Lord Curzon.

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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 at* 11·30 A.M. *on Saturday, January* 26, 1918.

Present:

The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M., M.P. (*in the Chair*).
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.
Lieutenant-Colonel SIR MARK SYKES, Bart., M.P.
Major-General Sir G. M. W. MACDONOGH, K.C.M.G., C.B., War Office.
The Right Hon. LORD ISLINGTON, G.C.M.G., D.S.O.
Mr. J. E. SHUCKBURGH, India Office.
Colonel J. BUCHAN.

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

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Palestine:
(*a.*) Inclusion of French and Italian Officers in Administration.

1. General Macdonogh reported the receipt of a telegram from General Allenby (E.A.–770), in which the Commander-in-Chief expressed his view that it was not practicable to appoint any French or Italian officers to administrative posts in Palestine, as had been suggested by the Committee.

Mr. Balfour accepted the decision of the Commander-in-Chief, but wished it to be clearly understood that, in the event of a time being reached when such appointments might be made, the French and Italians should be treated on an equal footing.

Palestine:
(*b.*) Religious and International Difficulties at Jerusalem.

The Committee had before them a telegram from General Allenby (E.A.–681) regarding the attitude adopted by M. Picot in regard to his official recognition at the Sunday Mass in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the consequent friction that had arisen with other nationals, particularly with the President of the Franciscans.

Sir Mark Sykes pointed out that M. Picot attached importance to the ceremony as it was the symbol of the French claim to exclusive protection of Latin Christians in the East: ever since the anti-clerical régime in France the Vatican had ceased to support the French claim.

He also pointed out the system now in vogue in regard to the guards placed over the Church of the Holy Sepulchre involved the mounting of troops of different nationalities on different days. This arrangement might very well result in abuses.

Lord Hardinge expressed the opinion that it might prove desirable that the arrangement should be altered and that British Military Police should be substituted for these different national guards.



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The Committee decided that—

Lord Hardinge should have a frank talk with the French Ambassador upon the situation, pointing out to him the indignity of allowing friction and disturbances in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre between Christian representatives of different nationality.

They further decided that—

Lord Hardinge, after his interview with M. Cambon, should provide the D.M.I. with material for a reply to General Allenby's telegram.

Palestine: (c.) Propaganda.

It was pointed out to the Committee that further material for propaganda in regard to Palestine was required for dissemination from this country. Propaganda was more particularly required for—

(a.) The Jews.
(b.) Irish-Americans.
(c.) Anglicans.

General Macdonogh suggested that some officer who understood the political conditions for which propaganda was required should be attached to General Clayton's staff, and that additional newspaper correspondence should be sent to Palestine.

Colonel Buchan suggested that Mr. Philip Gibbs, now serving as a correspondent on the Western front, would be a suitable person to undertake the preparation of newspaper propaganda in Palestine.

It was further pointed out to the Committee that Mr. Sacher, a leader writer on the "Manchester Guardian," was to be attached to the Zionist Commission.

The Committee decided that—

Among the orders given to Captain Ormsby Gore, the War Office should include instructions to him to inform General Clayton regarding the nature of the propaganda material required, and that Colonel Buchan should take the necessary steps to obtain, if possible, the release of Mr. Philip Gibbs from his present duties, with a view to his proceeding to Palestine at the earliest possible date.

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Encouragement of Arab Forces.

2. General Macdonogh informed the Committee that Captain Lloyd, who had recently returned from Egypt, had informed him that much might be done to encourage the Arabs by the transmission of congratulatory telegrams, and by the granting to Arabs of British decorations, such as the Order of the British Empire, and the gift of sundry articles, such as field-glasses, &c., to Arab officers.

The Committee approved the carrying out of the above suggestions.

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Pan-Turanian Propaganda among Russian Moslems.

3. The attention of the Committee was drawn to telegram No. 64, dated the 8th January, from Petrograd, from which it would appear that the lines being adopted by Dr. Williams for combating Pan-Turanian propaganda in the Caucasus and other parts of the Russian Empire were of a very dangerous kind. It would appear that these methods included the spread of Pan-Islamic ideas.

General Macdonogh added in this connection that a telegram had been received from Sir Percy Cox suggesting that the King of the Hejaz should send a representative to Baku to explain to the Moslems in that neighbourhood the reasons why he was endeavouring to drive the Turks out of Moslem holy places.

The Committee were of opinion that this suggestion was most impracticable and undesirable.

The Committee decided that—

A telegram should be sent to Petrograd instructing Mr. Lindley that His Majesty's Government did not approve of the lines upon which Dr. Williams' suggested propaganda should be worked, and requested Sir Mark Sykes to get into touch with the Zionist leaders now in England with a view to arranging with them the best means whereby German-inspired Pan-Turanian propaganda might be combated.

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Assurances to the King of the Hejaz with regard to our Intentions in Arabia and Neighbouring Countries.

4. The Committee had before them a telegram from Sir Reginald Wingate (No. 154—M.E.C. 37), dated 22nd January, asking for a re-statement of our intentions in regard to Arabia, Palestine, and Syria.

In this connection the Committee also had before them an extract from a recent speech delivered to the Syrians in Paris by M. Gout, the Chief Permanent Official of the French Foreign Office.

The Committee requested Sir Mark Sykes to prepare f.r their consideration at their next meeting a statement of the assurances which had been given from time to time by representatives of His Majesty's Government to the King of the Hejaz, together with a draft reply to Sir Reginald Wingate's telegram No. 154.

Lord Islington stated that it was thought desirable to obtain from Sir P. Cox at the present stage a considered opinion on the whole question of future policy in Mesopotamia, and that a draft telegram to this effect had been prepared at the India Office for the consideration of the Committee.

The Committee decided—

To reserve this question for consideration at their next meeting, and directed that the draft telegram should be circulated to members in the meantime. They also requested the India Office to prepare for their consideration at the next meeting a statement of the pledges and proclamations which had been given in regard to Mesopotamia, together with a draft telegram for despatch to Sir Percy Cox.

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Central Arabia. Ibn Saud.

5. The Committee had before them a memorandum prepared by the War Office on the subject of the policy to be adopted towards the Emir Ibn Saud. This memorandum recommended no change in the policy already laid down by the Committee.

It was accordingly decided that—

Lord Islington should send a telegram to Sir Percy Cox informing him that His Majesty's Government, after full reconsideration of the matter, had decided to adhere to their previous policy.

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Pro-Turkish Articles in the "Morning Post."

6. The attention of the Committee was drawn to certain dangerous pro-Turkish articles which had appeared in the "Morning Post" issues of the 22nd and 23rd January. It was pointed out that if these articles fell into Arab hands they might have dangerous political and military consequences. It would seem that the articles in question infringed the Defence of the Realm Regulations.

The Committee decided that—

The Director of Military Intelligence should, if possible, see the editor of the "Morning Post," and should point out to him the serious character of the articles in question;

and, further—

That instructions should be given to the Censor to look out for further articles of a similar nature, and, in the event of their being published by the "Morning Post," to prohibit their export abroad.

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Discussions with the French Government regarding the Future of the Near East.

7. Sir Mark Sykes pointed out that he had paid several visits to Paris to discuss with the French Government affairs relating to the Near East. He thought it desirable that a representative of the French Foreign Office should be requested to come to London for a similar purpose.

This was agreed to by the Committee.

2, *Whitehall Gardens, S.W.*,
*January* 26, 1918.

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