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CABINET.

IRAQ. NEGOTIATIONS FOR REVISION OF THE TREATY.

NOTE BY THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER.

I CIRCULATE for the information of the Cabinet a record of a conversation which I had with King Feisal on Monday, the 28th November.

W. S. C.

*Treasury Chambers, S.W. 1,
November 29, 1927.*

King Feisal came to see me this afternoon. His mood had been much altered by his conversation with Sir Austen Chamberlain at luncheon.

After compliments, he narrated from his point of view the recent course of events in Iraq and the discussions here. He said that Great Britain's object in sending him to Iraq was to secure a reduction in expense and that this had been largely achieved in the six years that had passed.

I said that the reduction of expense was only one of our objects in Iraq, and that the discharge of our mission under the League of Nations and the maintenance of our permanent interests in Iraq were also part of our policy. On the other hand, although Iraq would certainly become rich enough to be independent of British financial aid, she would not for many years be able to protect herself. If the Turks invaded Kurdistan and Mosul, or if the Russians began a prolonged downward pressure through Persia, nothing that Iraq could do herself would preserve the life of the State. Sir Austen Chamberlain had told him at luncheon that if Iraq ran into danger through following British advice we should feel under an obligation to protect her, but that, of course, if the danger arose

through her having rejected our advice we should be entitled to disinterest ourselves. In this connection he must understand that even with the best will in the world it might not be in our power to defend the territory of Iraq. We could not undertake to do so on the spot. The influence of England in Europe and in the Council of the League of Nations was, however, very great, and that influence constituted the main protection for Iraq, supplemented as it would be by such forces of aeroplanes, &c., as we from time to time agreed with the Iraq Government to maintain.

The King accepted very well the statement that in certain circumstances it would be beyond our power to defend his country locally. He said that he quite understood that we could not put large armies on the frontiers of Mosul. He realised that British influence exerted in Europe would be the best safeguard. For that very reason he urged that we ought to encourage Iraq to do the best she could to defend herself and make the largest preparations.

To this I replied that it would be a mistake for his Government to make itself unpopular by forcing through conscription in order to raise an army certainly more feeble than the armies it might have to meet. Feisal said that there was no idea of general conscription. They proposed to take from a population of $3\frac{1}{2}$ millions six thousand men a year, maintaining altogether twelve thousand men as against nine thousand they had at present. I said that nevertheless this would be no real defence comparable to the protection afforded by the support of England.

The King then came to his immediate troubles. He had been wounded by the memorandum handed to him on his first arrival by the Colonial Office. This memorandum was handed to me by his interpreter, and I read it. He complained that there was a lack of confidence, &c. I told him that it would be a grave error for him to go back to Iraq without signing a Treaty. It might not matter much to us, but a rupture between him and his British friends would be the occasion for every enemy, internal and external, to raise his head. Blood might flow and lives be lost if a needless breakdown were published to the world. Above all, I was most shocked last week to hear that he had permitted the word "abdication" to fall from his lips. Who would rejoice if this were to occur? The French who had hunted him from Damascus would say "I told you so"; and Ibn Saud who had chased the Sherifian family from the Holy Places would then feel that his work was complete. Our idea in promoting his candidature for the throne of Iraq had been to establish in the dynastic centre of his family a rallying point for Arab culture throughout the East, and the melancholy events which had occurred since in the Hedjaz left it the sole and last stronghold of the traditions of so many centuries.

Feisal admitted his grief and fear at returning without a Treaty. If he had used the word "abdication," it had only been because of the

hopeless position he would be in in face of an advertised rupture with the British.

I said I understood he had told Sir Austen Chamberlain at luncheon that in view of their conversation he would now remain and continue the negotiations. Was this the case? Could I report to my colleagues that he was determined to stay and reach an agreement? He said decidedly that this was so.

Apparently there are three points in dispute. The first is "complete independence." I said it was foolish to quarrel about an adjective when the substantive carries the essential meaning. As a matter of fact, complete independence was not reconcilable either with the facts or with our obligations to the League. He said that he would drop the request for the word "complete." Could we not, however, do something for him in regard to the power to dismiss British officials? They mostly had ten-year contracts, and we were only talking of a period of four years. In practice the case would hardly ever arise. Was it necessary to placard in the text of a Treaty conditions which were needlessly humiliating to Iraq and weakening to his position? I did not know how this matter stood, so I said that, if the King of his own motion stayed and negotiated with an earnest desire to reach an agreement, these discussions should be resumed.

Lastly, he raised the question of finance in connection with the payment due by Iraq for the Iraq railways and also for the military expenses. I said that in a few years, when the oil began to flow, Iraq would be very rich and quite able to pay all that was justly due; that it would be easier for me to take a somewhat more generous view on financial matters in the next few years if the sums paid by us or held over from settlement were put into a suspense account, to be paid when Iraq was rich enough to do so. This aspect could also be studied in the renewed conversations. He seemed gratified at this.

Generally speaking, I believe that he has no intention of going back without an agreement, and that the prospects of reaching one fully justify a persevering resumption of the discussions.

W. S. C.

November 28, 1927.