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Tunisia - 1958

15 Feb. - 26 May

D.H's aide memoire

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AIDE MEMOIRE

Ambassador Slim called me around 10.30 am. He had just been in touch over the telephone with Tunis, and had been told the following in reply to my question concerning assurances on supplies which I had put to him last Wednesday.

Some trucks with supplies had gone to the French troops yesterday. The Tunisian guards, when that happened, had been "active elsewhere", but, of course, the principle that no supplies were permissible was maintained. He had further been informed that, while the President maintained the principle that no supplies to the troops could be permitted, he would respond positively to a request for permission from some official personally, like the Secretary-General. However, of course, such supplies could be abused and he would, therefore, need some assurance. For that reason it would be desirable that somebody could, so to say, have a look at the supplies so as to provide a safeguard against abuse. (The need for an official demand and for some kind of "assurance" seems to indicate that the question has now entered the field of prestige problems of the well-known type).

I called up Sir Pierson Dixon and told him about this. He then told me that he had just received cables from the UK and US representatives in Tunis to the effect that the French Army people ~~ka~~ said that the supply situation was now somewhat easier and that they had the necessary supplies up to the 18th. The French Army were said to have advised the Government

against any use of airplanes now for supply purposes. I agreed with Dixon that we should think matters over a little bit, but indicated that my own attitude was that I should address a request to Bourhiba, saying only that it, of course, was based on the assumption that the ~~supplies~~ supply possibilities would not in any way be abused, while, on the other hand, I *would* inform the French about this request, saying that I have reason to believe that it would be accepted provided I could give assurances against abuse.

I later informed Wadsworth accordingly. He then mentioned that over the ticker the French Government was said to have agreed to mediation, to compensation and to intervention by the Red Cross in order to ~~REPAIR~~ restore damages in the village.

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AIDE MEMOIRE

Le Secrétaire Général tient à vous remercier de l'accueil fait à son appel et de la compréhension que le Gouvernement de la Tunisie a bien voulu montrer pour ses soucis.

Il note que le Gouvernement est disposé à autoriser les livraisons locales de vivres alimentaires nécessaires aux troupes françaises consignées en Tunisie, à la condition préalable que les possibilités de ravitaillement ainsi envisagées ne soient pas utilisées d'une façon abusive.

Sur la base d'un échange avec le Gouvernement de la France, le Secrétaire Général peut donner au Gouvernement de la Tunisie son assurance que les facilités envisagées seraient utilisées entièrement pour l'envoi de produits alimentaires et du ravitaillement nécessaire à la subsistance des troupes.

Il espère vivement que cette assurance du Secrétaire Général des Nations Unies puisse rendre satisfaction au Gouvernement de la Tunisie dans son désir de maintenir ce qu'il regarde comme des sauvegardes nécessaires pour la sécurité dans les circonstances actuelles.

le 16 février 1958

AIDE MEMOIRE

Ambassador Esin and Ambassador U Thant came to see me today at 11 a.m. on behalf of the Afro/Asian Group. They made three points which they said represented the consensus of the Group.

(a) It was the hope of the Group that France would not proceed with its plans for "le glacis defensif", pending the outcome of present good offices operations;

(b) They would like me to draw the attention of the High Commissioner for Refugees to the new refugees who had arrived in Tunisia;

(c) They were hoping for a positive outcome of the good offices operation, but wanted to emphasize that, if the negotiations were to drag out for too long, the delay itself would carry with it certain dangers.

On (a) I said that I wanted to check what the situation was; I had the impression that the French in fact were holding back the execution of their plans. (I later called Ambassador Georges-Picot and asked him for information).

On (b) I said that I would draw the attention of the High Commissioner to the problem. I would do so informally as he was autonomous in the interpretation of the extent of his mandate. However, my approach would be in line with the contacts we had had in the course of the past year.

On (c) I said that I certainly would mention to the British and American ambassadors what they had said. I was sure that their views was shared by all. Certainly, I subscribed to it myself.

In a telephone conversation with Ambassador Georges-Picot immediately after the visit, I gave him a brief summary of what had taken place. He had earlier called me and said that the Algerian girl had been pardoned, which I mentioned confidentially to the representatives of the Group.

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26 May 1958

A I D E M E M O I R E

Ambassador Slim saw me at 8 pm on Sunday evening, 25 May. He amplified the facts given in his two cables and said that he wanted to have them circulated first thing on Monday.

He was under instruction to ask me to intervene in the present conflict, in such a form and to such an extent as I found possible, in order to get the situation under control. It was clear that he included an initiative under Article 99 as part of the possible action; in fact, Slim gave very strongly the impression that as Bourguiba for general political reasons would prefer not to go to the Security Council, they hoped that I would. I felt their reason for this attitude to be mainly that they would not like to be accused of having precipitated a deterioration in the French crisis and that, further, they felt that they might lose their morally advantageous position regarding the withdrawal of troops, as established during the Good Offices operation.

In reply to a question he affirmed that Tunisia requested, in substance, first of all the withdrawal of the troops from the South of Tunisia, to be achieved in such a way as not to lay Tunisia open to an accusation of having rendered the French domestic problem worse. He was much less precise about the way in which the over-flights came into the picture.

I kept my own reactions vague and embarked mainly on an analysis of the risks combined with various alternative lines of action. I gave no indication of willingness to take an initiative before the Security Council, while, on the other hand, I said that I would bring the matter up the same evening with the French Ambassador in order to get his story, so as to be able to decide on my line of action with a fuller knowledge of facts.

I later saw Georges-Picot, who let me read a circular instruction from Paris. It appeared that Bénard had returned, in the course of Sunday, with new instructions, in order to start discussions with Tunisia on "un règlement général, satisfaisant pour les deux pays". The Ambassador had no further information on those talks. From his cables it emerged that Tunisia had cut off supplies in some limited cases and that it was very dubious from where the bombers over Tunisia Sunday morning had come; the Ambassador held firmly that they were part of a French governmental operation but could not explain the Tunisian statement that they have been seen crossing the border to Algeria.

After seeing Georges-Picot, I asked Mr. Cordier to get a message through to Washington to Ambassador Slim that he should call me as soon as he returned to Washington, which should be soon before midnight. I had prepared the following message for him:

"1. Je suis informé que Bénard est de retour à Tunis ce soir avec des nouvelles instructions, à fin d'entamer des conversations visant à un règlement général, satisfaisant pour les deux pays. Je comprends que cette initiative avait été prise après que le Gouvernement français a été saisi de la demande du Président Bourguiba que les troupes françaises soient retirés du Sud.

"2. Sous ces conditions et sans informations sur ces conversations, je n'ai pas à présent, une base pour une intervention. L'initiative du Gouvernement français est évidemment en ligne avec ce que j'aurais pu proposer moi-même.

"3. Pourtant, j'ai demandé au Gouvernement français de rétablir le status quo pendant que ces nouvelles discussions se poursuivent et à fin de les faciliter.

"4. Je dois évidemment maintenant adresser un appel similaire au Gouvernement Tunisien, ce que j'ai dit au Gouvernement français s'appliquant à titre égale à la Tunisie. J'observe que d'après les renseignements reçus, les autorités tunisiens semblent avoir couper les ravitaillements sur une échelle locale; si cela est ainsi, ce point est évidemment aussi visé dans l'appel général que j'ai fait.

"5. Je serais heureux de recevoir des renseignements sur les discussions dès que l'Ambassadeur serait informé de Tunis.

"6. Les points précédents couvrent une des deux bases possibles pour une demande adressée au Conseil de Sécurité, directement ou par l'intermédiaire du Secrétaire général, que le Conseil veuille considérer la situation qui s'est développée à la suite des événements des derniers jours. L'autre base possible est le survol d'avions étrangers du territoire tunisien au cours de dimanche et le bombardement dans lequel ces avions ont été engagés. Sur ce point les renseignements sont très peu clairs. Il semble que les avions, malgré tout, ont été d'origine française, et que les autorités françaises assument la responsabilité. C'est mon avis sérieux qu'une initiative auprès du Conseil sur la base indiquée doit venir de la Tunisie, pas du Secrétaire général, comme il n'y a pas des raisons de regarder une initiative du Secrétaire général que comme une alternative secondaire à l'initiative du pays attaqué, et que dans ce cas-ci la situation interne en France ne justifie pas un renversement de ces rôles."

I finally got a call from Slim, 8 a.m. on 26 May. I then transmitted the message to him. He had no reaction. He had no news.

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