

SYRIA

ATTITUDE OF THE UNITED STATES TOWARD RECOGNITION OF GOVERNMENTS IN SYRIA FOLLOWING A SUCCESSION OF *COUPS D'ÉTAT*

890D.01/4-2549

Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President

CONFIDENTIAL

WASHINGTON, April 25, 1949.

Subject: Request for Authority to Recognize New Syrian Government.

On March 30, 1949, the Syrian Government was overthrown without bloodshed in a military *coup d'état* by units of the Syrian Army led by the Chief of Staff, Colonel Husni Zaim.¹ As the situation now stands President Quwatly, Prime Minister Azm, and the former Syrian cabinet have resigned. Colonel Zaim has issued a decree dissolving the Syrian Parliament, has announced the formation of a constitutional committee to draft a new Syrian constitution and electoral law and has stated his intention to hold new elections shortly. He has recently announced the formation of a cabinet composed of reasonably prominent and responsible leaders.

Colonel Zaim has furthermore affirmed in public declarations and in a message to Secretary General Lie of the United Nations his intention to honor Syria's international obligations. He has given at least one tangible evidence of his sincerity in this respect in undertaking armistice negotiations with Israel.

Since the *coup d'état* the Department has exchanged information with the Governments of Great Britain and France² with regard to the question of recognition. The British, French, and American Ministers have indicated their belief that Colonel Zaim is in complete

¹ Colonel Zaim was Chief of State, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Interior in the new regime.

² The Department of State, on April 15, had informed the Embassy in Paris that "eventual recognition Zaim probably inevitable. Dept felt, however, this shld not be hurried for fol reasons:

"(a) We had had experience of recent unfortunate mil dictatorships in Latin Amer. We do not wish by too speedy recognition of Zaim inspire or encourage similar movements in other Arab armies.

"(b) We thought neighboring Arab states might well take lead in granting recognition and understood this connection that Leb Govt on point doing so.

"(c) Dept thought it desirable that Zaim shld form some type of constituted Govt other than his purely personal rule as at present existing before US shld extend recognition." (Telegram 1221, 890D.01/4-1549)

control of Syria and that there is no likelihood of his regime being displaced in the near future. They also believe that Colonel Zaim will honor Syria's international obligations and that recognition by the western democracies will enable us to keep better informed as to his thinking and to counsel the adoption of constructive policies. Great Britain and France have indicated their desire to recognize the new regime by Tuesday, April 26, but are waiting to ascertain the course of action the United States intends to follow, in the belief that recognition by all three governments should be coordinated.

Of the Arab states, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have stated they would recognize the Zaim government on April 23. Moreover, despite the *coup d'état*, Turkey has not purported to interrupt diplomatic relations with Syria.

The Department, while not implying approval of Colonel Zaim's method of coming to power, believes that his government fulfills our normal criteria for recognition, and that withholding recognition beyond the period of time which has already elapsed (now nearly one month) would not be in the best interests of the United States. The Department is also in accord with the view that recognition by the United States, the United Kingdom and France should be coordinated and should be extended by April 26 or as soon thereafter as is practicable.

Accordingly, it is requested that the Department be given authority to inform Great Britain and France that the United States has decided to recognize the new Syrian Government, and to take appropriate steps toward extending recognition after coordinating its arrangements in this regard with those governments.³

DEAN ACHESON

³The Department, on April 20, had informed Damascus that it was "considering recommending to President recognizing Zaim Govt near future. This decision based on assumption Zaim will continue maintain and consolidate effective control as well as that one or more Arab States will probably extend prior recognition. Dept considers delay beyond period perhaps totalling one month might be regarded as use of non-recognition as form of political pressure which . . . has in past proven ineffective as instrument of policy." (Telegram 166, 890D.01/4-2049)

President Truman approved this recommendation in an undated marginal notation.

890D.00/4-849 : Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria

CONFIDENTIAL US URGENT WASHINGTON, April 25, 1949—3 p. m.
 NIACT

174. Pursuant to authority recd from Pres. you are instructed after coordinating arrangements with Brit and Fr colleagues send to Syrian FonOff on Tues Apr 26 or soonest thereafter a note ack[nowledging]

those recd by Leg urtels 215 Apr 8 and 234 Apr 19.¹ Fol is suggested draft:

"The Amer Leg presents its compliments to the Syrian Ministry for FonAff and, pursuant to instrs from the United States Government, has the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the Ministry's note no. S-4 dated April 7, 1949, transmitting a copy of the communiqué issued by the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces in regard to the factors that led to the recent *coup d'état* in Syria, as well as of the Ministry's note no. M-6 dated April 18, 1949, informing the Leg that a new Cabinet had been formed and giving the names of the members of the Cabinet.

The Leg has been instructed to inform the Ministry that the United States Govt has noted with satisfaction the public assurances which His Excellency the PriMin, Colonel Husni Zaim, has made affirming the intention of the new Syrian Govt to discharge Syria's obligations arising out of all treaties and internatl agreements entered into by previous Syrian govts, as well as its attachment to democratic principles and its intention to hold new elections at an early date.

The Leg avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry the assurances of its highest consideration."

Tel urgently date note delivered.²

ACHESON

¹ Neither printed.

² This telegram was repeated to London and Paris; copies were sent by air to other Arab capitals, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv.

Damascus reported, on April 27, that after coordinating with British and French diplomatic representatives, a note "comprising verbatim text suggested in Deptel 174, April 25, delivered Foreign Office 11 o'clock this morning" (telegram 246, 890D.01/4-2749).

Editorial Note

A second military coup in Syria took place on August 14 (see Secretary Acheson's memorandum of September 19 to the President, page 1635).

Faiz el-Khouri, the Syrian Minister, called on Mr. McGhee on August 15. Harlan B. Clark's memorandum of their conversation expressed the Minister's hope that "the United States and other great powers would not move as quickly to recognize the new government as it had with respect to the Zaim Government, and specifically that recognition would not be extended until democratic institutions were clearly functioning again in Syria. He said that the fact that the United States Government, which professed to be a leading exponent of the principles of democratic freedom, had unhesitatingly recognized the dictatorial Zaim Government had greatly surprised people in the Near East. In the same way they wondered when they saw the United States giving unqualified support to the King of Saudi Arabia whose autocratic regime had no semblance to western democratic

systems. Mr. McGhee said we appreciated Faiz Bey's frank comments in this regard but pointed out that we had given very careful consideration to all factors involved before extending recognition to the Zaim Government. It was certainly true that the United States wished to support the development of democratic liberties in the Near East but that we had found from long experience that the withholding of recognition did not always achieve the desired objective and in fact it sometimes appeared to have the opposite effect. It was also true that in giving support to King Ibn Saud we by no means failed to be mindful of the needs of the Saudi people and were assisting him and indeed even influencing him in ways which would bring benefit to the whole nation." (890D.00/8-1549)

Mr. Clark was an officer of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs.

890D.01/9-1749: Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria*¹

CONFIDENTIAL
PRIORITY

WASHINGTON, September 17, 1949—5 p. m.

420. While deploring summary executions Pres Zaim and PriMin Barazi² and cognizant other factors mentioned urtels 540, Sept 13³ and 541 Sept 14,⁴ Dept has no evidence present civ[ilian] govt implicated in coup or executions, with possible exception alleged prior

¹ This telegram was repeated to London, Paris, Cairo, and Jidda and sent by pouch to Baghdad, Amman, Ankara, Beirut, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv.

² Regarding the coup of August 14, see Secretary Acheson's memorandum of September 19, p. 1635.

³ Not printed; it expressed Minister Keeley's concern that "in Department's exchange of views with British and French Governments no evidence that consideration has been given to possibility of expressing to Atassi Government regret at brutal means by which former regime was liquidated. . . . While it would be desirable to have British and French Governments join us in condemning violence, I feel that whatever may be British and French attitudes we shall have to reckon with our own consciences and consequences if by our silence we tacitly condone such barbarity which unless checked may well serve as pattern for further bloodletting in Syria and other Middle Eastern states to detriment of peace and stability for which our interests call." (890D.00/9-1349)

⁴ Not printed; it reported information from French and British diplomatic officials at Damascus that their governments had "decided time now propitious for recognition Atassi Government and have instructed their Embassies Washington to seek US agreement that France, Britain and US missions Damascus make coordinated communications this sense sometime during current week." It advised further that these officials favored a "simple statement that 'change in government will in no way alter friendly relations that have heretofore subsisted.'" Minister Keeley concluded that he was unable to share their views as to the timing or manner of recognition and expressed his preference for a "communication which takes note of formation of cabinet in tragic circumstances, expresses regret over resort to bloodshed and gives assurances of friendly support if cabinet is able to realize its announced intention of guiding nation back into democratic constitutional channel." (890D.01/9-1449)

knowledge Hawrani (Legtel 480).⁵ On contrary, Leg reports have indicated coup planned and carried out by Army (see for example Joint Weeka 38 CL 329 Aug 19)⁶ and corroboratory info this effect received from Brit and other sources. As stated Deptel 141 Apr 5 *de facto* control, public acquiescence and respect internatl obligations are criteria US recognition policy. Legitimacy no longer determinant factor and wld be inappropriate refer in recognition note to tragic circumstances in which govt formed or express regret over resort to bloodshed. Such action might also lend itself propaganda thesis US favored dictatorial regime for Syria.

In view Syria's polit unrest, Dept realizes recognition any Syrian Govt involves risk regime may not be permanent. However, it feels continued non-recognition wld hamper Syrian Govt in its expressed desire stabilize itself along democratic and constitutional lines. Lack official contact with Syrian Govt also prevents adequate diplomatic prep and assistance to ESM, and non-recognition wld be potential source embarrassment USUN in its dealings with Syrian Del at forthcoming GA Session.

Since reports from Leg and assurances from Syrian Min Washington indicate criteria for recognition have been reasonably fulfilled insofar as Syrian situation can presently be judged, Dept preparing request President's auth recognize Syrian Govt within few days. Dept has already given advance notice SAG, Egypt and appropriate western countries US actively considering early recognition.

If Pres approves Dept's recommendation you will be informed immed and you shld then consult with appropriate diplomatic colleagues concerning timing recognition notes. Suggested text US note being sent separate tel.

ACHESON

⁵ Dated August 16, not printed; Akram Hawrani was Minister of Justice and of Health.

⁶ Not printed.

890D.01/9-1749: Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria

CONFIDENTIAL
PRIORITY

WASHINGTON, September 17, 1949—5 p. m.

421. Deptel 413.¹ Fol is suggested text note you will be instructed to deliver when Pres auth received recognize Syrian Govt:

"Pursuant to instructions from the United States Government, the Legation of the United States of America has the honor to acknowl-

¹ Dated September 15, not printed.

edge the note from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated August 16, 1949, informing it of the establishment of a new Syrian Government under the Premiership of His Excellency Hashim al-Atassi.

The United States Government relies upon the assurances given to it by the Syrian Govt that Syria intends to honor its internatl obligations, and trusts that the friendly relations between our two nations will be continued. The promulgation on Sept 11, 1949 of a new electoral law reflecting the Syrian Govt's intention to hold elections and form a constitutional govt has also been noted.

The Leg takes this occasion to assure the Ministry of its highest consideration."

If you wish recommend changes tele Dept immed. Full text will be issued as press release on date recognition.

ACHESON

890D.01/9-1949

Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President

CONFIDENTIAL

WASHINGTON, September 19, 1949.

Subject: Recognition of the Syrian Government.

The Government of President Husni Zaim in Syria was overthrown on August 14, 1949, by a group of disgruntled military officers who had participated with him in the *coup d'état* of March 30, 1949. These officers, under the leadership of Colonel Sami Hinnawi, executed both President Zaim and Prime Minister Muhsin Barazi but there was no further bloodshed during the coup. There is no evidence to indicate that any outside power participated in the coup in any way, and it seems clear that the officers seizing control were motivated by personal grudges against Zaim, dissatisfaction with his alleged failure to fulfill promises for army reform, and also by a desire to end the personalized authoritarian rule which President Zaim had established.

The Officers conducting the coup immediately turned the Government over to a Cabinet composed of civilians under the premiership of Hashim Bey al Atassi, distinguished Syrian elder statesman, and including the most prominent leaders of the Syrian Populist Party which had constituted the only effective opposition group in Parliament prior to the *coup d'état* of March 30.

The new Syrian Government has stressed its democratic and civilian character in contrast to the "military dictatorship" of the Zaim Government, and on September 11, 1949, published an electoral law providing for free elections which it has announced will be held in the near future. The Government has given oral assurances to American officials that it will respect all of Syria's international obligations and

has stated that Syria is firmly aligned with the western democracies against Communism.

The governments of Turkey, Lebanon, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Argentina, Afghanistan and Venezuela are reported to have recognized the new Syrian Government, and Iraq and Hashemite Jordan have resumed relations with it. Saudi Arabia and Egypt have not yet recognized the new government, but the Saudi Arabian Government has stated that its attitude towards Syria is one of friendship.

In view of the unrest which has recently characterized Syrian internal politics, a decision to extend recognition to any Syrian Government involves some risk that the regime may not be permanent. However, the normal criteria for recognition of reasonable stability, public acquiescence and respect for international obligations seem to have been fulfilled in so far as the Syrian situation can presently be judged.

The Governments of Great Britain and France have stated they are ready to recognize the new government and desire to coordinate the timing of their recognition with the United States. Several other governments wish to take parallel action.

Continued suspension of diplomatic relations renders more difficult the accomplishment of projects in which the western countries are interested. Diplomatic preparation to facilitate the work of the Palestine Conciliation Commission's Economic Survey Mission, for example, cannot be adequately undertaken by our Legation in Damascus in the absence of official contact with the new government.

Moreover, I consider it to be in our interest, as well as that of the Syrian people, that the present civilian government maintain control and carry out peaceful elections providing for a return to constitutional government, and recognition by the great powers will undoubtedly have a stabilizing effect on the new government's position. In addition, early recognition will preclude the possibility of embarrassment to our representatives in their dealings with the Syrian Delegation at the forthcoming session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

After carefully weighing all factors involved, I therefore recommend that the United States recognize the Government of Syria within the next few days, and request that you authorize the Department to instruct the Legation at Damascus to take appropriate steps to that end.¹

DEAN ACHESON

¹ President Truman approved this recommendation in an undated marginal notation. The Department, on September 19, instructed Damascus to "take appropriate action [and?] coordinate with Fr and Brit colleagues in accordance with procedure outlined Deptels 420 and 421 Sept 17." (telegram 422, 890D.01/9-1949)

890D.00/12-2749 : Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria

SECRET

WASHINGTON, December 27, 1949—7 p. m.

536. Reurtel 735 Dec 23.¹ It is Dept's view that since Aug 14 regime vested authority in Constituent Assembly, continued functioning Assembly with reasonable ability carry out its mandate and particularly with ability establish executive agency capable exercising *de facto* administrative control and discharging internatl obligations is essential element continuity Aug 14 regime. If above conditions fulfilled Dept perceives no reason consider diplomatic relations interrupted.

If you concur and are aware no other objective criteria which shld be applied you are authorized continue normal relations Syrian Govt officials unless it becomes apparent break in continuity has in fact occurred. If on basis subsequent events you shld become convinced latter is case you shld request Dept's instructions re future relations.

Whenever warranted you are authorized emphasize that USG decision re continuance or interruption diplomatic relations will be based on objective criteria re continuity Aug 14 Govt and will not necessarily connote either approval or disapproval Syrian Govt aims, policies, or manner formation.²

ACHESON

¹ Not printed. Damascus, on December 19, had reported that in a third *coup d'état* "At 6 a. m. today army group under Colonel Adib Shishakli arrested Chief of Staff General Hinnawi and now in control city." (telegram 717, 890D.00/12-1949)

² This telegram was repeated to London and Paris for information. Damascus replied, on December 29, stating that the continuing functioning of the Constituent Assembly and the fact that the Cabinet, except for Khalid Azm who was both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, represented various political elements in the Assembly, seemed to meet the criteria set forth in the Department's telegram 536 (telegram 749, 890D.00/12-2949).