

1 FO (L 8028/381/65) 14.1.37.
 In copy of Laming's No. 1383 only report by
 Mr. L. B. Atiyah on New Eastern affair.

Sir Miles Lampson's despatch & paras 1-6 of the enclosed report are very interesting, the general argument being that the maintenance of British prestige in the Near & Middle East depends upon a ^{satisfactory to the Arabs} ~~satisfactory~~ solution being found in Palestine. Failing such a solution it is argued that assistance from the Italians, whose stock is high in the Arab world after the conquest of Abyssinia, would be welcomed for opportunistic motives.

A copy has gone to Palestine.
 A.R. Thomas 20/1

I agree with Mr. Thomas' summary. This is an extraordinarily interesting ^{report} ~~summary~~ - tho' it should be noted that Mr. Atiyah's investigations were carried out in the late summer; and do not take account of the developments of the last two or three months.

Sir Miles Lampson says that the Arab Federation is a dream. But this report shows, in the plainest terms,

t.R.

that in the last resort it is a question of weighing two fears - what the Federation might do if it were possible to create it, as against what will certainly happen if we don't try and create it. The first alternative would have been a venture of faith in the immediate post-war years, but it is the aim of Astryak's report to show that it has now become imperative, and that at the present moment the interests of imperialism are operating in the same direction as the dictates of old war-time policy.

J. S. Bennett
20.1.37

Well worth reading.

S. I. James
21/1

K. W. Blaxter
25/1

Sir M. Lempson seems to think that, with our low prestige & restricted resources, we cannot afford to risk the hostility towards us which he assumes will be aroused in Egypt & the Middle East by a pro-Jewish policy in Palestine. What one would like to see

is an authoritative appreciation of
 dangers & disadvantages to British
 interests of adopting a policy - in the
 hope of conciliating the Arab & Muslim
 world - advice to limit interests.

I shd have thought that F.O. in collaboration
 with Treasury, could produce very
 useful material which might well be
 needed by the Cabinet when they come
 to weigh pros & cons.

John Hillman

Yours truly / 26.1.37
 H.C. Cowell (Short Staff)

28/1/37
 Sir J.S. [unclear]

Very interesting - & in no
 way re-assuring.
 How Govt. have in front of
 them a mighty difficult
 problem. We have in
 these papers an alarming
 appreciation of the dangers
 which threaten if we do not
 take a decision which

does not satisfy the Moslem world. as W. Williams says, what are the actual dangers on the other side from a hostile world-Jewry? The Japs. was talking we some time ago that Jewish 'power' is a very subtle intangible thing, but now the lets very real.

For the moment, we no doubt still wait to hear what views the Royal Commission will present to H. G. - but this is a file which might well be brought up when we are considering action upon their report?

X

ackd
 27.1.37

28/1/37

Yes 28-1-37

2. to Adm Secret - w/c. encl in 1

~~S. F.O~~ _____ E. 8028/381/65 _____ 26.1.37.
 (no printed copy of Mr. Attyah's report)

End 3 is the same as end 1

Pulley. B.V. 31 March
 atore
 O.G.R. Williams
 W. 237

E.T.

Mr. Williams

Brought up.

R.I.

R.77.

31/5

~~31/5~~

B.V. in another month

O.G.R. Williams
 1.4.37 ch...

E.T.

Mr. Davies,

brought up v. x opposite. ? continue
 to wait, pd.

R.T.

3/5.

Another month

~~3/6~~

R.T. Downie

3/5

at...

R.T.

See report

Not very cheerful reading.
 But prestige will have been increased by the recent stroke against the Arab Higher Committee etc.

WGH
 26.10.37

We have a very long way to go and a very uphill job. I am quite sure that partition will either have to be imposed by us or that the mandate will have to curtail, or that we have to leave Palestine altogether. These are the only three alternatives. We shall meet with increasing & not diminishing resistance for some time to come. Ultimately I think it will be decided one way or the other - viz. will Britain or Mussolini be de facto master of the Eastern Mediterranean littoral territories.

WGH
 26.10.37

See report
 27.10.37

Put by GMD 27.10
 at home

S. F.O. ————— E.6780/251/65 ————— 17.11.67.

(no copy of despatch from Cairo, 1268 of 5/11,
covering note by Mr. Attiyah on
Palestinian & Syrian affairs.)

Mr. Attiyah's general analysis of the situation is familiar from previous papers on this file; this report is of interest, however, since it was written (unlike its predecessors) after the dissolution of the Higher Committee etc. In effect Mr. Attiyah's view now is that the situation cannot be explained in terms of "a few political agitators"; and that, as the result of Government's recent action against the Arabs, enhanced prestige in one sense (power based on fear) is more than balanced by depreciated prestige in the other sense (loyalty based on agreement of aims).

His comment on the recent innovation of Arabic broadcasting from the U.K. is also of interest. I take it that what he means is that, unless 'propaganda' in the Bavi sense is broadcast (which I understand is against the policy of H.M.G.), we can only radiate news; the

I think he means rather that news from a British station will be suspect so long as we are thought to be anti-Islam in Palestine [?]

news will not be palatable, and therefore the pro-British effect small. No doubt this point has been considered, but the Middle Eastern reaction is of interest.

Copy has gone to Jerusalem. ? put by

J.S. Bennett
 18.11.37

This is written ^{entirely} ~~entirely~~ from the Arab point of view, ~~with the intention of being sent to the Eastern Dept of the E.O.~~

? As proposed.

Journal in
 19/11

I rather suspect that Mr. Altigal is of Syrian origin. He is clearly in sympathy with the pan-Arab movement, and of Sir Miles Lampson relies on ^{M.S.A.} ~~him~~ as his adviser on the Palestine question the departing tone of the telegram ~~admirable~~ ^{admirable} ~~is~~ ^{is} that the F.O. news from Cairo is not surprising.

? put by

H.G. Dennis
 19.11.37

WOL 22.11.37
 13.11.37
 19/11/37

~~✓~~ F.O. ————— E.6730/351/65 ————— 13.12.37.

(see copy of Cairo desp 1262 of 5/11; note by Mr. Atiyah on Palestinian & Syrian affairs.)

A print of the enclosures to (5).

? sent by
J.P. Bennett
15.12.37

Malin
17/12/37

ance.

✓

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1865.
(52/224/57)

BRITISH EMBASSY,
CAIRO.

5th November, 1937.

Sir,

I have the honour to transmit herewith copy of a note by Samuel Bey Attiyah on conditions in Palestine and Syria as seen by him during his recent holiday in Syria.

2. I would invite attention to his remarks regarding the Arab trend towards Italy owing to British Zionist policy, his views regarding the genuineness of the anti-Zionist rebellion in Palestine and the attitude of the British press in imagining that this revolt is the work of a few political agitators, and finally to his version of the remarks made by Najî el Suedî, brother of the present Iraqi Minister for Foreign Affairs, in his opening speech at the Bludan Conference.

3. With reference to the recent arrangements made regarding British broadcasting from Palestine, it will be noted that Samuel Bey Attiyah thinks that the good results of this enterprise will largely depend on a question of fact, namely Great Britain's policy in Palestine.

4. A copy of this despatch has been forwarded to the Officer Administering the Government of Palestine, Jerusalem.

I have the honour to be,
With the highest respect,

Sir,

Your most obedient, humble servant.

AMBASSADOR.

The Right Honourable
Anthony Eden, M.S., K.P.,
&c., &c., &c.

SITUATION IN SYRIA.

The following notes on conditions prevailing in the "GRAND LIBAN" and "SYRIA" States may be of interest to those interested in the Near East.

The "GRAND LIBAN" continues to very badly suffer:-

(a) FINANCIALLY owing to the fall in the franc, and to the exploitation of its chief resources by French Capital.

(b) POLITICALLY by the forced and unnatural amalgamation of purely Mohammedan districts under Maronite influence.

This discontent on the part of the Mohammedan section of the population will undoubtedly reveal itself in case of any general crisis in which the Near East is implicated.

A constitution has been created for the "GRAND LIBAN" providing for a Parliament to include 62 members (for a population under one million); there was a strong opposition to the present Government, and a bloody struggle between the two parties was expected to take place on the occasion of the elections. However the High Commissioner, on his return from France, warned both parties that the French Government was too busy in more important issues, and did not desire any troubles in Lebanon - and an agreement, based on a proportional division of Parliamentary seats, was concluded. The elections took place peacefully on the 24th but the strife will be resumed on meeting of Parliament.

In the "SYRIA" State, there is more cohesion owing to the crushing majority of Mohammedans. The Druzes of Hauran mountain however, refuse to have a Mohammedan Governor appointed by the Damascus authorities and insist on the recognition of an autonomy for the mountain, and for a Druze Governor, of the Mountain itself, to be appointed.

The difference threatened to take serious dimensions,

/the

This reveals
the Atiyah's
inability.
/m

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- 2 -

the Druzes being reported to be secretly helped and moved by French policy in order to keep the country divided, and to create a strong opposition, in the State.

It was a current rumour in Damascus that France, (and with her Great Britain) did not defend the Syrian cause in the Alexandretta case, as they could and should have done. They attribute this to the anxiety of these two powers not to lose Turkish friendship in case of a War with Italy.

The friendliness shown now in Syria to France is only superficial; and the moment the last French soldier leaves Syria, the Syrian attitude will depend on their own interests and worldly events.

Since the return of Emir Shekib Arslan, ^{he} himself, and friends, have been spreading a propaganda to the effect that it is to the interest of Mohammedans and Druzes to throw in their lot with the Italians in the event of War.

They affirm that Italy's intentions towards them is very friendly, and consist only in assisting them to get rid of the British and French influence, to help them financially and Militarily, to organize themselves into an Arab confederation (to become in future an Arab Empire) - Italy and Germany would undertake to respect and guarantee their independence; and as such they would play a role in the Near East's politics as a third factor in the Rome-Berlin policy.

This propaganda is credited owing to the readiness of the population to believe it; and because they find Italy's policy directed against the British whom they look upon, now, as the enemy of Arabs and Islam due to the British Zionist policy.

It should be remembered that Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians have always formed one race and one country;

/and

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and any oppression which they believe is befalling one section of them, is felt by the others - This feelings of wrong having been done to themselves, and to their brethren in Palestine make them only too ready to believe and catch on such Italian propaganda.

It is a great pity that Great Britain who held the unique occasion to emerge from the Great War as the champion and supporter of Arabs and Islam, should be now looked upon as their enemy - Every good wisher of the British Government hopes that they might realize the mistake of their Zionist policy before it is too late - The Anti-Zionist rebellion in Palestine is genuine, and not the work of a few political agitators, headed by the Mufti, as the British Press wrongly represents the case - The whole Mohammedan Arab world resents the Zionist policy, and the agitation in Palestine will never die down. The present extreme repressive measures renders Great Britain more unpopular and will not help in remedying the situation. The Jews themselves should realize that if, left to themselves in a world's crisis, their lot would be an unenviable one; surrounded as they will be by Arab independent and armed states.

The congress held at "Beloudan" (Syria) last August, to discuss the Palestinian question, was fairly representative. Influential leaders who have interests at present with Great Britain and France, naturally did not attend; but the congress had the good will of everybody. The opening speech of the Irakian leader - Naji El Suedi - was significant. In communicating it to the Press the strong expressions he actually used were modified to appear ^{well} mild. He actually said that "When the British Staff, in case of a war, sit down to count their friends, they would certainly not find Mesopotamia included in their list; also the rest of Arab states - as long as Great Britain persists in her Zionist policy".

is he, though?
Mr. Oliver (a British Missionary who is accused of being a Secret British Agent) was refused admission to attend the conference.

/The

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- 4 -

The speech, on the subject of Palestine, by Wasaf Pasha Ghali, proves also that Egypt could not indefinitely remain indifferent to what is going on.

I read that Great Britain has arranged to use a British broadcasting station for the purpose of counteracting the effects of Italian - Arabic propaganda - the credulity and good results would greatly depend on Great Britain's Islamic policy as represented in their treatment of Palestine.

The Sudan Agency,
Cairo, 50-10-37.

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EASTERN (PALESTINE).

September 13, 1937.

CONFIDENTIAL.

SECTION 2.

[E 5360/351/65]

Copy No.

33

Mr. Kelly to Mr. Eden.—(Received September 13.)

(No. 1065.)

Sir,

Ramleh, September 9, 1937.

(3)

WITH reference to Sir Miles Lampson's despatch No. 1383 of the 17th December last, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith copy of a further note on Near Eastern affairs by Edward Attiyah.⁽¹⁾

2. In section 2 of his note Edward Attiyah expressed the opinion that the Syrian National party in the Lebanon, in spite of accusations often levelled against it, is not inspired by Italy but would be an admirable instrument for Italy to use in an emergency owing to its Fascist character.

3. He thinks that Italian propaganda has not made much progress in Palestine, but that Italian aid might be solicited by the Arabs in their struggle against the British Zionist policy (see section 5).

4. It is obvious that the Arabs, as indicated in section 6, would prefer the continuance of the mandate over an undivided Palestine, with restricted immigration of Jews, to partition, which Edward Attiyah considers is unacceptable to the Arabs. It might, however, become acceptable if cloaked by some such scheme as that which Nuri Pasha has put forward (see my despatch No. 1067 of to-day's date).

5. With regard to section 7 Nuri Pasha has also drawn attention to the fact that the more developed Palestine Arabs objects to being put under the more primitive Transjordan administration (see my despatch No. 1067 of to-day's date).

6. With reference to the last paragraph of section 10, I have no information of this alleged corruption of Osman Moharrem by Mr. Gibson.

7. It is satisfactory to note that the Sudanese enjoyed being entertained more in England than in Egypt. I would draw attention to the recommendations in section 15 that frequent opportunity should be given to the Sudanese of visiting and forming contact with England.

I have, &c.

D. V. KELLY.

Enclosure.

(Secret.)

Notes on the Near East by the Intelligence Officer, Khartum, July-August 1937.

1. *Syria: Religious Differences.*

It is still expected that the French Senate will shortly ratify the Syrian and Lebanese treaties with France, although the present French Government does not seem to like them as much as the Blum Ministry did. It is now quite clear that the Christians of the Lebanon are very mistrustful of the Moslem Arabs of Syria proper, and are likely to remain so for a long time to come. They have no real sympathy with the Arab movement, which they regard as being largely Islamic in character and therefore prejudicial to the Christian minorities in the Near East. Consequently, they believe that autonomy based on a perpetual alliance with France is the most satisfactory solution for their national problem, being their only guarantee against declining into the position of an oppressed minority among a Moslem population still largely backward and fanatical. Even those Christians who a few years ago tried to believe in the possibility of union with the Moslems in an Arab National Movement have now come to this conclusion. The problem is further complicated by the fact that while the Christians in the Lebanon are solidly against the incorporation of their country in the Syrian State (where they would be a minority), the Moslem minority in the Lebanon is equally opposed to continued separation from Syria. Religious differences in Syria continue to dominate the political situation.

⁽¹⁾ Extract only printed.

[105 n-2]

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2. *The Syrian National Party.*

An exception to this general thesis is the attitude of the Syrian National party, a youth movement formed a little over a year ago by a highly sophisticated Syrian Christian, Antoun Saadi. It is still of little importance, but bears sufficient resemblance to similar recent movements in Europe to be viewed as capable of startling development. The principles and organisation of this party are very much on Fascist lines, and indeed when the party became known to the Government it was believed that its inspiration and funds were Italian. This, however, has not been proved, nor, in my belief, is it true—so far. The movement, I believe, sprang up as a spontaneous local effort, though clearly the ideological inspiration came from Central Europe. Italian help and possibly control might come into it at any moment, particularly in a crisis. It would be an admirable instrument for Italy to use in an emergency.

3. *The S.N.P.: Strength and Prospects.*

At present, however, the party (which numbers between 15,000 and 25,000 members, chiefly young men, recruited from all classes) is fanatically anti-foreigner in its assertion of Syrian nationalism. Its particular objectives are Syrian national unity, embracing Christians and Moslems, and independence of foreign control. It appears to have achieved a large measure of success among the youth of the country (both Christians and Moslems) since its foundation. Such a form of idealism is easy to inculcate in young people, but it remains to be seen whether this idealism will achieve any lasting success against existing religious divisions, if the party does not obtain power in the near future. This seems very improbable at the moment, although the present internal condition of Syria favours the growth of such a movement. Acute economic distress aggravated by the fall of the franc, the openly scandalous corruption of the French Administration, the confusion in public opinion caused by internal sectarian strife; these seem to present an admirable conjunction of circumstances for the success of a Fascist movement. It is clear that the Government regards the growth of this party with some alarm, for it has several times imprisoned its "Leader" and rounded up all the principal organisers. As long as the Syrian Government is under the protection of France, however, it is difficult to imagine how such a party could seize power, unless some other foreign State were to support it at the critical moment (compare Spain). Incidentally, the frontiers of the Syrian nation, as conceived by this party, are the Taurus Mountains on the north and the Suez Canal on the south; that is to say, it includes Palestine, where the party, I believe, has a branch.

The Syrian National party is not well viewed in other Arab countries (apart from Palestine), because of its emphasis on Syrian nationalism against pan-Arabism, its advocacy of the isolation, and, so to speak, self-sufficiency of the Syrian national problem.

4. *The French Administration.*

On only one point there is unanimity in Syria—the unsatisfactory character of the French Administration. This is no mere matter of emotional hostility to a foreign régime, for the Maronites (the Christian majority in the Lebanon), who for centuries had been so pro-French that their only "nationalist" aspiration before the war was a French occupation of Syria, are now the first to want to get rid of French rule, which they openly denounce as scandalous. They are still, however, desirous of having the protection of France in the form of an alliance; though there are some who make no secret of a strong wish to substitute the British for the French as an ally or mandatory Power.

5. *Palestine: Moslem and Christian Unity.*

In Palestine, on the other hand, the religious rift between Moslems and Christians has on the surface been completely bridged by their sincerely united opposition to the Zionist menace. I say "on the surface," because beneath it, the Christians of Palestine, no less than their co-religionists in Syria, mistrust the Moslems, have little sympathy for the cause of an all-Arab union, and fear to become a minority in an independent Arab State. But, and it is a considerable "but," they are absolutely at one with the Moslems in their resistance to Zionism. Against the Jews they are Arabs, and their fear of Zionism, and

opposition to it, are (with a few exceptions) every whit as determined and sincere as that of the Moslems. It may be asked how in these circumstances the Palestine Christians reconcile their opposition to Zionism with their underlying mistrust of the Moslems. The answer is that they are against Zionism, but not against the British mandate or some other form of ultimate British control that would guarantee them the necessary protection in an Arab Palestine. This is true of the majority of Palestinian Christians. A small element, however, embittered by British policy in Palestine to the point of hatred, and seduced by crude Italian propaganda, displays, to-day, open leanings towards the Duce. It is significant that the individuals who show these pro-Italian sympathies are mostly Roman Catholics. Generally speaking, however, Italian propaganda has not achieved any appreciable success in convincing the Arabs either of the sincerity of the Italian championship of the cause of Islam, or of the superiority of Italian to British colonial administration; but this does not preclude the possibility, in a suitable emergency, of Italian aid being accepted or even solicited by the Arabs in their struggle against British Zionist policy.

6. Reactions to Partition.

The first reaction of the Arabs to the partition scheme recommended by the commission was one of intense disappointment and hostility. Not only did they in general feel bitterly opposed to the principle of partition, but they were genuinely aghast at the manner in which it was proposed to divide up the country, and at the share allotted to them.

For the Arabs there are two ways of looking at the Palestine problem. The first is to envisage it as it stands to-day, recognising, that is to say, certain accomplished facts, and to be prepared to accept a solution on this basis. The second is to go on looking at the problem as it arose twenty years ago, to go on denying the very basis on which it arose as having been unjust and invalid; and therefore to refuse to compromise on the basis of the *fait accompli*.

The spontaneous emotional approach of the Arabs is, naturally enough, the second of the two, and the logic of the case they present is very simple, and, to them, conclusive. It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, for them to recognise a fact which they have combated from its very inception, which has been accomplished against their will, and which finally demands of them the sacrifice of nearly one-half of their country. The emotional resistance to the situation is really formidable and, one can safely say, unanimous. For expropriation of home and native soil is a challenge to the most primitive and elementary instincts, and will therefore rouse not only the politically conscious population of the towns, but even the most backward elements of the rural population, who could not be moved on a more sophisticated and complex issue. Indeed, it seems to me that the partition scheme will, because of this, encounter more general opposition than the alternative arrangement (though by no means a solution) which has existed till now, and whereby the Jews had access to the whole of Palestine and could acquire land anywhere in it by purchase from individual Arabs. The danger to the Arabs of ultimate Jewish domination over the whole country, inherent in this arrangement, was of a more abstract and less tangible nature than the immediate loss of soil manifest in the partition scheme, though this loss is limited to one part of the country and leaves the Arabs sovereign and secure in the other part. Moreover, there is something final—an irrevocable surrender—in the partition scheme, from which the Arabs shrink violently. From many conversations I had with Arabs in Palestine and Syria, I gathered that they would definitely prefer the continuance of the mandate over an undivided Palestine, with a restricted immigration of Jews (the temporary solution proposed by the commission), in spite of the independence that partition would give them.

So much for the principle of partition, against which all the Arabs feel so strongly—I say “feel,” for there is an element which, subordinating emotion to rational consideration, is willing to accept the principle of partition as the only possible solution, although uncompromisingly rejecting the boundaries of the particular scheme recommended by the commission. From all that I saw and heard, I am convinced that the Arabs will resist to the utmost this scheme, which seems to them, not without cause, to give the Jews practically all that is worth having in Palestine; the fertile plains, water supplies and ports of the north. Jaffa, the one port allotted to the Arabs (apart from Gaza, which is of very

secondary importance), is to be doubly enclosed within the Jewish area and the corridor leading to Jerusalem; and Haifa, it is argued, though theoretically retained under the mandate, will almost certainly become Jewish.

7. *Union with Transjordan.*

Nor does the prospect of union with Transjordan under the Emir Abdullah seem to the Palestine Arabs sufficiently attractive to outweigh the disadvantages of the rest of the scheme. The sophisticated Arab leaders (particularly the Mufti) regard the Emir as a backward bedouin unfit to reign over their country; and they fail to see why the Arab world should be required to go on providing thrones for the House of Hashem. They were, moreover, greatly alarmed lest the Emir should succumb to this imperial bait and promote intrigues in favour of the partition scheme, a fear which at one moment seemed only too well-grounded. The Emir clearly was not averse from a partition scheme that promised him the throne of a respectable-sized kingdom, and the Nashashibi party in Jerusalem, in order to spite their enemy the Mufti, showed themselves for a moment disposed to approve partition and support the Emir's cause. Fear, however, of the rising tide of national sentiment against the scheme caused them to recant immediately, and they joined the tide.

8. *Prospects of Agreement.*

In conclusion, I would say that the partition scheme as it stands will be determinedly resisted by the Arabs, and that any attempt to impose it on them by force of arms would create a very serious situation in the Near East, a situation which in the event of a European war would cause England considerable embarrassment. Iraq (with ambitions of heading ultimately an Arab federation) has shown itself greatly interested; and even the Egyptian Government, which till now has maintained an attitude of extreme moderation because of Nahas Pasha's desire for friendly co-operation with England, would be driven to intervene by the pressure of public opinion and the desire to preserve its prestige in the Mahometan world, if physical force had to be employed against the Arabs of Palestine.

There is just a possibility, on the other hand, that if the terms of the scheme are considerably modified, the Arabs might in the end accept it, or at least allow it to be carried out, as the least objectionable solution of their problem.

9. *Decline of British Prestige.*

I should like here to say a few words about British prestige in the Near East. In Syria and Palestine it seemed to me to have somewhat recovered from the blow administered to it by the Italian conquest of Abyssinia. To this recovery no doubt the rearmament programme has contributed powerfully. But the recovery is by no means complete. The old impression of invulnerability has gone, and while there are many who believe that England can still hold her own in the Mediterranean, there are just as many who question her ability to do so. So much for England's international prestige. As for her "internal" prestige with the Arab Nationalists, there is very little of that left. Confidence in her probity, respect for her word, have vanished completely, while fear of her striking power is almost totally absent, since it is believed that in present circumstances she dare not strike. The leniency displayed by the Palestine Government during the disturbances, and what the Arabs claim as victories against British troops in the engagements that took place, have engendered in them a conspicuous attitude of defiant boldness.

In this connexion I may mention what a Syrian friend who was in Iraq this summer said to me. He was telling me about the purchase of twenty military aeroplanes by the Iraqi Government from Italy a few weeks ago, and how when two of them were damaged on arrival, the Italian Government promptly offered to have them repaired at its own expense. I asked him whether this purchase of military equipment from Italy was not contrary to the spirit of the treaty with England. "The Iraqians," he answered, "don't care a bit about England any more. They are neither afraid of her, nor amicably disposed towards her, and they treat with open contempt the Englishmen who are still in Iraq."

View
changed
CR17

No. 1583.
(181/12/36)

E 8028
29 DEC 1936

E 8028/351
THE RESIDENCY,
CAIRO,
December 17, 1936.

Sir,

I have the honour to transmit herewith a note on Near Eastern affairs written at Khartoum by Mr. M.S. Attiyah, the Sudan Government Intelligence Officer, after a visit he paid to Egypt, Palestine and Syria during last summer.

2. Mr. Attiyah was educated at Victoria College, Alexandria, from which he graduated to Brasenose College, Oxford.

3. Mr. Attiyah's report dwells first on the weakening of Great Britain's position in the Eastern Mediterranean owing to the general native interpretations of Italy's successful Abyssinian adventure and to Spanish developments. However, he believes that the majority of thinking people in these parts view with apprehension the possibility of a British eclipse, and would still be prepared to support Great Britain in any conflict between her and the Fascist Powers, provided a solution of the Palestine problem could be found acceptable to the Arabs. The failure to find such a solution must, he thinks, involve a recrudescence of armed hostility on a larger scale involving other Arab lands.

4. He then suggests that, in addition to the settlement of the Palestinian question in a manner acceptable to the Arabs, Great Britain and France, in order to make more secure Arab co-operation, might sponsor the creation of some sort

The Right Honourable
Anthony Eden, M.C., M.P.,
etc., etc., etc.,

/or

E.

of Arab Federation under their aegis. This, I say record, is an old dream which seems no more practicable now than seventeen years ago.

5. I need not dwell on Mr. Attiyah's picture of Egypt after the signature of the treaty. It is on the whole an accurate one, but it has already been presented to you in frequent reports from Mr. Kelly and myself.

6. The statement regarding the persecution of the Copts must be taken with a grain of salt. Many Muslims, on the contrary, are complaining that, owing to Sakras's position, Copts are at present being favoured at the expense of Muslims. This is indeed almost an obsession with the Prince Regent, who never fails to allude to it in his conversations with me.

7. With reference to the suggestion that Ahmed Maher was excluded by Mahas from the dinner given by the ex-Khedive to the latter at Carlisbad, it is possible that the exclusion was only due to the fact that Abbas Hilmi Pasha has not been on good terms with the Maher family generally. I draw this inference from certain information given me here by one of the ex-Khedive's intimates.

8. Mr. Attiyah's impressions regarding Egyptian intentions towards the Sudan are reassuring. He thinks that the Egyptians will lay stress on Egypto-Sudanese fraternisation rather than on a more active Egyptian share in the Condominium.

9. With regard to the more important part of Mr. Attiyah's note, namely that dealing with the Palestine question, I have, on several occasions during the present year, touched on its dangers to our position generally in the Near East. There appears to be a consensus of opinion among competent observers that the Arabs will not acquiesce peacefully in any solution of the question which does not

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assure a continuance of Arab predominance in Palestine. If His Majesty's Government are unable to admit such a solution, then it would seem advisable to be prepared beforehand for the consequences. If, after the Royal Commission's report, His Majesty's Government feel compelled to adopt a solution unacceptable to the Arabs, it is generally anticipated that there will be a recrudescence of trouble either in the near future or later when the Arabs have recovered from the strain of last summer's struggle, and that the reactions in neighbouring Arab countries will be wider and stronger than during the conflict now suspended by a sort of truce.

10. It will be remembered that only an amelioration of Anglo-Egyptian relations through the negotiations for, and subsequent conclusion of, an Anglo-Egyptian treaty, together with an easing of the Anglo-Italian tension through our unavoidable acquiescence in the Italian victory in Abyssinia, enabled us to withdraw troops from Egypt in order to provide essential reinforcements for Palestine. The events of this year seem to show that we have not enough forces available to deal with serious trouble in more than one quarter at the same time. No doubt any such limitation will be present to the minds of His Majesty's Government in determining their future policy in the Near East.

11. Even supposing, however, that Arab exhaustion were to preclude an immediate resumption of the armed struggle, an unsettled Palestine would still remain a permanent factor of disturbance in Arab lands and even in Egypt. This factor will always be weighing in the scales against co-operation with us among numerous elements who otherwise would, as Mr. Attiyah points out, be only too anxious to

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co-operate with us if we could give them a chance. Moreover, it would seem probable that Muslim countries of the Near East, excluding Turkey, must, sooner or later, be drawn into collective or separate action in favour of the Palestinian Arabs. For it must be remembered that these countries are not only actuated by a sense of Muslim or Arab solidarity, but also by real apprehensions that a Jewish absorption of Palestine would inevitably involve overflows of Jews and Jewish influences into neighbouring countries.

12. It would not be safe to rely much on local factors tending to pre-occupy Arab states with their own local nationalisms and thus to indispose them to co-operate with the Arabs of Palestine. Factors such as the establishment of the new régime in Iraq by coup d'état and the traditional isolation of Egypt may operate for a time against co-operation with the Palestinian Arabs, but in the long run the Muslim states of the Near East cannot remain indifferent to an Arab eclipse in Palestine.

13. Here I would invite attention to Reuters' telegram of December 18th from Jerusalem according to which the Arab leaders in Jerusalem propose to summon a Congress representative of all Arab countries in the Near and Middle East to meet in Cairo and that Ajuni Bey Abdul Hadi is understood to be leaving for Cairo to discuss the project with Mustafa el Mahas Nasha. I have telegraphed to His Majesty's High Commissioner in Palestine to ask if he can confirm this: but have at present not received his reply.

14. The Prince Regent asked the Oriental Secretary on December 18th whether he had any other information on the subject, and, on receiving a negative answer, said that he too had none. He added that, though a couple of days
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ago he had had a long conversation with Nahas on many different subjects, including that of the treaty with ~~Saudi~~ Saudi-Arabia, the Prime Minister had made no mention of any idea of such a Congress here. His Royal Highness concluded, therefore, that the Egyptian Government had had no previous knowledge of the project.

15. I need hardly dwell on the inconvenience of such a Congress in Cairo. But we must remember that Nahas, in addition to a certain vanity which is pushing him to seek a prominent rôle in this Arab drama, cannot afford to be too unsympathetic to appeals of Egypt's Muslim neighbours. Egyptians, proud of their recent independence and their predominant economic and cultural rôle in the Near East, have long been proclaiming the necessity of Egypt's playing a more active part in co-operation with Arab lands. Administrative measures even have been contemplated for this purpose, e.g. formation of an Oriental Section in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for organisation of propaganda in the East. Even a well-disposed Egyptian Government would find it difficult to evade playing a part in a struggle so intensely interesting to the Arab and Muslim world. Their opponents, always on the look-out for pretexts to promote their partisan aims, would be quick to seize on what they would no doubt qualify as subservience to the British and betrayal of Muslim interests. The Government would probably find it difficult not to make some sort of gesture in favour of the Arabs with a view to silencing the clamour of their opponents.

16. The situation indicated above, while disquieting to us from the point of view of our relations with the Arab States and Egypt, becomes even more disturbing in view of

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the powerful assistance which it is affording to Italy in her propaganda and penetration in Arabian lands and even Egypt.

17. His Majesty's Government are fully informed of the propaganda, deliberately hostile to us, conducted by Italy in all these lands. The dangerous possibility of Italy establishing herself in ^{Saudi} Saudi-Arabia through the training and controlling of ^{Saudi} Saudi aviation has formed the subject of correspondence with His Majesty's Minister at Jeddah (see correspondence ending with your despatch No. 1132 of December 2nd, 1936). Equally notorious is the Italian penetration of the Yemen through her agents disguised in civil functions (e.g. doctors) - through her intrigues in view of the succession of the old and sick Imam - through her provision of arms and financial facilities - through the reality of the menace she presents to the Yemen since the establishment of her East African empire. It is possible that the Imam's death is not so near as is repeatedly predicted, but his eventual disappearance is likely to afford an opportunity for much fishing in troubled waters caused by rivalries among the Imam's sons and certain tribal elements. Italy will, no doubt, make the most of any opportunities afforded to her by any internal confusion in the Yemen.

18. It is obvious that all this Italian effort will be greatly facilitated by the continuance and development of Arab hostility to Great Britain owing to an unsettled situation in Palestine. The Arabs are aware of the Italian danger to themselves but despair is a bad counsellor and, if the choice were to appear to them to lie between the Zionist absorption in Palestine, with its menace to the

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Arab world generally, and of co-operation with Italy against Great Britain and France, who, after all, are in the position of standing in the way of Arab aspirations, it is greatly to be feared that the second alternative might appear to them the least fatal.

19. It is not within my province to express opinions regarding the internal problem of Palestine, and it is only on the external reactions to that problem that I am venturing to dwell. Whatever may be the necessities of the Palestinian issue, I would earnestly urge that, anyhow, it be not examined in isolation from our whole position in the Near East, and that we consider carefully whether we have the means of maintaining our position in the Near East against an Italian thrust facilitated by Arab co-operation, based on despair of us and an apprehensive respect of Italian power as demonstrated by the conquest of Abyssinia.

20. I am sending copies of this despatch to His Majesty's High Commissioner for Palestine, His Majesty's Ambassador at Baghdad, and His Majesty's Minister at Jeddah.

I have the honour to be,

With the highest respect,

Sir,

Your most obedient, humble servant,

(Signed) ...

HIGH COMMISSIONER.

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S E C R E T.

APPENDIX TO S.M.I.S. No.54 (see para.847)

NOTE BY THE INTELLIGENCE OFFICER DATED 31st OCTOBER, 1936, ON IMPRESSIONS AND INFORMATION GATHERED DURING HIS VISITS TO EGYPT, SYRIA AND PALESTINE IN SUMMER OF 1936.

1. There have been three predominant topics of interest in the Near East this summer:

- (a) the Italo-Abyssinian affair and its termination,
- (b) the Palestine troubles, and
- (c) the treaties between England and Egypt and between France and Syria.

The treaties are the only bright spot in an otherwise very gloomy picture.

2. I am sorry to state that as a result of the Italo-Abyssinian business British prestige has suffered an extremely severe set-back in the Near East. Italy's bold and successful adventure is regarded everywhere as a serious reverse for the British Empire; for the League aspect of the matter is considered to be nothing more than an elaborate piece of window-dressing designed to camouflage an essentially imperialist duel between Britain and Italy - and for the first time the Arab and Islamic world has seen the British Empire successfully challenged over a big issue in and around the Mediterranean basin. The Spanish civil war, coming immediately on top of the Italian victory in Abyssinia, and implying (as it seems to most observers to imply) another Fascist triumph to the detriment of British and French Democracy, has unfortunately enhanced the newly created impression of England's vulnerability, so that many people in Egypt, Palestine and Syria are wondering whether really England's supremacy in the Mediterranean Basin and the East is not approaching its end. Everywhere one comes across feelings of insecurity and fear - chiefly experienced by intelligent and thinking persons, for in spite of all the clashes that have occurred since the War between Near East nationalism and British policy, there are

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few thinking individuals in that part of the world who do not still believe that British ascendancy is the ultimate preserver of order and stability in the East, and who (provided Great Britain is willing to satisfy some of their deepest aspirations) would not dread the prospect of its being seriously challenged.

3. In order, however, that the Moslem peoples of the Near East should give their support to England in any conflict that might break out between her and the Fascist powers, one imperative condition must be fulfilled - namely the solution (if a solution can be found at this stage) of the Palestine problem in a manner acceptable to the Arabs. For Palestine has definitely become the focus of Arab-Moslem feeling all over the Near East - the treatment of her problem will react profoundly on Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, Arabia and even Egypt.

4. The Arabs of Palestine, supported by their co-religionists in all the neighbouring Arab states, are now determined to fight to the death against the policy embodied in the Balfour declaration. They have made up their minds that they will not allow their country to become a national home for the Jews, absorbing more and more Jewish immigrants, and coming more and more under Jewish political control. The strike they carried out, and the determined self-sacrificing desperation that was behind it, and that one saw in every Arab one spoke to in Palestine this summer is a fairly clear indication of this back-to-the-wall resolve.

The cessation of the strike is nothing more than an armistice. The country for the time being was tired: 20,000 troops had arrived in Palestine, and the orange export season was at hand. If the strike was allowed to ruin this season the country would have been financially weakened to a disastrous degree. Moreover the Royal

/Commission

seemed to offer a chance which the leaders on the advice of the Arab King decided to take. Should, however, the British Government refuse to modify their policy - in other words should they decide to uphold the policy of the Balfour declaration, it is practically certain that the trouble will break out again - probably on a larger scale, involving the active co-operation of the Arabs in Iraq, Transjordan, etc.

5. In order, however, to gain the goodwill of the Arabs of the Near East to an extent that would make Britain's position among them really secure in the more or less improbable event of another European War, a more comprehensive and constructive policy than the mere pacification of Palestine is required. The Arabs, ^{still} clinging ardently to their dream of an Arab State, or, at least, a federation of Arab States. They bitterly remember that England promised to help them achieve this ideal during the War, and accuse her of having betrayed them at the conclusion of it. It is certain that if another War breaks out, while the Arabs are still feeling as they are today, they will refuse to believe any more promises and while harbouring no love for Italy or Germany, will pursue a purely opportunist line and seize the occasion to realize their long cherished ambitions in whatever way they can do so. Today there is not a single Arab in Palestine who has any love for Italy. Yet it is an open secret that the Palestine revolt has been helped by Italy with money and arms.

6. In view of all this one wonders whether it would not be possible for Britain and France, acting jointly (since it is the two of them that control the destinies of the Arabs - and since moreover it is more than likely that they will find themselves once again fighting a common battle in the event of another war) to sponsor the creation of some sort of an Arab State Federation under /their

Did they ever
promise anything
to the Arabs?
Ours

my
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their egis. France has now signed a treaty with Syria - England has a treaty with Iraq. Palestine is, of course, the chief difficulty, but if that was overcome, even perhaps without the co-operation of France, Britain might be able to do something along these lines.

EGYPT AND THE TREATY.

7. As was to be expected the Treaty has on the whole been well received in Egypt. The opposition to it among some of the minority groups (one can scarcely call them parties) is of a largely factions nature - although there are a number of individual politicians and journalists in the ranks of the minority who are imbued with the constitutional necessity of organising an opposition immediately in the interests of democratic government, and who not unnaturally see in the Treaty the first legitimate target for their criticisms.
8. The Sudan part of the Treaty is regarded as being rather vague, and there is considerable confusion of thought as to how it will be implemented e.g. number of troops to be returned, number of Egyptians to be employed in administrative posts in the Sudan, the exact functions of the Senior Egyptian Officer, etc. etc.
9. The post of Inspector General of Egyptian Irrigation is likely to go to Abd el Qawi Bey Ahmed, who from our point of view (as well as from the Egyptian) would be an excellent choice. I saw Abd el Qawi Bey himself, and he told me privately that he was hoping to get the appointment, the only consideration militating against him being the fact that he was not a Wafdist. As however the Wafd is somewhat poor in first class men of the type of Abd el Qawi Bey, Mahas will have to recruit a few servants from outside the Wafd ranks, and Abd el Qawi Bey may well be one of them.
10. The Minority Groups as well as patriotic individual observers view the future with considerable misgivings.

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They rightly hold that the next few years will be a decisive period in Egypt's history. The responsibility for what happens in Egypt can no longer be laid on the British Government. It is now exclusively held by the Egyptians themselves, and everything depends on how the Wafd is going to conduct itself. The omens are none too good, but one of course must make allowances for the initial period. Everywhere one hears of disquieting signs - and often one hears them from intelligent and disillusioned Egyptians. In the first place the Copts are being persecuted, and this in spite of the prominent part they have played in the Wafd, and of the fact that they have two Ministers in the Cabinet, one of whom, Makram Naha, is known to dominate Nahas. Nahas himself is not fanatical, but there is still a good deal of fanaticism among his followers, and Makram is too careful of his position and popularity to take any risks on behalf of his co-religionists.

Again private influence, nepotism and corruption are extremely rife, and that old evil the unjust distribution of irrigation water in the Provinces is becoming very acute - Every Deputy who owns agricultural land uses his influence over the local irrigation authorities to obtain preferential treatment, and sometimes the Deputy's wishes are confirmed by an order from the Minister.

ii. It is, of course, only human that the Wafd reaching the land of milk and honey after so many years in the wilderness, should desire to enjoy some personal refreshment on their arrival. One must not forget that even in enlightened European democracies (the few that remain of them) party followers have to be rewarded on the attainment of office by their party; or that in France for instance, the private influence of the deputies is often scandalously exerted for personal ends. The British are too often inclined to judge conditions in the East by the

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But see para 6 of Sir Miles Lampson's despatches

cf the Resolutions of the Council, 25th Dec.!

by the Wafd?

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admittedly austere standards of public life in England. Their perspective would be more correct and their outlook more tolerant if they adopted America or France as a standard of comparison. A much more serious danger is the existence of the new student organisations.

14. Wearing coloured shirts, these bodies of unruly young men have now definitely learned the Fascist secret of imposing an imperium in imperio by means of organised terrorism. I heard during my stay in Cairo that several opponents of the Treaty had been threatened by the Blue Shirts (Wafdists) with physical violence if they aired their views too freely; while Makram, I was told, was believed to be in danger of being assassinated by the Green Shirts, who held him responsible for the Treaty of which they did not approve.

15. The split in the Wafd itself (Mahas and Makram versus Maher and Mokrasbi) is more acute than it ever has been. Abd el Qawi Bey told me that when Mahas, Makram and Maher were at Carlsbad this summer after the signing of the Treaty, the ex-Khedive sent a message to Mahas inviting the three of them to dinner - Mahas' answer was that he and Makram would be pleased to dine with Effendina, but that Maher need not be with them, and in spite of the Khedive's expostulations, the venerable Leader insisted on pulling out the President of the Chamber of Deputies.

It is quite likely that this split will one day come to a head, in which event both factions will probably try to establish a dictatorship with the help of the Blue Shirts. Maher and Mokrasbi will not come into the open yet, as they realise that the magic of Mahas' name with the masses would be too much for them at the present stage - but if the people become dissatisfied through maladministration, and Mahas begins to lose in office the hold which he developed in opposition under the blows of Sidky's policemen, then these two masters of secret organisation and the

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political plot (it is Nakrashi actually who controls the party machinery of the Wafd) might decide to strike at their leader.

14. The chief trouble with Egypt is that its political and civil life is still controlled by that old clique of politicians who were either brought up in the traditions of the corrupt Turkish School or received their training in the demagogic days of the nationalist movement. A new generation of public-spirited civil servants is beginning to appear, but it is still small, and it will be some time before it displaces the older clique. The most outstanding personality of this new generation is Amin Osman, the new Under-Secretary for Finance, who before long will be in the Cabinet.

THE EGYPTIAN ATTITUDE TO THE SUDAN UNDER THE NEW REGIME.

15. For some time to come, at least, the official Egyptian attitude to the Sudan will, I believe, be correct. Nubas means to behave himself and create a good impression: and it is unlikely that the implementation of the Treaty will cause us any trouble. The Egyptians will now concentrate on developing ties with the Sudan - visits, financial help to schools, possibly (though not very likely) economic projects, etc. Occasionally, of course, we may have embarrassing incidents, outbursts of indiscretions, etc. such as may very likely attend on the proposed visit to us this winter of 100 Egyptian students.

There will be at the beginning, that is to say, a good deal of fraternisation, repeated emphasis on the ties that bind the two countries together etc. As, however, the Sudanese themselves would not welcome any suggestion that the treaty has given Egypt new rights in the Sudan, and as the Egyptians are anxious not to appear to their darker cousins to be claiming any sort of right over them, they will, I think, exercise caution and restraint. The

/Egyptians

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Egyptians have been made to realise (by the "Fagr" articles, by Sheikh Ahmed Osman el Qadi's conversations in Egypt, etc) that any over-insistence by them on their share in the Condominium would stress their character as rulers in Sudanese eyes: and that the Sudanese would resent their appearance in this rôle. Hence the stress, from their side, will be not so much on their active share in the Condominium as on fraternisation under the protection of the Condominium.

And personally, I believe that any excess of interest they show in the Sudan during the next few years as a result of the Treaty will gradually decrease as the novelty of the new regime wears off.
