

**MOST SECRET**  
August 16, 1942

**MEMORANDUM:**

It is generally conceded that of the United Nations the prestige of the United States is higher in the Middle East than is that of either Great Britain or the Free French of General de Gaulle. The reasons for this are complex, but it may be stated briefly that the native population of Syria has not been happy under the mandate of France and that the British have had so many troubles in Palestine which they could not solve with satisfaction either to the Jews or to the Arabs that their prestige, too, has declined. On the other hand, the good opinion of the United States has rested primarily on a long tradition of beneficent and philanthropic works, and the United States has not suffered under the disadvantage of having any immediate political or military entanglement with the Eastern Mediterranean. Distance has given it a measure of protection.

It now seems to be a matter of military interest to increase in any way possible the prestige and influence of the United States in the Middle East, and it is appropriate to examine ways and means of doing this. One plan is to send a political and military mission to Syria. Whether this mission consists of one man or five or twenty-five, it is desirable to explore its advantages and disadvantages to American prestige in the Eastern Mediterranean and on the probable course of the war.

Informed Jewish and Arabic leaders in the United States are in agreement that some such mission is desirable. This seems to

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be the immediate and primary reaction, though it soon develops that from the Jewish point of view the desirability is maintained only so long as the mission does not collaborate too closely with the Arabs and that from the Arabic point of view the desirability lasts only if the mission is willing to renounce American support of Zionism. By being removed from the actual scene, the United States is now in the fortunate position of being counted a potential friend by everyone. One Arabic observer has commented that within twenty-four hours after the arrival of any mission, every Arab of influence, whether Christian or Moslem, would want to know what stand the United States will take on the question of supporting the Jews in Palestine. If no commitment is made, the United States will lose face and be in no better position vis-a-vis the Arabs than are the British. If Zionism is renounced, Jewish people not only in Palestine but all over the world would regard it as a most outright betrayal, and the political repercussions would be tremendous, not only in the Middle East but in the United States. If Zionism is supported, a possible good influence of the mission upon the Arabs of Syria will be nullified.

These are delicate questions, but perhaps less fundamental than some others. Syria is now nominally free, the head of the Syrian Government being Taj-el-Din al Kasbi. This freedom was proclaimed by the British and grudgingly acquiesced in by the Free French after their occupation of Syria. There is, however, a Free French military control. Any American mission operating quite independently in Syria, making contacts directly with the nominal

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government and with the subjects of Inj-al-Bin, would run grave danger of coming into conflict with the Free French. Indeed, if the direct contacts with the Syrian people were to be effective enough to make them worthwhile, such conflict with the Free French would seem inevitable, unless, indeed, the American mission acted in a spirit of collaboration with the Free French. But any collaboration would spoil the effectiveness of the mission, because of the deep enmity between the Syrian people and the French authorities. It makes little difference to the Christian and Moslem Syrians whether the French are Vichy or Free. They would prefer to have as little as possible to do with both.

In any case, in such circumstances, there is little that the mission could offer the Syrians except to emphasize and underscore the nominal promises already made to them by the French authorities, and these in the eyes of the Syrians would remain only promises. There is, in addition, the danger that any misunderstanding between the American mission and the French authorities and any promises made by the American mission to the Syrians would be used by the Axis as propaganda to diminish the prestige of the United States with the French people in France itself. President Roosevelt has repeatedly assured the French people that the United States recognizes and intends to guarantee the integrity of the French empire at the end of the war, and it would be possible for the Germans and the collaborationists in France to point to the activity of the mission as an indication that these assurances of the President are not to be trusted.

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The immediate interest of the United States is to preserve the Eastern Mediterranean in this way to the United Nations, inasmuch as prestige in the eyes of the Arabic-speaking peoples is most effectively enhanced by a display of force close at hand, the most effective way of attaining this purpose would be to send men and armor in sufficient quantity to defend Syria and to impress the Arabs with the fact that Syria will be successfully defended from any attack by the Axis. One reason why the propaganda which comes from the Grand Mufti is effective is because there is no present aid from the United States to prove to the people by example that the Mufti's propaganda is not true. The most effective counter-propaganda to the Grand Mufti would be to let the Arabs see a display of American military aid instead of words and promises. The Axis partners and the Grand Mufti can never just as many promises as we can, and they are constantly doing so. What is needed to enhance our prestige is not more promises but a show of force.

This analysis of the problem suggests, therefore, that if a mission is to be sent to Syria it should be not political or military, but purely technical or economic so as to avoid the many pitfalls of a small military and political mission. Advice on soil enrichment and educational facilities might increase as a long-term investment the prestige which the United States is already enjoying in the Middle East because of similar benevolent activities in the past. Such a mission might include any subject from astronomy to hydro-electric power. A technical mission is desirable

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not because of the shortage of food in Syria and because of the lack of shipping, but politics would be kept out. There should be nothing like the investigation of the Magdalen Commission at the end of the last war and there should be no political post-war planning for the end of this war. The mission should act as a fact-finding body, perhaps in preparation for military cooperation, but should not judge in politics.

Most desirable would be an ultimate military occupying force capable of defending the country with arms and equipment against any Arab attack. Such a military force, so far as one can now foresee, ought to act in harmony with the French military mission. If powerful enough, it would probably escape the stigma of collaborating with the French while at the same time, because of its own show of power, it could win and hold the active support of the now recalcitrant Arab natives.

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