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21 October 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

SUBJECT: Consequences of Certain US Courses of Action
in the Middle East

I. What would be the consequences if the US encouraged Iraq
to intervene in Syria?

A. Background

1. Iraq is increasingly anxious to intervene in Syria to block Communist control there, to prevent further deliveries of Soviet arms, and to forestall possible Syrian move to cut off flow of Iraqi oil through Syria to Mediterranean ports. Such a move would fulfill a long-standing Iraqi ambition.

2. These dangers have almost certainly increased in the last few weeks. Ambassador Moeese in Damascus now estimates that a gradual leftist take over of the Syrian government is almost inevitable unless the US takes early action, either by giving a free hand to Iraq or Turkey, or by "positive" moves of its own. The UK has already indicated to Nuri that it favors a "more forward" Iraqi policy in Syria, though it has warned him against premature military action which could be cited against Iraq at the UN.

3. The chances are probably less than even that Iraq could install and maintain either a pro-Iraqi regime in Syria or some form of Iraqi-Syrian union without open military intervention.



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4. Extension of Iraqi influence or control in Syria, whether by peaceful or military means, would be followed by a prolonged period of instability and unrest in Syria. Iraq would have to cope with strong anti-Iraqi (including Communist) groups in Syria, who would be backed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and France. If pro-Iraqi forces did not quickly establish legal control of Syria, Egypt might intervene at least with air forces under its newly signed defense agreement with Syria. This agreement calls for a unified military command and may lead to Egyptian forces being stationed on Syrian soil.

B. EXTERNAL EFFECTS

1. It would be widely regarded that the Iraqi move would not have been possible without US aid and consent. The external effects would depend upon the extent to which Iraq had to use military force.

2. Turkey, and to a lesser extent Pakistan and Iran, would welcome the move as an indication of US determination to prevent the expansion of Communism in the Middle East and to strengthen its defenses.

3. Lebanon would hesitate to jump on the pro-West, pro-Iraqi bandwagon until they had assessed the reaction of Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the USSR. Jordan would also hesitate initially, but ultimately would be responsive to UK guidance.

4. Saudi Arabia would vigorously oppose the move. The Saudis would do everything possible to undermine Iraqi influence in Syria. They would increase their already substantial allocation of funds to that end. Initial emotional reaction might be strong enough to cause the Saudis to denounce the Dhahran Air Base contract out of hand and even to threaten to cancel the Aramco contracts. However, basic suspicion of Soviet intentions and need for continued oil revenues would probably prevent them from breaking all ties with the US.

5. Israel would get some satisfaction from the discomfiture of Egypt and the further fracturing of Arab unity. At the same time, however, its concern for its security would greatly increase as a result of the creation of a strong military state on its northeast frontier. It would almost certainly put increased pressure on the US for iron clad security guarantees. Although Israel would probably not launch an early attack on Syria, it might take advantage of the situation to increase its military pressures on Egypt.

6. The USSR would oppose the move and would almost certainly attempt to get the UN to act, particularly if Iraq intervened militarily. The USSR has offered guarantees to Syria against its northern US-supported neighbors and might make strenuous efforts to make good on this guarantee. It would almost certainly increase its subversive efforts in the area and would attempt to capitalize on Egyptian and Saudi resentment.

7. Egypt would almost certainly regard an Iraqi takeover of Syria as impossible without US and UK aid and consent and would therefore interpret it as strong evidence that the US and UK had elected to side with Egypt's enemies in the Arab world. Because of the magnitude of the challenge to Egypt's prestige in the Arab world, the RCC's initial reaction would be extremely emotional and hostile. It would almost certainly withdraw its support from the Johnston Plan. It might also feel that drastic steps, possibly including military action under its new treaty with Syria, were necessary in order to maintain itself in power and restore its prestige. There is thus the danger that its initial moves against the US might make it difficult for Nasser to continue his policy of developing a middle position between the West and the Soviet Bloc. This danger would be lessened if the Iraqi move were accompanied by convincing evidence of US support for Egypt.

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II. What would be the effects of the cessation of US aid to Egypt?

1. The cessation of US aid to Egypt would almost certainly lead Nasser to conclude that the US was attempting to isolate Egypt and bring about the downfall of the RCC, particularly if accompanied by an Iraqi take-over in Syria. The danger of violent anti-US disorders would be great. Nasser would be under tremendous pressure to rely increasingly on Soviet support. It is also possible that such a US move would cause the downfall of the Nasser regime and its replacement by a more extremist and leftist government.

2. Israel would derive considerable comfort from a cutoff of US aid to Egypt. Israel would, however, continue apprehensive of growing Egyptian strength and would continue to press for US arms and security guarantees.

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ALLEN W. DULLES
Director

O/NE:(app. by Board and DDI, 21 Oct.)

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