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Dec. 17

Notes on General Political Situation (Middle East),
Arab-Israeli Relations, Future of Jordan, Future
of UNEF, Palestino Refugees

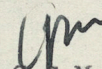
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17 December 1958

Note for the Secretary-General

1. You will be aware that in some foreign services, when masters proceed on tour, briefs are prepared for them to pose the principal problems. The attached are in no sense to be so regarded but they do contain some random and largely speculative thoughts on the following:

- A. General Political Situation
- B. Arab-Israeli Relations
- C. Future of Jordan
- D. Future of UNEF
- E. Palestine Refugees


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17 December 1958

MIDDLE EAST

A. General Political Situation

1. It might not be easy to decide whether the current situation in the Middle East is more or less unsettled than the one which prevailed during August and September 1958. It is true that the dangers of a Great Power clash in the area have receded considerably and that this has happened by tacit consent rather than by any clear understanding. The withdrawal of the US forces from Lebanon and UK forces from Jordan signified the end of what had become a drift toward head-on collision.
2. Nevertheless, political readjustment is still continuing within the area and its end is not yet in sight. The situation in Lebanon appears much better, especially if the economic repercussions of the civil disturbance can be minimized through foreign aid. Within the circumstances described under Part C of this paper, the situation in Jordan is temporarily on an even keel. It is the situation in Iraq which gives the most cause for concern but there is a corresponding and not altogether unrelated development within the UAR which is also worrying.
3. There has been no clear indication of what is happening in Iraq other than that a continuing struggle for power is taking place. It is alleged that the large landowners began to rebel when the Iraqi regime took steps to impose land reform. It is said that the Baath nationalists, allied to Nasser, were preparing a coup; the communists are reported to be at the head of the mobs and the mobs to be driving the government before them. The army seems to be rallying round Kassem, judging by the number of arrests he has ordered. No doubt the truth lies somewhere in the midst of these confused reports. One persistent indication is that the communist party in Iraq is better organized than its rivals. For this reason in a multilateral struggle, the communists might emerge on top. The technique frequently employed in the Middle Eastern countries is for a given regime to uncover one plot after another, producing a series of excuses for eliminating opposition and rivals. Nasser and Serraj employed these techniques. This could be happening in Baghdad but it might be hard to discover who is uncovering the plots and who is behind them.
4. What can be said is that the supposed or actual strength of the communists is likely to increase the attention paid by the Western Powers and this in turn

would attract attention by the Soviet Union. Accordingly, it may not be very long before the detente, reached by acquiescence, may be a thing of the past and the Great Powers will once again be pushing at one another in the Middle East. They have at no time been fully disengaged in any event.

5. However, Berlin may continue as the priority preoccupation and the Iraqis may be permitted to settle their own differences. Within the area the emergence of a left-wing regime would exert pressures on Damascus and consequently on Cairo which might sharply revive the long-standing rivalry between Iraqi and Egyptian. Probably the best regime for the peace of the area would be a solidly independent, middle of the road government in Baghdad.

6. The comments in Cairo on these developments will be of considerable interest and Amman will have its own version. Of similar interest, moreover, will be the comparison of the viewpoint as between Khartoum and Cairo since like their Iraqi counterparts the present Sudanese regime appear not entirely at one with Nasser.

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B. Arab-Israeli Relations

1. The most pressing problem of Arab-Israeli relations is the deterioration in the situation along the Israel-Syria armistice demarcation line, including the demilitarized zones. The recent evidence of Israeli military build-up in the area and of UAR intention to hit back hard (and accurately according to some sources) has not been completely offset by reports that the Israelis have been thinning out their troops, nor by the fact that international attention has been focussed on the flash point. The underlying causes remain and while they do, even with strict vigilance UNTSO will have its hands full.

2. Presumably the longstanding sources of friction, especially in the Lake Huleh area, have recently been aggravated by other circumstances, like the following:

(a) There has been a period of quiet on all Arab-Israeli sectors during which time the Great Powers have manoeuvred dangerously in the Middle East, the communist influence has significantly increased and the Arab States have differed sharply among themselves. Attention having been distracted from their activities, the Israelis have been working steadily and systematically to consolidate their political position along the frontier with Syria and not without some provocation to the Syrians.

(b) The Israelis themselves have been disturbed by recent shifts in the balance of power in the Middle East and especially by communist inroads. They are no doubt aware that Nasser has been having difficulty with a Syrian satrapy. They are conscious of the widely accepted thesis that Nasser runs hand in hand with international communism, notwithstanding his campaign against domestic communists. The Israelis would reckon that traffic would bear a considerable amount of anti-Nasser activity on Israel's part.

(c) As for the Syrians, there are no doubt elements within the "northern region" who would be glad to make trouble for Cairo. There are probably communist technicians (Czech and Russian) serving in Syrian military establishments bordering on Israel (this could account for the accuracy of the recent artillery shelling which was a surprise in certain quarters). In these circumstances the usually trigger-happy Syrians could be expected to react strongly to any provocation.

(d) It may also be that because of difficulties within Syria, Nasser is prepared to indulge in or allow anti-Israel activity which would serve

as a diversion. The Israelis have argued that Nasser needed an adventure to offset his losses in Lebanon and Jordan but this reasoning is not plausible in view of what actually happened, especially in Lebanon.

3. Whatever the reasons, the situation remains tense and every effort should be made to dissuade the parties from allowing it to drift in the direction of armed clashes. Persuasion by the Secretary-General could be most helpful in Cairo and Jerusalem. At the same time, however, efforts should be made to increase the effectiveness of UNTSO in the affected area, perhaps through opening new understandings with the parties or resuscitating old agreements.

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C. Future of Jordan

1. During the Secretary-General's mission in September the task in Jordan was to find practical arrangements which would serve to assure the Jordanian Government that the UN took a serious view of the Arab resolution calling essentially for a good neighbour policy among the Arab States. There was nervousness then in Jordanian circles about the future of Jordan as an integral State. Once international attention had been focussed on the country, however, and in particular once the UN watchdog had been allowed on the premises, the Jordanians showed signs of relaxation. The political tranquillity of Jordanian leaders was no doubt attributable in large part to the substantial economic assistance rendered by the USA. Moreover, the Arab good neighbour policy seems to have had some effect on the relations between Jordan and the UAR. The contribution of the UN in this regard although not materially large seems to have been psychologically most beneficial.
2. Notwithstanding these encouraging developments, the future of Jordan remains a large question. Last September the assessment was that Jordan could probably survive for a time because no neighbouring State wished to assume the liability which Jordan represented because of its economic sterility, political instability and the large refugee population living there. The underlying assumption was that there would be no internal revolt because the Jordanian army held the key to this and because prospective leaders of an army revolt would have to think of the "second day of the revolution", when the troops must be paid. In all these circumstances Jordan was assured at least a brief future and certainly as long as the United States economic aid were to continue.
3. It seems that these conditions continue but the situation is affected not a little by what has been happening in neighbouring States. The UAR campaign against Jordan has died down; the political leaders in Baghdad have been too preoccupied to give any thought to Jordan, although the most natural affiliation for Jordan would be found in Iraq. Even among the Syrians attention seems to have shifted from Jordan to Israel or to domestic differences as between Cairo and Damascus.
4. The emergence of left-wing elements in Baghdad could propel Jordan once more to a more central position on the Middle East stage. If the regime in

Baghdad should rely on the left, including the communists, for its continuation, Jordan could become more important as an anti-communist bastion. There could be, for example, a return to the shaky situation in the autumn of 1957, when Syria was said to be drifting into Soviet satellite status. At the same time internal unrest within Jordan might be fostered. In those circumstances, however, one could expect United States aid (military and economic) to continue with its stabilizing influence on the regime.

5. In the same circumstances it should be that Jordan's relations with the UAR would continue quiet. It could be hoped too that the Jordanians would have enough sense not to aggravate the situation along the Israel-Jordan demarcation line.

6. If the power struggle in Baghdad should have some other result like the emergence of pro-Nasser or independent Iraqi elements, the need for bolstering Jordan might seem less to the United States. In this case, while Jordan might be in the shade internationally, the domestic situation might deteriorate. However, the effect of such deterioration would probably not appear for some time.

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D. Future of UNEF

1. Presumably the Secretary-General will be discussing with General Burns and Dr. Fawzi the continuing operations of UNEF both in the Gaza Strip and at Sharm el Shaikh. During the visit in August-September Dr. Fawzi was more or less content to let matters stand, although he did complain slightly about:

(a) laxity by UNEF at the frontier, especially along the old international line south-east of Gaza where the effectiveness of UNEF is hampered by terrain and physical shortcomings;

(b) fraternization between UNEF and Israelis (I gathered that there might have been some illegal crossings at all levels);

(c) rough treatment of Gaza civilians which is always possible under prevailing conditions and especially when the UN troops are aware that armed fedayeen are present in the area.

On the whole none of these seem in any way serious, except perhaps (b) potentially.

2. In September relations within the force seemed tolerably good, although there was some alleged friction between Indian and Canadian senior officers and also between civilians and military officers on General Burns's staff. There was some complaint about the difficulty in having UNEF HQ orders implemented and that in any real emergency chaos might emerge. There was the suggestion that General Burns was too easy-going; that he failed to see some very obvious evils; that troubles might result. Much of this was probably (Canadian) military contempt for sloppy operation and perhaps a lack of understanding of the way in which the force has had to operate in all the circumstances. The need for diplomacy, especially in General Burns's relations with his senior subordinates, might not be as apparent to a regular army staff officer as to a civilian used to the perambulations of UN activity. On the whole the impression was that the officers on the staff, notwithstanding their military impatience, were living together reasonably well and had a considerable understanding of the requirements of UNEF existence.

3. If it should appear that UNEF is getting by, if not getting along well, some consideration should nevertheless be given during the current visit to the future of the force. It would be a mistake to assume that the operation could or should be continued indefinitely in much the same way as UNTSO has continued. There are solid reasons for saying this:

(a) originally UNEF was not conceived as an agency which would sit on the status quo ante and wait for the next explosion. There is creeping criticism that UNEF's stabilizing effect is being employed to protect the UAR and to leave Nasser free to make mischief in other sectors. This may be part of the "tool of Nasser" tradition but the passage of time is causing disillusionment even among those who rejected the earlier emanations in that tradition.

(b) The operation is costly and therefore causing criticism to swell within the UN ranks. The recent debate and especially the vote on the UNEF budget was most disappointing, but especially to participating governments. Even the USA seems to be growing less enthusiastic about paying. There is a nagging fear on the part of participants that they will be left with large unsettled debts.

(c) Some governments who have been participating from the start are now experiencing difficulty in maintaining their contingents. Canada, for example, has a very small army from which to draw specialists for UNEF. It is becoming difficult to find candidates except among personnel who have already served in Gaza. Moreover, there is continuing pressure to economize in military commitments.

(d) While risk of a new outbreak on the Gaza front might seem remote, there could be a chain reaction from incidents on other fronts. The recent incidents on the Israeli-Syrian frontier emphasize this and also suggest that UNEF's effectiveness as a general tranquillizer may be wearing off.

(e) The underlying idea of an international police force received a sharp setback during the 13th session. This could have an adverse popular reaction in countries, like Canada and the USA, which are contributing substantially to UNEF.

4. None of these reasons, nor even a combination of them, would be sufficient to suggest that UNEF operation should be discontinued. It would not help to remove the check on the Israel-UAR demarcation line and especially to open the possibility of new difficulty in the Straits of Tiran. Nevertheless, there would seem to be sufficient reason for giving serious consideration to some modification of UNEF which would reduce the strain on UN resources and on participating governments. UNTSO, for example, has continued to be effective and much less expensive in money, men and material. It would seem neither inappropriate nor inadvisable to sound out General Burns, General Von Horn and selected members of their staff on the problem of continuing UNEF. They

should be encouraged, however, to think beyond the military requirements because it is the political appreciation and political future of the force which deserves the most attention. For this very reason it might also be desirable to touch lightly on the same subject with Dr. Fawzi.

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E. Palestine Refugees

1. The recent debate on this subject in the General Assembly and more particularly the negotiations behind the scenes concerning the draft resolution served only to arouse Arab suspicions about Western intentions as regards the future of the Palestine refugees. The nub of the argument was the proposal that the means for providing for the refugees should be made the subject of careful study. It has been obvious for some time that the termination of UNRWA's mandate on 30 June 1960 would make such a study both desirable and necessary but this did not prevent the Arab delegations from rejecting the notion that the study should be authorized by the General Assembly and should begin almost at once. The Arab complaint appeared to be that the proposal for a study, which found expression in the Director-General's annual report and which was solidly if ineptly supported by the USA, had been sprung as a surprise. However, the proposal should not have been a surprise to the Arabs, who had no reason to assume that UNRWA would be continued without change beyond the termination of the current mandate. For some years contributing governments have complained about the refusal of the Arabs to give concrete consideration to the future of the relief programmes for the refugees and the contributors have not been impressed by the Arab argument concerning the "responsibility" of the UN for the refugees.
2. Now that the issue is out in the open and notwithstanding Arab assertions about confining the study to "technical operations", it would seem most desirable for those immediately concerned to undertake a comprehensive study of the whole problem of the refugees. As the Director has pointed out, the various services will have to be continued beyond the current mandate but it seems likely that there will be growing resistance to a mere renewal of the mandate. For one thing the passage of time has added greatly to the burden of UNRWA and the contributing governments have grown increasingly tired of that burden. They have been discouraged and disappointed not only because of the lack of progress toward a solution to the refugee problem but because of the apparent indifference of a great many other UN Members, who have the capacity to pay, about contributing to UNRWA. Thus not only will the task of raising funds become more difficult but there will be growing pressure for modification in the services which the UN provides.
3. The hopeful sign may be, as the Director has pointed out, the "growing appreciation of the desirability of self-support and of rehabilitations, in the broad sense of an improvement in their conditions of life and prospects for the future."

The USA, in particular, has shown a marked preference to give assistance toward self-support. Other contributors might be expected to follow suit. Of course, this probably would produce an adverse reaction among the Arab States and perhaps among the refugees themselves. Nevertheless, the most promising course would seem to be in the direction of self-support.

4. Accordingly, those most directly concerned with UNRWA should be encouraged to think concretely about its future and especially in terms of recommendations which should be made to the General Assembly at the 14th session. Moreover, the study should be in the direction of change, of modification which would imply something more than mere relief and an open-ended financial commitment for a relatively few Members of the UN.

5. Since the 12th session considerable thought has been devoted to means of achieving overall economic development in the Middle East. This has been regarded as one possible way of dealing with the problem of Palestine refugees, although indirectly. Immediate prospects for Middle East economic development on a comprehensive scale are not bright, especially with the continuing political disturbance in Iraq. This should not mean, however, that the study of the future of UNRWA should not be related appropriately to potential economic schemes for the area.