

No. 722

683.84A.722/11-351: Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Syria*¹

SECRET

WASHINGTON, November 3, 1953—6:23 p. m.

171. Syrian Ambassador Zeineddine in meeting with Jernegan Nov 2 stated re Banat Yaqub: As of A.M. Nov 2 work was continuing at dam site by at least 25 workers allegedly engaged in repairing leaks in dam. However, outside of Demilitarized Zone tractors and bulldozers were continuing excavation to tie in with DZ. This indicated Israel had every intention resume work in DZ at some future date no matter what decision UN Security Council takes. He cited agreements of 1922, 1923 and 1926 re Jordan river between the UK (for Palestine and Jordan) and France (on behalf Syria). Zeineddine pointed out Ambassador Eban insisting before UN and US public (a) Israel Government not obligated by General Armistice Agreement to make agreement with Syria on Banat Yaqub, (b) Banat Yaqub project not inconsistent with TVA unified plan, (c) authority of TSO chief requires no strengthening. In Zeineddine's view this adds up to future unilateral action by Israel.

Zeineddine stated Syria giving TVA plan serious open minded study from technical standpoint.

With regard US aid to Israel he hopes that US will again stop aid in event Israel fails comply with UN SC decision supporting Bennike.

In response Jernegan's hope Syria would not place itself in position of resisting all development of Jordan Valley, Zeineddine stated that if Banat Yaqub project is killed Syria will not adopt "dog in manger" attitude but prepared study all development plans with open mind.

In response Jernegan's inquiry re Syrian willingness eliminate Israel-Syria DZ, Zeineddine indicated that if Banat Yaqub project killed Syria would be prepared resume MAC discussions with Israel Government looking toward Syrian Armistice border on waterline Jordan River Lake Tiberias.

Comment: Appears Zeineddine is more interested in strategic position of Jordan channel and in preserving Syrian frontage thereon than in economic aspects Israel use Jordan water.

DULLES

¹ Sent also to Tel Aviv as telegram 351; repeated by air pouch to Amman, Beirut, Baghdad, Cairo, Jidda, Jerusalem, London, Paris, and New York.