

AMERICAN CONSULATE*

No. 17

Bagdad, Turkey, April 1, 1915

Subject: Christians

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to report, referring to your telegram of March twenty-four regarding conditions of Caldean Christians, the censorship here is very strict and martial law enforced strongly. Hence it is impossible to obtain exceedingly definite information. The Acting Bishop of the Caldean Church in Bagdad informs me he knows of no particular offense that has been committed against Caldean Christians at (5 letters)^A and believes would have heard by messenger had there been. However, the conditions of all Christian sects in this consular district is not good because I daily hear of isolated instances of what might be called religious persecution. Recently all the arms have been taken from the Armenian soldiers in the Bagdad army because it is reported that the Armenian soldiers in Armenia recently deserted to the Russians. All the Armenians here are very much worried. The soldiers from whom the arms have been taken are made to work on a small railroad being constructed toward (5 letters)^A and are reported to be treated badly.

The recent discovery of secret communication between Bagdad and Persia involved Bagdad and Mosul Caldean Christians some of whom have been arrested both in Bagdad and Mosul. Of those arrested some are said to be innocent and others guilty. The episode has made it more difficult here for all Christians. With few exceptions all the Christians are against the Turks but they must be so secretly, owing to martial law here.

Money is very scarce now as business has been stopped for a long time. The Christians are fairly wealthy but the wealthy Christians are not now liberal owing to the grave uncertainties here. It is useless to give money to the Government for distribution. The Austrian Consul gave one hundred pounds to the local

* Source: NA/RG59/867.00/760. Corrected copy NA/RG59/867.00/779.

Government for the sufferers from the flood in December but this money has not yet been distributed.

Recently a disagreement has occurred near Bassorah between the Sunni and Shia sects of Mohammedans and many of the volunteer Arab tribes of the Sunni sect have left the seat of war. On March twenty-four the Bagdad Governor General issued orders that this Consulate must not give financial assistance to British-Indian subjects who are Mohammedans because he claimed it is British propaganda but at the same time gave permission for this Consulate to give financial assistance to British-Indian subjects who are not Mohammedan. From many sources I hear cases of new oppressions against non-Mohammedans but it must be remembered that the local government has no real sympathy here for the non-Mohammedans and every non-Mohammedan who could find the money has bought himself out of the army. There is no national spirit here. It is impossible to foresee the future but present indications are that as the pressure against Turkey increases, if it does, more severe taxation will be imposed and worse conditions will follow. Should defeats of Turkish arms lead to fanaticism, at present indications are that serious troubles would follow. The dangers expected here when the Holy War was declared did not occur and it is to be hoped that none will develop here in future.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

CHARLES F. BRISSEL.
American Consul.

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(840.4)

NOTE:

The above despatch was received in red cypher. The groups in parentheses are absolutely unintelligible and the Consul should be so informed. The same letter indicates the same group.

[Signed] J. R. Buck