CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, S.W. 1, on Friday, 9th March, 1956, at 10-15 a.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. Sir ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Prime Minister.

The Most Hon. the MARQUESS OF SALISBURY, Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon. HAROLD MACMILLAN, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Right Hon. JAMES STUART, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Right Hon. ALAN LENNOX-BOYD, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The Right Hon. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Minister of Housing and Local Government.

The Right Hon. D. HEATHCOAT AMORY, M.P., Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Right Hon. IAIN MACLEOD, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.


The Right Hon. GWILYM LLOYD-GEORGE, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Welsh Affairs.

The Right Hon. the EARL OF HOME, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.

The Right Hon. Sir WALTER MONCKTON, Q.C., M.P., Minister of Defence.

The Right Hon. Peter THORNEYCROFT, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.

The Right Hon. Sir DAVID ECCLES, M.P., Minister of Education.

The Right Hon. the EARL OF SELKIRK, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The Right Hon. PATRICK BUCHAN-HEPBURN, M.P., Minister of Works.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. ANTHONY NUTTING, M.P., Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon. EDWARD HEATH, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury.

Sir ALEC KIRKBRIDE (Item 1).

The Right Hon. Sir NORMAN BROOK, Secretary.
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I. The Prime Minister said that he had asked Sir Alec Kirkbride to attend this meeting of the Cabinet in order that he might give his impressions of the present situation in Jordan. Sir Alec, who had served for more than twenty years in Jordan and had been H.M. Minister there until 1951, had happened to be in Amman on private business at the time when General Glubb was dismissed. King Hussein had sent for him and, after discussing the situation, had pressed him to come specially to London in order to assure Her Majesty's Government that neither the King nor the Government of Jordan desired to see any change in the traditional relations of friendship and co-operation between the two countries. From the conversations which he had held in Amman, Sir Alec was satisfied that the King's dismissal of General Glubb was not a sudden decision taken in a mood of temperamental instability, but derived from a long-standing dissatisfaction with the way in which General Glubb had controlled the Arab Legion. It was essentially an act directed against General Glubb personally; it was not designed to disrupt Jordan's relations with the United Kingdom; and both the King and the Prime Minister of Jordan were now most seriously disturbed at the possibility that a lasting breach might thereby be created in the relations between the two countries. Their primary object was to preserve the independence of Jordan, and they recognised that this could not be preserved without the continuing friendship and support of the United Kingdom.

In reply to questions by Ministers, Sir Alec Kirkbride made the following points:

(a) The King's action had destroyed the unity of the Arab Legion. Without British officers in positions of executive command, the Legion could not be expected to recover its efficiency as a fighting force. If, however, we decided on that account to withdraw from Jordan, the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan would fall and the country itself would collapse. This would have serious effects in Iraq. It would probably lead to the fall of the Hashemite dynasty, and the end of British influence, in that country also. We must therefore continue to support Jordan in order to protect our vital interests in Iraq.

(b) It would be a mistake to attempt to bring Iraq into any discussions which we might now have about the future of our relations with Jordan. The Prime Minister of Jordan, who was in league with the Saudis, was a bitter enemy of the Prime Minister of Iraq and was strongly opposed to any closer association between Jordan and Iraq. King Hussein would also resent any attempt by us to instigate his relatives in Iraq to bring pressure to bear on him.

(c) The Jordan Government were unlikely to accept suggestions that they should look to Egypt or Saudi Arabia, instead of the United Kingdom, for financial assistance. They realised that such financial support would not be continued for long when once the link between Jordan and the United Kingdom had been broken. The object of these other Arab States was to absorb Jordan, not to preserve its independence.

(d) The relations between the United Kingdom and Jordan had been seriously shaken by the events of the last few days, but the damage was not irreparable and the situation could be restored if prompt action were taken. What was immediately required was an assurance that the United Kingdom Government were not proposing to withdraw their support from Jordan, and an offer to discuss the terms on which British officers might serve with the Arab Legion in the future.

The Prime Minister thanked Sir Alec Kirkbride for the information and explanations which he had given to the Cabinet. Sir Alec Kirkbride then withdrew from the meeting.
Discussion showed that there was general agreement in the Cabinet that it would be inexpedient for the Government to base their policy on the assumption that friendly relations between this country and Jordan could not be restored. The extent to which we could continue our Treaty obligations to Jordan must, however, depend on the future reliability of the Arab Legion. Our first task should therefore be to discuss with the Jordan Government the basis on which British officers might be associated with the Legion in the future. It might, for example, be possible to persuade the Jordan Government to accept a definite commitment to retain a number of British officers in given posts for specific periods. The scope of these discussions might subsequently be widened so as to cover the more general problem of future relations between this country and Jordan. Before this wider question was broached, however, we should consider how we could reduce the extent of our obligations under the existing Treaty. In present circumstances it seemed undesirable that we should retain under any Treaty with Jordan obligations greater than those which we had undertaken by the Tripartite Declaration of 1950.

The Cabinet then considered the draft of a personal message from the Prime Minister to the King of Jordan and of a formal note to the Jordan Government. The first of these was intended as a reply to King Hussein's message to the Prime Minister in Telegram No. 364 from Amman. Its purpose was to make it plain that the United Kingdom Government were prepared to match any efforts which the Jordan Government might now be ready to make to strengthen the Anglo-Jordan alliance. The second draft, while reaffirming the decision that British officers could not now hold positions of executive command in the Arab Legion, suggested that discussions should be held about the terms on which British officers might serve in Jordan in the future.

In discussion various suggestions were made for amendment of these two drafts. It was also agreed that they should be accompanied by a telegram of instructions to H.M. Ambassador in Amman making it clear that the discussions which he was authorised to open with the Jordan Government should at this stage be confined to questions affecting the service of British officers in Jordan, now and in the future, and that he should not embark on the wider issue of future relations between the United Kingdom and Jordan until he had received further instructions.

The Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs to revise the drafts of the message to King Hussein and of the note to the Jordan Government, in the light of the comments made in the Cabinet's discussion, and to prepare a draft of the instructions to Her Majesty's Ambassador at Amman which should accompany those messages.

(2) Took note that the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs would submit drafts of these three telegrams for the Prime Minister's approval.

2. The Minister of Agriculture said that, after the Cabinet's meeting on the previous day, he had communicated to Sir James Turner, the President of the National Farmers' Union, the Government's decision that the current review of farm prices should be concluded on the basis of a schedule of guarantees representing an increase of £24 millions, as compared with the previous year, and including an increase of 3d. a gallon in the guaranteed price for milk. Sir James Turner had now indicated that the farmer's would be prepared to accept a settlement on the basis of a figure of
£25½ millions with a somewhat different schedule of guarantees, including an increase of ½d. a gallon on milk. The Minister said that he could not recommend acceptance of the latest schedule put forward on behalf of the farmers: in particular he would not be in favour of increasing the price of milk by more than ½d.: but he was disposed, for the sake of an agreed settlement, to offer a rather different schedule of guarantees representing a total increase of £25½ millions.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that, in view of the course which the negotiations had taken, there was much to be said for imposing a settlement. It would be difficult for the farmers to criticise effectively a settlement at £24 millions when it would be known that they had been ready to accept one of £25½ millions. His own preference was therefore for adhering to the decision which the Cabinet had reached on the previous day. If, however, an additional £1 million was to be offered it was important that the increase to be made should be one which could be justified on economic grounds. He would be strongly opposed to any further increase in the price of milk.

Discussion showed that opinion in the Cabinet was divided on this question. Some Ministers saw positive advantage in imposing a settlement on this occasion. They thought that this would be consistent with the Government's general economic policy at this time. It would help the Government to justify decisions which they might subsequently be required to take in respect of other industries. It would also be likely to have a salutary effect in strengthening the farmers' opposition to further wage claims by farm workers.

Other Ministers thought it would be unwise to forego this opportunity of arriving at an agreed settlement with the farmers. It would not seem reasonable to have broken off negotiations when the gap dividing the two parties was so small a figure as £1 million. The Government had been right to show that, in present economic circumstances, they were resolved to deal firmly with the farmers; but they had achieved that object by reducing the farmers' demand from £41 millions to £25 millions. An imposed settlement was likely to give rise to political difficulties in the House of Commons and bitterness in the rural constituencies.

There was, however, agreement in the Cabinet that, even if another £1 million were to be conceded, no concession should be made to the farmers on the prices of milk, eggs or pigs. In all the circumstances the best course would be for the Minister of Agriculture to inform Sir James Turner that the Government were not prepared to increase the guaranteed price of milk by more than ½d. a gallon, and to see whether he had any other proposal to put forward.

The Cabinet—

Authorised the Minister of Agriculture to inform the President of the National Farmers' Union that the Government were not prepared to increase the guaranteed price of milk by more than ½d. a gallon.
Foreign Secretary could now decline to visit Jerusalem, accepting the risk that the Israeli Government might say that in that event they would prefer that he should not visit Israel at all. Alternatively, he could carry out the programme which they suggested, but issue a public statement thereafter making it clear that this did not imply recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. The first of these courses was more in accord with the policy which we had hitherto pursued, but it might give rise to political criticism in Parliament.

In discussion it was suggested that in this matter the Foreign Secretary should be guided by the precedent established by the United States Secretary of State. If he paid the same visits as Mr. Dulles had done, this should give rise to no political criticism. If he made this offer and the Israeli Government rejected it, he could then offer to visit Tel Aviv but not Jerusalem.

The Cabinet—

Invited the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs to advise the Foreign Secretary in the sense of their discussion.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1.
9th March, 1956.