

1173

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J2084/1433/9/16
War Cabinet
Conclusions
65(43)
Dated: 5 May
Received: 10 May

Political situation in Egypt
Deals with H/S telegram 1095 + Cairo
tels. 855 + 911 regarding the possibility
that King Farouk would dismiss
Nahas Pasha and his Government.
See also within War Cabinet Conclusions
66(43) of 7/5 and Note by The Secy. of 5/5

Last Paper.
J2058

(Minutes.)
See within
H/S.
11/5.

References.
J1916/1433/9
J1971/954/16

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(How disposed of.)

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Next Paper.
Down

5th May 1943.

EGYPT

Constitutional
Crisis.

The War Cabinet had before them telegrams from the Minister of State (No. 1095) and His Majesty's Ambassador in Cairo (Nos. 855 and 911) regarding the possibility that King Farouk would dismiss Nahas Pasha and his Government.

J 1916/2

J 1971/984/16

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS recalled that His Majesty's Ambassador had originally proposed that, with a view to preventing the summary dismissal of the War Government, he should advise the King to allow Nahas Pasha to go to the country if he so desired. This proposal had been approved by His Majesty's Government; and the Chiefs of Staff had instructed the Commanders-in-Chief in Egypt to arrange that the advice tendered by His Majesty's Ambassador could be backed by force if need arose. Subsequently, the Commanders-in-Chief had stressed the difficulty of making British troops available for such purposes in present circumstances. At a meeting of the Defence Committee in Cairo on the 27th April, they had indicated that they could not contemplate the use of force without prejudice to other and bigger issues; and they were telegraphing to the Chiefs of Staff their views on the military implications of using force at the present time. This telegram had not yet, however, been received.

Meanwhile, His Majesty's Ambassador was asking for early instructions regarding the line which he should take with King Farouk. He still thought that the right course would be to tender formal advice that Nahas Pasha should be allowed to go to the country if he so desired; but he was disinclined to tender such advice unless he were assured that means would be available to enforce that advice if, in the last resort, the use of force became necessary. If the means of coercion were not available, even in the last resort, it might be preferable that his action should take the form of an appeal to King Farouk, rather than formal advice.

The Minister of State, while agreeing that all reasonable efforts should be made to keep Nahas Pasha and his Government in office, deprecated any threat of coercion. He believed that His Majesty's Ambassador had a good chance of persuading the King to retain Nahas without threatening force; and that, on balance, it would be better to let the War go out of office rather than contemplate the use of force and the deposition of King Farouk in order to keep them in office.

THE FOREIGN SECRETARY suggested that instructions might be sent to His Majesty's Ambassador on the following lines:-

- (i) He should not rule out in advance coercive measures against the King; but equally His Majesty's Government were not committed, at the present stage, to the use of force.
- (ii) There was no question of an appeal to the King, but His Majesty's Ambassador should tender formal advice. Any military dispositions which it might be necessary to make should not be made at the same time as advice was tendered.

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(iii) The advice tendered should be that we did not regard the dismissal of Nahas at this juncture as in the best interest of Egypt or of the war effort. If it was thought necessary that the air should be cleared, this should be done by a general election. His Majesty's Ambassador was prepared to discuss such measures as could be taken for seeing that the elections were fairly conducted.

(iv) If King Farouk ignored our advice, no action should be taken with a view to its being enforced without further reference home.

The Foreign Secretary pointed out that action on these lines would hold the position until we had heard the views of the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East.

In discussion, the view was put forward that instructions on these lines would not enable His Majesty's Ambassador to decide whether to act strongly. In the last resort, the question to be settled was that posed in paragraph 2(d) in Mr. Casey's telegram, namely whether, in the final issue, should the King remain obdurate, we should be prepared to turn him out in order to keep the Wafd in.

It was agreed that the first step was to make up our minds on this point and to base our action on it.

The general view of the War Cabinet was that we should be prepared, if necessary, to use force in order to avoid the dismissal of Nahas. There could be no hope of gaining the friendship of the King, while if we allowed Nahas to be dismissed we should incur the enmity of the Wafd, and troubles in Egypt were certain to ensue. It was bad policy, particularly in the East, to allow it to be thought that our friends could not rely upon us.

The next question discussed was whether a decision in this sense should be despatched at once, or whether the War Cabinet could defer a decision for, say, 48 hours, until the views of the Commanders-in-Chief had been received. It was pointed out that the use of force might mean recourse to units which were training for specific operations, which might thereby be delayed. It was felt that it would be preferable to defer a final decision until the views of the Commanders-in-Chief had been received, but that, in view of the delay which had already occurred, His Majesty's Ambassador should be given authority to act at once should he find this necessary.

The War Cabinet's Conclusions were as follows:-

(1) The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was authorised to send a telegram to His Majesty's Ambassador on the following lines:-

(a) We should prefer to defer a final decision for, say, 48 hours, until the views of the Commanders-in-Chief on the military implications of the use of force had been received.

(b) If, however, His Majesty's Ambassador was of the opinion that the situation did not admit of any further delay, he was authorised to tender formal advice to King Farouk on the lines set out in paragraph 5(a) of his telegram No. 855 - namely that Nahas Pasha should be allowed to go to the country if he so desire - with the knowledge that this advice would, if necessary, in the last resort be backed by force.

- (c) Instructions were being sent to the Commanders-in-Chief to provide the necessary support.
- (2) The Chiefs of Staff were invited to telegraph to the Commanders-in-Chief, informing them of the decision in (1), and instructing them to lend the necessary support to whatever action was deemed necessary by His Majesty's Ambassador.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W.1.,

5th May, 1943.

Extract from War Cabinet Conclusions 66(43)
Cite J/G 7th May 1943. 124

EGYPT.

Constitutional
Crisis.

(Previous
Reference:
W.M.(43) 65th
Conclusions.)

2084

9461 AMM 62

1. The War Cabinet again considered the position in Egypt, and had before them a telegram from the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East, to the Chiefs of Staff (No. CC.228 of the 5th May) as to the military implications of the use of force, should this prove necessary.

THE CHIEF OF THE IMPERIAL GENERAL STAFF said that, if only passive non-co-operation on the part of the Egyptian army was contemplated, the situation could easily be dealt with by the Commanders-in-Chief. The only situation which need therefore be considered was a position in which the Egyptian army was actively hostile and had to be disarmed.

The view of the War Cabinet was that this need not be envisaged as a serious contingency.

The War Cabinet also took the view that paragraph 10 of the telegram from the Commanders-in-Chief did not attach sufficient importance to the serious labour difficulties which we should have to face if the Wafd went out of office and became hostile to us.

The War Cabinet:-

- (1) Invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to send a telegram to H.M. Ambassador confirming the instructions issued to him in the telegram sent after the Meeting of the War Cabinet on the 5th May (Telegram No. 767). The Foreign Secretary would add that the War Cabinet wished to be kept informed of the position, and that, if the situation permitted, they would wish to have an opportunity of commenting on the course of action proposed by H.M. Ambassador before action was taken.
- (2) Invited the Chiefs of Staff to inform the Commanders-in-Chief of the above decision.

TO BE KEPT UNDER LOOK AND KEY.

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It is requested that special care may be taken to
ensure the secrecy of this document.

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SECRET

Evans

COPY NO. 4

WAR CABINET

12084

Note by the Secretary

The attached telegrams are circulated for
consideration at the Meeting of the War Cabinet to
be held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of
Commons, today, Wednesday, 5th May, 1943 at 3.0 p.m.

(Signed) E.E. BRIDGES.

Offices of the War Cabinet,
S.W.1.,

5th MAY, 1943.

Copies of this Note have been sent to the
following with a view to their attendance:-

The War Cabinet.

Lord Privy Seal.
First Lord of the Admiralty
Secretary of State for War
Secretary of State for Air
Minister of Aircraft Production.

The Chiefs of Staff.

[Cypher].

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PERSONAL (SECRETARY OF STATE).

FROM CAIRO TO FOREIGN OFFICE.

Sir M. Lampson

No. 911

4th May, 1943.

D. 12.12 a.m. 5th May, 1943.

R. 2.10 a.m. 5th May, 1943.

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IMMEDIATE.

DEYOU.

Minister of State's telegram No. 1095.

PERSONAL and SECRET.

This gets us back to the precise position dealt with in my telegram No. 855, by every word of which I stand.

Please instruct me at your earliest convenience whether action outlined in paragraph 5 of my telegram under reference should as there suggested take the form of "an appeal" rather than "advice". If not I become increasingly doubtful whether in the best public interests I should take any further action at all [grp. undec. ? and not] let events take their course.

O.T.P.

[Cypher.]

PERSONAL (SECRETARY OF STATE).

FROM MINISTER OF STATE, CAIRO, TO FOREIGN OFFICE.

No. 1095.

4th May, 1943.

D. 12.15 a.m., 5th May, 1943.

R. 2.10 a.m., 5th May, 1943.

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IMMEDIATE.

DEYOU.

Following Personal and Most Secret for Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Reference His Majesty's Ambassador's telegram No. 855 April 29th.

The Ambassador was good enough to discuss the current Egyptian political crisis with me on April 21st and at intervals subsequently. After full discussion I was and am in agreement with proposal that all reasonable efforts should be made to keep Nahas Pasha and his Government in office short of threat or use of force.

2. I have been against the threat of force for four reasons:

(a) because we have but little military force that is not allocated and in training for specific future tasks.

(b) because threat of force against the King would involve loss of co-operation and even possibly hostility on the part of the Egyptian army on which we are largely relying for internal security, for Canal watching and for anti-aircraft defence of Egypt.

(c) because maintenance in power by British arms of a Government that is generally regarded as corrupt is not a good issue.

(d) because in the final issue (should the King remain obdurate) we would have to turn the King out in order to keep the Wafd in.

3. I believe the Ambassador has a good chance of being able to get the King to agree to retain the Wafd without going to extremes to do so - although I admit that, with the knowledge that force was at his disposal if all else failed the job would be a great deal easier and final sanction (dismissal of the King) would probably not have to be invoked.

4. However my view is that on net balance it would be better to let the Wafd go out of office rather than be obliged to contemplate threat of force and dismissal of the King in order to keep them in. I do not believe alternative of a non-Wafd Government (with Wafd in Opposition) is so bad as to oblige us to go to such lengths to retain the Wafd.

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5. I believe there is likely to be much less disturbance (and threat to security) in Egypt arising out of the above proposal than if we adopt the policy of supporting the Wafd at all costs.

6. Another factor that has influenced me against going to extremes is that if the King yielded under duress we would have antagonised the Egyptian army (which I now have little doubt is solidly behind the King [grp. undec. ?and not] in sympathy with the Wafd) and we would have crystallised the King in his latent hostility to us for all time. On the other hand I believe it to be not impossible to get the King on to our side by careful handling in the future.

7. Commanders-in-Chief are telegraphing separately to Chiefs of Staff on military implications of the use of force at this time.

8. I have shown this telegram to the Ambassador who is telegraphing separately.

O.T.P.

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35533

EGYPT and SUDAN

J 2067

9 MAY 1943

Registry Number } J 2067/2/16.

TELEGRAM FROM
Sir Miles Lampson
(Cairo).

No. 927.

Dated 7th May, 1943.

Received in Registry } 9th May, 1943.

J: Egypt and Sudan.

Last Paper.

J 2060.

References.

J 1916/1437/9
J 2047/2/16.

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(Action completed.)

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(Index.)

16/1/5
101

Next Paper.

J 2070

Political situation. ✓

Refers to Foreign Office telegram 757 (J 1916/G.) It has been ascertained that Wafd have lost support since February 1942 particularly among educated classes, but retain allegiance of the masses. They would probably poll 60% of votes in a free election. Considers proposals contained in telegram under reference would show that Government intended to conduct any election fairly. Amin Osman also mentioned proposals on the Government's behalf. Nahas believes that he still commands sufficient majority to fulfil the conditions required by His Majesty's Government.

1 p.p. in Egypt copy (minutes) of reference attached.

Re para 2 all we have seen are two S/S. reports. One indicated that opinion in Cairo had turned against the Wafd & the other that opinion in Upper Egypt was also against the Govt.

EA High/Prod's
10/5

It looks uncomfortably as if all the brains in Egypt were now anti-Wafd and all the brains pro-Wafd. ~~If this state of affairs is in fact reached, the Wafd will scarcely be in a position to conform to our requirement that they shall be a real majority Government capable of implementing the treaty.~~

Scrivenor
10/5
11.5.

[This telegram is of particular secrecy and should be retained by the authorised recipient and not passed on]

[CYPHER]

WAR CABINET DISTRIBUTION

FROM: EGYPT

FROM CAIRO TO FOREIGN OFFICE

Sir M. Lampson.
No. 917.

D. 4.53 p.m. 6th May, 1943.

6th May, 1943.

R. 7.25 p.m. 6th May, 1943.

& & &

IMPORTANT

Your telegram No. 757.

I shall deal with your points in greater detail later on. Meanwhile you may wish to know our minds have evidently been working along very similar lines.

2. I purposely am not seeing Nahas Pasha himself too much just now but I am in constant touch with him through Amin Osman.

3. I had a frank discussion this morning with Amin Osman in the presence of my senior staff, making it clear that anything I said involved no commitment on my part. It might be that discussions in Parliament on Black Book charges would satisfy us that they were not damning; but there was always the unpleasant factor that we might be accused of keeping in favour a government which was widely regarded as corrupt. We had to consider our own public opinion as well as that of the Egyptians. If, therefore, we were ourselves satisfied with [sic ? that] the charges had not been proven, it was politically undesirable to get issue between the Palace and the Government moved from the basis of Black Book to that of enabling a Prime Minister, who, we all believed, still had a popular majority in the country, to remain in power. I did not know whether Nahas Pasha wished to appeal to the country but it seemed to me that was the logical course and the natural one in a democracy, if he desired to clear himself in the eyes of public opinion everywhere. If he did, and if I were to advise King Farouk that we considered this to be the right course, it was vitally important that election should not only be conducted fairly but demonstrably so. We all knew how difficult that was in Egypt but I hoped that Amin Osman would consult with Nahas Pasha as to how best this could be done in case the need arose. It would clearly be essential to have free speech and full publicity as regards election issues, always within the limits necessary for our military security, and there must be free ballot box. Amin Osman said he preferred first to consult Hilali Pasha and Serhry Abu Alam Pasha about what could be done to ensure maximum free election and to let me know

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as soon as possible. I again emphasised that I was not committing myself at this stage but was only thinking ahead bearing in mind that our policy in this crisis had been, and still was, that Nahas Pasha should have a square deal as being the leading party best qualified to deliver the goods as regards our war interests.

2. I took the opportunity to rub into Amin Osman again that if Nahas Pasha weaved this story, he must put his house in order, xenophobic measures, headstrong, and crazy acts like the dismissal of Alexandrian Municipal Commission must stop. Nahas Pasha must see to it that no further cause was given for charges of nepotism (and I cited in this connexion a deal by Madame Nahas Pasha's brother in molasses which I had [grp. undec: ? good] proof was scandalous and at least as bad as anything in the Black Book. I am reporting separately on this). I referred repeatedly to representations I have had from the British Community about the inefficiency of the Wafd Administration. This must also be put right. I made it clear that I was not laying these down as conditions of support as the making of conditions for such and such an eventuality is almost always disappointing.

3. Finally I touched in an [grp. undec: ? unbiased] way on the points mentioned in paragraph 3 of your telegram No. 757 and suggested that the Wafd had outlived its original purpose and that the time had come for it to take the role of a popular party devoted to the interests of the poorer classes especially with regard to health, better housing conditions etc. I mentioned that Mr. Churchill had stressed to me the importance of such measures when he was here. I have in all my conversations with Amin Osman (and others including the Prime Minister and Hassanein) emphasised the importance of our having a stable base here in accordance with the alliance.

[OTP]

J 2067

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[This telegram is of particular secrecy and should be retained by the authorised recipient and not passed on]

[CYPHER]

WAR CABINET DISTRIBUTIONFROM: EGYPTFROM CAIRO TO FOREIGN OFFICE

Sir M. Lampson

No. 927

7th May, 1943.

D. 2.40 p.m. 8th May, 1943.

R. 6.10 p.m. 8th May, 1943.

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IMPORTANT

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Your telegram No. 757, second paragraph.

J 1916/1033/9

Although there is a considerable element of guess-work in all such computations, information at our disposal, including that supplied by Consular agents and special officers sent to tour the provinces, indicates that the following is approximately the state of opinion in the country.

2. The Wafd have lost considerably in the country since February 1942, particularly amongst the educated classes, but they still retain allegiance of the masses with, however, some defections amongst the latter. On our reports we reckon that the Wafd would get about sixty per cent of the votes in really free election.

3. The upper classes, army, police, officialdom and intelligentsia, including students are largely anti-Wafd (remember always it is essentially the popular party). The bulk of the army is strongly pro-King but there are some Wafdist elements whom the Minister of Defence has been using against the Palace.

4. Madame Zaghloul has for long been keeping out of these Wafd family squabbles, but I read to Amin Osman this morning passage in your telegram relating to him and the House of the Nation.

5. I also read to Amin Osman last paragraph of your telegram and asked him to draw Mahas Pasha's particular attention to the suggestion in the last sentence which, if practicable, would do much to show that the Government intended election (if it came to that) to be conducted fairly. Amin Osman himself mentioned certain proposals which the

Government ...

- 2 -

Government had in mind as a result of our earlier discussion yesterday (my telegram No. 917). On these I am reporting separately.

J2047/2/16 oked JV

6. I have throughout made it abundantly clear that what we want is to see real majority Government capable of and anxious to implement the treaty; and that if a free election does not return the Wafd they would not fulfil these conditions. This is, I think, understood by Nahas Pasha who (for what it may be worth) in fact remains confident that he does still command such a majority and that free election will prove it. Amin Osman assures me that he honestly believes the same.

O.T.P.