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Suez story-19

(as put together by D.H.)

14 July 56

Lloyd, Selwyn (Foreign Minister of U.K.)

- 1 letter to D.H.
- 1 letter from D.H.

TOP SECRET

July 14, 1956

*My dear Dag,*

I want you to know that on July 5 Dr. Fawzi raised the Palestine question with Trevelyan and outlined his ideas on how progress could be made towards a settlement. He suggested that the first step was to ascertain what the gap was between Cairo and Tel Aviv and to narrow it as far as possible. This might be done secretly through you or some other intermediary, and the process might begin as soon as the present tension between Israel and Jordan was removed.

2. He then contemplated a second stage, which he thought could only take place after the American elections. There would undoubtedly be a gap remaining between the Arab and Israeli ideas. At this stage certain outside Powers could come into the picture and should try, in consultation with Cairo and Tel Aviv, to produce a scheme for a settlement. During this process, Egypt would consult the other Arab States and obtain an all-Arab view. The terms proposed by the countries concerned could then be given shape in a United Nations resolution sponsored by as many States as possible and United Nations authority could, if necessary, be used to insist upon the acceptance of the settlement by Arabs and Israelis.

3. In discussing this second stage Fawzi suggested that there were three possible means of proceeding:

/(a) through

Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld.

- (a) through you;
- (b) through the Tripartite Powers (but this the Egyptians would oppose as having an appearance of foreign influence in it); and
- (c) through a mixture of outside States. He first talked about India, Indonesia, Burma and some Latin American States, but subsequently discarded this idea and made a precise proposal of the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, India and Pakistan. When asked about the French, he said that he had not put their name in as he wanted to get away from the usual pattern, but he did not absolutely exclude them.

4. In answer to Trevelyan's questions Fawzi said that the Egyptians had not discussed their ideas with the Soviet Government and that their intention was that the suggested machinery should be limited to the question of Palestine. The Egyptians wanted to be helpful and were therefore taking this initiative. They would be glad to discuss it further with Trevelyan informally.

5. After discussion with the Americans I authorised Trevelyan to give Fawzi an interim reply on July 11 to the following effect. First, we welcomed the initiative which we thought constructive. Secondly, we agreed with his proposed first stage and suggested that his ideas should be put to you on your next visit to Cairo. Thirdly, we were considering further his ideas on the second stage, which would necessarily

/depend

depend in part on the success of the first. Trevelyan added also that the success of the proposed effort would depend to a considerable extent on the general feeling that both sides were really working for a settlement and that for this reason matters would be greatly helped if some progress could be made concurrently on your negotiations on compliance with the Armistice Agreement. Fawzi expressed agreement with this.

6. I understand that Fawzi intends to put his ideas to you in Cairo, apparently on July 22. It will I think be useful for you to know about them in advance, and you may also like to have my preliminary comments which are as follows. I should welcome your views in due course.

7. I do not think that we should overemphasize the significance of the Egyptian approach. Nasser has been very skilful in the past at using a show of conciliatoriness on the Palestine issue to soften our attitude to him in general, and Fawzi has made no bones about wanting to use the initiative to improve Egyptian relations with the Americans and ourselves. On the other hand, I am sure that the Egyptian approach is an opening which should be explored in order to put their intentions to the test and to see whether any real possibility of progress exists. I should add that Nasser, without at all disowning Fawzi, seems to be less encouraging about the immediate possibilities.

8. The idea of a first stage seems sensible, and someone of your standing would clearly be best qualified to carry it out. Since the gap between the initial stands of the two parties is bound to be wide, the process of narrowing it may be more complicated than

/the Egyptians

the Egyptians seem to think. You might think it difficult for you personally to carry through the whole process, particularly as secrecy would be essential and your continued presence in the area could hardly fail to be remarked. Some alternative arrangement might therefore have to be developed, as indeed the Egyptians envisage.

9. We have more serious misgivings about the proposed second stage, although we have not yet formulated any definite views on it. It seems to be part of the Egyptian idea that certain great powers, including the Soviet Union and ourselves, should formulate a settlement which would be endorsed in a United Nations resolution and, if necessary, forced upon the parties. Apart from the fact that acceptance of a United Nations resolution cannot be forced in this way, there are other difficulties; for instance the Assembly might not necessarily accept as it stood any plan put to them by the "sponsors". If a conference is necessary at all to put the finishing touches to a settlement it might be better if all great powers were excluded from it. It might be best of all if a settlement acceptable to both sides could be reached as a result of the first stage only.

10. Fawzi has told us that the Egyptians will not mind if we discuss their ideas with you in advance. You may deem it wiser, however, when talking to them yourself to play down the extent to which we have discussed the question. It would also be valuable to us if you felt able to keep Trevelyan informed of your discussions with the Egyptians. He will know that I have written to you.

With best wishes  
Yours  
Selwyn

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1. I thank you for your letter and shall reply fully after my visit to the region. Here only a couple of reactions prima vista.

2. The Egyptian initiative is not surprising. It is in line with the interpretation of their stand which I arrived at in April. I believe that they are honest although inspired also by a wish to appease the West. But they simply have to act on Art. VII and/or Suez if we are to get anywhere and force the Israeli's to take them seriously.

3. Re "stage one". As Fawzi recognizes the exploration cannot take place until we have got away from the present Jordanian trouble. There are also some essential changes in Ben Gurion's political philosophy that must be achieved before we can usefully discuss their negotiation margins: today he is aggressively intransigent on the basis of the status quo. I may be used to prepare the ground in the ways mentioned but cannot engage in the long operation which is likely to follow. This is true for the reason you give, but also because it would take too much time and because we may already have risked the prestige of the Office to the limits set by wisdom, in view of future needs. What arrangements should be made if and when I have to stop my one-man operation must be given further thought.

4. Re "stage two". I share your doubts on this point and agree with your objections. The ideal would, of course, be direct contacts between the Parties with due pressure from the outside. It may also be the only technique open to us. At least I think it is wise to try out the possibilities in this direction before embarking on an enforcement policy, which may easily fail and would force the assisting nations to take sides prematurely and would render a conflict with the USSR only too possible. I have Shepilov's promise to support my present efforts to build up "an atmosphere in which we can get the Parties to sit down together" (in the beginning necessarily on specific issues).

Before talking to Fawzi and Nasser I cannot go beyond this reaction. If their proposal is carried through, I could probably withdraw from the stage. In case of success for an effort to initiate negotiations - presumably they would take the form of negotiations for amendments of the Armistice Agreements under e.g. Art. XII in the Israel-Egypt Agreement - I would

probably have to accept at least temporary chairmanship. (Personally I would prefer to wind up my part of the action as soon as circumstances permit.)

5. A general observation: Ben Gurion is even more suspicious of outside Powers than the Arabs because he anticipates a pressure on Israel to "give" something to the countries on the other side. This attitude has recently been sharpened and covers also the UN.