MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE BETWEEN SECRETARIES HULL, KNOX, AND STIMSON, NOVEMBER 10, 1942

We had one of the most important talks that I can remember.

In the first place Hull stated the background of his policy towards Vichy since October 12, 1940, giving a resume of everything that had been done and the purposes which he had in mind in so doing. He had to deal with a government which the United States believed did not represent ninety per cent of the French population. His purpose was twofold: First, to keep it from giving consent to Hitler to enter the African colonies; second, to keep in consular and other posts in both France and Africa men who could keep us acquainted with what was going on and thus be observation posts for us; and also in North Africa these men should organize connections with leading Frenchmen who did not sympathize with Hitler and who would constitute an organization which we could use if we subsequently chose to enter and keep Germany out forcibly. He gave a description of the men and the way in which this had been carried out.

He has had constant trouble with deGaulle who, whenever either we or the British undertook any operation, sought to get in and represent France in such an operation. He and the British believe that this would make trouble because it would introduce the cross-current of French politics into every such transaction as deGaulle was trying to establish himself as a representative of the French people and thus it would risk a break with Vichy and a discontinuance of his watch post policy.
By this organisation he succeeded for a long time in preventing Petain and Laval from becoming hostile to us and also from acceding to Germany's constant request for permission to send Germans into French Africa.

Gradually the Germans broke down Petain's resistance. He made a bad mistake when he, at the dictation of Hitler, announced that he would defend French Africa against any invasion including us. But Hitler's policy did succeed in having a skeleton organisation ready in North Africa which we in the Army have used in the present invasion, including particularly Murphy. But now when Petain has finally ordered Frenchmen to fire on American troops coming to help France, Hull considers that Vichy has become a mere nullity—an appendix of Hitler's, not in any sense representing the French people. Consequently when Laval broke off relations with us, Hull announced that this meant nothing to us because the Laval government had become purely a Hitler appendage.

Hull then discussed the question of a declaration of war against us by Vichy. He said if that took place he would ignore it. He said that a declaration of war may make some complications with Canada, Mackenzie King had been for breaking off relations at once on the same ground that Hull had just mentioned but King said that any actual declaration of war between France and Canada might mislead and make complications with the French population in Canada. Therefore I gather that Hull's preference would be for no declaration of war by Vichy against us if it could be avoided (by non-provocation by us I suppose he meant).
I then told Hull that, while I was much interested in this background, I was particularly anxious for advice as to the immediate future. I told him of our capture of Darlan and Darlan's refusal to speak with Frenchmen and his coming conference with Clark. Hull was against going so far as to recognizing Darlan as the French leader or government in Africa. He had already directed fire against our men and we ought to demand that he should first bring fruits for repentance. Hull said he had been asked why not recognize deGaulle. Hull said that deGaulle's declaration yesterday in favor of Giraud was the first good thing he had done politically and Hull thought that Giraud as a man towered above deGaulle and would command more loyalty and less sincerity among Frenchmen than deGaulle. I told Hull that as the situation appeared to me in continental France, the Vichy government had become as he said a nullity. Laval was a mere Quisling. The mass of the French people, whom we believe friendly to us and hostile to Germany, were not represented at present by anyone whom we recognized as the government of France and so far as I knew there was no one of sufficient control over the population (other than the Germans) who could fulfill the basic condition of recognition which postulates that a government to be recognized must control the country.

On the other hand, I pointed out that the situation was different in Africa where, if our invasion is successful, a situation may arise of a country which Germany does not and can not control and there may arise someone there who can be recognized as the lawful government. Furthermore a situation may very soon arise when the recognition of such a lawful government may help the stabilization of the country and the keeping of it away from the Germans. Hull said he recognized this and we agreed that
we would keep in touch with each other on this question as to when and whether the time has arrived for such recognition. But he was evidently against any recognition of deGaulle for the reasons given above — that deGaulle was already so much in politics in France and Africa and had excited so many enemies there that he could not serve as a rallying post out of which to constitute a government.

We also discussed the military question. I pointed out to them both that, while tactically the United States force had scored a very fine success, they were strategically in a very hazardous position. The chief danger in my opinion lay from Spain consenting to Germany's sending troops through Spain to cut off our line of communication through the Straits of Gibraltar and getting at us through Tangier. Hull said that he fully agreed with this. He had been very much alarmed by the first conference which Ambassador Hays had with the Foreign Minister of Spain (S.D. dispatches of two or three days ago) where the Foreign Minister used language which indicated that, if we invaded French Morocco, Spain would feel she was relieved from neutrality and would be ready to give access to Germany. I told him I had read that dispatch and was similarly alarmed. Hull said he had been reassured by the subsequent message from Franco but that the reassurance he felt was temporary and he believed that down at the bottom there was some secret understanding between Germany and Spain which would permit Germany to go through in case of necessity.
I pointed out the extreme seriousness of the situation which this would create for our troops. We had recognised it as the main hazard of the expedition. Hull asked me if this hazard would be alleviated if we rushed American troops forward to Tunisia to cooperate against Rommel with the British. I told him that so long as the menace existed in Spain I thought that every soldier we sent forward there was an additional liability because our lines of communication were necessarily westward either through the Straits of Gibraltar or through the easily breakable line south of Tangier. I said, "In case you want to rush troops to help against Rommel, by all means let them be British troops for at worst the British have a base in Egypt and we do not".

Hull asked me to find out how many Germans were on the Spanish border according to our calculations.
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When I arrived, Norman Davis was there also for a few minutes on the subject of the Red Cross. He told us that a large number of his Red Cross agents had gone into North Africa with the expedition. He is much concerned about the situation in Casablanca where there is already much typhus and some bubonic and where consequently it is very important that recreation places for the men should be established to keep them out of trouble.

He also suggested that it would be a good move to send a ship with the Red Cross for food for the natives of North Africa in the Casablanca locality. We agreed. Knox agreed to see about getting a ship for this purpose. It was also brought out that two French ships are coming over I think from Martinique loaded with supplies for France. I think, though I am not sure, that the supplies are from us to be traded with France for other articles of her production. This was a matter which was not to be taken care of by us at all but merely the first ship.