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SECRET.

M.E.C. 3rd Minutes.
(New Series.)

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WAR CABINET.

MIDDLE EAST COMMITTEE.

Minutes of a Meeting of the Middle East Committee held in the Secretary of State's Room at the Foreign Office on Saturday, February 2, 1918, at 11:30 A.M.

Present :

The Right Hon. EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.
(*in the Chair*).
The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M., M.P.
The Right Hon. LORD HARDINGE OF PENSHURST, K.G., G.C.B., G.C.S.I.,
G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., I.S.O.
The Right Hon. LORD ROBERT CECIL, K.C., M.P.
The Right Hon. LORD ISLINGTON, G.C.M.G., D.S.O.
Lieutenant-Colonel SIR MARK SYKES, Bart., M.P.
Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. GRIBBON, War Office.
Mr. J. E. SHUCKENBURGH, India Office.

Captain the Hon. W. ORMSBY-GORE, M.P. (*Secretary*).

Assurances to
King Hussein.

1. THE Committee had before them two telegrams from Sir Reginald Wingate, Nos. 154 and 199 (M.E.C.-37 and 54), together with memoranda prepared by the India Office :—

- (1.) M.E.C.-60, giving a summary of the pledges made by, or on behalf of, the British Government to the Arabs and to King Hussein.
- (2.) Memorandum dated 31st January (M.E.C.-68, not previously circulated) entitled "The Future of Mesopotamia."

It was pointed out that both Sir Percy Cox and the Government of India had expressed the hope that in any reassurances to be given to King Hussein no further announcement should be made with regard to the future of Irak; further, the view was submitted that it might be desirable to inform Sir Percy Cox regarding the recent trend of political thought concerning the war aims of the *Entente* Powers.

Lord Islington said that what he had in mind was not any idea of requiring the Civil Commissioner and the officers under him to abandon their policy of reconstruction in Mesopotamia, but rather the desirability of explaining clearly to Sir Percy Cox the general trend of events in Europe, the specific declarations of President Wilson and the Prime Minister on the subject of Mesopotamia, &c., and the factors making for a peace based on the principles of "no annexations" and "self-determination." If Sir Percy Cox were fully apprised of the tendencies now operating on the situation, and

of their probable outcome, he would be in a position to consider and report to His Majesty's Government on the local action best calculated to safeguard British influence in Mesopotamia against future contingencies. Lord Islington considered that even more might be done than had so far been attempted to render the British connection acceptable and indispensable to the people of the country at the end of the war.

On the other hand the view was expressed that any telegram suggesting to Sir Percy Cox that our intentions with regard to the future of Mesopotamia had undergone any recent change might have a very unfortunate result. It therefore seemed desirable that any communication of the kind suggested should be made to him by word of mouth. This could be done either by sending someone having full knowledge of the general political situation from England to Mesopotamia, or by arranging for Sir Percy Cox to come home on leave, or, at any rate, as far as Cairo. If the latter course was adopted, someone would have to meet him at Cairo.

The India Office undertook to study these alternatives and to submit recommendations to the Committee as to the selection of an envoy for the purpose.

In regard to the telegram to be despatched to Sir Reginald Wingate, Sir Mark Sykes stated that he had personally explained to King Hussein at Jeddah the difficulties which would ensue should King Hussein be burdened with the responsibility of the inclusion of Palestine, west of the Jordan, under his suzerainty. He thought that King Hussein fully realised the position in regard to Palestine, but that it was desirable that some definite "accord" in writing should be effected. The real apprehension at the back of King Hussein's mind was the accusation which might be cast against him by Moslems, that by his action and co-operation with England he had brought about the replacement of the Moslem by the Christian flag in Arab countries.

Sir Mark Sykes expressed the view that it would be possible for us to overcome this difficulty, and to obtain all the essentials which we require for the future, provided we could accommodate Moslem and Arab views with regard to the feelings which inspired King Hussein. In this connection he drew special attention to the declaration made recently by M. Gout that the French Government were not animated by any desire of colonial domination or annexation in Arab lands.

The Committee took the view that it would be quite impossible to recognise King Hussein as King of the Arabs until, at any rate, he had been recognised as such by the great mass of the Arab peoples and rulers, which was not at present the case.

Lord Islington was strongly of opinion that no new assurances referring specifically to Irak should be given to King Hussein.

The Committee requested Sir Mark Sykes to draft a telegram to Sir R. Wingate embodying the above views for despatch as soon as the approval of the Chairman, the Foreign Secretary, and the Secretary of State for India had been obtained.

Zionist Commission.

2. The Committee had before them a letter from the President of the English Zionist Federation to the Secretary (M.E.C. 53).

Mr. Balfour stated that he had seen Dr. Weizmann on the subject, and had agreed to his proceeding to America as suggested, and to the sending of a telegram to the British representative at Washington, pointing out the reasons for his mission.

Sir Mark Sykes expressed the view that it might prove undesirable that the departure of the Commission to Palestine should be delayed until Dr. Weizmann returned from Washington, as he had seen several letters from Palestine showing that the local Zionists and Jews were inclined to complicate matters with their

Arab neighbours. He thought that M. Sokolof could replace Dr. Weizmann, at any rate temporarily, as Head of the Commission, and that it might be desirable that M. Sokolof should see King Hussein at Jeddah.

The Committee agreed to the departure of the Commission as soon as the military situation permitted, and arrangements could be made for their journey, and instructed Sir Mark Sykes to communicate with the Zionist leaders as to the desirability of sending a representative in advance to Palestine, to help in dealing with the present situation.

Reorganisation of
the Arab Bureau.

3. The Committee had before them a memorandum by Captain Lloyd (M.E.C. 47) in regard to the reorganisation of the Arab Bureau.

Lord Hardinge pointed out that Captain Lloyd's proposal ran counter to the accepted policy of the Committee, which had been accepted by Sir Reginald Wingate.

The Committee decided to adhere to their previous decision.

Propaganda.

4. The Secretary read to the Committee a letter from Colonel Buchan, intimating that Mr. Philip Gibbs could not be spared for propaganda work in Palestine, and suggesting that Mr. Harold Begbie should be selected in his place.

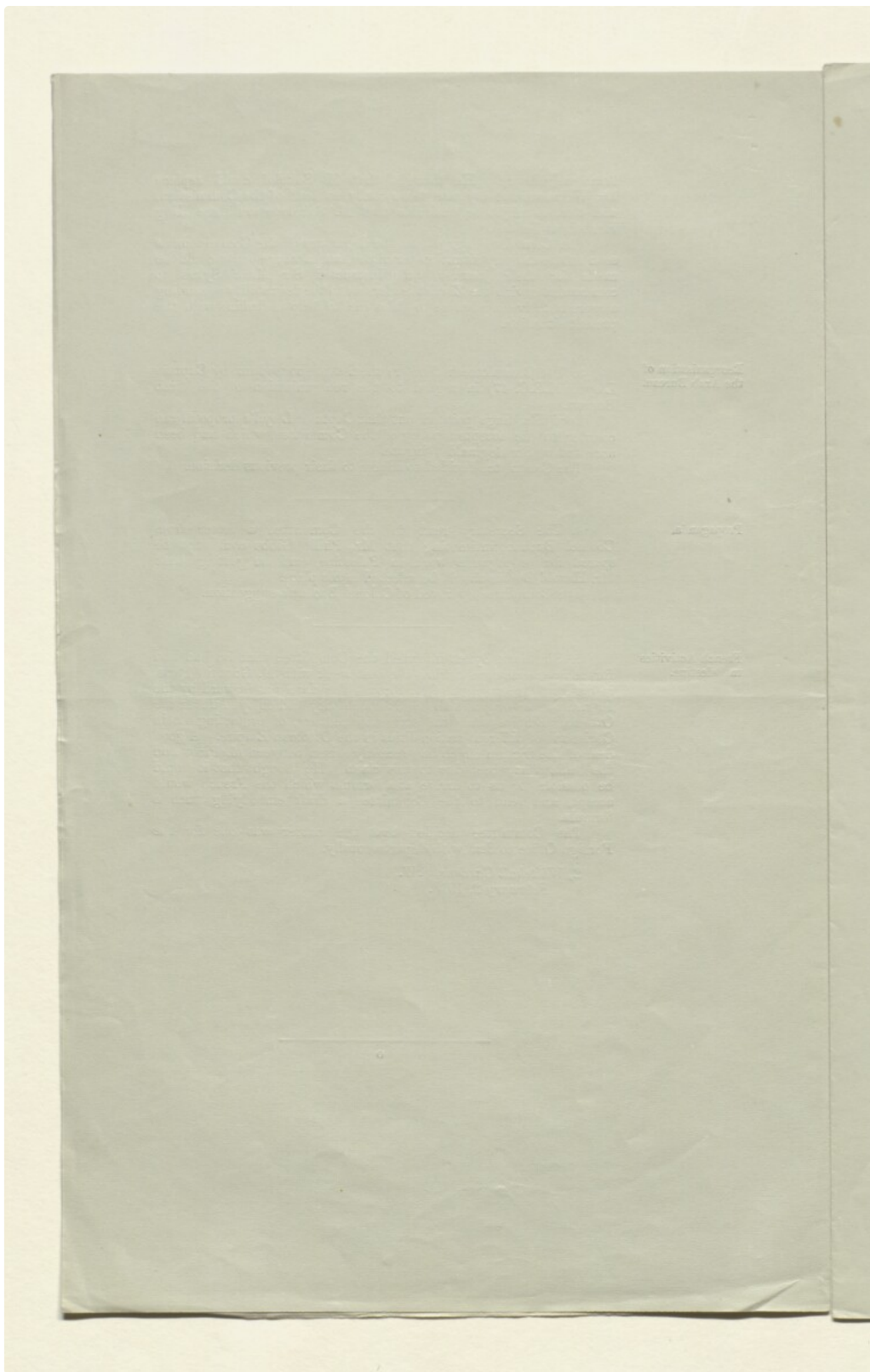
The Committee approved of Colonel Buchan's suggestion.

French Activities
in Palestine.

5. Sir Mark Sykes informed the Committee that he had had further conversations during the past week with M. Gout in Paris, in regard to the position of M. Picot. The claim put forward by the French had its origin in the right which they had enjoyed under the Ottoman Empire since the sixteenth century, of protecting Latin Christians of different nationalities in the Ottoman Empire. A good deal of the friction which had recently arisen between M. Picot and the Italians had been due to this claim. He thought that it would be possible for us to arrive at a formula which the French would accept, and read to the Committee a draft embodying such a formula.

The Committee decided that the matter was one for the Foreign Office to deal with departmentally.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
February 2, 1918.



Japanese in Mesopotamia seen as a threat to British Economic Interests in 1918!