Foreign Office memorandum on Soviet behaviour at the UN, 22 February 1946

Northern Department

 One could write a whole volume on the proceedings of the Soviet Delegation at the United Nations, but the following brief indications may be of some use.

1. Security Council

Whatever the interpretation may be, the Russians made a dead set at us on the Security Council. There was some hope that when they got their way substantially over Persia[[1]](#footnote-1) the pressure would relax, but it did not. The same hope was renewed when Mr. Vyshinsky agreed, amid applause, to the solution of the Greek question[[2]](#footnote-2) by means of a Chairman’s statement[[3]](#footnote-3). This again was frustrated and the Russians and Ukrainians took up the case against us over Indonesia with renewed fury. In the Syrian and Lebanon debate it was noticeable that Mr. Vyshinsky intervened with objections whenever the Security Council seemed to be getting somewhere near general agreement.

2. Assembly

The Russians were clearly under instructions to obtain certain very specific objectives.

(a) Exclusive admission of the World Federation of Trade Unions to some form of consultation with the United Nations.

(b) Prevention of the adoption of any recommendation on refugees which would cause an international body with a wide and lasting mandate to be set up to deal with the question.

(c) Passage of a resolution re-affirming the necessity for handing over and punishment of war criminals.

(c) was unanimously approved but on (a) and (b) the Russians, after a hard and bitter fight in which the Russian bloc used every device of procedure possible to stave off defeat, were finally defeated. They accepted this verdict without protest or making difficulties, but they are far from having given up the struggle as is shown by a quick Russian manoeuvre at the Economic and Social Council to ensure that all the countries of their persuasion are represented on the sub-committee dealing with the refugee question.

3. General

Considering the strain on Anglo-Soviet political relations caused by these various points of difference, personal relationships with the UK delegates remained good. It must, however, be added that the Russians and their satellites stood out as an uncompromising element in an Assembly which, for the most part, was prepared to do a good deal of compromising towards the common end.

There was little evidence of collusion between the Levant States Delegation and the Soviet Delegation. I understand that the latter expressed their appreciation of Soviet support after debate although in fact they must have been somewhat embarrassed by it. As is well known, M. Vyshinsky finally decided to use his veto, after failing to put through either of his three amendments to the United States resolution[[4]](#footnote-4), and thus prevented the Council from formally adopting a decision which was friendly and helpful to the Levant States cause.

The Russians have a Minister to the Levant States[[5]](#footnote-5) who in his interviews with the two Governments is understood to have expressed Russia’s support for them in their wish to remove the last vestiges of foreign control. Kimche’s report[[6]](#footnote-6) that the Minister had presented a formal note in these terms was however denied[[7]](#footnote-7). The general impression one gains is that the Russians are prepared to make full use of the Levant States situation to embarrass us and complicate our Middle East policy but that they have not yet developed a high degree of interference in those countries. It is possible that the Russians will use the grievance over the Hatay to embarrass the Turks and they are also reported to be taking an interest in the Kurds[[8]](#footnote-8).

[TNA, FO 371/56832]

Keywords: United Nations

1. By means of a resolution of the Security Council on 30 January 1946, the issue of the Soviet-Iranian disputes was literally removed from discussion in the Council to be settled through bilateral talks; that was the basis of the original Soviet position on this issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is likely that Bevin had in mind the Security Council meeting of 4 February, during which Vyshinsky, without retreating from earlier declarations, agreed to consider discussion of the Greek issue exhausted. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Makin, Norman John Oswald (1889 – 1982) – Australian politician and diplomat. Minister for the Navy (1941 – 1946), Minister for Munitions (1941 – 1946), Head of the Australian Delegation to the UN (1945 – 1946), President of the UN Security Council (1946, 1947), Australian Ambassador to the USA (1946 – 1951). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The reference is to the session of the Security Council of 16 February where a letter from the heads of the Syrian and Lebanese delegations had been discussed. Vyshinsky tried to make the wording of the resolution more severe, including a more urgent formulation in place of ‘at the first opportunity’ in respect of the Council’s recommendation of the withdrawal of British and French troops from Syrian and Lebanese territory. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Solod, Daniil Semenovich (1908 – 1988) – Soviet diplomat, adviser at the Embassy of the USSR in Egypt (1943 – 1944), Envoy of the USSR in Syria and Lebanon (1944 – 1950), Deputy in charge of the Near and Middle East Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR (1951 – 1953). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The likely reference is to Kimche, John (1909 – 1994) – a British journalist and historian, editor of *Tribune* (1942 – 1945, 1946 – 1947) and a Middle East specialist. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As subsequent studies have shown, the note (dated 10 January 1946) with the proposal of concluding a treaty between the USSR, Syria and Lebanon was passed to the Lebanese authorities by the envoy Solod. According to the treaties themselves, which had remained secret (the Soviet-Syrian one was dated 1 February 1946, the Soviet-Lebanese one 3 February), the Soviet Union, among other things, would be obliged to provide support to the two Middle Eastern countries in their steps towards attaining independence. For more detail see: Ginat R. Syria’s and Lebanon’s Meandering Road to Independence: The Soviet Involvement and the Anglo-French Rivalry // *Diplomacy & Statecraft*. Vol. 13 4 (2002), p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Alongside this, a detailed 1946 report by the Foreign Office devoted to the Kurdish issue called for exaggeration to be avoided, but, nonetheless, for vigilance to be maintained: ‘The impression given by all reports is that, except in Persia, the Soviet authorities are not at present making any serious effort to direct the Kurdish movement, and even there they are still pursuing a limited objective … Meanwhile, in the absence of any effective counter action, propaganda, whether directed by them or inspired by their actions, prepares the way for a possible change to a policy of unification of the Kurds and their absorption in the U.S.S.R. Even if the Soviet Government has no intention of adopting this policy, it is a bogey which can be produced at need, and the present limited support for Kurdish autonomy helps the process of undermining British influence and prestige in the Middle East’ (cited in: Records of the Kurds. Territory, Revolt and Nationalism, 1831 – 1979. British Documentary Sources. Vol. 10 / Ed. by A.L.P. Burdett. (Cambridge, 2015), p. 277). For more detail on Soviet policy in respect of Iranian Kurdistan see: Gasanli Dzh. SSSR – Iran. Gl. 10. Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War*, ch.10). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)