

SECRET.

50

B314

O. 1/180/518

RAILWAY POLICY IN RELATION TO
GENERAL MILITARY POLICY IN
THE MIDDLE EAST.

RAILWAY POLICY IN RELATION TO GENERAL MILITARY POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

1. Railway projects in the Middle East may conveniently be considered in the following order:—

Mesopotamia and Persia.—

- (i.) The through Euphrates project.
- (ii.) The Baghdad—Khanikin—Kermanshah project.
- (iii.) The extension along the Tigris beyond Tekrit.
- (iv.) The extension from Khanikin to Altun Keupri.
- (v.) Extension of the Baghdad—Feluja—Dhibban line.

Persia.—

- (i.) Trans-Persian Railway project.
- (ii.) Bundar Abbas—Kirman Railway.
- (iii.) Connection of Sistan Railway (Mirjawa) with the Trans-Persian Railway.
- (iv.) Mohammerah—Khoramabad Railway.

India.—

- (i.) Chaman Reserve.

Syria and Palestine.—

The extension of the Egyptian—Palestine railway system to Haifa.

2. *Mesopotamia projects—General.*—The development of the Mesopotamian railway system must be considered in relation to our general railway policy throughout the Middle East, especially in regard to the future defence of India.

Our potential enemies have disappeared for the time being, but we cannot count on this favourable situation lasting, and the development of railway construction to the utmost may be in the end the easiest, most economical, and possibly the only way by which we can reap advantages commensurate with the great military effort we have made in Mesopotamia.

There are immediate benefits to be gained by opening up the country as soon as possible, and the work of construction has considerable political advantages, as it affords work and a living wage to the population of the occupied territories, during a period when they might otherwise suffer considerably from the effects of the war.

From a strategical point of view it is considered that future railway construction in Mesopotamia should be directed to the completion of a well-developed railway system which would enable us to place troops quickly on any part of the frontier which may be threatened. The question is therefore bound up with our ultimate intentions as regards the area over which we mean to establish a protectorate.

(i.) *The through Euphrates project.*—As pointed out by the Political Officer, Baghdad,* this project has political and commercial advantages. So long as we maintain a force in the neighbourhood of Baghdad, as we certainly shall, it must be considered also as having great military advantages. These are as follows:—

- (a.) Substantial reduction could be effected in the Tigris river fleet, manned mainly by "duration of the war" personnel.
- (b.) A great saving in labour which is now necessary for transshipment at Amara and Kut.
- (c.) A saving in fuel, for the fleet uses comparatively large quantities owing to the windings of the river, strong currents, shallow water, &c.
- (d.) Great saving of time. An ordinary goods train would be able to travel from Basra to Baghdad in 36 hours, as against 5 days by rail and river, *via* the Tigris.
- (e.) On completion, the Kut—Baghdad line would no longer be required, and 100 miles of metre-gauge material would be set free.

This railway will always be a strategic asset. It will pass through the most fertile districts of Mesopotamia and will materially assist the Empire's output of foodstuffs.

It will form a thoroughly sound line of communication from our base on the Persian Gulf to our advanced base at Baghdad, and with feeders to the various frontiers

* No. R. 9839, dated 14th November, 1918, Appendix A.

of our sphere of protection, will be the backbone of the defence of British Mesopotamia in the future.

The question of gauge is dealt with in paragraph 6.

(ii) *The Baghdad—Khanikin—Kermanshah project.*—This railway was commenced as being the only means within the time available of maintaining forces in North-West Persia and getting control of the Caspian.

The enemy's progress eastward *viâ* the Caucasus and the Caspian will now cease. The Germans will be forced to leave the Caucasus, and the Turks are already withdrawing behind their former frontiers. In any case for the present we have an easier line of approach *viâ* Batum and Baku, which we intend to use.

In these circumstances we have no longer any object in controlling the Caspian from Baghdad. Our immediate aim is merely to obtain political and economic ascendancy in Persia, which would be greatly strengthened by the construction of a railway on to the Persian plateau.

We have no guarantee that in the future military conditions similar to those which forced us to go into Persia may not recur, and in these circumstances a railway on to the plateau would be a military necessity. It is true that the alignment from Baghdad has the strategic disadvantage of being parallel to the front, but to a large extent it is protected by the rugged nature of Kurdistan.

The projected scheme of continuing the railway now under construction to some point beyond Khanikin is certainly the easiest method of obtaining our immediate political and economic aims, and may well prove the only feasible means of providing for future possible military requirements.

This latter point can, however, only be settled by further surveys of the Basra—Khoramabad—Kermanshah or Hamadan line (*vide* 3 (iv.)). In any case we should complete the line to the Persian frontier, beyond which it is not clear that we have any right to proceed. The option of doing so should be obtained from the Persian Government at the first convenient opportunity, with a view to further extension, which in General de Candolle's opinion must be metre gauge. (*See Appendix B, telegram No. X 9278 of 5th December, 1918, from General de Candolle.*)

(iii.) *The extension beyond Tekrit.*—This extension has been made for tactical reasons only, and has now been stopped. The continuation of the line to Mosul, which would be its ultimate objective, is not considered now to be a war-time proposition. We have neither the material nor the time to finish such a work, nor in view of the uncertainty of the future frontier is there any immediate object in doing so.

As a post-war proposition, we must face the facts that the whole section from Nisibin to Baghdad will be completed, and will be of the first importance, as forming a link in an overland route from Great Britain to India. This will have to be considered in relation to the final settlement of Anatolia, and also with reference to the delimitation of spheres of influence between ourselves and other Great Powers.

(iv.) *Khanikin—Kifri—Altun Keupri.*—The Political Officer, Baghdad,* advocates for political and economic purposes an extension from Khanikin *viâ* Kifri—Kirkuk—Altun Keupri—Erbil—Mosul which, like the section from Baghdad to Khanikin, might in the first instance be of metre gauge up to our frontier, from material released by conversion to standard gauge elsewhere. If continued to Mosul it would render the extension in (iii) up the Tigris unnecessary.

(v.) *Extension of the Baghdad—Feluja—Dhibban Line.*—This is a feeder on standard gauge built to maintain our detachment on the Euphrates, and to meet any Turkish advance down the Euphrates at a sufficient distance from Baghdad.

The question of its extension to join up with the Palestine system can only be decided when spheres of influence as between ourselves and the French have been settled. Surveys must then be made to ascertain if there is any route lying wholly within our sphere which could compete with the Baghdad—Mosul—Alexandretta route. *Strategically it is most desirable that rail connection between British Palestine and Mesopotamia should exist, otherwise we shall always be at a disadvantage against an enemy able to threaten both from the direction of Muslimie.*

(vi.) *Extension from Altun Keupri viâ the Wasna Pass to Tabriz.*—This is recommended by General de Candolle as a branch feeder for economic reasons. It is not of military urgency though it should be surveyed.

3. *Persian projects.*—The plains of Mesopotamia will never be secure unless we are in a position to occupy the Persian plateau at least up to Kermanshah to protect our right flank, and also to operate against an enemy attempting to penetrate towards India through Persia.

* R. 9839, dated 14th November, 1918.

The following alternatives additional to the Khanikin—Kermanshab project already mentioned have been proposed :—

(i.) *Trans-Persian Railway.*—The project for the construction of a railway from the terminus of the Russian system at Tabriz to link up with the railway system of India has been under discussion for a number of years. The most favoured alignment was that running from Tabriz *via* Teheran—Ispahan—Kirman to Nushki. Alternative proposals brought the line from Kirman to a port on the Persian Gulf and thence by a coastal alignment to Karachi. The General Staff has been opposed to any such connection in the past, and they adhere to this opinion now, though the latter alternative is less dangerous than the former, as being more easily controlled from the sea.

(ii.) *Bundar Abbas—Kirman Railway.*—This project has been favoured in connection with a possible Trans-Persian Railway as described in (i) above, the object being to divert it from direct access to India. For this purpose alternative (iv) is, however, preferable, if, as the result of survey, it should prove a practical proposition.

(iii.) *The Mirjawa extension.*—This line is being extended to cope with a transitory situation, and its strategic necessity has already disappeared. It was never our intention to fight the Bolsheviki in these inaccessible regions of Trans-Caspia, and our policy should be to repatriate enemy prisoners of war and so remove the only potential danger to India. Railway extension in this direction is strategically unsound, as tending to bridge the gap between the Russian and Indian railway systems, and *work should be stopped.*

(iv.) *Mohammerah—Khoramabad Railway.*—This railway offers a means of controlling the Baktiari county, which would always be a threat to our right flank and particularly to the oilfields, which latter may well be of paramount importance in the future. So far as our present information goes, the engineering difficulties beyond Khoramabad would appear to be almost insuperable, whilst from an economic point of view, it is unlikely that it could ever compete with the Hamadan—Kermanshab—Khanikin route to Baghdad, which has been the great trade route from time immemorial. A survey should, however, be carried out to settle this question.

4. *India.*—(i.) *Chaman Reserve.*—Normally a reserve of railway material is stored at railhead at Chaman to provide for the immediate extension of the Indian railway system to Kandahar in the event of military necessity. The reserve was kept up complete with all necessary bridges, but it has been necessary to use the rails in carrying out the construction of military railways during the last 2 years. It should be replaced eventually, but there is no immediate urgency and, so long as cheap labour is available for actual construction, it should wait.

5. *Syria and Palestine.*—With the occupation of Aleppo, the conquest of Syria is finally completed, and all schemes for the extension of the Palestine railway system become, relatively speaking, post-war projects and, as such, dependent on the limitation of spheres of influence.

Work on the standard-gauge line from the present railhead near Tulkeram to Haifa is, however, being continued to meet the necessities of the forces of occupation.

6. *The question of gauge.*—This is a fundamental question going to the root of our railway policy in Mesopotamia and Persia. It should be finally dealt with in relation to our general post-war policy in both of these countries.

(i.) The gauges in question are the Indian (5-ft. 6-in.), the Russian (5-ft.), standard (4-ft. 8½-in.), and the metre gauge. Their present disposition is shown in map.*

In balancing the relative advantages and disadvantages of the above, the following are the main military considerations :—

- (a.) As a protection a lesser gauge is more effective than a broader gauge, as being less easy to convert.
- (b.) *The menace from the Russian side will eventually be greater than from the Turkish side,* and therefore the 4-ft. 8½-in. is preferable to the 5-ft. 6-in. Indian gauge.
- (c.) The 4-ft. 8½-in. is the least gauge which can be considered satisfactory for long continuous running. Its advantage over the metre gauge has been clearly demonstrated in the Palestine campaign.
- (d.) The 4-ft. 8½-in. gauge would facilitate an advance and eventual linking up with the Palestine system.

* Appendix C. Map showing railway gauges in Middle East.

Against the above must be put the following disadvantages:—

- (a.) The port of Basra has been constructed to deal with metre-gauge traffic, but with a view to possible conversion to standard gauge. The section from Basra to Nasrie has also been laid with a view to conversion to standard gauge.

It may, however, be mentioned that Basra is not necessarily the best port obtainable, the Khor Abdulla being free from the disadvantage of the bar and giving safe anchorage in deep water close in shore. As an alternative to Basra or Koweit it merits consideration.

- (b.) Lay-out has been designed at Baghdad for facilitating change from standard to metre gauge, with the idea of converting the Baghdad—Hillah section from standard to metre gauge.
- (c.) Standard gauge would compete with India for heavier rails, for which there is a great demand in that country; against this, however, there is a certain amount of standard-gauge material which should be available from Egypt.
- (d.) Standard-gauge rolling stock is barely sufficient for working the existing line. It is believed that there is little, if any, plant in India capable of constructing or adapting locomotives for standard gauge. Therefore, at the present time, all additional rolling stock would have to come from European or American markets.

Summing up the above, it may be said that the retention of metre gauge will meet existing requirements, and will be less expensive, but that looking to the future there can be no question that a larger gauge is far preferable for through traffic, and will eventually be adopted, and that the most suitable appears to be standard gauge.

(ii.) The Basra—Khoramabad—Kermanshab or Hamadan line, should it be feasible would be strategically of great importance, but it seems possible that once Hamadan is linked by rail with Baghdad the main flow of trade will be to the great central mart which the latter place will become, as it was in the past. General de Candolle reports that this or any other long distance project in Persia must be metre gauge for technical reasons.*

(iii.) The branch line from Baghdad eastwards and its extension might in the first instance be metre gauge to the extent of completing work already in hand, *i.e.*, the line Baghdad—Khanikin—Kifri—Kirkuk—Altun Keupri. A change, however, to standard gauge will be necessary if this is selected as the through route, and the formation should be designed accordingly.

(iv.) The Baghdad—Feluja—Dhibban is now standard gauge. As it may eventually be connected up with the Palestine system it should so remain.

(v.) The Baghdad—Kut metre-gauge line can be taken up and used elsewhere.

7. *Conclusions.*—(1.) Priority should be given to the construction of Euphrates Valley line with a view to conversion to standard gauge, this being the backbone of any future railway system in Mesopotamia.

(2.) Work on the Khanikin extension should be continued up to the frontier, as at present, on metre gauge. An agreement should be made with the Persian Government for its extension into the plateau, if such an agreement is necessary, and work pushed on.

(3.) A survey should be made for an alignment to Mosul, *via* Kifri and Kirkuk, and from Altun Keupri up the Wasna Pass.

(4.) No extension should be made for the present towards Hit or Mosul.

5. A survey should be carried out on the various projected lines towards the Persian plateau from the head of the Persian Gulf.

6. The above projects should be carried out up to the limits of material available from India so long as military, prisoner and other cheap labour is available.

7. Work should be stopped on the Mirjawa—Neh extension of the Indian railway system.

8. The Chaman Reserve should only be replaced when cheap labour is no longer available for construction in Mesopotamia.

GENERAL STAFF,

8th December, 1918.

* Appendix B.

APPENDIX A.

From Political, Baghdad, 14th November, 1918.

(Reputed to Foreign.)

(Received 16th, 1 p.m.)

(No. R. 9839.)

Our railway policy in Mesopotamia has hitherto been determined by our immediate strategic needs. The whole matter in its broadest aspects is now doubtless engaging the attention of Government, but I venture nevertheless to submit, with consent of General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, the following brief statement of certain local aspects of the question for such consideration as may seem called for.

Metre gauge lines exist from Basra to Nasiriyah, from Basra to Amarah, and from Kut through Baghdad to near Khanikin. A 2-ft. 6-in. line runs from Hillah to Kifl.

The following standard-gauge lines run from Baghdad:—

- (1.) To Hillah.
- (2.) To Dhibban, just beyond Feluja on Euphrates, and
- (3.) To a point beyond Tekrit in direction of Mosul.

Bridging and earthworks to link up Nasiriyah and Hillah by standard or metre gauge, as necessary, is in hand and should be finished by March. The construction of this railway has become of greater importance in view of general armistice, and it should be of standard gauge if possible, but if not, it should be constructed on metre gauge and converted later. This line is of considerable importance from political and commercial point of view. The line from Baghdad to Kut is a military necessity only and could be taken up on reduction of force and completion of Basra—Baghdad line.

The continuation of standard gauge northwards from Tekrit is being energetically pushed forward and should reach northern limit of the Baghdad Vilayet by end of this month. Its continuance to Mosul is of primary importance if we are to include this vilayet within boundaries of the Irak State. If, on the other hand, it is to fall within French sphere it is perhaps questionable whether it is expedient to utilize railway material so urgently required elsewhere in these territories to extend our Irak railway system to Mosul. It may not be linked up with Mediterranean for years to come, and in any case its completion would probably militate against the construction of a British controlled line from Euphrates to Mediterranean, the surveys for which, now that we are in occupation of Karh-el-Qaim, could, if desired, be pressed forward.

It is doubtless realized that Baghdad—Mosul line passes through almost the whole of its length through desert country which is not even potentially fertile except between Baghdad and Samarrah. The alignment has been designed with an eye to through communication between Aleppo and Baghdad; for development of country [corrupt group] at length alignment would be Khanikin—Kifri—Kirkuk—Altun Keupri—Arbil—Mosul with branches to Sulaimanieh and Rawia, but we are now presumably committed to the Tigris route.

Whether or not Mosul is eventually excluded and Irak sphere is limited by Greater Zab, it will still be possible to give effect to policy recently adumbrated for Kurdistan by carrying out foregoing railway northwards from Tekrit up the Lesser Zab to Altun Keupri and Rawia. I regard this line as essential if we are to exercise any degree of effective control over Kurds and thereby [? uphold] the destinies of Armenians; the line would pass through very fertile wheat-growing country and could be extended to the north-east eventually if desired. It could be surveyed forthwith.

Its construction would solve automatically many of the problems which now face us in Kurdistan, Armenia and North-West Persia, and might make an extension of the Khanikin line to Kermanshah unnecessary for the present.

If Lesser Zab is to be the north-west limit of Irak, it becomes of primary political importance to make the most of Sulaimanieh as a Kurdish centre; with this object we might well extend metre-gauge system from Khanikin up the Djalha to Halobja plain and Sulaimanieh. This line would almost certainly be profitable. The Ottoman tobacco régime is understood to have made 100,000*l.* per annum net profit out of the tobacco grown in this district before the war, and it is a market for every sort of pastoral and forest produce as well as a fine wheat-growing area. I recommend that this be surveyed as soon as possible.

In conclusion I beg to urge importance of an early decision upon the general question of railways in and beyond Mesopotamia. Apart from political and strategical issues involved it must be remembered that river transport is almost entirely military; at present personnel have been enlisted "for the duration" only, and unless a proportion of fleet and personnel for working it is kept it is likely to be quite inadequate to meet needs of the garrison and civil population unless supplemented by a through railway.

The same consideration applies in a lesser degree to railway personnel but the numbers involved relatively to tonnage [? handled] are much smaller and they should be more easily obtained.

APPENDIX B.

From General de Cambolle, Baghdad, to Director-General of Movements and Railways.

5th December, 1918.

(No. X. 4278.)

I now submit my report with suggestions as to what survey work might usefully be undertaken as instructed in War Office telegram No. 70503, cipher, M.R. 2 (A) 629, 9th November. You may desire type of these surveys to be distributed, so as to be prepared to supply information needed during sitting of Peace Conference. Time is very short and transport and escorts are difficult, so in that case reconnaissances might have to be substituted for the surveys suggested below. Technically, sole dependable basis for examining Persian railway problem are recent studies under Director of Railways on line through Kermanshah. Commercially, problem is inseparably (?) linked to development of prospects in Mesopotamia. Taking first Kermanshah surveys and reconnaissances they prove that a reasonable line can be obtained from Baghdad to Kermanshah, 258 miles. Only two bad stretches are descent to Mahidasht Plain, miles 225 to miles 231, and Dardand Gorge, miles 170 to miles 178. Both will demand 1 in 30 gradient and 16 degrees

curves (one group undecipherable) ed, but no important tunnel or other special work. Rest of line Khanikin, miles 108, to Kermanshah is relatively easy. Reconnaissances from Kermanshah to Hamadan, miles 392, have disclosed unexpectedly light line. Hardly any big works except on ascent to escarpment bordering Hamadan Plateau from miles 351 to miles 361 and on 3 miles steep gorges in Serpentine rock, the greater part on a fairly straight but cragged reach between miles 300 and 302. All mileages from Baghdad. The whole of—Khanikin Hamadan project has proved remarkably easy from construction standpoint notwithstanding forbidding nature of orography. But on account of curvature no wider gauge than metre would be practicable either here or over any other long distance in Persia. This is immaterial, for on a majority of these lines traffics are destined to remain light. No particular obstacles are anticipated between Hamadan and Teheran. This length should be surveyed, but I do not suggest contemplating construction beyond Hamadan for several years. Turning now to development of prospects in Mesopotamia, almost everything depends on what is done with Tigris and Euphrates except oil production. In the opinion of Colonel Garrow, just returned from further inspection of Tigris, and of other river experts, regeneration of rivers could be taken in hand gradually at small expense. I entirely concur with this opinion. The only essential is an immediate start upon comprehensive programme which Garrow could now formulate. Very soon irrigation, drainage and security of country would begin to benefit, but earliest to feel good effects would be navigation of all kinds and, therefore, internal communications. Immigration and navigation thus concurrently improved would promote more briskness of irrigation and faster agricultural development than could otherwise occur. In distant future light narrow gauge feeder railways would take the place of much of the navigation. Centre of gravity of eventual agricultural development which, with timely measures, can be counted upon, will be much nearer Persian Gulf than Mediterranean. Heaviest produce traffic as from Baghdad region will therefore move towards Persian Gulf. It is partly for that reason that I recommend standard gauge between Baghdad and Basra. Ultimately another standard gauge ought to be planned connecting Mesopotamia with Mediterranean for rapid international exchanges and for high class freight and Mecca pilgrims of both Mesopotamia and Persia. For such a line Baghdad is the indicated eastern terminus, and for western terminus British interests will presumably be served best by aiming at some port lying as far south as attainable. But the promising territory around Deir, north-west of El Quain, should be served either by the line itself or by a branch from it. In case it acquired importance during the peace negotiations this Mediterranean connection should be reconnoitred at once. Meanwhile, above prospects sufficiently indicate that Baghdad must necessarily become chief railway centre in this part of Asia. Upon it the main Persian railway system should be based. It is fortunate that line thence to Teheran *via* Kermanshah has proved so much less difficult than was feared. As to the various proposals for Persian railway to northwards of Kermanshah line, it is manifest that the rich Caspian littoral must ever remain chiefly tributary to Russia. Both British and Mesopotamian interests would suffer from the building of a railway between that littoral and the Persian plateau. Exports from plateau would then be also attracted to Russia and imports would be foodstuffs from littoral and oil and goods from Russia. All these commodities can and should, from our standpoint, be moved from and be provided to plateau *via* Kermanshah. I recommend abandoning the idea of railway or even reconnoitring from Hamadan *via* Kasvin to Enzeli both for these reasons and to far less extent because reconnaissances indicate descent from plateau to Menjil to be most difficult stretch on whole distance from Baghdad to Caspian. For immediate transport a good metal cart road exists over that length already. Similarly, I deprecate any British promoted railway from plateau to Tabriz *via* either Zinjan or unexplored Kizil Uzun country. On the other hand, (?) as Azerbaijan still remains more populous and productive than rest of Persia, although it has been devastated and depopulated by both Russian and Turkish armies, benefit would be derived from placing it in position to become tributary to Baghdad. To effect that, metre gauge might be laid down to Tabriz (?) through Azerbaijan from junction with proposed (?) Baghdad—Altun Keupri line. Incidentally, relations between Trans-Caucasian and (?) Trans-Caspian races and Mesopotamia, certainly to its advantage, would be fostered by this line to Tabriz. It should be surveyed therefore (?) up over Wasna Pass. Further, in order to direct currents of traffic rather towards Baghdad than towards other spheres northwestwards, it is well worth studying whether Suleimanieh branch could not be taken down rougher country to Khanikin *via* Dialla River than over westward (?) easier country *via* Kirkuk. This Dialla line should be surveyed (?) therefore. Lastly, information is sketchy as regards railway projects southwards of Kermanshah, but my appreciation is as follows:—

An alternative railway from sea to main Persian plateau, intended to afford all Persia (group undecipherable) without transshipment, would be tried only from Muhammareh by Dizful and the Burujird Plain, reaching trace Kermanshah line at foot of Hamadan escarpment. The scope of reconnaissance for this alternative should include route through Ab-i-Diz Gorges. The Ab-i-Diz route would be much shorter than *via* Khoramabad, and carry much less rise and fall. No part of it has ever been studied. The Dizful and Burujird section, even if practicable, would be extravagantly costly by any route, and if built would tend to shorten circuit more advantageous to Kizil line. Neither this reconnaissance, therefore, nor any towards Shiraz is recommended. There might be a little better promise in a reconnaissance of Muhammareh, Ahwaz, Ispahan. But even that should be undertaken only if a survey or (word omitted)s are over plentiful. Krasnovodsk, Samarkand may, perhaps, be sound political objectives for a railway from India, but present information does not justify a Trans-Persian railway from India into Central Persia. Its utility could not possibly compensate for great expense of construction and operations. If ever built it would join Kizil trace to Teheran, near Kum. Except in territory around Hamadan and towards Teheran, the surveys and reconnaissances suggested in this report might be effected during winter months.