

Convention had been initialled. The delay in obtaining the return of prisoners led to the detention in Palestine of General Dentz, and twenty-nine of his most senior officers. They were released in due course as the British prisoners were returned to Syria.

The work of the Commission of Control and its twenty sub-committees deserves the highest praise. In the space of ten weeks they accomplished the task of arranging the orderly evacuation of an army 37,000 strong, of checking and handing over all its equipment and of transferring the public services from one administration to another, in conditions which the war had rendered chaotic.

8. The capitulation of the Vichy Forces and the occupation of Syria by the British and Free French made it necessary to take a number of decisions, political and military. General de Gaulle considered that the Armistice terms did not give the Free French enough facilities for rallying the Vichy troops, and did not fully safeguard the position of Free France. After discussions between the Minister of State and General de Gaulle in Cairo in the first week of July, agreements were reached under which the civil authority in Syria and the Lebanon was to rest in the hands of the Free French provided that our military security was not jeopardised. General de Gaulle recognised the unity of command and placed the Free French Forces throughout the Middle East under the British Commander-in-Chief for operational purposes. He also recognised that in the British Military Zone the civil authority must carry out the requests of the military authority where the security of the armed forces was concerned.

Meanwhile the Free French took over the civil administration of Syria under General Catroux as Délégué Général de la France, the title of High Commissioner being dropped. Unfortunately the French were short of experienced personnel. On the civilian side out of about 1,200 Frenchmen in Syria (excluding religious orders and their dependents), about one-third rallied to the Free French, one-third were allowed to remain in Syria on sufferance without rallying, and one-third returned to France. No doubt a number of those who rallied did so as a matter of personal expediency. In any case, the lack of first-rate men with administrative ability was severely felt, and there were many complaints from the Syrians and Lebanese that former Vichy officials, who were corrupt or discredited, were being retained in their old positions. The first weeks were also marked by a good deal of friction between the British and French, particularly in connection with the work of the Disarmament Commission. Mistakes were made on both sides but obstacles were gradually overcome. The Spears Mission, working under difficult conditions, established good relations with their Free French colleagues. A British Security Mission was appointed under Brigadier A. S. Mavrogordato and a joint Anglo-French propaganda plan was agreed upon.

9. Early in September economic difficulties led to a crisis. Stocks of essential commodities were short owing to the British blockade before the fall of the Vichy régime. The wheat crop was below normal, and wheat was hoarded partly in the hopes of realising higher and

higher prices as the shortage increased, and partly from fear. In certain areas there was hardship, and minor bread riots occurred. British assistance was given in distributing supplies, and arrangements have now been made for large quantities to be available throughout the winter.

10. A certain amount of political unrest was inevitable. The necessity for safeguarding the interests of France, whose special position we had recognised, on the one hand, and the need for setting up a friendly and stable government on the other were not easy to reconcile. There was much disappointment that Great Britain had not taken over Syria and the Lebanon herself. French administration under the mandate had never succeeded in reconciling the Nationalist opposition, or in attracting popular support. The Free French promises of independence were not believed, and there was general fear that the old régime would be perpetuated. Added to this was a desire to play off the British against the Free French.

Late in September there was trouble among the tribes of the Euphrates and of the Syrian Desert, who had always chafed under French political control. Administrative shortcomings and mistakes on the French side and failure by the local Free French authorities to keep the British military commander of the district informed of their intentions led to tribal outbreaks in the Abu Kemal district. There were several clashes between the Arabs and Free French troops resulting in casualties to both sides. Finally it became necessary for British troops to intervene, but eventually an agreement was reached to cease hostilities and to refer the dispute to arbitration by a joint Anglo-French Commission.

The military security of this vital area was discussed during October both in London with General de Gaulle and in the Middle East with General Catroux. General de Gaulle agreed in principle to the authority necessary to safeguard it being delegated in certain circumstances to the British Command, and General Catroux gave me an undertaking to proclaim *Etat de Siège* immediately, if troubles begin in any area and threaten to spread, and in the event of threatened enemy attack.

11. Pursuing the policy previously approved I had already decided that as soon as the Syrian campaign was successfully concluded, every effort should be concentrated on intensive preparations for driving the enemy out of North Africa. Consequently the North must be defended with a minimum of troops. Apart from the Free French forces, which for political reasons have been disposed in detachments all over Syria by their High Command, I have so far been unable to allot more than five divisions at any one time to the defence of Syria and Palestine since the end of the campaign.

The 1st Australian Corps and the skeleton Headquarters of the 10th Corps have already carried out detailed reconnaissances of the defensive areas. Work on the defences has begun and is being pushed on as fast as the number of troops and the amount of civilian labour available will permit.

CYPRUS.

12. The Defence Committee considered it essential to deny the enemy the use of Cyprus as a base for naval and air operations against