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(as put together by D.H.)

24 July 56

Dulles, John Foster (Secy of State, USA)

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TOP SECRET

24 July 1956

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Through Consul-General Gowen I received your message concerning certain suggestions reportedly made on July 5th, 1956, by the Foreign Minister of Egypt.

After my talks in Cairo I wish very briefly to comment on those suggestions which, although significant, in my view are, perhaps, of less importance than first impressions led to believe. I went into the matter very fully with Dr. Fawzi, and as we know each other intimately, I think I have a quite clear understanding of the thinking on his side.

I should like first of all to stress that the suggestions cannot be regarded as formal proposals, even if interpreted in a most broad sense. They appear to me as a piece of "thinking aloud" within the framework of the efforts of the world community to find the direction in which we should move in order to reach, as quickly as possible, a settlement of the Palestine problem.

The suggestions are firm only in two respects : as an indication of the need to widen present efforts beyond the scope of the armistice agreements, and as an indication of the conviction that even solutions acceptable to leading politicians in the area may have to be proposed from outside, not with a view to enforcement but so as to enable the Governments to take the unavoidable steps as concessions to such outside proposals.

Interpreted in this way, Dr. Fawzi's suggestions are very much in line with the interpretation I gave the Egyptian policy already in April. If they bring in any new element, it is that Egypt now feels that it can go on record in relation to the Western powers with its wish to push towards a broader settlement. In doing so, Egypt is doubtlessly to some extent animated by the wish to improve its relations to the West. I guess, however, that Egypt is also influenced by the stand recently taken by Mr. Shepilov, who seems to have left no doubt about his wish to see the situation brought under control while he, on the other hand, did not in any way commit himself on questions of substance. Finally, there is in the Egyptian move an element of recognition of failure, so far, to get anywhere along the lines we discussed in Cairo in April, that is through unilateral actions : obviously, efforts in that direction have been slowed down by complications in relation to other Arab countries and by Israeli's failure, on its side, to show any cooperativeness.

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The Honorable John Foster Dulles,  
Secretary of State,  
Department of State,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

In terms of action Dr. Fawzi, as I understand him, envisages the next development as follows : interwoven with the continued efforts to safeguard and strengthen the cease-fire and to move towards compliance, I should try and explore such related fields as could naturally be brought up within the orbit of my exchange of views. Subjects, time and form for such explorations should be entirely determined by the circumstances, as they develop in the course of my continued contacts. "We are not in a rush", Dr. Fawzi said in this context.

If, as planned, I go to the Middle East in October, this would be the natural time for a stock-taking. Although we should already before that time consistently work for an appropriate widening of the field of interest, the October talks would provide the proper occasion for a more systematic effort to get further. The "exploration" should even then remain informal and, as to its concrete content, played by ear. To the extent that, at this stage, the main parts of a peace settlement come up for discussion, it would be our task not only to register the stands, and the extent of the gap, but also, by appropriate suggestions, to try to narrow the gap. Results reached in this exploration which could be made elements of an agreement, might then be presented from the outside, and Dr. Fawzi did not feel that there was any reason now to decide how or by whom such proposals should be put forward; the group of nations he had mentioned had been indicated only by way of example. On this score he had a completely open mind and could accept anything which, in the given situation, would meet the practical purpose.

It follows from what I have said that the suggestions from the Egyptian side do not request any hurried consideration or any quick decision. We shall have plenty of time to give them thought and to discuss them, as at all events no innovation would be considered within the next future. I therefore feel that, for the present, I can limit myself to this account of my interpretation of the Egyptian stand, leaving the rest for a discussion on my return to New York.

As to my own role under the Egyptian plan, there is nothing to be said against the Egyptian ideas as concerns the next future. How things should be organised later is a different problem which has to be studied in the light of such circumstances as the rather particular position I now hold in relation to both Cairo and Jerusalem; my difficulty to dispose of the time necessary, especially after October; and the doubts I feel about the wisdom of keeping the Secretary-General's Office so much in the frontline of a conflict where, sooner or later, it may be exposed beyond what may serve the long term interest of the Organisation. Both Cairo and Jerusalem stress their view that I must remain in the picture, but personally I sense increasingly the difficulties this particular task creates for my regular work.

I may, perhaps, add that my personal evaluation of the possibility of progress in the forms suggested is not optimistic. I know only too well the present stands on both sides - I checked them again in private talks during my last visit - and the gap is very wide indeed. Even in the better atmosphere, for which we hope and work, the gap is likely to remain considerable with very inflexible views held on points not open for compromise. However, we cannot accept the existence of impossibilities, and to proceed now as suggested will at least not do any harm.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Ambassador Byroad. I also write to Mrs Selwyn Lloyd along the same lines.

EYES ONLY

July 25th, 1956

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I refer to your letter to me dated July 13th, 1956, transmitted by Consul-General Gowen.

I wish to express my appreciation of your informing me about the measure decided upon by the U.S. Government. Short of such background information my task in relation to the Middle East problem would be seriously complicated.

From our talk the evening we met at Ambassador Lodge's home, you know that I do not believe that an outbreak of hostilities in the region, if it were to happen, is likely to take a form where the word aggression has a clear sense or where it can be in any way unambiguously determined who is to be considered aggressor. This does not reduce the potential value of the measure taken by you, but it obviously limits the extent to which the measure can usefully influence the present situation. The risk we run now is closely related to the very particular circumstances prevailing in Jordan, and especially the situation in the Jerusalem area. A further fact of importance is to be found in Israel's refusal to accept that acts of retaliation cannot be justified as self-defense, and therefore might constitute acts of aggression.

You say in your letter that you are not going to publish the measure taken until after my visit to the region. It is obviously desirable that the publication be so timed and phrased as to minimize the risk of an association with my visit. Such an association might carry the implication that I had found the risk of aggression so imminent as to warrant a reaction. It should obviously be carefully avoided to provide any basis for such a misleading interpretation.

The Honorable John Foster Dulles  
Secretary of State  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C.