Cabinet conclusions concerning British foreign policy in the Middle East, dated 4 October 1945

Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1, on Thursday, 4th October, 1945 at 11 a.m.

CM (45) 38

Middle East

Future Policy

6. The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Foreign Secretary (C.P/ (45) 174) submitting recommendations on Middle East policy based on the discussions at the Conference held in September with British Representatives in the Middle East.

*The Foreign Secretary* said that, in his view, it was essential to broaden the basis of British influence in the Middle East by developing an economic and social policy which would make for prosperity and contentment in the area as a whole. It would be the object of this policy to remedy the mal-distribution of purchasing power in the Middle East communities and to raise the standard of living in the masses of the people. The Middle East Supply Centre had, during the war, pursued a policy of economic coordination throughout the Middle East and the good work which it had started should not be lost. We had to face a threatening situation in Palestine, an agitation in Egypt for the withdrawal of our forces, and the difficulties with France in the Levant. If, however, we could promote economic development and social reform in the areas these military and political problems would be more easily solved.

So far as concerned defence, the Chiefs of Staff were considering the possibility of basing in British territory, rather than in Egypt, the forces required for the protection of the Middle East. If this could be arranged, responsibility for the defence of Egypt could be shared by a common agreement which would leave with the responsibility for the defence of the Suez Canal area.

With regard to the Levant his aim was to arrive at a clear-cut agreement which would finally remove French suspicions about our intentions in this area; and he made some progress in discussions which he had held with M. Bidault during the Conference of the Council of Foreign Ministers. He proposed to pursue the matter further with the French Government alone before summoning a conference on the lines suggested in paragraph 5 (c) (iv) of C.P. (45) 174. M. Bidault had asked for our support for the proposal that France should obtain from the Untied Nations Organisation authority for a base in the Levant. He did not rule out the possibility of France’s obtaining such a base when the time came for a settlement of the question of bases, but he had avoided giving in advance any pledge of British support for such a claim.

With regard to Persia, he had an exchange of letters with M. Molotov in which undertakings had been given that both the Russian and the British troops would be withdrawn from Persia, in accordance with the Treaty, before the 2nd March, 1946…

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