

CURTIN, CHURCHILL & ROOSEVELT  
Wartime Relations

Whilst leaders maintained generally cordial relations, there were tensions between the three countries, especially during the early part of John Curtin's prime ministership.

A2 U

0.2986.

COPY TO

MR. FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT,  
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED  
STATES OF AMERICA,  
WHITE HOUSE,  
WASHINGTON.

SENT 30th January, 1942.

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of  
your birthday, the Government and people of Australia  
extend to you their cordial congratulations, and express  
the hope that you may be spared to enjoy very many years of  
peace after the victory for which you and your nation  
are working so hard to achieve.

JOHN CURTIN.

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Copy sent to P.M's.

2/2/42

40

Decypher of telegram received from Washington Legation. U.S.A.

23rd March 1942

IMMEDIATE.

No. 39

PERSONAL FOR BRUCE.

Your telegram of 20th March on Russia. I agree entirely with approach which is in accordance with views expressed to you from Australia. I have already discussed matter with President. My impression is that he has given Litvinov private assurance of agreement although he is naturally disinclined to commit himself in writing. My own view is that, as already indicated, Clauses 2 and 3 of Atlantic Charter can be substantially satisfied. At a Conference last night I developed position with Hopkins and he is in agreement with your views and ours though he stressed disinclination of United States to make a written bargain. On the whole position seems satisfactory and again Churchill should be beholden to Australia and to you.

I wish we could do something to restore Churchill to favour in Australia not because he is Churchill but because he is Prime Minister. Every step taken recently suggests that the United Kingdom is throwing exclusive responsibility for defence of Australia and New Zealand on to shoulders of United States

The reaction everywhere is bad. Our position in Australia for the next two months is a desperate one. Why could not Churchill agree to immediate deliveries to Australia of entire United Kingdom allocation for six weeks only? This would not take away from United Kingdom production but it might make him the saviour of Australia. The continuous rowing over unfortunate things and attempt to hector over more important things gravely impair Empire solidarity. It is not for me to apportion blame but I can assure you that the President is very disturbed and is anxious to effect conciliation which in my opinion requires also some earnest from United Kingdom Government.

I should be glad if you would arrange to convey to Churchill substance of this message on the understanding that it is regarded as confidential and personal.

Introducing it you might read the letter of introduction from W.M.Hughes which I quote:

"Dear Mr. Churchill,

This will introduce my friend the Honourable H. V. EVATT, Attorney General and Minister for External Affairs of the Commonwealth of Australia and Minister representing in War Cabinet.

Telegram from Minister for Foreign Affairs, H V Evatt, to British High Commissioner, S M Bruce, 23 March 1942.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. UK and USA – Evatt Mission, 1942. JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: MIOO March 1942

"You know all about him - he was for ten years Justice of the High Court - a man of parts, and he comes to Britain to get help for Australia in the hour of supreme peril.

He will tell you all about our position - Australia will fight, do not doubt for a moment - but the nemy is strong, fired by fanatical zeal and has complete local command of the sea - and great superiority in the air.

We want planes, fighters and bombers - dive bombers - and, of course, ships and we want all these now.

Dr. Evatt will put the position in detail before you.

We must hold Australia. We will fight as you bade the English do - on the beaches, on the roads, in every hanlet - but we want planes - and now.

I ought to say I have known Dr. Evatt for the last thirty years; he has like all of us, an intense admiration for you; and he has great influence in Australia.

I commend (him to) you and I am,

Yours truly,

(Signed) E. M. HUGHES.\*

Finally with regard to 9th Division could you not arrange for Churchill to withdraw suggestion that 9th Division should be retained in the Middle East?

Recently we made decision over Ceylon on express understanding that this Division was to return home.

Equally President made it clear now Division from United States was not conditional on any decision of ours in relation to Australian Imperial Forces.

I think Prime Minister should be reminded of undertaking he gave to Australia and New Zealand on 11th August 1940. Cable of that date in paragraph (4) read as follows.-

\* A final question arises whether Japan having declared war would attempt to invade Australia or New Zealand with a considerable army. We think this very unlikely because Japan is first absorbed in China, secondly, would be gathering rich prizes in Dutch East Indies, and thirdly, would fear very much to send important part of her fleet far to the southwards leaving American fleet between it and home. If however contrary to

/prudence

Telegram from Minister for Foreign Affairs, H V Evatt, to British High Commissioner, S M Bruce, 23 March 1942.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. UK and USA - Evatt Mission, 1942. JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: MIOO March 1942

"prudence and self-interest Japan set about invading Australia or New Zealand on a large scale I have the explicit authority of the Cabinet to assure you that we should then cut our losses in the Mediterranean and proceed to your aid sacrificing every interest except only defence position of this island on which all depends."

Prime Minister will see significance of this in relation to Australian Imperial Forces and other vital matters. It would be fine gesture if he now 'unselfishly' consented to what is essential to morale of Australia.

EVATT.

Telegram from Minister for Foreign Affairs, H V Evatt, to British High Commissioner, S M Bruce, 23 March 1942.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *UK and USA – Evatt Mission, 1942*. JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: MIOO March 1942

Curtin's article, *The Task Ahead*, was poorly received by both Roosevelt and Churchill and Roosevelt believed it indicated panic and disloyalty. However, Curtin's 'turn to America' was for pragmatic reasons.

# The Task Ahead

By John Curtin

*That reddish veil which o'er the face  
Of night-hag East is drawn . . .  
Flames new disaster for the race?  
Or can it be the Dawn?*

SO wrote Bernard O'Dowd. I see 1942 as a year in which we shall know the answer.

I would, however, that we provide the answer. We can and we will. Therefore I see 1942 as a year of immense change in Australian life.

The Australian Government's policy has been grounded on two facts. One is that the war with Japan is not a phase of the struggle with the Axis powers, but is a new war. The second is that Australia must go on to a war footing.

Those two facts involve two lines of action—one in the direction of external policy as to our dealings with Britain, the United States, Russia, the Netherlands East Indies and China in the higher direction of the war in the Pacific.

The second is the reshaping, in fact the revolutionising, of the Australian way of life until a war footing is attained quickly, efficiently, and without question.

AS the Australian Government enters 1942, it has behind it a record of realism in respect of foreign affairs. I point to the forthright declaration in respect of Finland, Hungary, and Rumania, which was followed with little delay by a declaration of war against those countries by the Democracies.

We felt that there could be no half-measures in our dealings with the Soviet when that nation was being assailed by the three countries mentioned.

Similarly, we put forward that a reciprocal agreement between Russia and Britain should be negotiated to meet an event of aggression by Japan. Our suggestion was then regarded, wrongly as time has proved, as premature.

Now, with equal realism, we take the view that while the determination of military policy is the Soviet's business, we should be able to look forward with reason to aid from Russia against Japan.

We look for a solid and impregnable barrier of the democracies against the three Axis powers, and we refuse to accept the dictum that the

Pacific struggle must be treated as a subordinate segment of the general conflict. By that it is not meant that any one of the other theatres of war is of less importance than the Pacific, but that Australia asks for a concerted plan evoking the greatest strength at the Democracies' disposal, determined upon hurling Japan back.

THE Australian Government therefore regards the Pacific struggle as primarily one in which the United States and Australia must have the fullest say in the direction of the Democracies' fighting plan.

Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.

We know the problems that the United Kingdom faces. We know the constant threat of invasion. We know the dangers of dispersal of strength. But we know too that Australia can go, and Britain can still hold on.

We are therefore determined that Australia shall not go, and we shall exert all our energies toward the shaping of a plan, with the United States as its keystone, which will give to our country some confidence of being able to hold out until the tide of battle swings against the enemy.

Summed up, Australian external policy will be shaped toward obtaining Russian aid, and working out, with the United States, as the major factor, a plan of Pacific strategy, along with British, Chinese and Dutch forces.

AUSTRALIAN internal policy has undergone striking changes in the past few weeks. These, and those that will inevitably come before 1942 is far advanced, have been prompted by several reasons.

In the first place the Commonwealth Government found



Mr Curtin

it exceedingly difficult to bring the Australian people to a realisation of what, after two years of war, our position had become. Even the entry of Japan, bringing a direct threat in our own waters, was met with a subconscious view that the Americans would deal with the short-sighted, underfed and fanatical Japanese.

The announcement that no further appeals would be made to the Australian people, and the decisions that followed, were motivated by psychological factors. They had an arresting effect. They awakened in the somewhat lackadaisical Australian mind the attitude that was imperative if we were to save ourselves, to enter an all-in effort in the only possible manner.

That experiment in psychology was eminently successful, and we commence 1942 with a better realisation, by a greater number of Australians, of what the war means than in the whole preceding two years.

THE decisions were prompted by other reasons, all related to the necessity of getting on to a war footing, and the results so far achieved have been most heartening, especially in respect of production and conservation of stocks.

I make it clear that the experiment, undertaken was never intended as one to awaken Australian patriotism or sense of duty. Those qualities have been ever-present; but the response to leadership and direction had never been requested of the people, and desirable talents and untapped resources had lain dormant.

Our task for 1942 is stern. The Government is under no illusions as to "something cropping up" in the future.

The nadir of our fortunes in this struggle, as compared with 1914-1918, has yet to be reached.

Let there be no mistake about that. The position

The year that begins next Thursday will be the most critical in the history of Australia.

Here the Prime Minister (Mr Curtin) in a special message, tells the Australian people of the job that is to be done in 1942.

Australia faces internally far exceeding dangers anything that confronted us in 1914-1918.

The year 1942 will impose supreme tests. These range from resistance to invasion to deprivation of more and more amenities, not only the amenities of peacetime but those enjoyed in time of war.

AUSTRALIANS must realise that to place the nation on a war footing every citizen must place himself, his private and business affairs, his entire mode of living, on a war footing. The civilian way of life cannot be any less rigorous can contribute no less than that which the fighting men have to follow.

I demand that Australians everywhere realise that Australia is now inside the fighting lines.

Australian governmental policy will be directed strictly on those lines. We have to regard our country and its 7,000,000 people as though we were a nation and a people with the enemy hammering at our frontier.

AUSTRALIANS must be perpetually on guard; on guard against the possibility, at any hour without warning, of raid or invasion; on guard against spending money, or doing anything that cannot be justified; on guard against hampering by disputation or idle, irresponsible chatter, the decisions of the Government taken for the welfare of all.

All Australia is the stake in this war. All Australia must stand together to hold that stake. We face a powerfully led and unbelievably courageous foe.

We must watch the enemy accordingly. We shall watch him accordingly.





SECRET

*Cancel. (his keep, 985)*

*[Handwritten scribble]*

10, Downing Street,  
Whitehall.

*RECEIVED  
1941*

PRIME MINISTER TO MR. CURTIN.

PERSONAL AND SECRET. WINCH

1. I have read your JOHCU Nos: 8 and 10 and other messages at the same time. I do not feel I can add anything usefully to the reply sent you by His Majesty's Government in London, with which I am in full accord. I have been greatly pained in all my labours here by the harsh tone which has characterised your various messages.

2. I now read in the American Press your reported statement in an article written for the "MELBOURNE HERALD" in which the following occurs:-

"....I make it clear that Australia looks to America free from any pangs about our traditional links of friendship to Britain".

Such a statement will cause resentment throughout the Empire and had a very poor reception in high quarters in the United States.

986



10, Downing Street,  
Whitehall.

3. I hope you will not mind my saying that you have really not begun to feel the weight of this war, or even begun to experience the danger and suffering under which the people of Great Britain have long been proud to live.

4. At your wish we arranged for the withdrawal of all Australian forces from Tobruk and the battle-front in Libya, and I have myself proposed that you should remove one of your Divisions to the Singapore area. I do not understand the reason for this mood of panic which I am sure is not shared by the people of Australia. If hostile speeches continue to be delivered by members of your Government against the mother country and the present war direction I should be quite ready to address a broadcast to the Australian people. I feel confident of their generosity and enduring goodwill.

29.12.41

HIGHEST SECRET

T.O.O. 2040Z/29

L. N. 3

GREY 165

Prime Minister to Lord Privy Seal and Dominions Secretary.

Curtin's article in the "Melbourne Herald" has made very bad impression in high American circles and of course excites lively scorn in Canada. I think you should call Earle Page to account in Cabinet for it and ask him what is the meaning of this sort of language. By placing their relations with Britain after those with Russia, Dutch and China, and by saying they rely on America unhampered by any pangs of traditional friendship for Britain, they must be taken as relieving us of part of our responsibility in pursuance of which we have sacrificed PRINCE OF WALES and REPULSE. Once again to get better understanding you should take a firm stand against this misbehaviour which certainly does not represent the brave Australian nation. I hope, therefore, there will be no weakness or pandering to them at this juncture, while at the same time we do all in human power to come to their aid.

2. In same way a very firm attitude should be adopted in House of Commons to the snarlers and naggers who are trying to make trouble out of the Japanese attack on us in the Far East. I hope you will endeavour to let all issues stand over bluntly until I return so that I may face any opposition myself.

2040Z/29

Distribution:

When news of the surrender in Singapore came through, Curtin sent a telegram on 17 February 1942 asking for the 6th and 7th Divisions to be returned to Australia and also for the return of the 9th Division 'at an early date'. That same day Curtin convened the Full Cabinet to authorise the War Cabinet to organise for 'complete mobilisation...of all resources, human and material' to ensure the defence of Australia. (JCPML00137/1/2)

PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT.

CABLEGRAM.

MOST  
SECRETO.4843  
O.4844  
O.4845  
O.4846

SENT: 17th February, 1942.

DECRYPTER NO:

Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs,  
LONDON. No. 127

Repeated to -

General Sir Archibald Wavell,  
BATAVIA. No. 33The Prime Minister of New Zealand,  
WELLINGTON. No. 61The Right Hon. Sir Earle Page,  
LONDON. No. 26

Most Immediate. Most Secret.

Following for Prime Minister from Prime  
Minister.

1. <sup>K</sup> With further reference to my (No. 123) *telegram of 15 Feb*  
the Chiefs of Staff have considered General Wavell's appreciation  
of the situation in the A.B.D.A. Area in his message dated 14th  
February, and the views of the Chief of the General Staff on the  
future employment of the A.I.F. which have taken into consider-  
ation a report by the General Officer Commanding A.I.F. Corps.  
In view of the present situation they are of opinion:-

(I) As General Wavell does not consider  
Java can be held, Australia and Burma become of primary  
importance as the only positions in which forces can be  
concentrated for an ultimate advance against the enemy:

(II) That, if possible, all Australian  
forces now under orders to transfer to the Far East from  
the Middle East should be diverted to Australia. These  
forces are the 6th and 7th Divisions and accompanying  
Corps base and line of communication troops, in all  
64,000; and there is also a British armoured brigade  
of about 8,000. They would prefer that all these  
forces should be concentrated in Australia but are  
mindful of the fact that the strategic position of  
Burma may necessitate some reinforcement there until  
other troops are available from elsewhere:

(III) That Darwin is the first place in  
Australia that should be reinforced out of the troops  
being transferred:

(IV) The recall of the 9th Division of the  
A.I.F. which is at present in Syria requires early  
consideration as this would entail further redistribution  
of the forces of the Allied nations.

PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT.

**CABLEGRAM.**

O.4843  
O.4844  
O.4845  
O.4846

2. The Government accordingly requests that urgent arrangements be made for:-

- (a) The diversion to Australia of that portion of the A.I.F. now at Bombay and en route to Java.
- (b) The diversion of the remaining two flights to Australia.
- (c) The recall of 9th Australian Division and remaining A.I.F. in Middle East at an early date.

3. In regard to the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff in sub-paragraph (II), the Government will be glad to know whether it is possible also to divert the British Armoured Brigade to Australia.

X  
CURTIN.

19/2/42

On 19 February, the day of the first bombing raid on Darwin, Churchill asked for the leading division of the returning Australian forces to be diverted to Burma. President Roosevelt, and Australia's representatives in London, Page and Bruce, as well as Opposition members Menzies and Spender in Canberra, supported the British request urging the Curtin Government to allow those members of the 7th Division already at sea to be diverted for the defence of Burma. Standing against this strong opposition, however, Curtin firmly refused the diversion.

PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT.

# CABLEGRAM. MOST SECRET

0.5088

SENT: 19th February, 1942.

DECIPHER TO:

The Right. Hon. Sir Earle Page,  
LONDON.

20. Most Secret. Most Immediate.

Your P.45.

X After most anxious consideration Government has decided that it cannot agree to the proposal that 7th A.I.F. Division should be diverted to Burma.

2. A.I.F. Divisions were to be sent to the vital Netherlands East Indies sector to help stop the southern thrust of the enemy. It has apparently been decided by Wavell that this sector is not to be reinforced further. To carry out the same objective the destination to which they should now proceed is obviously Australia which is in imminent danger of attack which is an essential allied base and which is the nearest area of concentration south of Netherlands East Indies.

3. Cable just received from Lavarack regarding Wavell's suggestion of diversion to Burma finishes as follows:-

"Not personally in position to judge Australian home defence position owing considerable absence. If this reasonably satisfactory believe Australia's best interests served by course suggested. This despite natural desire Australian Corps assist direct defence own homeland if considered necessary."

Position is that mainly owing our efforts overseas, home defence position is, in opinion of our Chiefs of General Staff, not satisfactory. Therefore we cannot approve of the proposed diversion. X

CURTIN.

20/2/42



**CABLEGRAM.**

I.6423

HB.

CE 47

Sent 19th February, 1942.

7.48 p.m.

Received 20th February, 1942.

DECYPHER FROM  
THE RIGHT HON. SIR EARLE PAGE,  
LONDON.

MOST IMMEDIATE. MOST SECRET.

P.47. For the Prime Minister. Most Secret. For himself alone.

1. From the time of despatch of your telegram 26 and absence of reference to my later telegram P.46, I feel that the Australian decision has been arrived at before receipt and consideration of my P.46 and Wavell's appreciation of 16th February.

2. You will have since received in Dominions Office 226 of 19th February the American offer to give an additional American Division for Australia in exchange for one of our Divisions and also Wavell's further appreciation.

3. Accordingly I am holding your telegram secret until receipt of further advice. No instructions to divert its course have been sent to the convey.

4. I have discussed the American offer with Churchill who will try to expedite arrival of this American Division in Australia if the 7th Australian Division is diverted to Burma. The 8th and 9th Divisions can still go to Australia if so determined by the Australian Government. The 6th Division is in the process of embarkation.

5. In our discussion, Churchill expressed great anxiety of the effect on China of not reinforcing Burma, especially if troops so near the battle-front and only troops that could be available are not allocated at this critical moment. Both he and Roosevelt believe that China is the ultimate key of the whole Asian situation. China has been invited to become a member of the Pacific War Council in London and their reply to that invitation is awaited.

6. As time presses would appreciate clear the line reply.

..... PAGE.

Copy to War Cabinet,  
Mr. Shedden.

20/2/42

COPY

OUTWARD TELEGRAM

TYPEX

FROM: D.O.  
TO: AUSTRALIA (GOVT.)  
(Sent 1.25 a.m., 21st Feb. 1942).

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MOST IMMEDIATE

No. 235 MOST SECRET & PERSONAL.

My telegram of 20th February No. 233.

Following for Prime Minister from Prime Minister.

I have received the following telegram from  
President of United States. Begins.

I hope you can persuade Australian Government  
to allow proposed temporary diversion of their leading  
Australian Division to Burma. I think this of utmost  
importance. Tell them I am speeding additional troops  
as well as planes to Australia and that my estimate of  
the situation there is highly optimistic and by no  
means dark. Roosevelt. Ends.

**MOST**  
**CABLEGRAM.**

860

MOST IMMEDIATE.

DECYPHER FROM  
AUS. MINISTER, WASHINGTON.

Date sent 31st Feb. 1942  
12.13 a.m.  
Recd. 31st Feb. 1942.

No.330.

The President sends me in hand-written note to transmit message to the Prime Minister.

No.72. Personal and secret for Prime Minister Curtin from the President.

I fully appreciate how grave are your responsibilities in reaching a decision in the present serious circumstances as to the disposition of the first Australian division returning from the Middle East.

I assume you know now of our determination to send, in addition to all troops and forces now en route, another force of over 27,000 men to Australia. This force will be fully equipped in every respect.

We must fight to the limit for our two flanks - one based on Australia and the other on Burma, India and China. Because of our geographical position we Americans can better handle the re-inforcement of Australia and the right flank.

I say this to you so that you may have every confidence that we are going to reinforce your position with all possible speed. Moreover, the operation which the United States Navy have begun and have in view will in a measure constitute a protection to the coasts of Australia and New Zealand. On the other hand the left flank simply must be held. If Burma goes it seems to me our whole position, including that of Australia will be extremely strained. Your Australian division is the only force that is available for immediate reinforcement. It could get into the fight at once and would, I believe, have strength to save what now seems a very dangerous situation.

While I realize the Japanese are moving rapidly I cannot believe that, in view of your geographical position and forces on their way to you or operating in your neighbourhood, your vital centres are in immediate danger.

While I realize that your men have been fighting all over the world, and are still, and while I know full well of great sacrifices which Australia has made, I nevertheless want to ask you in the interest of our whole war effort in the Far East if you will reconsider your decision and order the division now en route to Australia to move with all speed to support the British forces fighting in Burma.

You may be sure we will fight by your side with all our force until victory. Roosevelt.

Copy to - P.M. 21.2.42.

When Curtin learned on the afternoon of 22 February that Churchill had 'temporarily' diverted the convoy his response was swift and decisive, forcing Churchill to give way and the convoy to sail on to Australia.

PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT.

**CABLEGRAM.**

I. 6802  
Ce.9

DECYPHER FROM :  
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR  
DOMINION AFFAIRS,  
LONDON.

Dated - 22nd Feb., 1942.  
5 p.m.  
Received - 23rd Feb., 1942.

MOST IMMEDIATE.

241. Following from the Prime Minister for the Prime  
Minister. (Begins):-

We could not contemplate that you would refuse our request and that of the President of the United States for the diversion of the leading division to save the situation in Burma. We knew that if our ships proceeded on their course to Australia while we were waiting for your formal approval they would either arrive too late at Rangoon or even be without enough fuel to go there at all. We therefore decided that the convoy should be temporarily diverted to the northward. The convoy is now too far north for some of the ships in it to reach Australia without refuelling. These physical considerations give a few days for the situation to develop and for you to review the position should you wish to do so. Otherwise the leading Australian Division will be returned to Australia as quickly as possible in accordance with your wishes. (Ends).

Copy to War Cabinet  
Mr. Shedden.

23/2/42.

CABLEGRAM

**MOST  
SECRET**

O.5424

SENT: 23rd February, 1942.

DECRYPTER TO:

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs,  
LONDON.

No. 159. Most Immediate. Most Secret.

Prime Minister to Prime Minister.

Reference your 241.

In your <sup>collection of 20 Feb</sup> 255 it was clearly implied that the <sup>The collection of 23 Feb</sup> convoy was not proceeding to the northward. From (241) it appears that you have diverted the convoy towards Rangoon and had treated our approval to this <sup>vital</sup> diversion as merely a matter of form. By doing so you have established a physical situation which adds to the dangers of the convoy and the responsibility of the consequences of such diversion rests upon you.

②. We have already informed the President of the reasons for our decision and, having regard to the terms of his communications to me, we are quite satisfied from his sympathetic reply that he fully understands and appreciates the reasons for our decision.

③. Wavell's message considered by Pacific War Council on Saturday reveals that Java faces imminent invasion. Australia's outer defences are now quickly vanishing and our vulnerability is completely exposed.

④. With A.I.F. troops we sought to save Malaya and Singapore falling back on Netherlands East Indies. All these northern defences are gone or going. Now you contemplate using the A.I.F. to save Burma. All this has been done as in Greece without adequate air support.

⑤. We feel a primary obligation to save Australia not only for itself but to preserve it as a base for the development of the war against Japan. In the circumstances it is quite impossible to reverse a decision which we made with the utmost care and which we have affirmed and re-affirmed.

<sup>collection</sup> ⑥. Our Chief of General Staff advises although your (241) refers to the leading division only the fact is that owing to the loading of the flights it is impossible at the present time to separate the two divisions and the destination of all the flights will be governed by that of the first flight. This fact re-inforces us in our decision. x

25/2/42

Until the 1943 election Curtin had rejected all proposals that he should travel overseas, including those from President Roosevelt urging him to visit Washington. In 1944 he travelled to the United States, Great Britain and Canada.

*Australia J 11*

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

January 3, 1944.

My dear Mr. Curtin:-

Now that I am back from the Conferences with Mr. Churchill and the Generalissimo and Marshal Stalin, I feel even more strongly that you and I should meet. As you know, I have been close to Mackenzie King almost since we were boys; Marshal Smuts and I first met in 1918, and I had a grand reunion with him in Cairo last month; and Peter Fraser has stopped off here in Washington several times; and I feel that there is a real void which can only be filled by a meeting between you and me.

I do hope that you will consider coming here within a few months. It would not take you long and my thought is that you would spend a couple of days at the White House, making perhaps one public appearance either on the West Coast or in New York City at a big meeting. Then you could run up for a day or two to see Mackenzie King.

Incidentally and confidentially, while Churchill and I did not discuss the matter in any way, I do not think it would do anything but good if you could go to London for a short visit. I think you would receive a very warm welcome.

My plans call for no definite absence from Washington for some months though, of course, the military situation may change suddenly making it necessary for me to dash off to a meeting before that.

There are many things I want to talk with you about, even though they are not matters which require immediate decisions. For instance, I think we should discuss the future military, naval and air protection of Australia and, in a preliminary way at least, the disposition of the Japanese-owned mandated or controlled islands. Also, I want to talk with you about the future policing of the whole Pacific and Asiatic area.

DECLASSIFIED  
By Deputy Archivist of the U.S.  
By W. J. Stewart Date FEB 4 1972





PRIME MINISTER,  
CANBERRA.

2nd February, 1944.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
*file*  
PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

My dear Mr. President,

I am very grateful for your kind invitation to visit Washington and to stay with Mrs. Roosevelt and yourself at the White House. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be able to accept it.

2. Mr. Churchill has been in touch with me about a meeting of Prime Ministers this year and, if this eventuates, I would be delighted to visit you on my way to London. We could then discuss those matters relating to the Pacific area in which we have such mutual and common interests.

3. Thank you for your kind remarks about Australia's war effort. We are stretched to the utmost, and, as the demands on our manpower and material resources exceed our capacity, the constant problem confronting the Government is to determine the precise limits of what we are capable of doing in the field and in the various avenues of services and supplies. Our great anxiety is to help General MacArthur to the utmost, both in respect of our own military effort and the aid which we can give to the United States Forces in the Southwest and South Pacific Areas.

4. Your good wishes for the New Year are heartily reciprocated, and I trust that, at the end of 1944, we shall be well on the way to final victory.

With kindest regards to Mrs. Roosevelt and yourself.

Yours very sincerely,

Franklin D. Roosevelt,  
President of the  
United States of America,  
The White House,  
WASHINGTON.

DECLASSIFIED  
By Authority of Hr. Australian  
Archives, dtd 29 May 1974  
By RRS Date JUN 14 1974

Letter from Curtin to Roosevelt, responding to the invitation to visit, 2 February 1944.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. Records of Franklin Roosevelt. Diplomatic - Australia, 14/9/42-13/6/44.

JCPML00266/3. Original held by Franklin D Roosevelt Presidential Library

COPY

TELEGRAM

From THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

March 17, 1944.

MRS. ROOSEVELT

Lord Athlone, Governor General of Canada, and his wife want to stay with us at the White House April 17th to 19th. Prime Minister Curtin is expected to arrive about April 18th or 19th. I hope much that you can be in Washington at that time. Will you let me know? Love

F. D. R.

COPY

~~SECRET~~  
WAR DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF  
WASHINGTON

March 23, 1944.

MEMORANDUM FOR GENERAL WATSON:

We have just received the following message from Mrs. Roosevelt at Quarry Heights, Canal Zone, for delivery to the President:

"Can be home 18th and 19th. Am trying to cancel engagement for 17th but it may not be possible. Hope your cold is not serious. All well. Much love, signed E. R. "

B. W. DAVENPORT,  
Major, G. S. C.,  
Asst. Secretary, General Staff.

Documents from the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London, May 1944.

CONFERENCE OF PRIME MINISTERS IN LONDON.

*British  
This is condensed  
summary  
of PM's meeting*

AGENDA.

First week

- (1) Opening session.
- (2) The war situation other than the Pacific.
- (3) The war against Japan.
- (4) Review of foreign affairs.

Second week

- (5) Economic policy including -
    - (a) Monetary Policy.
    - (b) Commercial Policy.
  - (6) Post-war world settlement.
  - (7) Colonial questions with special reference to regional arrangements in Africa and the Pacific.
  - (8) Civil Aviation.
  - (9) Shipping.
  - (10) Post-war employment plans.
  - (11) Migration.
  - (12) Improvement in Machinery of Empire Co-operation.
- 

Agenda for Conference of Dominion Prime Ministers, May 1944.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Prime Ministers' Conference, 1944*. JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A5954, 662/1

The circulation of this paper has been strictly limited.

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TOP SECRET

Copy No. ....

WAR CABINET

CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a Staff Conference held in the  
Prime Minister's Map Room, on  
FRIDAY, 26TH MAY, 1944 at 11.30 a.m.

P R E S E N T:

The Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill, M.P.,  
Prime Minister and Minister of Defence  
(In the Chair)

The Rt. Hon. John Curtin, M.P.,  
Prime Minister of the Commonwealth  
of Australia

The Rt. Hon. C.R. Attlee, M.P.,  
Deputy Prime Minister

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

The Rt. Hon. Oliver Lyttelton,  
M.P., Minister of Production

The Rt. Hon. Lord Leathers,  
Minister of War Transport

Sir Frederick Shedden,  
Secretary of the War Cabinet  
War Council and Department of  
Defence (Australia)

General Sir Thomas Blamey,  
General Officer Commanding  
Australian Military Forces

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew  
B. Cunningham, First Sea Lord  
and Chief of Naval Staff

Field Marshal Sir Alan F.  
Brooke, Chief of the  
Imperial General Staff

Marshal of the Royal Air Force  
Sir Charles F.A. Portal,  
Chief of the Air Staff

General Sir Hastings L. Ismay,  
Office of the Minister  
of Defence

SECRETARIAT

Major General L.C. Hollis  
Lieut.-Colonel D. Capel-Dunn

1. STRATEGY FOR THE WAR AGAINST JAPAN

THE PRIME MINISTER said that, as Mr. Curtin was aware, discussions had been proceeding over many months on the best contribution that the British Empire could make in the operations for the overthrow of Japan. The plan which was outlined in the document that had been sent to Mr. Curtin did not represent a compromise between conflicting points of view, but was a new project altogether. The Prime Minister said that his principal objection to the so-called "Pacific" strategy had been that the long lines of communication would mean the expenditure of a formidable effort resulting in the end in only a small operational dividend. For long he had favoured an operation for the occupation of the tip of Sumatra with the object of securing air domination over Malaya and Siam. The present proposal dealt with a situation which was remote in the sense that it was unlikely that we would have many land or air forces available during this year. The sooner, however, we began to plan, the sooner could our operations begin. It was, in his view, essential that the British Empire as a whole should play an important part in the overthrow of Japan, so that the slur on our reputation that the earlier Japanese successes had inflicted should be wiped out.

MR. CURTIN said that he had not had time to consider the Chiefs of Staff proposal, and it would be quite impossible for him to express any firm opinion on it, or to offer any reasonable criticism. Neither was it possible for him, in the absence of any discussion with his colleagues in the Commonwealth Government, to commit himself to any changes in the Command arrangements in the South-West Pacific area. He referred to the history of those Command arrangements. First there had been the A.B.D.A. Command. This had been arranged by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States, and the Australian Government had had no say in its creation nor in the instructions given. Subsequently, there had been established the Pacific War Councils in London and Washington. The London body had, to all extents and purposes, ceased to exist, and the Washington body was completely defunct. He, therefore, had had to deal with General MacArthur as an Allied Commander with Headquarters established in Australia. He feared that there was a danger of the gravest misunderstandings with the United States if Australian forces were taken away from General MacArthur's direct command and placed under a new Commander.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he wished to make it quite clear that there was no intention whatever of submitting firm proposals that day. It was essential that these matters be fully discussed with the United States Chiefs of Staff, but it was also desirable that Mr. Curtin should know the way in which our minds were working. It was now 6 months since there had been any meeting between the British and American Chiefs of Staff, and it was essential that such a meeting should take place shortly. All that we were asking of the Australian Government at this stage was that they should help us to find out what base facilities existed, or could be developed, in Australia. Upon the result of this enquiry might well depend the shape our strategy took.

MR. CURTIN, reverting to the question of command, pointed out that the decision on this issue could not be taken without consideration of the past. There was a heritage of successful association and collaboration between the Australian Government and General MacArthur's Headquarters. That was a fact which was bound to influence the Australian attitude in this matter.

Mr. Curtin referred to the letter<sup>22</sup> which he had addressed on 17th May to the Prime Minister, in which he had set out a number of questions upon which he would like to have answers for communication to his Government on his return. His principal requirement was a decision by the Combined Chiefs of Staff as to whether additional forces were ultimately to be sent to the Pacific or not. The Australian Government had to take decisions regarding the balance of their war effort, and upon the size of the forces likely to be based on Australia, would depend the measures to be taken by the Australian Government for their supply and maintenance. He would like an expression of opinion regarding the desirability of Australia proceeding with such measures.

THE MINISTER OF PRODUCTION said that Mr. Curtin should know that we in this country should be able to give Australia relief in the production of primary munitions to almost any extent likely to be required. This should make available considerable Australian productive capacity in other directions.

SIR ALAN BROOKE pointed out that it was not proposed that all the forces sent from the European theatre to Australia should be maintained by Australia. On the question of command, he wished to make it clear that we were not suggesting an immediate change, but that since we hoped to build up to a substantial share in the operations in the Pacific war, we felt that we had the right to come say in the control of those operations. At present General MacArthur took his directions from the American Chiefs of Staff and we had no say whatsoever.

MR. CURTIN said that he understood that it was the wish of the United Kingdom Government to maintain imports from Australia at their present level, but not to increase them. There were interests in Australia which pressed for increased exports to the United Kingdom. He would like Lord Leathers' opinion on this matter.

THE MINISTER OF WAR TRANSPORT said that there were certain limitations, particularly as regards refrigerated ships, which made an increase of certain imports from Australia out of the question. He undertook to prepare a note for Mr. Curtin on the transport aspects of exports from Australia to this country.

SIR ANDREW CUNNINGHAM, at the request of Mr. Curtin, undertook to provide a note on the help in manning the naval units that we would like to have from Australia. He pointed out that towards the end of this year it was hoped to hand over to the Royal Australian Navy one aircraft carrier and two cruisers.

MR. CURTIN enquired regarding the transfer of R.A.A.F. squadrons back to Australia.

<sup>22</sup> Annex to C.O.S. (44) 447 (0)

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he was most anxious to meet Mr. Curtin's wishes in this matter, but it was not possible to give a firm undertaking at this stage, as much would depend upon the course events took in the OVERSEAS battle. Once we could see daylight, we would arrange the transfer according to Mr. Curtin's wishes.

X IT WAS AGREED:-

- (i) That the Prime Minister would send a reply to Mr. Curtin's letter of the 17th May, in the light of the above discussion and of the conference held at Chequers on 21st May, answering so far as possible the various questions set out therein, and including an indication of the line which His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom would like Mr. Curtin to take during his forthcoming discussions with the American Chiefs of Staff. X
- (ii) To invite the Minister of War Transport to prepare a note for Mr. Curtin on the transport aspects of the export trade from Australia to the United Kingdom.
- (iii) To invite the First Sea Lord to prepare for Mr. Curtin a note on the return of Australian naval personnel serving overseas, and upon the possible assistance in the transfer of warships that the Admiralty might be able to afford to the Royal Australian Navy.

## 2. AWARDS TO AUSTRALIAN SERVICE PERSONNEL

SIR THOMAS BLAMEY stated that there was strong feeling in Australia and among the Australian armed forces on the subject of the award of the 1939/1943 Medal and the Africa Star. The feeling on the subject was accentuated owing to the lavish distribution of decorations in the American armed forces. A particular matter which had caused complaint was the special symbol worn on the ribbon of the Africa Star by those who belonged to the Eighth Army. There were other Australian divisions which had fought long and no less arduously than the Australians in the Eighth Army. The requirements of the different Dominions as regards honours and awards differed. The Canadians and the South Africans had started a separate issue of medals of their own. The Australians did not wish to do this, but they did put forward the proposal that each Dominion should be entitled to arrange for its own special symbols to be attached to the ribbons of the Imperial medals and stars.

THE PRIME MINISTER undertook to reconsider this question, and to communicate with Mr. Curtin on the subject.

## 3. MR. CURTIN'S DEPARTURE

MR. CURTIN said that as this would probably be the last formal meeting that he attended, he desired to express to the Prime Minister his best wishes for the early success of his best hopes. He had, during his stay in this country, expressed himself frequently with great frankness. This he believed to be the proper basis for true friendship among active collaborators, and that was the proper relationship



between his Government and that of the United Kingdom. He wishes to thank the Prime Minister for the time which he had given to discussions with him, and for the help which his colleagues and the Military and Civil Staffs had so generously afforded to him.

THE PRIME MINISTER stated that he wished to tell Mr. Curtin that he had found the greatest pleasure in working with him. He hoped that the relationship which had so happily begun during this visit of Mr. Curtin's would be permanent. Mr. Curtin's contribution to their discussions had been of the highest distinction, and the people of this country had come to appreciate the wisdom of the council that he gave. We in this country were determined to assist and take our due share in beating down the Japanese peril so that it should never rise again. The people of this country were prepared to undertake further sacrifices so as to ensure the attainment of this end. It should never be said that we were willing to accept the help of others in our own extremity, but were unprepared to take our share in the troubles of others. He looked forward to a great Allied meeting on Australian soil. Finally, he wished Mr. Curtin Godspeed and repeated that he hoped and believed that the contacts that had been made in the last few weeks should endure.



10, Downing Street,  
Whitehall.

25 May, 1944.

*My dear Curtin,*

You wrote to me on May 23  
suggesting two amendments to the minutes  
of the Conference we had at Chequers on  
Sunday.

I understand that these  
amendments have already been circulated.

*Yours sincerely,  
Winston Churchill*

The Rt. Hon. J.H. Curtin.

Note from Churchill to Curtin, 25 May 1944.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Prime Ministers Conference, 1944*. JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A5954, 5/5

Curtin wrote regular reports for the Acting Prime Minister, Frank Forde, whilst he was in attendance at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. In this example Curtin outlines discussion on international relations following a postwar settlement.

# OUTWARD TELEGRAM

CABLEGRAM FOR:

THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

18

MOST IMMEDIATE  
Most Secret and Personal for Mr. Forde

~~SECRET~~ — POST-WAR WORLD SETTLEMENT

1. The United Kingdom Government circulated just prior to the meeting a series of lengthy memoranda prepared by the Foreign Office on the following subjects:-

- A. Scope and nature of an international organisation.
- B. Guarantees and the pacific settlement of disputes.
- C. Security
- D. Co-ordination of economic and political international machinery.
- E. Method and procedure for establishing a world organisation.

This procedure evoked some degree of protest by Prime Ministers.

2. It was explained by the Foreign Secretary that the United States Government desire that informal discussions of an exploratory and non-committal character, on the official level, should take place in Washington next month between representatives of the United Kingdom, the United States and Russia. He

added that the latest information from the United Kingdom Ambassador in Washington and from Mr. Stettinius during his recent visit to London was that Mr. Hull now felt that if agreement could be reached on general ideas about post-war organisation, and if, in the course of the late autumn, an announcement of a provisional character could in consequence be made, there was little chance of the Republicans going back on any such declaration, and that there would be a better chance of getting United States opinion behind it.

3. In the documents submitted to the Conference the following passage on procedure occurs:-

Before Memoranda "A" to "E" are given to the United States and Soviet Governments, we should like to feel sure that other British Commonwealth Governments agree that these papers are on the right lines as a basis for the preliminary and informal discussions, which it is hoped will take place at Washington at the end of May or early in June. It is suggested in Memorandum "E" that the aim of the Washington talks should be to reach a measure of agreement which could find expression in a Draft Declaration to be referred to Governments and subsequently published. It is contemplated that the progress made in the Washington talks would be the subject of further consultation between British Commonwealth Governments before any such declaration were published.

Cablegram report from Curtin to Forde, 16 May 1944.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Prime Ministers' Conference, 1944*. JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A5954, 656/3

4. The objective referred to in paragraph 2 is a very important consideration in view of the previous failure to secure the adhesion of the United States to the League of Nations. Without their support a world organisation would be impotent and we should go to extreme lengths to secure it. I therefore stated that I was agreeable to the discussions proceeding on the basis outlined by the Foreign Secretary and the use of the documents in accordance with the conditions mentioned by him.

5. I drew attention to the question of procedure for consultations with the Dominions on this matter as dealt with in our cablegram no.66 of 14th March and other communications.

6. I said that it was intended to transmit the Foreign Office memoranda to the Australian Government for its consideration and remarks. It was hoped that these would be available before the discussions in Washington. It was desired that the results of the Washington talks be communicated to the Australian Government for their consideration in order that the High Commissioner may be suitably instructed in regard to the further consultations between members of the British Commonwealth.

7. My own further remarks were broadly confined to the views expressed in my speech of 14th December, 1943.

Cablegram report from Curtin to Forde, 16 May 1944.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Prime Ministers' Conference, 1944*. JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A5954, 656/3

8. Canada adopted a similar attitude and submitted some comments on the Foreign Office memoranda which you will find interesting.

9. The Foreign Office memoranda are being forwarded by the High Commissioner by air mail and he will arrange for a summary to be cabled if you so desire.

*See letter  
of 16/5  
to Mr.  
Forde*

CURTIN

REPATCHED BY  
CABLE DEPT.

16th May, 1944.

Cablegram report from Curtin to Forde, 16 May 1944.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. *Prime Ministers' Conference, 1944*. JCPML00869. Courtesy National Archives of Australia: A5954, 656/3