through this change of leadership and it was not until 22 May that the French Supreme Commander issued his Operations Order No.1 for the counter-attack, which became known as the Weygand Plan.[609]

At a command level the above incident demonstrates that Gamelin and Weygand were robust in identifying the importance of the Arras as an area for counter-attack and that it would cut the 1st Army Group's communication. The problem lies that in comparison to the Germans, the French High Command moved in slow motion. The delay of three days between identifying the problem and the preference for counter-attack illustrates the French approach and its significant weaknesses. The tactic of methodical battle may have succeeded against an enemy equal to the French, however it was inadequate against the

[606] Cited in full in Horne, *To Lose a Battle*, p.665.
[607] Ibid.
[608] See Shirer, p.808-817. For more information on Weygand and Gamelin see Martin Alexander, *The Republic in Danger. General Maurice Gamelin and the Politics of French* Defence, 1933—1940 (Cambridge, CUP, 1993) Chap.12.
[609] TNA CAB 106/246, 'General Gort's Second Despatch,' p.32.

more mobile and aggressive Wehrmacht. Furthermore, the French Command's endeavours for an Arras counter-offensive were set back because General Billotte, the Commander-in-Chief of the 1st Army Group and overseer of the BEF, was killed in a car accident on the evening of 21 May while returning from a meeting with Weygand in Ypres. Thus, the only man thoroughly familiar with the French plan was dead, which was a great loss to the French. The bureaucratic nature of the system caused delays, which meant that his successor, General Blanchard, was not appointed for another three days.[610] As a result, the counter-offensive initially proposed for 23 May was postponed by Weygand to 24 May, and finally to 26 or 27 May, before finally being cancelled.[611]

While the German Command took the initiative and made decisions that would contribute to the accomplishment of the objectives, the French emphasised the importance of orders and the application of doctrine, and lacked flexibility. By being more capable at a strategic, operational and tactical level, the Germans succeeded in overwhelming the Allied response. Gamelin and Weygand's failure to act decisively and launch a counter-attack until written orders had been processed stands as an example of the French adherence to plans and procedures. It is not the purpose of this section to discuss Weygand or Gamelin's conduct, apart from drawing the conclusion that it was ultimately the failure of operational planning against the speed of the Wehrmacht advance that hindered the Allies.

I.II: STRATEGY: TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE COS AND THE FRENCH HIGH COMMAND DEMONSTATE STRATEGIC FORESIGHT?

The traditional interpretation of Allied actions during this period focuses overwhelmingly on defeats at Sedan and the evacuation of Dunkirk. Contrary to the assessment once made by Alistair Horne that this period 'became largely a matter of marching for the Germans,' it will be seen that the French and British took offensive action against the Wehrmacht's advance.[612] Assessment will focus on the tactical response of the COS and the French High

[610] TNA WO 106/1708, 'Lt. Brooke Diary of the 2nd Corps, 10-30th May 1940,' 24 May 1940, p.5. [Alan Brooke's official report].
[611] For the planned Weygand Offensive see, Maxime Weygand, *Memoires* (Paris, Flammarion, 1950), Vol 3, p.77; Glover, *The Fight for the Channel Ports*, p.104; Bond, *Britain, France, and Belgium*, Chap.4; Jackson, *The Fall of France*, pp.88-92.
[612] Alistair Horne, 'Fall of France,' in I.C.B. Dear, (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War* (Oxford, OUP, 1995), p.414.

Command, demonstrating that both showed strategic foresight, a sense of urgency, and attempted to counter the German advance.

The COS, and in particularly CIGS Ironside, quickly grasped the dilemma facing the BEF and its commander Lord Gort in France:

> If Billotte cannot stop this broadening to the north we shall find ourselves cut from our lines of communication in Amiens. That means that we shall be trying to evacuate the BEF from Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne. An impossible proposition.[613]

By 18 May the COS's policy had been decided: urgent measures were required to prevent the BEF being lost. It was evident to the policy-makers that unless the Allies were able to maintain their communication with the BEF, it would follow that supplies would fail, thereby rendering the armies in the north incapable of further resistance. As CIGS Ironside explained to the War Cabinet on 19 May,

> The immediate danger was the risk that the Germans would succeed in establishing themselves across the British line of communication between Amiens and Abbeville.[614]

If this happened the BEF would have been isolated from supplies and communication, with resources only being delivered through Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk, all of which had been under air attack.[615] Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, was in favour of the action, visiting Paris on 16 May to boost morale.[616] He figuratively illustrated the situation to Gamelin on 19 May:

> The tortoise has protruded its head very far from its shell. Some days must elapse before their main body can reach our lines of communication. It would appear that powerful blows struck from north and south of this drawn-out pocket could yield surprising results.[617]

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[613] Ironside, *Diaries*, 17 May 1940, pp.313-314.
[614] TNA CAB 65/7, WM (40) 129, 'War Cabinet: Minutes,' 19 May 1940.
[615] Ironside, *Diaries*, 17 May 1940, pp.313-314.
[616] See Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill: Finest Hours, 1939-1941* (London, Heinemann, 1983), pp.349-51.
[617] Cited in Horne, *To Lose a Battle*, p.472.

The COS assessed that the best strategic move for the British contingent was south or south-west to maintain communications through Amiens and join the main French force. A second alternative, which was difficult to contemplate, was a withdrawal north to the Channel ports. The first scenario would lead to the Belgians being abandoned, while the second would result in the abandonment of France and the certain loss of BEF men and equipment.[618] As a consequence the COS recommended that BEF Commander Lord Gort should 'concentrate some part of the British Expeditionary Force in the Arras area.'[619] The object was to reconnect the lines of communication between Arras and Amiens and isolate the advancing Panzers. The outcome of the discussion was the despatch of Ironside to France to co-ordinate with Gort and liaise with the French Command.

By formulating this strategy, the COS is shown to have exhibited foresight. The committee recognised the strategic imperative of seizing the initiative and in supporting France in turning the retreat into an offensive. It was decided by the COS that 'the important thing would be to afford the maximum support to this [the French] counter-attack.'[620] By making this statement the COS, besides aiding the survival of the BEF, was also bolstering the morale of the French. At this stage Churchill and the COS still discounted the eventuality of the French collapse, believing that the Wehrmacht advance 'could not conquer the whole of France, but there was a danger of their spreading panic behind the lines.'[621] As Ironside presented to the COS and the War Cabinet,

> It would now appear imperative for the French to make an opportunity to grasp the initiative. The present appears to a favourable moment, with the German mechanised forces tired and the main bodies strung out. Time is vital.[622]

Subsequently, the COS sought to put heart into their Allies and secure their position on the battlefield through the despatch of an armed brigade to France. [623] During this period from 16 to 25 May the COS demonstrated long-term strategic thinking both in the present and

[618] Although on 17 May 1940 Ironside wrote in his diary that the evacuation of the BEF was 'an impossible proposition,' on that same day the collection and organisation of vessels for an evacuation was ordered by Ironside to the Admiralty.
[619] Ibid.
[620] TNA CAB 79/4, COS (40) 132, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes,' 14 May 1940.
[621] TNA CAB 65/13, WM 124 1, 'War Cabinet: Confidential Annex,' 16 May 1940.
[622] TNA WO 106/1772, 'Note on the Situation on the Western Front: CIGS's Statement,' 19 May 1940.
[623] TNA CAB 79/4, COS (40) 134, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes,' 16 May 1940 and Ironside, *Diaries,* p.310 16 May 1940.

towards the future. For instance, the COS submitted on 25 May 'British Strategy in a Certain Eventuality,' however several drafts had been produced by the JPC as early as 19 May. The paper has been analysed by several historians as Britain outlining its position beyond the Fall of France.[624] As the subject matter falls outwith the Phoney War it will not be a primary avenue of analysis in this thesis. Nonetheless, it can be concluded from the paper's commissioning that the COS was looking to the future, to a conflict without France as an Ally. In the interval, since it was by no means certain that France would actually be defeated, the COS proceeded to support an offensive action. As Ironside confided in his diary, 'it was a battle that may lay France low and we must not stand out.'[625] The CIGS and the COS recognised this.

The French High Command also acknowledged the importance of an offensive. General Gamelin, like his British counterparts, recognised that the Wehrmacht's breakthrough towards the Channel coast had created a vacuum which the Germans could not secure. The Panzer advance had created a forty kilometre wide gap which, if exploited by the Allies, would cut the Wehrmacht from their supplies and result in their encirclement along the Channel coasts. Both Britain and France reacted quickly to this strategic opportunity, as discussed above, with the Weygand Plan.

Gamelin's and the COS's instructions for the counter-attack reveal a sense of urgency and an acknowledgement of the need to counter the German advance. Much has been made by historians of the significance of losing French troops in Holland and in Belgium and the Breda manoeuvre remains a fateful gamble gone wrong which damaged Gamelin's record as a Commander-in-Chief.[626] However, despite these losses, 60 French and 4 British divisions remained to fight for France. The COS had not given in and abandoned France: independent of French policy-makers and without knowing Gamelin's directive, the COS took the initiative and formulated a strategy to exploit the Panzer's advance for the Allied benefit. As a committee they had foreseen that the BEF was in danger of losing its communications and supplies, and were proactive in seeking a solution. While it would be

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[624] See Hill, *Cabinet Decisions*; John Lukacs, *Five Days in London: May 1940* (London, 1994); Phillip M. Bell, *A Certain Eventuality*; David Reynolds, 'Churchill and Britain's Decision to Fight on in 1940,' in Richard Langhorne (ed.) *Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War* (Cambridge, CUP, 1985).
[625] Ironside, *Diaries*, 16 May 1940, p.310.
[626] See D. Reynolds, 'Churchill and the British "Decision" to Fight on in 1940: Right Policy, Wrong Reason,' in R.T.B. Langhorne, ed., *Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War: Essays in Honour of F.H. Hinsley* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 147–67; Bond, *Britain, France and Belgium*; Gunsburg, *Divided and Conquered*; Doughty, *The Breaking Point* and Alexander, 'Repercussions of the Breda Variant,' *FHS* and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*.

theoretical to picture the situation had the COS not acted, it could be argued that the German halt order which resulted from their tactical counter-attack enabled the evacuation of the BEF from Dunkirk. The COS therefore fulfilled its duty in guiding Britain's course at this point in the war.

I.III: INFLUENCE: IRONSIDE'S ROLE IN THE ARRAS DECISION

The Arras Campaign is a good case study of inter-allied liaison, and Ironside's meetings with Gort and the French to ratify the operation are particularly revealing. As discussed previously, the War Cabinet agreed to the COS's recommendations that,

> The French should be informed that the BEF was being instructed to move in a south-westerly direction on the axis Arras-Amiens attacking all enemy forces encountered, and to join up with the French Army. The CIGS should cross to France… and communicate the above instructions.[627]

On 19 May 1940 Ironside was despatched to France to communicate with the BEF and the French Generals the War Cabinet's directive. An analysis of Ironside's two meetings provides insight into the strengths of the CIGS as a tactical commander and his relationship with both within the COS and the French High Command in communicating the assessments made. These meetings give insight into the COS as a decision-making body, and also its relationship with the French.

Early on the morning of 20 May Ironside arrived at Gort's headquarters at Wahagnies to communicate the War Cabinet's unequivocal order to adopt the operations discussed above. No official minutes were recorded of the meeting; diary entries are the only source of what occurred. However the conversation was observed by Sir John Slessor, who noted that Ironside's news to Gort caused a 'mild sensation.'[628] Ironside's record of the conversation is noted in his diary.

> I told the C-in-C [Gort] that in my opinion only an attack with all his force, backed if it was possible by the French troops near him, in the direction of

[627] TNA CAB 65/13, WM (40) 130 'War Cabinet: Confidential Annex,' 19 May 1940.
[628] Slessor, *Central Blue*, p.289.

> Amiens would release the BEF from their present encirclement. Did he agree? Did he think it a possible solution? If he did, I was ready to give him an order to proceed at once. I would then proceed to get the French troops near him to conform. After some though, Lord Gort did not agree. I asked him to try, but the C-in-C said no, he could not agree.[629]

From the above, it can be assessed that Ironside's conversation with Gort was less of a command being communicated than a discussion and debate over the direction that should be taken, with Ironside inviting Gort's personal opinion on the matter. Gort's views did not agree with the War Cabinet's. Briefly, Gort and his deputy Pownall argued against the withdrawal as seven of the nine BEF divisions were in contact with the Wehrmacht on the Escaut. Added to this was the belief that the withdrawal would create a gap between the BEF and the Belgians which the Wehrmacht would exploit. Finally, the BEF had been in close fighting for nine days without respite and were low on ammunition.[630] To mollify the War Cabinet, Gort was prepared to employ his two unengaged divisions (5th and 50th) at Arras the following day. However, the main effort to fill the void, Gort insisted, must be made by French forces from south of the Somme.[631]

Interestingly for our study of decision-making within the COS, Ironside appears in slightly more than one hour to have been persuaded into accepting Gort's views without argument. This is significant, as Ironside was supposed to represent the War Cabinet and the COS in delivering a Cabinet instruction. This he failed to do. He communicated to the French not the War Cabinet directive, but the abridged plan agreed with Gort. In so doing, Ironside was defying a Cabinet order. The previous day in Cabinet the CIGS had stated alongside the rest of the COS that the BEF should advance through the Bethune-Arras area, 'in order to get back on to its line of communication, and fight its way through to join up with the French.'[632] We have already examined this personal-public conflict of interest within Ironside in discussion over the Low Countries in Chapter Two, and this was again revealed in May 1940.

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[629] Ironside, *Diaries,* 19 May 1940, p.320.
[630] Ibid.
[631] See Bond, 'Arras, 21 May 1940,' Barnett (ed.) *Old Battles and New Defences,* p.65.
[632] TNA CAB 65/13, WM (40) 130 'War Cabinet: Confidential Annex,' 19 May 1940.

There are considerable difficulties in trying to arrive at conclusions on Ironside's actions, not the least because there is no detailed written record as to the meeting and Ironside's change in direction. Furthermore, care needs to be taken not to introduce an attribution or causal effect explanation where no clear evidence of such exists. Nonetheless, conclusions can be tentatively drawn from Ironside's actions. In many ways Ironside was not simply a representative of the COS, as CIGS he was a military commander responsible for the wellbeing of British troops. The conflict within Ironside was between his duty as a Chief of Staff to provide advice and implement the wider committee's decisions, and his military mind in which tactics were uppermost. In changing the directive, Ironside demonstrates his leadership as CIGS; to him tactics were not fixed, but could evolve. In superseding the Cabinet decision, Ironside was fulfilling his duties as CIGS by envisaging the tactical consequences of the directive and adjusting the directive based on the risks assessed. Giving Ironside the benefit of the doubt, he did not act unilaterally. Although he undertook such actions without the acknowledgement or approval of the COS or War Cabinet, he did seek Gort's opinion – the most senior military commander in the field. In this regard the CIGS can be seen to have consulted militarily and acted in the interest of his service.

The mandated role of the CIGS and the COS was not simply to provide advice to ministers and then unquestioningly implement their decision. Instead, the role of the COS was to engage in discourse and if the policy seemed assured, then implement it. If the circumstances changed, and if the implementation of a policy proved to endanger Britain's interests, the role of the COS was to act accordingly. It was in this regard that Ironside used his discretion. Faced with Gort's assessment of the state of the BEF, and after reconnoitring the situation in the field, Ironside comprehended the consequences of the directive to the BEF – the overstretching of an already vulnerable Army that was in close combat with the enemy. As Ironside acknowledged at the War Cabinet the next day, Gort would be under difficulty 'to extricate himself from his present positon on the Escaut.'[633] From Gort's point of view, the situation was becoming desperate. On 20 May, Gamelin had been replaced by Weygand as Commander-in-Chief of the French Armed Services, but was still in the process of taking over. The Wehrmacht had reached the coast thereby cutting the BEF's line of communication. Gort was similarly isolated, with no communication from the French and 'no orders for some eight days.'[634] Subsequently Ironside persuaded the War Cabinet to reassess the directive, which was amended to include a counter-attack at Arras.

[633] TNA CAB 65/13, WM (40) 131 'War Cabinet: Confidential Annex,' 20 May 1940.
[634] Ironside, *Diaries*, 19 May 1940, p.320.

In examining the COS's conduct in relation to the French High Command, reference must also be made to Ironside's subsequent meeting with the French on 20 May to ratify the Arras counter-attack at the French headquarters at Lens. Ironside represented the COS and Pownall the BEF; on the French side were Generals Weygand and Billotte and the Commander-in-Chief of the First Army, Blanchard. The fact that Ironside had to go to France to ratify the directive illustrates the leading role the French played. Britain's diminutive military contribution in France left Britain the weaker ally, and the COS had to negotiate the plan with Gamelin and Georges. There is no official minute of the meeting on 20 May, only the diary entries of Ironside and Pownall. A certain bias might be evidenced because both British officers were frustrated with the French; this may have clouded their appreciation of the meeting, however both French generals were seemingly discouraged and uncertain about the future:

> All [were] in a state of complete depression. No plan, no thought of any plan, just ready to be slaughtered. Defeated at the head without casualties. *Très fatigués* and nothing doing. I lost my temper and shook Billotte by the button of his tunic. The man is completely beaten. I got him to agree [to a plan]... Gort told me when I got back to his HQ that they would never attack.[635]

General Pownall recorded that the French Commanders:

> …were in a proper dither, even Blanchard who is not *nerveux.* But the two of them and [Colonel] Alembert were all three shouting at one moment - Billotte shouted loudest, trembling, that he had no means to deal with tanks and that if his infantry were put into line they would not withstand attack. Tiny [Ironside] was quite good in speaking to them firmly and getting them to take a pull.... C-in-C [Gort] telephoned them (at Lens) to say he was putting in 50th and 5th Divisions to counter-attack southwards from the Scarpe tomorrow morning. We got the French to agree they would co-operate also with two divisions [attacking south towards Cambrai with elements of Prioux's Cavalry Corps co-operating on Franklyn's immediate right] (not so great an effort as they have at least eight

[635] Ironside, *Diaries,* 20 May 1940.

> in the neighbourhood). This is our last reserve… We cannot do much more in the common cause.[636]

As a study of inter-allied liaison, this meeting is interesting. In some regards Ironside demonstrated strong leadership in asserting the British position in the face of negativity and French resignation. He was able to achieve his objective of securing French support, which ultimately resulted in the counter-attack at Arras.

Yet, Ironside's actions during the conference display a high level of frustration and a lack of deference towards the French as the stronger partner. He seems not to have sympathised with their demoralising circumstances and fear of the future. Ironside's actions demonstrate his failing to recognise or acknowledge the point of view of others. He was unable to put aside his disquiet and impatience with the French High Command. As he recounted to the War Cabinet the next day, Ironside was exasperated with the,

> Indecision [that] had reigned in the French High Command… He [General Billotte] had failed to carry out his duties of co-ordination for the last eight days and appeared to have no plans.[637]

While Ironside had a right to be annoyed, he overlooked that fact that the fast nature of the battle had affected communication between the BEF and the French. For example, on 18 May the BEF received conflicting orders to both stay and depart their position at Dendre. Having moved once already, Lord Gort refused to tolerate further changes and unilaterally remained in position until 19 May.[638]

As far as inter-allied relationships were concerned, Ironside ignored the French's concern about unfolding events and instead of being conciliatory, he was aggressive and assertive. Such an attitude did not foster good co-operation and unity towards the manoeuvre, and as mentioned earlier, the French had already developed their own plan and were the stronger partner.

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[636] Pownall, *Diaries,* 20 May 1940, pp.323-4.
[637] TNA CAB 65/7, 132 (40), 'War Cabinet Minutes,' 21 May 1940.
[638] KCL LHCMA, BRIDGEMAN 1/1, Lord Gort's Despatches, pp.35-36.

The Arras Plan was ratified by the French Generals and Weygand. However, instead of leaving the meeting with the confidence that close co-collaboration had been achieved, Ironside concluded that although he 'had tried hard to make him [General Billotte] attack… he [Ironside] expressed no great faith in this attack, or in General Billotte.'[639] A lack of trust is evident between both parties at this stage in the Phoney War. As the Battle of France progressed in the following weeks this mistrust continued to build, culminating with the BEF's evacuation from Dunkirk.

This examination of the COS's actions regarding the strategy and liaison for the Arras counter-attack has been important in understanding the Allied policy-making and decision-making process in play, and Allied relations. The COS did demonstrate strategic foresight in formulating the Arras Campaign, despite being the weaker partner in the Alliance. Despite the perceived confusion caused by the speed of the Wehrmacht's advance, both policy-making bodies recognised the threat of the German advance on the future conduct of the battle and subsequently took steps to counter it. Subsequently the COS can be judged to have acquitted itself in its policy-making function and taken steps to communicate their directive with the French. The conduct of Ironside in communicating the directive has been examined, revealing that Ironside used his discretion as CIGS not to implement the War Cabinet's directive without discussion with the BEF. Ironside demonstrated independent thinking and in defiance of War Cabinet instructions, agreed to a different variant of the operation. Finally, it was shown that Ironside in representing the COS did succeed in achieving an agreement with the French, however in a manner which can be assessed to be aggressive rather than conciliatory.

On 27 May 1940 Ironside was replaced as CIGS by General Sir John Dill, who had been Vice-Chief since 23 April. Ironside after his return to London on 22 May never returned to France during the Battle and the command of the Arras counter-attack was delegated to Gort and the French. The COS no longer had a role to play.

[639] TNA CAB 65/13, WM (40) 131 'War Cabinet: Confidential Annex,' 20 May 1940.

III: THE QUESTION OF AIR SUPPORT: THE COS'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Our focus in this chapter is the COS's relationship with France during the Battle of France, examining the committee's decision-making and policy-making ability alongside her French ally. An evaluation of the Arras Campaign in May 1940 has shown that the COS was proactive in formulating a policy for counter-attack, and agreed with the French that urgent action was required. Although at the start of May 1940 the French were the stronger partners, it has been shown in meetings at the end of the month that the French High Command had become weakened, dispirited and indecisive. A closer examination of inter-allied meetings has revealed that Ironside responded with aggression and forcefulness, but displayed shortcomings, communicating not the agreed COS policy but a revised version following a conversation with Gort.

The French demand for air support throughout May and June 1940 is another worthwhile case study of the COS's relationship with France and its ability to make decisions. One assumption in the historiography is that the COS effectively abandoned France due to a lack of Air Power. It will now be assessed whether this is correct. The purpose of this section is to evaluate how the COS reached a decision on air support to France – whether there was consensus in reaching this decision, and why in this instance the COS, unlike in September 1939, did not feel obligated to her French ally.

As this thesis is on the policy-making and decision-making role of the COS, this section will consequently not evaluate the RAF and its influence on the course of the Battle of France. In the historiography *L'Armée de l'Air* is typically portrayed as disorganised and inferior, while the RAF's image in the Second World War is all too often one of heroism in the face of the unsurmountable odds of inefficient aircraft, the result of lost years of rearmament in the inter-war period.[640] In recent years Phillips O'Brien has successfully overturned this image by showing that the RAF was in fact a strong and competent force

[640] Anthony Cain, 'L'Armée De l'Air, 1933–1940: Drifting toward Defeat.' *Why Air Forces Fail: The Anatomy of Defeat*, (ed.) Robin Higham and Stephen J. Harris, (Lexington, University of Kentucky, 2016), pp.41-70; A. D. Harvey, 'The French Armée de l'Air in May–June 1940: A Failure of Conception', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.25, 4, 1990, pp.447-465; Basil Collier, *The Defence of the United Kingdom* (London, Collins, 1957); Kate Caffrey, Combat Report: The RAF and the Fall of France (Swindon, Wiltshire, 1990); Richard P. Hallion, *Strike from the Sky* (Washington, University of Alabama, 1989) and T.C.G. James and Sebastian Cox (ed.), *The Growth of Fighter Command, 1936-1940*, (Royal Air Force Official Histories, 2001).

in 1940 and 'was bound to win' the air war against the Luftwaffe.[641] O'Brien shows that the Luftwaffe's tactical performance in the Battle of France led the RAF to overestimate German air strength, particularly with regards to strategic bombing. The British mistakenly assumed the strength of the Luftwaffe and underestimated the capability of the RAF.[642] This section assumes that the COS, in viewing the documents provided by the RAF, took them at face value.

During the Battle of France, Britain deployed 16 squadrons of RAF Fighters to the continent.[643] Nonetheless, a central topic of debate between the COS and the French High Command during the Battle of France was Britain's commitment – or lack of commitment in General Weygand's view – to provide Air Power. Throughout May and June 1940 French requests for fighter support increased in urgency. A letter from General Doumenc on 11 June stated that,

> Compelling needs… lead me to request the co-operation of British Air Forces, amounting to six fighter squadrons…. May I stress that the giving of this aid be urgent.[644]

However, the COS's stance was clear: limited fighter assistance. On 3 June 1940 the committee reported as follows:

> We most strongly recommend that no additional fighters be sent to France since even the three squadrons referred to above (i.e. those still in France) cannot be maintained in circumstances of heavy wastage, except at the expense of Home Defence.[645]

In coming to this decision the COS denied the further despatch of fighter squadrons to France. It will now be evaluated how they reached this decision.

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[641] Philips O'Brien, *How the War was Won: Air-Sea power and Allied victory in World War II* (Cambridge, CUP) p.122.
[642] Ibid, p.120-22.
[643] WO 106/1680, Section A. 10 May 1940 – 4 June 1940, 'France and the Low Countries - Planning and Operations: Air Policy' p.19.
[644] TNA AIR 8/287, 'Letter, No 1435, Document to War Cabinet,' 11 June 1940.
[645] TNA CAB 80/12, COS (40) 421, 'Western Front – British Military Policy,' 3 June 1940, p.6.

III.I: WHAT WAS THE COS'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS REGARDING AIR SUPPORT TO FRANCE?

Chapter Four evaluated the COS in regard to the Norway Campaign; it was revealed that the COS in March 1940 was influenced by the War Cabinet in reaching a decision. What influences were there in May 1940 which led the COS to recommend no further air support for France?

One major influence was the RAF, and in particular Chief of Staff Cyril Newall. A report by the Expansion and Re-Equipment Policy Committee as early as 22 January 1940 recommended to the COS 'that no additional fighter squadrons should be definitely allocated to France until the full home programme of 53 squadrons had been met.'[646] Furthermore, it recognised that assistance from France would be of 'very small help.'[647] A secret report approved by CAS Newall for the Secretary of State of Air in April 1940, demonstrates that the Air Ministry acknowledged that the French *L'Armée de l'Air* was ill-equipped to defend France.

> If we assume that Air Power is going to be the deciding factor in a war between Germany and Italy on the one hand and France, Poland, Romania and ourselves on the other, it is clear that this country will have to fight and win the war in the air, and that we can expect very small help from our Allies.[648]

Therefore, the Air Ministry argued to the COS that due to the inadequacies of the French Air Force, only the RAF could defend Britain. The Air Ministry stressed to the COS the significance of the RAF to Britain's security and that fighters were a resource that could not be endangered, so it was made clear that it would be irresponsible of the COS to use these valuable resources frivolously. The Air Ministry judged that Britain would be involved in a future war in the air and that therefore maintaining fighters was vital for the long-term security of Britain.

Air Chief Marshall of the Fighter Command Hugh Dowding, like the Air Ministry, supported only limited deployment of fighter Air Power. On 16 May 1940 Dowding wrote

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[646] TNA CAB 21/1306, 'Expansion and Re-Equipment Policy Committee Minutes: 22 January 1940,' p.2.
[647] Ibid.
[648] TNA AIR 19/58, 'Secret, DDCII's report to Secretary of State,' 5 April 1940, p.1.

officially to the Air Ministry arguing his position on fighter reinforcement to France, as he had been doing throughout the previous months.

> I believe, that, if an adequate fighter force is kept in this country, if the Fleet remains in being, and if Home Forces are suitably organised to resist invasion, we should be able to carry on the war single-handed for some time, if not indefinitely. But if the Home Defence Force is drained away in desperate attempts to remedy the situation in France, defeat in France will involve the final, complete and irremediable defeat of this country.[649]

Dowding's position was unequivocal: the future defence of the United Kingdom was at stake. His letter had a profound impact. Cyril Newall presented Dowding's letter to the COS on 18 May, together with a personal statement outlining his own position.[650] Previously, Newall had taken an impartial stance between the demands of Fighter Command and the demands of France; however, now that the question concerned the nation's survival, he took a firmer line. Newall's report stated:

> We do not believe that to throw in a few more squadrons, whose loss might vitally weaken the fighter line at home, would make the difference of victory and defeat in France.[651]

It would be an over-simplification to state that Newall only now, in May 1940, perceived the dangers of sending RAF Fighters to France. The fact was that until a French defeat was highly probable, it was the RAF's duty, and to the benefit of her ally and the Army, to sustain an RAF presence in France for as long as possible. It should also be acknowledged that whereas the French had only been promised four fighter squadrons in addition to the six already in France at the start of the Battle of France, a further ten squadrons had been despatched.[652] However, for the RAF in general, and CAS Cyril Newall in particular, it was now impracticable to send more squadrons. For example, a day before receiving Dowding's letter on 15 May, Newall noted in a confidential War Cabinet Meeting:

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[649] TNA CAB 66/7, FO/8.19048, 'Copy of a Letter from Air Officer Commanding in Chief, Fighter Command to the Under Secretary of State, Air Ministry,' 16 May 1940, p.2.
[650] TNA CAB 66/7, WP (40) 159, 'The Air Defence of Great Britain: A report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee' 18 May 1940, 'Note by the Chief of the Air Staff.'
[651] Ibid, p.2.
[652] WO 106/1680, Section A. 10 May 1940 – 4 June 1940, 'France and the Low Countries - Planning and Operations: Air Policy,' p.19.

> In reply to a question by the Prime Minister, the Chief of the Air Staff said that he would not, at this moment, advise the despatch of any additional fighters to France.[653]

In his personal letter to the secretary of the COS, General Ismay, Newall explained why there could be no more deployments of RAF fighters. Newall argued that fighters operating from Britain were more 'economically and effectively employed than they are when fighting under the present conditions in France.'[654] Newall believed that British-based fighters could protect Britain through the RAF Defence System, which would identify enemy formations 'as opposed to the rather wasteful patrols we carry out in France, some of which never make contact with the enemy.'[655] Finally, he stated that it would be a 'more rapid process to salvage aircraft which are damaged at home' and return their pilots to the front line.[656]

The influence of powerful figures in the RAF who supported the denial of more air support to France was an overriding factor in the COS reaching a decision. As illustrated above, the Air Ministry was a strong lobbyist, and indeed had been since the start of the war. The Air Council had agreed in October 1939 that its priorities were to maintain an efficient air defence in Britain, assist the Army in France, and to increase, as its main contribution to winning the war, bomber command.[657] Air Vice-Marshal Evill told the French that the prevalent view among the Air Ministry was that

> We should not fritter away our striking force on unprofitable objectives in deference to a public clamour for retaliation or public criticism at inaction.[658]

In the minds of Newall and the RAF officials, the contribution of the RAF was in the bombing of industries and cities – *not* air combat in the field of battle. As the Air Council agreed, 'the needs of fighter squadrons in France must not be allowed to cause an

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[653] TNA Air 8/287, p.135 Confidential Annex of the War Cabinet held on Wed may 15th 1940.
[654] TNA Air 8/287, 'Letter from Cyril Newall to Ismay, dater 20 May 1940,' p.2.
[655] Ibid.
[656] Ibid.
[657] For more information see James and Cox, *The Growth of Fighter Command*, p.73-75.
[658] CAB/66/2/36, COS (39)88 *Air Policy* dated 20 October 1939, para, 2a and approved by the War Cabinet at CAB/65/1/55 dated 21 October 1939, para 5. Air Ministry instructions to Evill are at AIR 2/4474.

unwarrantable drain upon the available resource.'[659] For the Air Ministry the defence of Britain was paramount.

A flaw in the COS's decision-making process was the degree to which the RAF lobbied the committee. Unlike other important policies presented to the COS such as the Balkan policy and mine-laying in Norway, which were fresh issues to be discussed, the COS had been aware of the RAF position against Fighter Support to France since the outbreak of the war. In analysing the RAF's recommendations against sending fighters, one is struck by the prevalence of personal opinion: 'we believe…' and 'I believe…' in the reports. The Air Ministry and Newall were passionate in their protection of the RAF and wanted to ensure its resources were not exploited. The COS seemed happy to accept such statements and to work on the basis that the advice was correct. There was an absence of intellectual rigour and questioning of the RAF's position. Ironside and Pound seemed to have deferred too easily to Newall's desire not to send Fighters. The mandated role of the COS was to defend Britain's interests and to secure its safety against external threats. Yet, the COS in deciding on a policy was influenced in its decision-making process by 'evidence', which was primarily personal judgements and recommendations from the institution that would be affected by the deployment.

However, the COS was also presented with tangible statistical analyses. As O'Brien has shown, the RAF underestimated the strength of Fighter Command during May 1940: the RAF had more fighters operational than the Germans, with 1,981 RAF fighters versus 1,464 Luftwaffe fighters.[660] The Air Ministry was unaware of the RAF's strength in comparison to the Luftwaffe, believing that RAF losses were considerable and that Germany had the upper hand. Certainly, the figures presented to the COS outlined that losses in the air during the Battle of France were considerable. Figures drawn up between 10 May and 12 June 1940 presented British losses as 701 and French losses as 988; a total of 1,689 aircraft.[661] As far as the COS was concerned, these figures demonstrated considerable losses, with the RAF Advanced Air Striking Force losing one aircraft in every two sorties.[662] Statistics such as these convinced the COS and Churchill that 'the continuance of fighting on this scale would soon completely consume the British Air Force in spite of its individual

[659] Cited in James and Cox (ed.), *The Growth of Fighter Command,* p.74.
[660] See O'Brien, *How the War was Won,* p.121.
[661] TNA CAB 21/973, 'Memorandum Prepared by the Air Ministry as Directed in the Prime Minister's Minute to General Ismay, dated 15th June,' 16 June 1940.
[662] See Denis Richards, *The Royal Air Force 1939-1945 – Volume I: The Fight at Odds*, (London, HSMO, 1953), p.127.

ascendancy.'[663] British industry could not replenish the RAF at the rate needed to rebuild the Air Force quickly. While the French air industry had concentrated mainly on the production of fighters, British industry had to build the aircraft required by the Air Striking Force as well as Naval co-operation units. Production figures for Britain and France showed a marked difference. In October 1939 French monthly output was 185 fighters, while British output was 103.[664] The dire quantitative data presented to the COS left it with no choice but to limit assistance to its ally. An extract from the minutes of a meeting of Ministers and the COS held in 10 Downing Street on Saturday 8 June 1940 clearly states their position regarding the question of British fighters:

> The Prime Minister said that there were two alternatives open to us at the present time. We could regard the present battle as decisive for France and ourselves, and throw in the whole of our fighter resources in an attempt to save the situation, and bring about victory. If we failed, we should then have to surrender.
>
> Alternatively, we should recognise that whereas the present land battle was of great importance, it would not be decisive one way or the other for Great Britain…. He felt it would be fatal to yield to the French demands and jeopardise our own safety. Unanimous agreement was expressed with this view.[665]

This put the British Government and the COS in a difficult position *as regards her ally*. As the COS wrote in its report to the War Cabinet on 3 June:

> Nevertheless, the military disadvantages of the consequences of a flat negative to the request of the French Prime Minister leads us to the conclusion that we must accept the additional risks involved in assisting our ally.[666]

The same report goes on to argue that

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[663] Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, p.38.
[664] TNA WO 193/684, COS (39) 159, 'Strengthening of British Fighter Force in France by the Early Spring of 1940. By the Chief of the Air Staff,' p.2.
[665] TNA AIR 8/287, 'Extract from the minutes of a meeting of Minsters and the Chiefs of Staff held in 10 Dowding Street on Saturday 8 June 1940,' p.1.
[666] TNA CAB 80/12, COS (40) 421, 'Western Front – British Military Policy,' 3 June 1940, p.6.

> It is extremely doubtful whether any forces that we can send in the near future will make any difference to the course of the battle. Any forces despatched to France can virtually be written off.[667]

As intractable as the situation seemed to be between the COS and the French during May 1940, it did not preclude genuine attempts by the COS to break the impasses and institute compromises. Indeed, between May and June, the COS gave serious attention to the problem of how best to meet the French requirements; assessments were read, memoranda written, and conferences held with the French. Indeed, despite the suggestion in the historiography that the COS did not fully assess the situation regarding the despatch of fighters to France this section has shown that the COS undertook a detailed assessment. [668]

This section has shown that the major influencers on the COS's decision regarding the despatch of fighters to France were statistics from the Air Ministry and personal exhortations from Dowding in Fighter Command and Newall, himself one of the Chiefs. There had been a long-standing policy since the outbreak of war for limited fighter despatch to France, and therefore the COS had little choice but to accept the recommendations. The Air Ministry's function was to secure the position of the RAF and this could not be overlooked. In summary, the COS heard evidence from various sources and made a decision in a rational manner. Instead of being persuaded by French demands, the COS performed its duty in reaching a decision and formulating a policy that was in the best interests of Britain's security.

In retrospect, lack of air support was a weakness which overshadowed all others in the Battle of France between 10 May and 18 June (the day of the withdrawal of all British forces). Just over 400 RAF aircraft were sent to France and Belgium, which meant that the Germans had more than a two to one advantage on the battlefield.[669] German air operations had a demoralising effect on the Allied soldiers and the Luftwaffe exerted a decisive influence and was a contributing factor in the successful conclusion of the Wehrmacht's

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[667] Ibid, p.3.
[668] For more information on French betrayal see Gates; *End of the Affair*, p.117-18; Nicholas Herman, *Dunkirk* (London, Coronet Books 1990), p.50, Jackson, *The Fall of France*, p.98.
[669] Jackson, *The Fall of France*, p.21.

offensive. Britain was accused of abandoning France. As argued above, this is essentially true.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this chapter has been the COS's conduct as a decision-making and policy-making body, and its relationship with France during the Battle of France in May and June 1940. Firstly, it has been shown that throughout the Battle of France, the COS demonstrated strategic forethought and an ability to assess analytically before coming to a conclusion. For instance, the COS identified the opportunity to stop the Wehrmacht's advance and secure the Allies' position on the continent, and judged that a possible Battle of Britain would require a strong air defence and that it was not in Britain's security interests to concede to French demands for air support. As a committee, the COS carried out its designated function well, and Ironside, using his discretion as a military leader, gave direction to the BEF to counter-attack which led to the German halt order and the subsequent evacuation at Dunkirk.

The general consensus in the historiography is that the COS abandoned France, citing the Dunkirk evacuation and the denial of air support. As this chapter has shown, the COS did not abandon France but through the Arras Campaign, sought to create an offensive in support of her ally. However, despite these overtures, when it came to the aerial defence of Britain, the COS considered the options and statistics presented, and took the advice of the Air Ministry and RAF in agreeing to deny the French further Air Power.

The fact that the COS supported France in one regard and not in the other shows that the COS did not have an overarching disinclination towards her ally, but fulfilled its policy-making and decision-making function by assessing each campaign on its own merits, in order to fulfil its obligation of securing Britain's defence. If France was abandoned therefore, this was not due to a desertion of duty, but out of a higher duty to Britain's course in the war.

In this study of the COS, the actions of Ironside in inter-allied relations is illuminating. During the Battle of France, he exhibited forcefulness of opinion and independence of thought, using his discretion as a commander to consult with Gort rather than immediately communicating the COS's policy to the French. Ironside, as in previous chapters, revealed

a dichotomy of thought and action, however he can be assessed to have shown military insight and leadership in evolving the directive of the Arras Campaign, and to have shown unity in agreeing with the majority COS decision to deny French air support.

Due to the decisions discussed in this chapter, Britain's relationship with France deteriorated between May and June 1940. General Spears encapsulated the feeling between the two Allies in his description of a dinner with hitherto close French friends:

> But that night there was a rift between us, a slight crack in the crystal cup sufficient to change its sound when touched. I had my password and they did not have theirs. We no longer belonged to one society bounded by the same horizon. A lifetime steeped in French feeling, sentiment and affection was falling from me. England alone counted now.[670]

By the night of 18 June 1940, the Battle of France was over for the COS. The dilemma of Anglo-French relations coupled with the demands of the British Armed Services no longer applied, and the COS was now free to concentrate on the task for which the Committee had been formed – to guide the future direction of Great Britain in the war.

[670] Edward Spears, *Assignment to Catastrophe, Volume 1* (Heinemann, 1954). p.48.

CONCLUSION

The members of the COS played a vital role in directing Britain's course in the Second World War. This thesis has sought to address the deficiency in the current historiography by examining the COS's actions during the Phoney War period from September 1939 to May 1940. It has assessed the COS's effectiveness as a decision-making and policy-making body within the British War Machinery by examining the context of the committee and its support staff through a number of case studies. Furthermore, it has considered to what extent the COS carried out its mandated duty towards the War Cabinet and whether it adequately guided Britain's course in the war.

By evaluating the COS's effectiveness, this thesis has judged how well the committee performed its mandated duty as laid down in the 1923 Salisbury Committee's Report. The stated functions of the COS were:

> To keep the defence situation as a whole constantly under review so as to ensure that defence preparations and plans and the expenditure thereupon are co-ordinated and framed to meet policy.
>
> In addition to the functions of COS of Staff as advisers on questions of sea, land or air policy respectively, to their own Board or Council, each of the three COS of Staff will have an individual and collective responsibility for advising on defence policy as a whole, the three constituting, as it were, a Super-Chief of a War Staff in Commission. In carrying out this function they will meet together for the discussion of questions which affect their joint responsibilities.
>
> The Committee (subject to any directions by the Cabinet) will consider such questions in the light of the general defence policy of the Government, and of the strategical plans drawn up to give effect to that policy in time of war.[671]

The COS was thus responsible for advising the War Cabinet and acting as a decision-maker and policy-maker regarding the security of the nation. To be more precise, the COS guided

[671] TNA CAB 24/162, CP 461 (23), 'The Salisbury Report,' 15 November 1923, p.12, para. 36(8). The Cabinet decision on the Salisbury Memorandum is at CAB 23/46 Cabinet Conclusions 31 July 1923.

the War Cabinet towards defence policy decisions, with the War Cabinet and the Prime Minister ultimately making the final decisions.

The conclusion reached in this research is that the COS was weak and ineffective as a policy-making and decision-making body, with the committee's inadequacies having a major impact on the planning and conduct of the Phoney War. Furthermore, it has been found that decision-making with the War Cabinet was wholly impractical for the successful management of the war. Decision-making and policy-making required far more focus and direction than could be achieved by the bureaucratic committee structure of the period. While some of the COS's inadequacies as a decision-maker and policy-maker were due to factors outwith its control, overall the committee failed to perform its mandated role towards the War Cabinet and can, therefore, be judged to have been ineffective.

Although the overall conclusion of this thesis is that the COS was weak and ineffective, nevertheless the committee was not without value. One of the most important, as well as long lasting, contributions of the COS during the Phoney War was its decision to engage in an economic long-war of attrition. As discussed in Chapter One, central to the COS's position was its strategic capability in acknowledging that Britain had no prospect of staging a successful major land offensive in the west because militarily the country was weak. Consequently, the COS believed that economic pressure through blockade and selected offensive operations was the only way to achieve victory, either by forcing Hitler to overreach the Wehrmacht militarily or by causing the strong German economy to collapse. As the COS itself stated, 'Upon the economic factor depends our only hope of bringing about the downfall of Germany.'[672] As a result of this belief, the COS concentrated its actions in the Phoney War on slowly strangling Germany by naval blockade and offensive action in Scandinavia in order to deny their enemy the import of iron ore.

The COS's conclusion that Germany did not have the economic capacity to beat the Allies in a long-war was correct. Historians such as Adam Tooze and Joe Maiolo have demonstrated that the Allied blockade was in fact working and that the extraordinary victories achieved by Hitler during the summer of 1940 to some extent obscure the precariousness and precociousness of the German situation during the Phoney War.[673] In

[672] TNA CAB 66/7, 'British Strategy in a Certain Eventuality,' May 15 1940.
[673] See Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*, (Allen Lane, London, 2006); Maiolo, 'To Gamble all on a Single Throw,' in Baxter, Dockrill and Hamilton (eds.), *Britain*

the end, however, the COS was unfortunate that the German gamble to invade Norway and France, born of desperation, paid off.[674] By implementing the long-war economic strategy, the COS can be seen to have demonstrated strategic foresight. At the start of the war, the COS undertook detailed appreciations to confirm whether a long-war and economic attrition was the correct course. In so doing, the COS displayed rigour in its decision-making process. Furthermore, the COS did not simply stand by the strategy, but actively engaged in supporting the naval blockade and planning offensives in Scandinavia to sustain an economic war with Germany. The COS's strategic insight would later be endorsed, as a long-war of economic attrition eventually secured Allied victory in the Second World War. Therefore, the economic strategy the COS pursued was certainly effective, although its strategy was hampered in the longer term by Hitler's decision to invade Norway and the France, something that could not have been predicted.

The COS's position towards Italy and the Balkans in September 1939 also demonstrated the committee's strategic and operational capabilities. Despite France's shift towards supporting action in the Balkans, the COS maintained the opinion that it would not be in Britain's best interests to engage in offensive operations in the Balkans at this stage of the war. In coming to that decision, the COS demonstrated strategic prudence in recognising that a military invasion of the Balkans could have led to Italy joining Germany and then the Wehrmacht invading the Balkans. This was the correct decision.

In Chapter Six, the case study of the Arras Campaign in May 1940 similarly exhibited the committee's ability to successfully make decisions and formulate strategy. The committee recognised that there was a strategic imperative to seize the initiative on 18 May and to support France in combatting the Wehrmacht's advice. The COS realised that unless the Allies were able to maintain their communication with the BEF, it would follow that supplies would fail, thereby rendering the armies in the north incapable of further resistance. By deciding on a counter-attack at Arras, the COS sought to bolster France and secure the BEF's position on the battlefield. During the month of May, the COS demonstrated long-term strategic thinking in dispatching an armed brigade to France and

in Global Politics; Joe Maiolo, *Cry Havoc: The Arms Race and the Second World War 1931–1941* (London, 2010); R. J. Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1994) and Karl-Heinz Frieser, John T. Greenwood (Translator), *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West*, (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Md, 2005) pp.71-77.

[674] For more information see Maiolo, 'To Gamble all on a Single Throw,' in Baxter, Dockrill and Hamilton (eds.), *Britain in Global Politics*.

in contemplating Britain's position if France fell. Tactically, the manoeuvre achieved little, but operationally the action caused the German High Command to halt the German advance, which allowed the British evacuation at Dunkirk. Therefore, the COS demonstrated strong decision-making and policy-making abilities on this occasion.

Thus, it can be asserted that in the above instances the COS performed its duty effectively. The COS demonstrated cohesion in maintaining an economic strategy and in realistically appreciating the danger of offensives in the Balkans. Its assessment towards the Arras counter-attack equally revealed an ability to assess events on the battlefield and make decisions.

Nevertheless, despite the above assessment, the conclusion of this thesis is that the COS was not able to fulfil its mandated duty adequately. Having examined the COS throughout the Phoney War period from September 1939 to May 1940, the COS's failures outweighed its successes. This thesis has identified six different areas in which the COS fell short in performing its function, and each of these will now be assessed in turn.

I: Strategic & Operational Shortcomings

One flaw the COS demonstrated was the degree to which the committee did not correctly assess the strategic landscape during the Phoney War. One specific example of this oversight was in November 1939, when the COS ratified the Dyle plan, a manoeuvre that has long been regarded by military historians as one of the greatest errors of command. Through analysis of the source material, Chapter Two demonstrated that, to a certain extent, the COS showed foresight in correctly assessing the dangers of the advance to the Dyle River and South-Eastern Holland by the Allies. However, this foresight was limited. The COS did not assess whether the BEF could be extricated from Belgium should the Germans advance, as happened in May 1940. Moreover, the JPC, while critical of the advance to the Scheldt estuary, did not consider that the decision would deprive France of her central reserve of troops – an oversight that would prove fundamental to the failure of the Dyle Plan and the Battle of France.

A failure of the COS was that it set aside its reticence towards Plan D for diplomatic rather than strategic reasons. Despite well-founded concerns about recreating a stalemate similar to that which occurred during the First World War, the Plan was ratified. As argued in

Chapter Two, the COS's decision was the consequence of Britain's weak military position, and the COS and the French High Command both recognised that the Low Countries represented the clear possibility of a quick and complete defeat for France. The case studies demonstrated the difficult position the COS found itself in during the Phoney War, balancing its obligation to France as an ally and its obligation to safeguard Britain's armed service. This behoved the COS to think of France instead of making unilateral decisions. It was the COS's duty as an ally to France that ultimately guided its decision to endorse the Plan. The COS's strategic oversight, therefore, was due to their prioritisation of Britain's duty to France over the best interests of their country.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the COS in decision-making and policy-making can be found in an examination of its conduct in translating policies into plans. The War Cabinet's and the COS's interest in Scandinavia had its roots in the strategic objective to prevent the exportation of iron ore from Sweden to Germany. To this economic objective was added, in December 1939, the desire to provide support to Finland in its war with Russia. The objective was clear: the denial of iron ore to Germany. The strategy, however, was flawed. The COS and the War Cabinet became, to a great extent, primarily focused on how to achieve their objective rather than giving consideration as to whether they could, and should, achieve this objective. Rational and analytical thinking was wanting. A large portion of this thesis has concentrated on Scandinavia and iron ore, as it was the major objective of the COS and the Allies during the Phoney War. Indeed, in Chapters Three and Four, it was demonstrated that the objective to deny iron ore became an imperative. Churchill and Ironside focused only on positive outcomes, believing that operations in Finland and Norway would be decisive in denying iron ore to their enemies instead of focusing on German intentions and the capabilities of the Allies. Both argued this because of the MEW's essentially speculative evidence on the economic importance of the stoppage of iron ore, but they presented their case as if it was based on undeniable objective facts. Analysis in Chapters Three and Four demonstrated that the COS, and in particular Ironside, gave insufficient attention to the methodical planning of the campaign. There was no tactical and strategic thinking over crucial details, such as operational headquarters, the provision of resources, or liaison between the Allies. Furthermore, concerning the Norway Campaign, the COS failed to inform the War Cabinet that the expedition force had been disbanded, that necessary detailed planning had been halted, or that operations in February and May contained a high number of risks. The COS insufficiently emphasised the dangers to the War Cabinet and allowed ministers to be influenced by the diplomatic and political

momentum for action, without taking due responsibility for the practical feasibility of operations.

The duty of the COS was to maintain a continuous and persistent focus on how operations affected the agreed defensive long-war strategy. As discussed above, the COS recognised the importance of an economic war of attrition, however they also acknowledged that militarily Britain was unable to conduct offensive operations. The COS lacked consistency of thinking in guiding the War Cabinet towards offensive tactics that were risky militarily. Instead of achieving their economic war through blockade and sanctions, Ironside and Churchill led the COS and Britain towards fixating on offensive tactical schemes in Scandinavia. Churchill's obsession with Operation Catherine and Ironside's desire to gain the initiative in the conduct of the war, despite the risks, was revealed in Operation Catherine and the Norway Campaign. In many ways, Ironside's strategic comprehension was detached from the realities of the war. It overlooked that the Allies had agreed to a long defensive war for good reasons and operations in Scandinavia would, as a consequence of his actions, deprive the Western Front of resources. From October 1939 to May 1940, the CIGS did not strategically or tactically assess the situation due to their fixation with denying Germany iron ore. Questioning of the policy objective within the context of the overall policy of the war was missing in the COS's decision-making and policy-making conduct.

Thus, the COS fell short in making sound strategic and operational decisions. While it recognised its duty to defend Britain's interests and to secure victory, its analytical thinking became clouded by its obligations to its ally and its drive to achieve economic warfare. In September 1939, the COS made a strategic analysis of the long-war strategy, however a combination of factors then caused the COS's focus to shift.

II: A Failure to Recognise Sound Advice

The COS's failure to recognise or acknowledge the quality and wisdom provided by their advisers in the JPC also hampered the committee's conduct. The COS, and in particular CIGS Ironside, has been demonstrated in this thesis to have believed that, by virtue of appointment, they knew best. However, this was a failing. The JPC, in particular, had a better appreciation of how to establish priorities, manage risk and ensure the ways and means of an operation successfully. Nonetheless, the COS frequently ignored the advice of

the JPC, the JIC and the AMC. Regarding the Norway Campaign, the conclusion from the JPC that the military operation was 'not a feasible operation' was dismissed by the COS in their report to the War Cabinet.[675] The Joint Planners' appreciations on possible German pre-emptive action in Norway, and their concern at the lack of feasibility of the operation, did not seem to concern the COS. So in this case, the COS failed to acknowledge the quality of the JPC's advice. Rather than giving the JPC's report careful consideration and taking heed of the warnings, the COS ordered preparations to begin. Ironside focused only on a positive outcome, despite the Joint Planner's rigorous analysis and sound advice based on good judgement. The COS should instead have raised concerns with the War Cabinet and proposed an adjusted policy. The clearest example in this thesis of this behaviour is the COS's dismissal of the JPC's advice for a British force to be dispatched to Trondheim instead of Narvik. Despite coming to an agreement with the JPC at a joint meeting, the COS simply dispensed with the JPC's advice altogether in its report to the Cabinet. It was the role and duty of the COS to present the Cabinet with impartial information, rather than to conduct its own reinterpretation of the Joint Planners' report. Therefore, the COS failed to perform its duty.

The COS's personal judgements impaired their ability to analyse the data presented to them. Ironside, for example, was wedded to the assumption that Germany was incapable of conducting a successful invasion of Norway or France. The result was that critical evidence, such as the intelligence reports about the German invasion of Norway, was ignored. Moreover, the COS did not use the AMC to strengthen its understanding of French opinions towards intended operations and future policy. The COS's inability to question and assess reports weakened its ability to formulate an overview of the war. This problem should have been identified and addressed by the COS, but nothing was done. The Chiefs, and in particular Ironside, believed themselves to be the best men to interpret and analyse incoming information and to decide whether to act upon it or not. This failure to listen to advice was a weakness of the COS that impinged upon its ability to perform its mandated duty effectively.

[675] TNA CAB 84/10, JP. (40) 20 'Joint Planning Committee: Memorandum' Scandinavia: Capture of the Northern Ore Fields in the Face of Scandinavian Opposition' January 1940, p.1 and TNA CAB 66/5, COS (40) 218, 'Intervention in Scandinavia: Plans and Implications' 28 January 1940, p.6.

III: A Failure to Argue its Position

Another flaw that can be identified within the COS was its inability to press its points with sufficient force when advising the War Cabinet. As discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four, the COS provided good advice against the Dyle Plan and conducting operations in Finland and Norway. However, their advice was often either ignored or rejected by the War Cabinet. As Chapter Four illustrates, the COS and the JPC fulfilled their duty in many regards by assessing the situation and formulating logical arguments against the Norwegian Campaign. As their superiors, the Cabinet had the right to overrule the COS. Nonetheless, when the War Cabinet desired to proceed with Operations Royal Marine and Wilfred, the COS unquestioningly went to work to provide a plan for enacting the operations, rather than warning the War Cabinet that the resourcing were inadequate. When the COS's advice was ignored and the risks of the Norwegian Campaign for the British military further increased, the COS did not assert themselves and press home the opinion that Britain was ill-prepared for the Norwegian Campaign. This can be seen from the War Cabinet minutes, which do not record any member of the Cabinet raising caution on the COS's advice. The War Cabinet gave little analytical thought to the significances of the decision and, to an extent, the COS's duties were to analyse the consequences of decisions.

While it can be shown that the COS imposed its views on the Cabinet in regard to the Balkan policy, Arras counter-attack, and the denial of air support to France, these were rare occasions and, moreover, in each of these cases the Cabinet and the COS were of the same opinion. Although, in many ways, it was the COS's function to advise the War Cabinet only, leaving the War Cabinet to ratify a final decision, nonetheless it was also within their role and duty to confront dangerous thinking with realism and 'to speak truth unto power.' However, this did not seem to happen and complacency and an inability to press its judgements upon the War Cabinet characterised the COS.

IV: The Over-Influence of Churchill

Winston Churchill was not a member of the COS but, nonetheless, he exercised a major influence over the planning and conduct of the committee during the Phoney War. Churchill was a member of the Military Co-ordination Committee and was also First Lord of the Admiralty. A proclivity for offensive operations characterised Churchill's influence on the COS during the Phoney War. His particular concern was for action in Scandinavia.

In this case, Churchill provided the initiative, set the tone and pressed the issue. He easily overcame the COS's hesitation towards offensive action in Scandinavia, gradually building momentum for action among the French and within the War Cabinet. In this study of decision-making and policy-making, Churchill's actions can be seen to have hindered the effectiveness of the COS. By arguing that the restriction of iron ore would be 'decisive action' and that the operation was feasible despite difficulties, Churchill placed the obligation on the COS to challenge his prejudgement of the issue, while at the same time drawing their attention away from any balanced consideration of the pros and cons. By presenting his opinion as facts and the moral imperative, Churchill created momentum for his interpretation of British policy that would have required major confrontation by the COS, Ministry of Supply and Board of Trade to stop. By implying that argument was unthinkable, Churchill pre-empted the COS's policy on Scandinavia and the Government's decision on the issue.

Churchill was a dominant character and his forceful personality exerted influence on the COS's thinking and decision-making processes. The Chiefs were in thrall to Churchill and unable to deter him from his chosen path. He was disruptive to the COS, continually questioning the committee's position on issues and lobbying for his if it differed. Ultimately, his reforms in May 1940 would lead to him having an even greater influence over the COS in his role of Prime Minister and in the newly created post of Minister of Defence.

V: The Domination of Ironside

The COS was a committee of equals, however, in many respects, Ironside dominated over the other Chiefs of Staff and impacted on the conduct of the committee. Ironside had been appointed CIGS due to his long command experience in the field of battle and at Staff College, yet his advice and actions within the context of the COS suggests that he was ill suited to the role. Throughout this thesis, Ironside has been a dominant voice, and for good reason: his ignorance of the advice of the JPC, his frustration with Britain's defence strategy, his domineering presence over his fellow Chiefs and the duplicity between his public and private thinking hampered the conduct of the COS.

Ironside dominated fellow Chiefs Newall and Pound. His fellow Chiefs of Staff did not unanimously support Ironside's confidence in offensive action in Scandinavia, but their

reticence did not hinder him and he dismissed their arguments. Indeed, Sir John Slessor, Director of Plans at the Air Ministry and a member of the Joint Planning Committee, wrote that two of the Chiefs were 'reluctant to override the opinion of the third' because he had 'more experience and better information that they.'[676] Newall and Pound accepted Ironside's domination to some extent because they lacked knowledge on the subject of military operations, and partly because Ironside was similar to Churchill in his single-minded enthusiasm for an operation and impatience towards those who disagreed with him. Once he had seized on an idea, Ironside was unconcerned with logical arguments against it. Indeed, he was alone among members of the COS in his full commitment to an expedition in Scandinavia. An example of how Ironside treated those who disagreed with him is outlined in Chapter Three, when Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, Air Vice-Marshal Peirse raised concerns over seizing the Gallivare ore fields. Ironside simply dismissed the arguments by concluding that the operation was 'not difficult.'[677] This exchange demonstrated Ironside's power as CIGS in that he was able to dismiss these concerns without further debate, confident that this would be the end of the matter. Moreover, the statement that the operation to Scandinavia was 'not difficult' was drawn from little intellectual rigour on Ironside's part, poor analysis of the information provided, and a failure to draw logical, realistic conclusions about the feasibility of the operation. Ironside persuaded the COS to approve operations and glossed over problems that were raised by fellows Chiefs and within his own service.

Of course, this is not to suggest that Dudley Pound or Cyril Newall were unable to assert themselves. First Sea Lord Pound was capable of standing his ground, and he did not inform, let alone consult, the other COS members on 7 April when he ordered the disembarkation of Army R4 units destined for Norway so that the Fleet could venture into combat in the North Atlantic. Newall too was not afraid of challenging consensus, having being involved in fierce disputes in the inter-war period within the Air Ministry over whether to concentrate on building fighters or bombers. Furthermore, differing opinions between the Chiefs are evident in the source material over offensive actions in Scandinavia. While it is difficult to assess why Newall and Pound did not challenge Ironside, it can be assumed that to have done so would have required greater resolve, strength of character and conviction than either the First Sea Lord or the Air Marshal possessed.

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[676] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p.268.
[677] TNA CAB 79/3, COS (40) 14, 'Chiefs of Staff Committee: Minutes,' 24 January 1940, p.2.

The disconnect between Ironside's public and private thoughts has been a recurring theme throughout this study. The analysis undertaken has identified three occasions where, seemingly in the heat of the moment, Ironside changed the COS's official position while representing the committee. The first occasion documented was in Chapter One at a meeting between Newall and Ironside to discuss the Dyle Plan with the French Generals. Prior to the start of the meeting, the COS's position was that it would accept an advance into Belgium if Germany invaded,[678] but the committee had reservations about French proposals for the Seventh Army to advance into South-Eastern Holland. However, Ironside did not communicate this. Instead, notes of the meeting reveal that Ironside dominated the discussion and steered it towards topics regarding military deployment and French Command over the BEF, both areas under his remit as CIGS. Ironside did not press British concerns about the advancement of the Seventh Army. Indeed, when the topic arose, Ironside almost dismissed the COS's reservations over an advance to Holland with a one-sentence response. Therefore, Ironside failed in his duty to the COS by not communicating the assessments made by the JPC. This is significant for this study of the COS as a decision-making body, as clearly Ironside failed to represent the committee's thinking in these face-to-face negotiations.

Another example of Ironside's duplicity is evidenced in Chapter Four. The COS had agreed with the JPC's assessment that Trondheim should be the primary location for the British invasion, as it possessed a larger harbour and was strategically important. However, during the War Cabinet meeting one hour later, the COS, and Ironside in particular, reinterpreted the JPC's advice and recommended Narvik instead of Trondheim. Whatever the motive, this was reckless conduct on the part of the Ironside and the COS. It was the role and duty of the COS to present the Cabinet with impartial information, rather than to conduct its own reinterpretation of the Joint Planner's reports. Furthermore, it can be seen from this that the CIGS did not recognise his own weaknesses or limitations; Ironside, in particular, can be considered arrogant in his failure to recognise the value of the JPC's appreciations over the Norway Campaign.

The final example of Ironside's contradictory positioning occurred in May 1940 when he was despatched to France to communicate with the BEF and the French Generals the War Cabinet's directive regarding the counter-offensive at Arras. An analysis of Ironside's two

[678] TNA CAB 79/2, COS (39) 71, 'Chiefs of Staff: Minutes,' 7 November 1939, p.2.

meetings provides insight into the strengths of the CIGS as a tactical commander and his relationship both with the COS and the French High Command. Ironside appears to have been persuaded, in only a little over an hour, into accepting Gort's views, which differed substantially from those of the COS. This is significant, as Ironside was mandated to represent the War Cabinet and the COS in delivering a Cabinet instruction and yet he failed to do this. He communicated to the French not the War Cabinet directive, but the abridged plan he had agreed with Gort. In so doing, Ironside was defying a Cabinet order. It could be argued, however, that this demonstrated Ironside's leadership skills as CIGS, as for him tactics were not fixed, but could evolve in response to events on the ground; in the face of French weakness, he took charge. Yet, Ironside's actions during the conference with the French High Command display a high level of frustration and a lack of deference towards the French as the stronger partner. Furthermore, he seems not to have sympathised with their demoralising circumstances and fear of the future. Ironside's was unable to put aside his disquiet and impatience with the French High Command, and his actions demonstrate his failing to recognise or acknowledge the point of view of others.

In analysing Ironside's conduct within the COS, it has been demonstrated that Ironside displayed ignorance of, and disdain for, logistics in planning. This was dangerous for the effectiveness of the COS as a policy-making body. As an experienced commander, Ironside's errors in decision-making and policy-making are surprising. The fact that he issued orders that differed from the agreed COS policy, his dismissal of the advice of the support committee, and his domination of his fellow Chiefs were major errors – the result of a lack of foresight, clarity of mind and intellectual rigour. While the other two Chiefs of Staff were not without fault, ultimately Ironside failed to listen to the cautions and warnings of his fellow Commanders, Chiefs and the Joint Planners. The CIGS overruled or rejected advice, and either did not advise the War Cabinet of warnings, or diluted their substance. An assessment of Ironside and the Phoney War reveals incremental, ad-hoc decision-making. The CIGS's conduct is, therefore, open to criticism and can be argued to have been a disruptive influence on the COS and a factor in the committee's ineffectiveness in performing its mandated duty.

VI: The Impractical Decision-Making Process

Finally, an evaluation of the COS's conduct during the Phoney War has revealed that it was limited by the ponderous, over-bureaucratic nature of the British War Machinery. The COS's business was not conducted at one meeting, but over several. The Chiefs' day started at 6am with separate meetings with the War Cabinet and the MCC. Next, they met as the COS, and typically they also had meetings with the JPC and other support committees. These often continued into the night, with the COS meeting at 11pm. This was a convoluted committee structure that was unsuited to rapid decision-making. COS plans had to be passed to the MCC before being presented to the War Cabinet. The system was supposed to lessen the load on the War Cabinet, but it ultimately hindered the COS. For instance, in the month of April alone, the COS attended thirty-two War Cabinet meetings, twenty-one Military Co-ordination Committee meetings, and forty-two COS meetings. As a result, Chiefs who sat on all three committees attended a staggering ninety-four meetings that month. The working life of a member of the COS was exhaustive, with Ironside recalling to a friend: 'I never realised until I had thrown off the harness how tired I was and how much I wanted a let up at the time.'[679] Although the conduct of the COS can be criticised, with hindsight the Chiefs' duties were arduous. There was enormous pressure upon them during the Phoney War to quickly resolve the issues they faced as events unfolded in Scandinavia and France.

That the British War Machinery did not function adequately at this time is evidenced by the reforms instigated by Churchill upon becoming Prime Minister in May 1940. A new distinctive decision-making process was ratified, based on closer interaction between the Prime Minister and the COS. The influence of the War Cabinet and the MCC were removed from the decision-making and policy-making process, with Churchill appointing himself Minister of Defence and an independent Chairman of the COS. As this thesis has demonstrated, the COS struggled to communicate its military decisions and advice to civilians in the War Cabinet and in other committees. Churchill recognised that the COS needed the power to be able to exert more influence on Britain's course in the war and to react quickly to changing events on the ground. Prior to May 1940, this was not achievable as the COS was a subordinate committee to the War Cabinet with limited power over the

[679] IWM 92/40/1, Ironside Letter, 9, 'Letter from Ironside to Lindsay' 31 December 1940.

final decisions taken. Therefore, the burdensome bureaucratic structure has to factor in an evaluation of the effectiveness of the COS.

SUMMARY

In summary, several failings contributed to the COS's weakness as a decision-making and policy-making body during the Phoney War period. Strategic, operational, personal and institutional factors all contributed to the COS's inability to perform its mandated duty. This thesis has shown that the COS, in some areas, was successful: pursuing the correct strategy for Britain at the onset of war, focussing on an economic war, and providing the War Cabinet with regular advice. The study does not dispute that individual Chiefs were committed to the War Cabinet, their mandated remit, their service, and, ultimately, to their king. However, as a combined committee, they failed in the seven areas discussed above, and their inadequacies in decision-making and policy-making had a major impact on the planning and conduct of the Phoney War. The COS is, therefore, can be judged to have been ineffective in performing its duty of steering the War Cabinet and Britain's course in the war.

Scholars have often overlooked the COS and the Phoney War. The nine month period of September 1939 to May 1940 is typically portrayed as a period of inactivity. Yet, as this thesis has shown, behind the historiography's focus on the Norway Campaign and the Battle of France lies a committee that was instrumental in shaping British foreign and defence policy throughout the period. The Chiefs as decision-makers and policy-makers were responsible for the major events of the Phoney War: the long-war strategy, an economic war of attrition, the focus on Scandinavia as a peripheral theatre, and Britain's response to the Battle of France. The hitherto absence of the COS and the Phoney War from the literature could be better. Clearly, there is a need for further research into the workings and influence of the Chiefs of Staff Committee throughout the whole of the Second World War. This thesis has made as a start.

APPENDICES

Appendix One: Service Record of members of the Chiefs of Staff Committee

Field Marshal Sir Edmund Ironside, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, September 1939-May 1940

Location	Date and Activities
Boer War:	Royal Artillery, 1899. Wounded three times, decorated and mentioned in despatches in 1901. Commissioned Lieutenant 1901.
Intelligence Work:	Worked as an Afrikaans-speaking Boer wagon driver through German controlled South West Africa. Managed to escape when real identity discovered. Claimed to be the basis for John Buchan's Richard Hannay.
India:	Served in battery units, promoted to Captain in February 1908, then Brigade-Major in June 1909.
Staff College, Camberley:	Enrolled in 1912. Cut Short by outbreak of war.
First World War:	5th August 1914 landed in France and appointed Staff Captain to Boulogne-sur-Mer then St. Nazaire. Promoted to Major in October 1914 and attached to 6th Division. Appointed in October 1914; General Staff Officer[680] (Grade 3), February 1915; GSO2 and then in March 1916 GSO1 to the 4th Canadian Division. Known for his hard training regime, intending to get the division battle ready as quickly as possible. Due to the inexperience of the 4th Canadian Division's Commander, General David Watson – Ironside according to his memoirs found himself commanding the division on occasions and Watson regularly authorised Ironside's orders in his name. In 1916 at the end of the Battle of the Somme at Vimy, Ironside took unofficial command of the division overturning an ambiguous order from Watson at headquarters to halt the attack, and instead lead the division into action. Remained with the 6th Division through the Battle of Passchendale and until December 1917, when his appointed to an administrative posting as commandant of the Small Arms School, with the rank of Acting Colonel. He quickly returned to the Western Front, appointed to command 99th Brigade as Brigadier-General at the end of March.
Allied Expeditionary Force:	November 1918; promoted Brigadier-General and given command of the Allied Expeditionary Force fighting the Bolsheviks in Northern Russia, his first independent command of a force, which was part of a large and scattered coalition Army. Forced by 1919 to admit defeat against the Red Army he returned to Britain. Ironside was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath, and promoted to Major-General for his efforts; this made him one of the youngest Major-Generals in the British Army.
Hungary:	1920, commanded military mission to supervise the withdrawal of Romanian Forces in Hungary after Hungarian-Romanian War of 1919.
Persia:	Posted to Persia in August 1920 and was involved in the Reza Khan coup. This saw the Reza Khan rising to rule Persia from 1925 to 1941. To extent of his involvement in the coup is unclear – but Ironside had appointed Reza Khan to command the Cossack Brigade and certainly provided advice. Was to take command of the New

[680] The chief of staff. He was in charge of the General Staff Branch, responsible for training, intelligence, planning operations and directing the battle as it progressed.

	British Force in Iraq in 1921, but, was invalided after his aircraft crashed in April 1921 on a trip back to Persia.
Commandant of the Staff College:	In May 1922 after recovering from injuries returned to duty as Commandant of the Staff College. He spent four years running the college and publishing articles on the Battle of Tannenberg. During this time he became close friend with J.F.C Fuller – whose views of reforming the Army as an elite armoured force with air support and forming a central Ministry of Defence was deeply influential on Ironside. Ironside also developed the view for faster modernisation and rearmament of the British armed forces.
2nd Division:	Appointed in 1926 to command 2nd Division – Ironside was deeply frustrated in the role as he was tasked with training an infantry force with no modern equipment.
India:	Command of the Merrut district of India, 1928. Promoted to Lieutenant-General in March 1931 and left for England in May the same year.
Lieutenant to the Tower of London:	1931-33
India:	Returned to India as Quartermaster-General in 1933. The position saw him visiting regiments across the country.
Eastern Command:	Returned home in 1936 and promoted to full general and to lead Eastern Command, one of the regional commands; responsible for one regular division and three territorial divisions. Discovered the Army in a parlous state.
Possible candidate for Chief of the Imperial General Staff:	Ironside was placed on a shortlist in 1937 to become CIGS. However, he lost the opportunity for higher office due to his mishandling of a mobile force in the annual exercises of 1937. The previous CIGS Hore-Belisha gave him the official news informing Ironside at aged 57 he was deemed too old for the post. Appointed Aide-de-Camp to the King in October 1937.
Governor of Gibraltar:	As compensation was appointed the role of Governor of Gibraltar with the suggestion that in the event of war, he could be transferred to command forces in the Middle East. Under his command Gibraltar's defences were strengthened.
Inspector General of Overseas Forces:	The position gave Ironside overall responsibility for the readiness of forces based outside the United Kingdom. Ironside was originally considered for the position only a month into his post as Governor of Gibraltar in December 1938. However, the offer was delayed over disagreement between the War Office and the COS over the parameters of the role. It was argued that Ironside would presume the role would evolve into becoming commander-in-chief of the BEF when war broke. Instead, Ironside was appointed in May 1939 alongside Lord Gort's command of Inspector-General of Home Forces. The support of Sir Basil Liddell-Hart (an old acquaintance of Ironside) and the break-down in the relationship between Hore-Belisha and Gort helped the position being offered. As expected, Ironside interpreted the command meaning he would be Commander-in-Chief of the BEF and began to clash with Lord Gort over their respective powers. Ironside concluded that Gort was "out of his depth" as CIGS.[681]
Chief of the Imperial General Staff:	Appointed on 3 September 1939. Ironside had presumed he would be appointed the Commander-in-Chief of the BEF and had begun preparations for his headquarters at Aldershot. His appointment was politically driven – Hore-Belisha used the outbreak of war as a pretext for Gort to leave Whitehall and Churchill lobbied heavily for Ironside over John Dill.

[681] Brian Bond, "Ironside", Keegan, Ian, ed. *Churchill's Generals*. (Abacus, 1999) pp. 20-21.

Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces	

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Alfred Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord, June 1939-September 1943

Location	Date and Activities
Before First World War:	In 1891 passed the naval entrance examination as the top candidate out of fifty-eight in the class by obtaining 1846 marks out of a possible 2000. Aged 13 joined HMS Britannia at Dartmouth on 15 January 1891 as naval cadet. In December 1892 passed his examinations with First Class certificates in seamanship, mathematics and external subjects. Later obtained Firsts in all of his sub lieutenant's courses except gunnery.[682] By comparison Andrew Cunningham five years later obtained only two firsts. From 1891 to 1907 Pound served on several ships, HMS Calypso, HMS Opossum, HMS Magnificent, HMS Vernon, HMS Grafton, HMS King Edward VII, HMS Queen. Stationed in China, the Pacific, the Atlantic and Mediterranean Fleet. Pound was promoted to lieutenant in 1898 and to Torpedo Officer in 1901.
Ordnance Department of the Admiralty:	in 1909.
HMS Superb:	Promoted to commander on 30 June 1909 and transferred to HMS Superb in the Home Fleet in May 1911.
Royal Naval War College:	1913
First World War:	Promoted captain on 31 December 1914 and transferred to be Additional Naval Assistant to the First Sea Lord.
HMS Colossus:	Given command of the battleship in May 1915. Had notable success in the Battle of Jutland as commander, sinking the German cruiser Wiesbaden.
Assistant Director of Plans and Director of Operations Division (Home):	In July 1917, with Pound closely involved with the planning of the Zeebrugge Raid.
HMS Repulse:	1920.
Director of the planning division at the Admiralty:	June 1923.
Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-chief of the	1925 to Roger Keyes.

[682] Robin Brodhurst, *Churchill's Anchor: A Biography of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound*. (Pen & Sword, 2000) p.10.

Mediterranean Fleet: May	
Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff:	Promoted to Rear-Admiral on 1 March 1926 and became Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff.
Commander of Battle Cruiser Squadron:	May 1929.
Second Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Personnel:	August 1932.
Chief of Staff of the Mediterranean	: promoted to full Admiral in January 1933 and Chief of Staff of the Mediterranean.
Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet:	March 1936[683]
First Sea Lord:	June 1939 and Admiral of the Fleet in 31 July 1939. His health was noted at this stage, but other experienced admirals were in even poorer health.

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Cyril Newall, Chief of the Air Staff, September 1939-October 1940

Location	**Date and Activities**
Royal Warwickshire Regiment:	Commissioned into the regiment in August 1905 and promoted to lieutenant in November 1908.
2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles:	Transferred in September 1909 and served alongside future colleague Hugh Dowding on the North-West Frontier.
1911:	Learned to fly in a Bristol Biplane whilst on leave in England. Newall was the 144th person issued with a certificate to fly by the Royal Aero Club.
Central Flying School, Upavon:	Passed a formal course in 1913 and began working as a pilot trainer from November 1913. Newall was intended to form part of a flight training school to be established in India, but this was abandoned due to the First World War.
Royal Flying Corps:	In September 1914 promoted to the temporary rank of Captain and attached to the RFC as flight commander to No.1 Squadron on the Western Front.
No.12 Squadron:	March 1915 promoted to major and appointed to command No.12 Squadron. The squadron took part in the Battle of Loos, bombing railways and carrying out reconnaissance. On taking command of the squadron, he decided to stop flying in order to concentrate on administration. Awarded the Albert Medal for his courage in walking into a burning bomb store to control the fire.
Training No.6 Wing:	February 1916 promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and transferred back to England to train pilots.

[683] Brian P. Farrell, 'Pound, Sir (Alfred) Dudley Pickman Rogers (1877–1943),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press. Retrieved 2014-10-14.

1916-1918:	October 1916 took command of the newly formed No.41 Wing which was upgraded as the 8th Brigade in December, with Newall promoted to temporary rank of Brigadier-General. December 1916 took command of No.9 Wing in France, a long-range bomber and reconnaissance formation. In 1918 joined the Independent Bombing Force, the main strategic bombing arm of the newly formed Royal Air Force. June 1918 appointed Deputy Commander of the Independent Bombing Force, under Trenchard.
Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Air Force	In August 1919 granted permanent commission as Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Air Force and promoted to Group Captain
Deputy Director of Personnel at the Air Ministry	in August 1919
the Deputy Commandant of the apprentice's technical training school	in August 1922.
Air Commodore	in 1925
Auxiliary Air Force	in May 1925
League of Nations disarmament committee	in December 1925.
Deputy Chief of the Air Staff and Director of Operation and Intelligence:	April 1926 to February 1931.
1931:	Air Officer Commanding Wessex Bombing Area in February 1931 and then Air Officer Commanding Middle East Command in September 1931.
Air Ministry as Air Member for Supply and Organisation	On 14 January 1935, during the beginnings of the pre-war expansion and rearmament. Promoted to Air Marshal on 1 July 1935.[684]
Chief of the Air Staff	Appointed on 1 September 1937. Policy: - Newall supported sharp increases in aircraft production through double-shift working and duplication of factories. - Pushed for creation of a dedicated organisation to repair and refit damaged aircraft. - Supported funding on Hurricane and Spitfire. - Resistant to the transfer of fighter squadrons to aid the fall France. - Committed to offensives by Bomber Command.

[684] Vincent Orange, 'Newall, Cyril Louis Norton, first Baron Newall (1886–1963)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press. Retrieved 2014-10-14.

Appendix Two: Allied Military Committee Members

Heads of the Anglo-French Liaison

Anglo-French Liaison Officer	Captain A.W. 'Nobby' Clarke, R.N
	Mr. H.L. d'A. Hopkinson

British Members

British Military Representative	Major-General Sir Richard Howard-Vyse, KCMG, DSO *Acting Head: 6 September to 9 September 1939*
	Major-General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall
British Air Representative	Air Vice-Marshal Douglas Evill, DSC, APC
British Naval Representative	Vice-Admiral William S. Chalmers CBE, DSC

French Members

French Military Representative	General Albert Lelong, CVO
French Air Force Representative	Colonel Paul Rozoy
French Naval Representative	Vice-Admiral Jean-Ernest Odend'Hal, DSC

British Liaison Officers

Representatives of the War Office	Major-General R.H. Dewing DSO, MC
	Brigadier O.M. Lund
	Major G.F. Hopkinson, MC
	Major G.G. Mears, MC
	Major C.R.A Swynnerton
	Major G.M.O Davy
Representatives of the Admiralty	Commander J.S.S. Litchfield-Speer, R.N.
	Commander Harding, R.N.
	Captain G.C. Lucas
	Captain C.B. Crawford
Representatives of the Air Force	Squadron Leader R.E. de T. Vintras
Representative of the Foreign Office	Mr Henry Colyton

French Liaison Officers

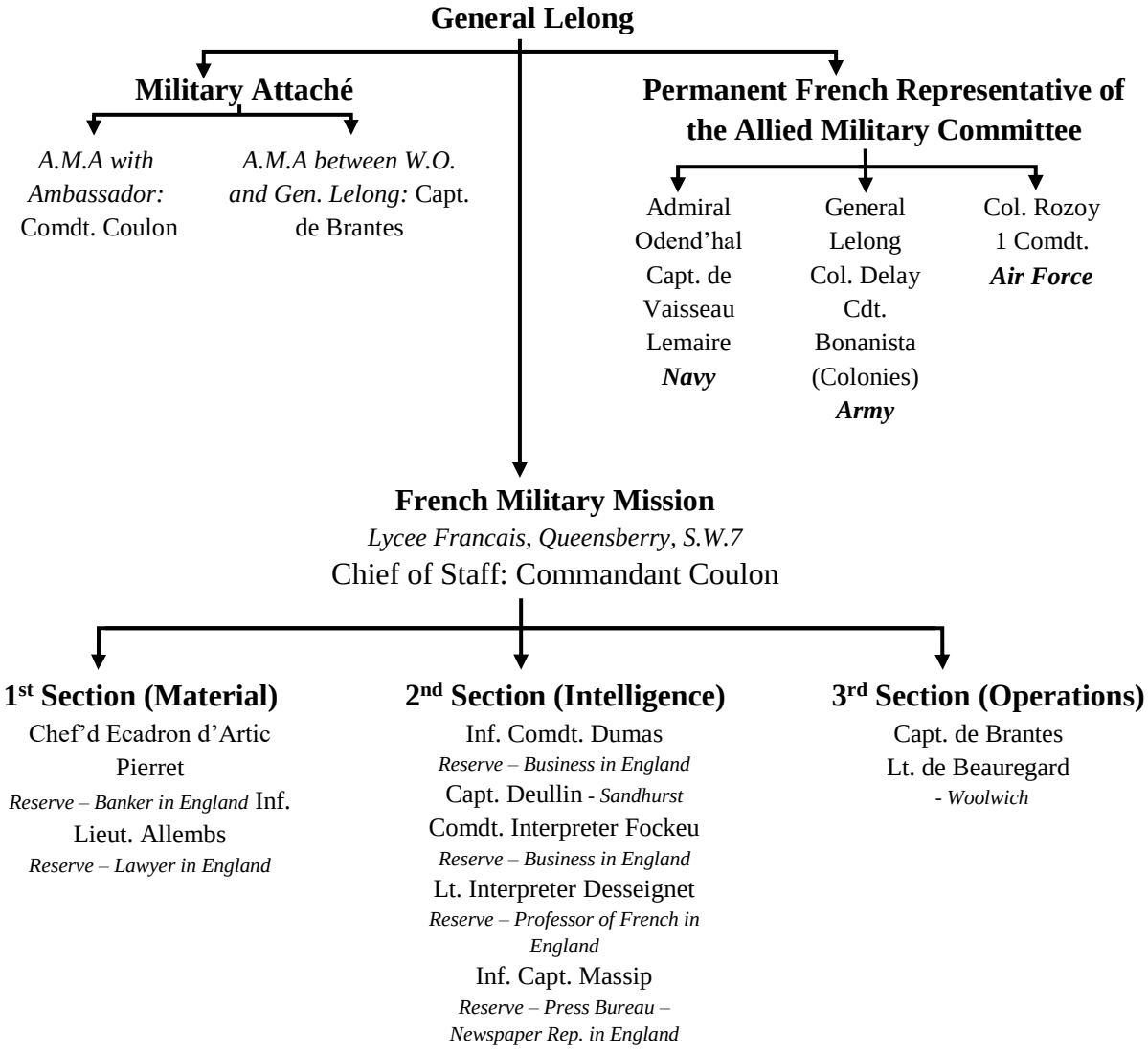
Representatives of the War Office	Colonel Delay
	Colonel Bonanista
	Colonel P. Marion
	Lt. Colonel F.J.E. de Peyronnet
Representatives of the Air Force	Commandant Lionel-Max Chassin
	Commandant F. Boillot
Representatives of the Admiralty	Capitaine de Fregate J.C. Plante
	Capitaine de Vaisseau Lemaire
	Capitaine F. de Brantes
	Capitaine S. Deullin M.B.E.

Support Staff

Translator	Captain Humphrey Berkeley
	Lieutenant G.G. Hannaford
Translator & Secretary	Major W.B. Kennion
Secretary	Major J.C.D. Carlisle, DSO, MC

Source: TNA CAB 85/1, 'Anglo-French Committees: Allied Military Committee Minutes', and TNA CAB 21/1320, File No. 19/10/19, 'British Representatives on the Allied Military Committee.'

Appendix Three: French Military Staff in Great Britain



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AIR 19/58, AIR 2/4474, AIR 23/755, AIR 69/558, AIR 8/287,

CAB 16/183A, CAB 21/1180, CAB 21/1281, CAB 21/1284, CAB 21/1302, CAB 21/1306, CAB 21/1310, CAB 21/1313, CAB 21/1317, CAB 21/1320, CAB 21/973, CAB 24/162, CAB 53/44, CAB 53/7, CAB 55/15, CAB 55/18, CAB 63/83, CAB 65/1, CAB 65/12, CAB 65/13, CAB 65/2, CAB 65/3, CAB 65/4, CAB 65/5, CAB 65/6, CAB 65/7, CAB 66/1, CAB 66/3, CAB 66/4, CAB 66/5, CAB 66/6, CAB 66/7, CAB 79/1, CAB 79/2, CAB 79/3, CAB 79/4, CAB 79/85, CAB 80/1, CAB 80/2, CAB 80/3, CAB 80/4, CAB 80/5, CAB 80/6, CAB 80/7, CAB 80/9, CAB 80/11,CAB 80/12, CAB 80/104, CAB 80/105, CAB 81/87, CAB 83/1, CAB 83/3, CAB 84/1, CAB 84/10, CAB 84/11, CAB 84/12, CAB 84/2, CAB 84/7, CAB 84/8, CAB 84/9, CAB 85/1, CAB 85/3, CAB 85/5, CAB 99/3, CAB 106/246, CAB 106/98, CAB 120/49, CAB 127/50, CAB 140/98,

DEFE 11/540,

FO 116/4471, FO 371/23659, FO 371/23660, FO 371/24815, FO 837/146, FO 837/802,

PREM 1/384, PREM 1/404, PREM 3/119/10, PREM 7/1,

WO 105/5706B, WO 106/1680, WO 106/1685, WO 106/1701, WO 106/1708, WO 106/1772, WO 106/1969, WO 165/48, WO 168/83, WO 193/ 744, WO 193/134, WO 193/147, WO 193/173, WO 193/215, WO 193/684, WO 193/722, WO 193/834, WO 208/2257, WO 216/48,

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