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MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series II: Harold P. Manson File (Zionism Files), 1940-1949, undated.

Sub-series A: Main Manson File, 1940-1949.

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St. John Philby, 1943.

EXTRACTS FROM A STATEMENT SENT TO ME BY MR. ST. JOHN PHILBY, 17.11.43

.....It was, I said, on January 8th, 1940 - a few days after my return to Arabia - that I communicated "the plan" to the King. There was nothing whatsoever to prevent him telling me then and there that it was an impossible and unacceptable proposition - in which case I should have informed Dr. Weizmann accordingly and dropped the whole thing. But the King did not tell me that. He told me, on the contrary, that some such arrangements might be possible in appropriate future circumstances, that he would keep the matter in mind, that he would give me a definite answer at the appropriate time, that meanwhile I should not breathe a word about the matter to anyone - least of all to any Arab - and finally, that if the proposals became the subject of public discussion with any suggestion of his approving them, he would have no hesitation whatsoever in denouncing me as having no authority to commit him in the matter. I was perfectly prepared to accept that position, and the King knew that I would communicate his answer to Dr. Weizmann. He did not forbid me to do so!

So far from being a persona non grata to the King owing to my connection with this business, I remained in Arabia until July 21st of that year (1940) - six and a half months after the fatal communication, and practically all the time as the King's guest at Riyadh or in his desert camp. Indeed, on June 1st His Majesty made me a gift of a newly-built house on the assumption and in the hope that I should live permanently in Arabia. Time dragged on with never a sign from the King, and on a certain occasion when Yusuf Yasin and I were alone together in the desert I ventured to broach the subject to him. As I expected he was hostile, but, so far as I know, he kept my confidence and I heard no more of the incident. Still later, under similar conditions of confidence I told Bashir Sa'dawi the general outline of the plan, and found him unexpectedly favourable; but within the hour he had told the King of our conversation, and, when I walked into the audience-chamber that afternoon, the King summoned me to his side. Didn't I tell you, he said, not to talk to anyone about that matter? I made some very lame excuse, saying that I thought he must have forgotten all about it, and that there was no harm in talking about it as an academic proposition. Well, remember, he said; don't do it again! Meanwhile, the European situation was having a gloomy effect on Arabia, and I imagined that appropriate conditions for the discussion of Palestine affairs would be long in establishing themselves. In May I decided to press the King for an answer, but, ~~for~~ as I anticipated he put me off again - though without one single word of reproach.

It was entirely on my own initiative that I decided about the middle of June to leave Arabia for America. Communications with my family in England had been cut off by the closing of the Mediterranean; but, when I gave this as my reason for going to America, the King telegraphed

to the Arabian Minister in London to telegraph a weekly bulletin regarding my family. Nevertheless, I insisted on going despite the efforts of the King and the Amir Sa'ud to dissuade me on the ground that I might get into trouble owing to my habit of free speech. I answered that England was a democratic country cherishing the right of free speech at all times. In the end, unable to dissuade me, the King insisted on my recording in my diary that he himself had warned me not to leave Arabia lest I might get into trouble. On the very day of my departure the Crown Prince, who had come to the door to see me off, begged me to change my mind even at the last moment, and begged me to record in my diary that he too had tried to prevent me leaving Arabia.

I explained all this in detail to Colonel Hoskins in order to disabuse him of the impression that I was at any time, after making "the plan" known to Ibn Sa'ud, a persona non grata at his Court. As regards the future, I put it to Colonel Hoskins that the suggestion of my return to Arabia being unwelcome to the King was obviously susceptible of a very simple test. The very same suggestion had been officially made once before (in February 1941) and I had applied the test with the result that I had been categorically assured by the Arabian Minister in London not only that I would be welcome back in Arabia, but that he was ready at any time to give me the necessary visa for the purpose of returning thither. In view, however, of the withdrawal of Colonel Hoskins' original statement that the King would not permit my return, I did not think it necessary to take any specific action in the matter. I was, indeed, as I explained to Colonel Hoskins, completely satisfied with his explanation of the whole matter, and he readily accepted my suggestion that, as his remarks about the King's attitude to me had naturally shocked Dr. Weizmann, he should seek an opportunity of ~~explaining~~ explaining the real position to them as he had done to me. With that, I brought the conversation back to "the plan". On his own showing, I said, he had known nothing of "the plan" until it had been mentioned to him by the King. It followed that he had not gone to the King with anything in the nature of a firm offer on the lines of "the plan" on behalf of the United States Government. A further statement, made by Colonel Hoskins to Dr. Weizmann (but not repeated to me) was that Colonel Hoskins started by asking the King whether he would see Dr. Weizmann; that the King replied that he would consider the matter, but some days elapsed without his returning to the subject. Concluding from this that the answer was negative, Colonel Hoskins asked him whether he would meet one of Dr. Weizmann's colleagues? It was then that the King is reported to have broken out against Dr. Weizmann and the Scheme. Colonel Hoskins was now aware, I went on, from what I had said, that the King had sworn me to complete secrecy and had warned me that he would, if necessary, denounce me. That was exactly what had happened, and the deduction I drew from the whole story was as follows:

The King, on hearing that he was to be visited officially by a confidential emissary of the American Government naturally assumed that the emissary was coming to communicate to him a firm offer on the lines of "the plan". The emissary came with no such offer, but merely with the suggestion that Ibn Sa'ud should meet Dr. Weizmann or some other Jewish leader, presumably for the purpose of further bargaining

over Palestine. The King, fully accustomed to the tortuous ways of diplomacy, had deliberately refrained both from giving a definite answer and from expressing his opinion of Dr. Weizmann. He may well have thought that a few days of silent incubation would produce the firm offer which he had a right to expect if "the plan" reflected the ~~the~~ desire of the British and American Governments. But Colonel Hoskins had no firm offer to make him; and when some days later he merely asked for the King's reply to his original suggestion about seeing Dr. Weizmann, His Majesty, realising that "the plan" had obviously not won acceptance on the part of the two Governments concerned, allowed himself, as he occasionally does in moments of disappointment, the luxury of a fit of ill-temper at the expense of Dr. Weizmann, the Jews in general, and myself. It was exactly what I would have expected in the circumstances. King Ibn Sa'ud is getting very weary of the ways of Western diplomacy, and he perhaps rightly suspects that the strategic, economic and political interests of certain Great Powers debar them from making ~~any~~ really acceptable offer to the Arabs.

Nevertheless, as I made clear to Colonel Hoskins after our very full talk over the whole business, his account of his conversations with King Ibn Sa'ud had not in the least shaken my conviction - a conviction on which I was prepared to stake my whole reputation, which was all I had to stake since I had already sacrificed my career by my fight for Arab independence - that, had he gone out to Arabia with President Roosevelt's firm offer, made on behalf of the American and British Governments, on the lines of "the plan" that offer would have been accepted. I could only draw the rather disappointing conclusion that the British and American Governments are not prepared to make the relatively light sacrifices involved in "the plan" even to save the Jews from persecution, torture and death. If, however, I am ~~xxx~~ wrong on this point the opportunity presents itself for putting the matter to the test. If the two Governments are really desirous of an arrangement on the lines of "the plan" and are prepared to make to Ibn Sa'ud a firm offer in that sense, I am convinced that the King will accept it - but it must be a firm offer on the lines of "the plan", to be accepted or rejected as it stands without modification or bargaining. I have only my own conviction to pit against the views of Colonel Hoskins, but no harm can come of putting the matter to the test. Either "the plan" is accepted, or the status quo remains intact without prejudice to anybody. For my part, I guarantee (for what my guarantee is worth) that the suggested firm offer will be accepted if made by any reasonably intelligent person of indisputable goodwill on behalf of the two Governments concerned.

H.St. J. PHILBY.
17.11.43