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Smuts, Field-Marshal, 1943.

SECRET

SHORT NOTE OF CONVERSATION WITH FIELD-MARSHAL SMUTS, HYDE PARK HOTEL, LONDON, S.W.1.
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14th, 1943, at 10 a.m.

I met General Smuts at the Hyde Park Hotel at ten o'clock this morning, and though we had not seen each other for eleven years, we met as old friends. I had, however, a considerable amount of leeway to make up in order to put before him a picture of the situation as I see it at present, and this took about half an hour.

I described our difficulties and frustrations: the White Paper, and what it means for us, the Jewish Army, etc., and incidentally told him that because of the White Paper probably about 150,000 to 200,000 more Jews had died in torment because we could not get them out. I added that in a few months now, there would be a notice over the gates of Palestine: "No Jew need apply!" I described the gun-running trials, and told him that Englishmen and Americans were apt to return from Palestine with poisoned minds, to spread anti-Jewish, anti-Zionist, anti-Semitic, propaganda, suggesting that the Jews were subversive, and attacking the United Nations in the midst of the war. They were trying to drive us into revolt, and at the same time they accused us of being subversive. It seemed that they were following the pattern so successfully evolved by Hitler: first defame - then you can do what you please with them.

The General listened with close attention, and at the end said that I had painted a dark picture. He thought I had changed a great deal in the years since we had met. I said it was small wonder if I had. But my attitude had taken a course precisely opposite to his own: he had started by fighting the British, and now everything was being done to drive the Jews into opposition to them. I think this made an impression on him.

I said that, so far as the Jews were concerned, Hitler had won the war, because he had succeeded in poisoning men's minds everywhere. He replied emphatically that Hitler was not going to win.

He asked me whether I thought the Jews still followed me? I said I believed that English, American and South African Jews still did. So far as Palestine was concerned, it was some years since I had been there and they might regard me as coming empty-handed. But I thought they would still follow me.

I told him the story about Ibn Sa'ud and Philby and the Prime Minister's talk with me about his plan. But more than two years had passed since then, and nothing happened. I was afraid that such an atmosphere was being created as eventually to make it impossible for the Prime Minister - with the best will in the world - to do anything; his hands would be tied - the Administration in Cairo and Jerusalem would see to that. I said it was therefore essential to do something now, and the first thing I would suggest was that General Smuts and myself should meet the Prime Minister and discuss the matter. He thought this an excellent suggestion, and said he would try to arrange it.

That more or less terminated the interview. I am sending him a written note of the facts mentioned in my statement. He will, as he said, "chew it over", and we shall meet again. He will then try to arrange the interview with the P.M.

~~In conclusion~~

In conclusion, I said: the picture is gloomy, but there are still three men in the world who could solve our problem: the Prime Minister, Mr. Roosevelt and yourself. I then gave him a short account of my talk with Roosevelt.

The talk, which was throughout most friendly, lasted about three-quarters of an hour.



EXTRACTS FROM MINUTES

23rd November, 1943

INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL SMUTS:

Dr. Weizmann said he had seen General Smuts at 11 o'clock that morning, and had had a very cordial talk with him. General Smuts had given him as much time as he wanted. The General thought that things were going well for them. A decision might be taken by Mr. Stalin, the Prime Minister and the President at their present conference, and General Smuts might join them at the end of the week - or the beginning of next week. He suggested that Dr. Weizmann and Sir Wyndham Deedes should lunch with him before he left. The General said that the Prime Minister's mind was revolving round partition, which would give a good run to the Jews. He told Dr. Weizmann that he should not ask too many questions, so that he should not be committed. They wanted to retain Dr. Weizmann's leadership. General Smuts said that the talk which Dr. Weizmann had had with the Prime Minister meant more than they believed. Dr. Weizmann should not pay too much attention to what other people were saying: it would be the Prime Minister, the President, and perhaps he himself who would settle the matter. The General said they had friends in Mr. Amery and Sir Archibald Sinclair. In the meantime, Palestine must be kept quiet. He would see Mr. Casey on the way back. He mentioned that Mr. Casey had spoken to him about the Haganah. General Smuts did not believe there had been organised "provocation", but there probably was a good deal of "panic" (he used the words "terror judaica") which led to provocative acts. Dr. Weizmann said that such acts had to be stopped, and General Smuts said he would talk about it that day. General Smuts said the Government had great confidence in Dr. Weizmann, and Dr. Weizmann replied that they had a funny way of showing it, because he was not even allowed to communicate with his people in Palestine and in America. General Smuts said he was surprised to hear this and would take it up. The General told him about Mr. Ben-Gurion, and the cables sent to Palestine and America. General Smuts said that if necessary, they would arrange for Mrs. Weizmann to travel with him.

Dr. Weizmann said that at one time they had heard that Sir Douglas Harris was here and was advising on some kind of partition scheme. General Smuts brushed this aside and said: "We will decide."

Summing up, Dr. Weizmann said they had discussed three points:

- (a) the stoppage of the arms searches;
- (b) communications with Palestine and America;
- (c) provision of transport facilities for Mrs. Weizmann if Dr. Weizmann had to go to Palestine.

SECRET:

EXTRACTS FROM MINUTES OF THE 21st DECEMBER, 1943

TALK WITH MR. AMERY:

Dr. Weizmann said he had shown Mr. Amery the telegram he had received from General Smuts; Mr. Amery had answered that he could not tell him anything about it. Dr. Weizmann replied that he quite understood that, but it seemed to him that things were going towards partition. Mr. Amery replied that there would only be a definite decision when the Prime Minister was back in London. After some time, Mr. Amery said there was one thing he could mention, and that was the Palestine Currency Board had accumulated ~~some~~ some £50,000,000, so that there would be some money to give both to Arabs and Jews. At one stage, Mr. Amery said: Let them impose it on you, otherwise the Arabs will refuse.

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