

Militärische und diplomatische Analysen bezüglich eines österreichisch–ungarischen Separatfriedens aus englischer Sicht

[London, 1918 Mai]

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Analysen der britischen Regierung und der Alliierten im Hinblick auf einen Separatfrieden mit Österreich–Ungarn (Juli - September 1917). Ausschnitte von "Proceedings in Regard to a Separate Peace with Austria. Part II. From July to September 1917", die der Sekretär der britischen Regierung Maurice Hankey auf der Grundlage von Notizen, Memoranden und Protokollen für die britische Unterhausdebatte zur Sixtusaffäre (16. 05. 1918) zusammenstellte. (fol. 345-364).

[.....] I. The important Meeting of the War Cabinet held on June 8, 1917, which resulted in setting up the Cabinet Committee on War Policy. This Committee sat during the greater part of June and July.

By far the most important question that it discussed was as to whether the then forthcoming offensive of the Allies should be conducted in Flanders, as Field Marshal Haig¹, with General Robertson's² support, urged, or whether the Allies should adopt a defensive attitude on the Western front, and concentrate their artillery on the Italian front, with a view to a stroke against Austria, designed with the object of compelling that country to make a separate peace. Apart from no less than 21 formal Meetings, many of which were attended by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, at which a large amount of naval and military evidence was taken, the Committee dined together on two occasions, at both of which this question was the main topic of conversation.

II. Tenth meeting of the Cabinet Committee on War Policy, June 21, 1917.

[...]Summary:

The second alternative was to undertake an operation which was, in the first place, military, and in the second, diplomatic, with the object of detaching Austria from Germany, namely an attack on the Austrian front.

[Lloyd George:]

He felt that the fatal error which had been committed in the present War had been continually to attack where the enemy was strongest. Surely, it was a mistake to strike with the sword against the thickest part of the enemy's armour. If we had made efforts earlier in the war to knock out Austria, we should be in a far better position now. He felt, however, that we had another chance of effecting this. There was not the smallest doubt that Austria was anxious to be out of the war. This was not a matter of conjecture, but of absolute knowledge. Austria, however, would not be willing to pay the price demanded by the Allies, although if another heavy blow were struck against her she might be brought to accept our terms. He pointed out the difficult internal situation of Austria with about half her population disaffected. He compared it to the position that this country would occupy if Wales, Scotland, and either the South or the East of England was hostile, only a patriotic and bellicose core remaining in the centre. The accounts that had reached us of the Sessions of the Austrian Chamber showed that the nation was sulky³. This appeared to offer a special opportunity for a military and diplomatic success. The prize was far the biggest in sight. If Austria could be forced out of the War, Bulgaria and Turkey would automatically have to go out. The umbilical cord of the Central Alliance would be cut and no more ammunition could reach Bulgaria and Turkey, and both would have to make terms. Next year the whole of the forces now locked up at Salonica, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, would be set free for operations on the Western front. Moreover, Italy would then be bound to support us, for he did not contemplate cooperation with Italy without a bargain that if Austria was reduced to terms Italy would support us in our attacks against Germany. How then was this result to be accomplished? It was his belief that Trieste was the only thing which stood between Italy and a separate peace with Austria. He had reason to believe that Austria would be willing to cede the Trentino now, but not Trieste. If Trieste were captured, Austria would have to appeal to a population that was half Slav to recapture it. They would refuse to do it. The Magyars also did not care about Trieste. Neither the Hungarians nor the Slav would sacrifice themselves to recover it. The question arose as to whether success in this attack was feasible.

¹ Douglas Haig Gf v Bemersyde, FM, seit 19.12.1915 Oberbefehlshaber der brit. Armeen in Frankreich. Vgl. Die Kriegsaufzeichnungen des Feldmarschalls Lord Douglas Haig, München 1923/24.

² William Robertson, 04.08.1914-26.01.1915 Generalquartiermeister der brit. Kontinentalarmee; 26.01.-23.12.1915 Chef des Generalstabes der Kontinentalarmee; 23.12.1915-16.02.1918 Chef des brit. Reichsgeneralstabes.

³ Sitzung vom 28.06.1917 des österreichischen Herrenhauses, XXII. Session, vgl. Nr. 51, Anm. a.

[Lloyd George:]

He asked the Committee particularly to consider the effect of the Austrian operation on Russia. If Russia went out of the War while Austria still remained in, we could not win. If the Eastern armies of Germany were released we should have no chance of eventual victory. The United States of America might in time place half a million men in the field, but if Russia had gone out of the War Germany could bring 1 1/2 million men to the Western front. The Allies could not bring so large a force from anywhere. We should then have an inferiority both in men and guns in the west, and this meant defeat. Hence, the vital necessity of the hour was to get Austria out of the war in order to give Sir Douglas Haig a chance of victory next year.

The above extract shows very clearly what was in the Prime Minister's mind. He foresaw the elimination of Russia from the War; if that happened he could not foresee the sort of victory we desire. We had failed to secure the elimination of Austria by diplomatic means, owing to Baron Sonnino's objections⁴.

He aspired, therefore, to acquire Trieste for the Allies in order, by one blow, to get assets into our hands which would enable Italy to support a separate peace with Austria, and would, at the same time, bring Austria into a suitable frame of mind. The whole question in all its aspects is summed up in Part IV. of the Report of the Cabinet Committee on War Policy. Here again the considerations are mainly military, but a few extracts that are pertinent to this Memorandum may be quoted: -

The plan has many attractions. As already mentioned, Austria is war-weary and anxious for a separate peace. She is believed, however, to be unwilling to surrender Trieste as one of the conditions of peace, and Italy cannot take less. A severe defeat involving the loss of Trieste and accompanied by heavy casualties might provide the stimulus necessary to induce her to break with Germany and to accept peace on terms acceptable to the Allies. The consequences of this might be decisive. Bulgaria and Turkey would then become atrophied and would probably soon have to make peace. Germany would be isolated. Great Allied forces would be released from the Balkans, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus for concentration against Germany. As a condition of our cooperation also a bargain ought to be made with Italy to send troops subsequently to France, or elsewhere, to assist the Allies as required. The situation in the Balkans would be restored and the scheme of Mittel Europa definitely ended. The Dardanelles would be opened up, whereby Russia would be more easily supplied with war material. Italy and Greece would once more draw their supplies of imported wheat from Russia, their normal market. The shipping situation would be considerably relieved. [...]

III. On July 25, and 26, 1917, the long-deferred Allied Conference took place at Paris⁵. The Proceedings of the main Conference, at which the minor as well as the major Allies were represented, naturally did not touch the question of a separate peace with Austria; but several diplomatic conversations took place in Monsieur Ribot's room at the Paris Foreign Office. They were attended by Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Balfour and General Smuts⁶ a number of French Ministers, and Baron Sonnino; on behalf of Italy. Unfortunately, no Secretary was present, except for a short part of one Meeting, and there is no record of what transpired. The Secretary of the War Cabinet has no note of having been informed of what occurred at this Meeting, although he was in the ante-room at the Quai d'Orsay. The time, however, was so fully occupied during these two days that he scarcely had an opportunity for conversation with Mr. Lloyd George or Mr. Balfour. Nevertheless, there can hardly be a doubt but that the question of a separate peace with Austria must have been discussed. The Secretary of the War Cabinet⁷ was present at a dinner given on the night of the British Ministers arrival by Monsieur Albert Thomas⁸ to Mr. Lloyd George, and this was the main topic of conversation; on this occasion, however, no question was raised in regard to Diplomatic negotiations, and the conversation was entirely on the question of a blow at Austria with a view to diplomatic negotiations. It is not unreasonable to assume that the conversations at the Quai d'Orsay took the same line. This, in fact, is born out by the procès verbal of the Meeting on the afternoon of July 26, when the Secretary was present. On that occasion the main discussion was as to the action to be taken if Russia went out of the War, and the following extracts are pertinent:

Mr. Lloyd George then asked if it was not possible to anticipate the enemy's blow. Instead of concentrating for defensive purposes, why should we not ourselves deliver a blow with the object of detaching some of the enemy's Allies ?

After an allusion to the possibility of eliminating Turkey, the procès verbal continues: Mr Lloyd George also expressed his belief that we could inflict so severe a blow on the Austrians as to enable the Italians to achieve a great part of their desiderata. He pointed out that if the Russians collapse, Roumania's collapse was also inevitable, and that in such circumstances it would be very difficult to exact the claims of the Entente's Eastern Allies against Austria. This rendered it the more desirable to concentrate on the claims of Italy, who was cooperating with us to her full extent. Mr. Lloyd George pointed out that if the whole of the Russian, Roumanian, and Serbian claims against Austria were realised in their entirety, the break-up of the Austrian

⁴ Vgl. Nr. 39. Dazu auch die Aufzeichnungen Sonninos, in: DDI 9, 81-83.

⁵ Vgl. zur Konferenz von Paris: Riccardi, *Alleati non amici*, 514-519; zur Konferenz von London, ebd., 519-521.

⁶ Vgl. Nr. 39. Jan Christiaan Smuts, Burengeneral, Mitglied des brit. Kriegskabinettes, seit 1910 mehrfach Minister der südafrikanischen Union.

⁷ Sir Maurice Hankey, vgl. Nr. 39.

⁸ Albert Thomas, 12.12.1916-07.09.1917 frz. Munitionsminister

Empire was involved, but that the Italian claims could be exacted without any such break-up, Austria, he pointed out, was both exhausted and divided against herself. For this reason he believed that Austria could be induced to concede Italian claims, but not without a blow. He then alluded briefly to Austria's difficulties. The population of the Austrian Empire was some 50,000,000, but of these something like 30,000,000 consisted of disaffected races. Hence, if Austria received a sufficiently severe blow she might find herself in a position to justify her Government in acceding to the major part of the Italian claims. If this was achieved we might then get Austria out of the war. He assumed that Italy would still continue to support her Allies in such circumstances? Baron Sonnino assented.

Mr. Lloyd George urged, therefore, that we should anticipate the events discussed in the Military Report. Hitherto the Entente Powers had shown too little anticipation. They had been too slow-footed. This was one of the opportunities, by taking swift action, to convert a possible defeat into a victory. The military document, though expressed in calm language, spelled only one word, 'disaster'. It might be an honourable disaster, but none the less it was a disaster. What was the use of our holding our own? Germany was in possession of Belgium, North France, Serbia, and mistress of a great part of the Ottoman Empire. Merely to hold on was, therefore, he claimed, to face a disastrous peace.

To get Turkey out of the war was important, but to get Austria was infinitely more so. If we still continued in the expectation of winning Galicia, Bukowina, Banat, Temesvar, Transylvania, and all the Serbian claims, we really were lacking the courage to face the facts. Again and again we had seen the Germans take such an initiative as he now urged. He asked that we should take advantage of this opportunity to detach Germany's Eastern Allies with the object of concentrating all our efforts on our main aim in the war, namely, the defeat of Prussian autocracy. Short of this he could see nothing but the prospect of going blindly to disaster.

Baron Sonnino, though hesitating to express views on the military aspects of the question in General Cadorna's⁹ absence, supported Mr. Lloyd George in the main. French military opinion, however, was dead against the proposal. General Foch¹⁰, who was present at the Meeting, insisted that: - "A decisive result could only be achieved by a double attack on the one side by the Russo-Roumanian Armies, and on the other side by Italy. A double attack could not be looked for at the present time. The utmost, therefore, that could be hoped for was good moral and tactical effects, but not a decision, which could only be achieved by a concerted attack on the two fronts.

General Pétain¹¹ pointed out that the British attack now about to be developed was to be followed by a big French attack. Very large quantities of artillery were committed to these offensive operations. It would be impossible to disengage them at present and to concentrate them on the Italian front.

IV. The question of a blow at Austria, with a view to inducing her to make a separate peace, was again discussed, this time at very great length, at a Conference of the Allies held in London on August 7 and 8, which was attended by most of the War Cabinet, as well as the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, M. Ribot¹², M. Painlevé¹³, M. Thierry¹⁴, M. Thomas, and Baron Sonnino, as well as by Generals Robertson, Foch, and Albricci¹⁵. The question was actually raised by Baron Sonnino, who, on this occasion, strongly urged support for the Italian front. The motives for such action, however, were set forth by the Prime Minister, and several extracts may usefully be made from his remarks: e.g.:

Mr. Lloyd George observed that he had always thought himself that the best policy was for the Allies to try really to crush Austria. He had made the suggestion in Rome, and it was then considered too early. He made it now, and it was apparently considered too late. He contrasted the method of the Central Powers in pooling their resources, which enable them to drive back and break up great armies and to hold a vast extent of enemy territory, with the Allies' efforts which, gallant though they were, only chipped a few bits off a granite rock. He considered it a great misfortune that the Allies could not deliver one big smashing blow.

Mr. Lloyd George said a good deal more during this Meeting to the same effect. He was supported throughout by Baron Sonnino, but M. Ribot and M. Painlevé, though not opposing him in principle, considered it impossible to change the plans for 1917, and were rather for shelving the subject until 1918. In this attitude they rested themselves on the advice of Generals Foch and Robertson, who had been asked to report on the question. The two Generals had merely re-affirmed their agreement with the Conclusions of a Military Conference which they and General Cadorna had attended at Paris on the 24th July, namely, that the present plans could not be changed, and that the knocking out of Austria was to be aimed at by continuing the attack on the German forces according to the programme already agreed to and by attacking Austria simultaneously on two fronts. In the course of the

⁹ Luigi Graf Cadorna, Mai 1915-08.11.1917 Chef des ital. Generalstabes. Vgl. dazu auch DDI 8, 301-302.

¹⁰ Ferdinand Foch, frz. General, seit 06.08.1918 Marschall von Frankreich, Generalstabschef, seit 05.11.1917 Mitglied des obersten Kriegsrates der Entente, seit 26.03.1918 Oberbefehlshaber der alliierten Armeen in Frankreich.

¹¹ Philippe Pétain, frz. Marschall, seit 17.05.1917 Oberbefehlshaber in Frankreich.

¹² Vgl. Nr. 39.

¹³ Paul Painlevé, 20.03.-07.09.1917 frz. Kriegsminister; 12.09.-13.11.1917 frz. Kriegsminister und Ministerpräsident.

¹⁴ Joseph Thierry, frz. Minister für öffentliche Arbeiten: 24.03.-02.12.1913 und frz. Minister für Finanzen: 20.03.-07.09.1917.

¹⁵ Alberico Giuseppe Albricci, ital. General.

discussion at the last Meeting of this series General Foch made a long statement on the possibilities of a blow at Austria, Bulgaria, and Turkey, respectively, with a view to eliminating them from the War¹⁶:

Taking the case of Austria first, General Foch said that theoretically, in order to defeat her, it would be necessary to cross the Alps and reach Vienna. This involved a very great military effort. On the other hand, it might be to Austria's interest, after a partial defeat, to make a separate peace. A great attack on the Carso might lead to the fall of Trieste, and Austria might then be willing to treat, but this was not by any means certain. It was, however, a serious possibility and the military means of bringing it about deserved consideration.

Summing up, therefore, General Foch pointed out that, on the whole, it would be very difficult to reach an absolute decision in any of the fields he had discussed. Complete defeat of the enemy could only be achieved by the destruction of their armies, and the bringing of their Governments to heel. If we could not expect to accomplish this we might, at any rate, bring about a situation in which either Austria or Turkey might be glad to come to terms.

General Albricci, the Italian General, while urging support to the Italians, said: - "That the latest season was the end of August, and after that an offensive must wait until the end of the spring, say, the 15th May.

On August 14th, 1917, the Prime Minister informed the War Cabinet that he had received private information of certain very secret negotiations in Switzerland between a French agent, under M. Painlevé's direction, and Austria, which promised favourable for a real break between Austria and Germany. There was also a preliminary discussion on the Pope's Peace proposals, which it was agreed had probably been connived at by Austria.

By instructions the Secretary kept no Minutes of this Meeting, and no details are on record beyond the bare facts mentioned above which were taken from the Secretary's rough notes¹⁷. [.....].

¹⁶ Vgl. DDI 8, 360 (Nr. 480).

¹⁷ Vgl. dazu auch den Bericht von Ladislaus Ritter von Skrzynski an das Außenministerium, Bern, 1917 07.05, in: HHStA, PA XXVII, 57:

"Es gibt aber auch in der Entente ganz entschiedene Gegner separater Verhandlungen mit der Monarchie. Darunter alle, die bloß von der Verlängerung des Krieges eine radikale Republikanisierung Europas erwarten, in erster Linie der Freimaurerstab: Ein Mitglied desselben sagte unlängst über die in England wachsende Austrophilie klagend: Lassen wir doch dem amerikanischen Gelde die nötige Zeit, die Throne und die Kirche, erstens in Spanien, dann in Österreich-Ungarn zu treffen. Sinon tout sera à recommencer."

Einen Monat später berichtete der k.u.k. Botschafter in Bern, Alexander von Musulin an Ottokar Graf Czernin-Chudenitz über Friedenschancen, Bern, 1917 08.04, in: HHStA; PA XXVII, 58:

"Österreich-Ungarn dürfte kaum den Frieden beschleunigen können. Die Freimaurerei arbeitet nun wieder mit Hochdruck gegen die Monarchie. Die jusqu'au boutischen Leiter der Entente sind gegen das Bestehen derselben, die freimaureristischen [sic!] Pazifisten, größtenteils eher verkappte Germanophile, auch gegen die Monarchie.

Wie die Gruppe Caillaux denkt, ersieht man aus folgendem Satze des Artikels 'Manoeuvres pontificales des Pays' vom 28.07.1917:

'La paix blanche souhaitée par le Vatican, l'objectif du pape étant de sauver la double Monarchie, son dernier espoir'. [.....] Glauben Sie mir, der Frieden in 1917 ist eine Illusion, die Entente will ihn nicht haben. In 1918 werden die Zentralstaaten die Feuerprobe entweder bestehen und einen wirtschaftlich für sie jedenfalls ungünstigen Kompromißfrieden schließen können oder es wird ihnen der Friede diktiert werden. (General Pau sagte hier, daß man auf einen Frieden vor Herbst 1918 nicht rechnen dürfte)." [.....]

Dank freundlicher Mitteilung von Herrn Louis-Pierre Laroche.

Vgl. zu den Friedensgesprächen in Fribourg durch die Grafen Armand und Revertera von 06. 1917 bis 03.1918, in: Steglich, Friedensversuche (1984) XIV-XXXVIII; 1-93 und unsere Nr. 87a.