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March 20, 1961

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WASHINGTON TALKS: APRIL, 1961

MIDDLE EAST

Brief by Foreign Office

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23 MAR 1961
E1072/113

Talking Points

(to be made if opportunity occurs)

1. CENTO

We are very glad that Mr. Rusk is to attend the Ministerial Meeting at the end of April. We hope that the Americans may be able, at that meeting, to reassure the regional members of the continued United States support of the organisation. This is particularly important in the case of Iran in view of the intensive propaganda conducted by the Soviet radio against Iran's ties with the West. The Shah shows no sign of giving in to this but needs all the support the Western Powers can give him.

2. Israel Nuclear Reactor

(a) It is important to try to ensure that the secret nuclear installation which the Israelis are building near Beersheba with French help cannot be employed to provide the Israelis with an independent nuclear weapons capacity.

(b) It is almost equally important to reassure the Arab countries that Israel will not be able to use the Beersheba installation in this way. Public assurances of a general nature, such as the Israel and French Governments have given, and references to undisclosed 'safeguards', are insufficient to lull Arab suspicions.

(c) President Nasser has said that if Israel acquires atomic weapons the United Arab Republic will get them "at any cost", even if this means abandoning non-alignment.

(d) A step in the right direction, and probably the least that would make any real impact on Arab opinion, would be for the Israelis to invite the application of IAEA safeguards to any equipment in the Beersheba installation that could be used for nuclear weapons manufacture.

(e) But Ben Gurion has said he will not accept IAEA safeguards while there are other countries that do not do so. Can we put pressure on him? Could we and the Americans get really tough if this were necessary?

(f) In addition to accepting "credible" safeguards, the Israelis should invite foreign scientists to visit the site and see exactly what reactors and associated installations are being constructed. The Americans have been told by Mr. Ben Gurion that he will consider this urgently if he gets back into office, but this implies considerable delay. Such visits are, of course, not a substitute for safeguards but complementary to them.

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(g) It may be difficult to put heavy pressure on Mr. Ben Gurion with an election in the offing but any delay increases the risk that the Arabs will base their own plans, and orient their political thinking, on the assumption that Israel intends to produce nuclear weapons.

(h) M. Coave de Murville shares our concern and our views about safeguards. The French Government, if we consult them, might on this occasion, be willing at least not to encourage the Israelis to go on refusing safeguards.

Background

Introduction

Recent talks between H.M. Embassy, Washington and the State Department have shown that we are in agreement with the Americans on most issues in the Middle East and that Mr. Kennedy's administration have not so far produced any startlingly new ideas for dealing with the area. We have, however, been informed that the State Department and the Pentagon are now considering their policy towards CENTO, and we expect to hear the results shortly. H.M. Ambassador, Washington, is therefore likely to be able to supplement this brief.

1. CENTO

The Ministerial Meeting is to be held in Ankara from April 27, preceded by the meeting of the Military Committee. The question of a unified military command, about the absence of which regional members are becoming increasingly dissatisfied, is likely to be the most contentious issue there. We have put a compromise proposal to the State Department, who are still studying it. Because of the year's gap between this and the last Ministerial meeting, current economic matters have been disposed of by the Deputies, but the regional members will expect assurances from the Americans and ourselves of continued support on both the military and economic fronts.

2. Iran

The new Parliament is in session and a new government has been formed under the same Prime Minister, Sherif Emami. Changes in ministerial and other senior posts have involved the dismissal of a number of senior generals, possibly as a sop to the Americans. The elections passed off quietly, except for some disturbances centred on Tehran University. In spite of some economic difficulties, the short-term prospects for stability are reasonably good. A firm date for the Prime Minister's goodwill visit to the Soviet Union has not yet been fixed.

We and the Americans are agreed on the importance of Iran as the key to the Northern Tier. Following The Queen's visit, Iranian relations with the United Kingdom are, broadly speaking, very happy. In spite, however, of recent reassurances in general terms, the Shah is still worried that President Kennedy is going to reduce American support for CENTO, or at least reduce military aid while concentrating on the economic side. The Americans have said that they will continue to support Iran militarily and economically, but have not yet decided on the exact level of their aid to Iran.

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3. Afghanistan

We are exchanging views with the Americans at official level, and have agreed that a somewhat increased Western presence in Afghanistan would be desirable to help counter the Soviet presence there and show the Afghans that we have not written them off. We are considering ways and means of achieving this, though there is little money available.

Pakhtunistan agitation has started again, after a lull which had persisted since the disastrous Afghan incursion into Pakistani tribal territory last September. The Afghans, who still feel very strongly on the subject, have attempted to make capital out of a Pakistani punitive bombing raid, undertaken after due warning, on a recalcitrant tribal leader on the Pakistani side of the Durand line. There were earlier reports of Afghan military preparations which may indicate that they intend to try another raid, but seem more likely to be designed simply to keep the Pakhtunistan issue alive.

4. Israel Nuclear Reactor

In September 1960 we and the Americans learned that a large industrial complex was being built in great secrecy near Beersheba in the Negev Desert. It was subsequently confirmed that the site contained nuclear installations and that France was helping Israel to construct these installations under an unpublished agreement.

Both we and the Americans were concerned that the secret installation might help give the Israelis a nuclear weapons capacity of their own. Mr. Herter accordingly summoned the Israel Ambassador on December 9 to ask for explanations. Shortly afterwards the story leaked to the press. The Press reports, some of which stated that Israel was secretly making nuclear weapons with French help, caused a storm in the Middle East as well as giving rise to concern in the United States and Europe. President Nasser, in a speech at Port Said on December 23 said that if Israel acquired atomic weapons the United Arab Republic would get them "at any cost." The Israel nuclear programme also formed the subject of a resolution adopted by a meeting of the Arab League Foreign Ministers in February 1961.

Mr. Ben Gurion told the Israel Parliament on December 21 that the reactor being built in the Negev was dedicated entirely to peaceful purposes and that it was untrue that an atomic bomb was being produced in Israel. On December 19 a spokesman of the French Foreign Office said that "all necessary dispositions had been taken to assure that the installation in question would be used for exclusively peaceful purposes."

There are signs that the French share our concern at what has happened. Monsieur Couve de Murville told the U.S. Ambassador in Paris that the French had urged the Israelis to handle their nuclear programme in an open fashion and had suggested to them that it might be desirable to apply the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards system to the Negev reactor. Speaking to the Lord Privy Seal on February 27, he expressed the fear that Nasser might be driven more towards the Soviet Union as a result of the revelations about the Israel reactor. The French Government had, however, arranged for the plutonium produced in it to be returned to France.

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(The United States Government have also been told this otherwise unpublished fact). He thought the decision to help Israel in this matter had been a regrettable one.

We and the Americans have been considering how best to allay the anxieties caused in the Middle East by the public disclosures about Israel's nuclear programme. We have recently been preparing the way for a proposal to the Americans to join with us as a first step in trying to persuade the French to reveal the terms of their agreement with the Israelis. If the safeguards arrangements embodied in it appear likely to satisfy Arab opinion, we might then urge both parties to agree to publication of it. On the other hand, we might want to propose to the Americans and the French that we should all press the Israelis to invite the application of international (I.A.E.A.) safeguards as being more likely to satisfy world opinion and take the heat out of this potentially dangerous development in the Middle East. However, we have just learnt that the State Department are in favour of waiting. They have had an assurance from Mr. Ben Gurion that, if returned to power, he will give early consideration to a visit to the site by a foreign (probably U.S.) scientist. Mr. Ben Gurion has resigned and is not likely to be able to form a new Government without a general election (now expected in the summer). In our view delay may be dangerous. It increases the risk that the Arabs will, if they have not already done so, take some irrevocable decision based on the worst interpretation of what the Israelis are up to. Pressure on Mr. Ben Gurion, who has told us that he will not accept I.A.E.A. safeguards while there are other countries that do not do so, may not succeed, but the alternative of letting matters drift may be worse.

The U.A.R. have recently shown interest in obtaining from West Germany a power reactor of a size comparable with that under construction in Israel. So far as we know, no agreement has yet been signed. We and the Americans want to ensure that, if the Germans agree to supply a reactor, satisfactory safeguards will be applied to it, and we have proposed to the Americans that we should jointly seek assurances to this effect from the German Government.

5. The Arab-Israel Problem Generally

President Kennedy's campaign speeches indicated a readiness to do something to solve the Arab-Israel problem (with particular reference to the Arab refugees). Discussions at official level with the State Department indicate that the Administration has not yet determined its line, would certainly take no precipitate action and in any case would not do anything without consulting the United Kingdom.

6. United Arab Republic

There has been no basic change in Nasser's policy of "positive neutrality" but he has tended in the last year to adopt positions close to the Soviet Union, partly because his ambitions in Africa (e.g. the Congo) have brought him into conflict with the West, partly because, on top of his usual resentment at what he regards as Western support for Israel, he fears that Israel may be developing a military atomic capacity with Western assistance. In addition, he resents the special position the U.K. still enjoys in the Middle East (Aden, the Persian Gulf). For these and other reasons we cannot expect any striking or rapid improvement in our relations as a result of exchanging Ambassadors.

The Prime

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The Prime Minister might take the line that while we want to improve relations with the U.A.R. as far as possible, we recognise that there are many points of conflict. Nasser has recently adopted positions close to the Communists on many issues, but this is more probably the result of a belief that their interests coincide, at least in the short run, than of any basic change in his attitude between East and West.

U.A.R. activities in Africa have increased. But despite his initial successes there, Africa presents Nasser with difficult problems. Many Africans are suspicious when the great Pan-Arab puts on the mantle of Pan-Africanism. And Nasser's dependence on Communist aid also faces him with a dilemma; for this inhibits him from taking a line too different from that of the Communists (even if he wishes to do so) while it is to his disadvantage in Africa if he appears always to be following Communist policy. This problem has faced him in the Congo.

7. Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf

It is not recommended that the Prime Minister should take the initiative in raising any question connected with the Arabian Peninsula or Persian Gulf. If, however, the subjects arise he may wish to speak as follows:

Kuwait

Kuwait is now entirely responsible for her own international relations. She has already joined a number of international organisations in her own right and she will no doubt wish to join the United Nations in due course. H.M. Government have actively assisted Kuwait in this development. Their main concern at present is to see that when Kuwait makes her appearance on the international stage she does so after proper preparation. For instance, we have urged the Kuwaitis to train staff for their future foreign service, and a dozen trainees are due to arrive in the U.K. very shortly.

The Ruler of Kuwait has recently asked for the conclusion of a new agreement which shall replace the out-of-date "Exclusive Agreement" of 1899. This is still being considered. The difficult question is how to embody our existing obligation to defend Kuwait in a new agreement which will have to be public and which will attract the unfavourable attention of Arab nationalists everywhere.

Muscat and Oman

The negotiations with the late rebel leaders have completely broken down because the rebels, apparently under pressure from the U.A.R. and Iraqi Governments, reversed their previous trend of moderation and have now made demands (including complete independence for Oman) which they must have known the Sultan could not possibly accept. This means that H.M. Government may have to put up with an indefinite period of uninformed Afro-Asian criticism and pressure in the United Nations. It is likely that the Arab Nationalists, whose declared aim is to remove British influence from the Arabian Peninsula, though they may allow this issue to rest from time to time, will not

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encourage a final solution between the Sultan and the rebels negotiated on the merits of the case and acceptable to the Sultan. We do not however despair of making the Sultan's case heard by some of its Afro-Asian critics. We shall continue to do everything possible to bring about a negotiated settlement, but a surrender to anything like the rebel leaders latest demands would lead in a short time to the destruction of the whole British position in the Persian Gulf.

Foreign Office,

March 20, 1961.

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