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Labouisse, Henry R. (Dir., UNRWA)

- memorandum to D.H. re U.N. Admini-
- stration of Gaza

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM

To: The Secretary-General
United Nations

From: Henry R. Labouisse
Director, UNRWA

Subject: United Nations Administration of Gaza

Some days ago you spoke to me about possible arrangements for a United Nations administration of the Gaza Strip, in the event such a course of action should be called for as a result of the current discussions. Since then, there has reappeared from various quarters the idea that the United Nations should assume full responsibility for such an administration and the theory is sometimes advanced that the task would be a relatively simple one. For example, the New York Times for February 14th states:

"The United States view is that the United Nations Emergency Force and the United Nations Relief and Works Administrations could easily run the Strip in a kind of de facto trusteeship."

As I know from experience that this will not be a simple task and as UNRWA plays an extremely important role in the life of the Strip, I have thought it desirable to set forth for your information an analysis of what would be involved, should the General Assembly determine that a United Nations administration be established.

This memorandum is in three parts: a description of the characteristics of the Strip pertinent to the present discussion; a description of the division of responsibilities between the former Egyptian administration and UNRWA; and comments concerning the nature of a United Nations administration.

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GAZA STRIP

Physical Resources: The Gaza Strip is about 25 miles long and some three to five miles wide. It is a small part of what was known, during the British Mandate, as the Gaza District of Palestine. There are three principal localities in the Strip, namely, Gaza, Khan Yunis, and Rafah. It consists mostly of sand. Only about 35% of the land is cultivable, and even of this small proportion much is poor and saline. The crops grown include citrus, melons, dates, barley, wheat and maize. Owing to lack of grazing land, there is little livestock; fishing is undertaken by about a thousand licensed fishermen in just over 200 small fishing boats. There is no large industry but there is a small soap factory, pottery works and some rug weaving and embroidery work.

Communications: Before 1 November 1956, the principal communication was by rail to Port Said and road to Ismailia. Since that date, however, the communication line is by rail to Haifa and road to Israel. There is a small dilapidated jetty at Gaza and in calm weather off-loading from small schooners is possible by lighters.

Population: Until 1948 approximately 100,000 persons lived in the area now known as the Gaza Strip. Many of these persons, however, worked outside that area and only maintained their homes in it. Today, in addition to the local residents, there are 215,000 refugees cared for by UNRWA. About 130,000 of these live in eight camps built by UNRWA; the balance live in the towns and villages through the Strip, or, in the case of many Bedouins, in their own tents.

Economic Viability: Of the total population of more than 300,000, it is estimated that less than 15% are self-supporting. In addition to some 215,000 on the UNRWA rolls, about 60,000 were receiving relief assistance from the Egyptian authorities prior to November 1, 1956. The Gaza Strip is an economic monstrosity.

Administration: The Strip was under Egyptian military occupation from 1948 until November 1, 1956. The Egyptian authority within the Strip was divided under two separate commands: one -- under an Egyptian commander (either Major-General or Brigadier) reporting directly to Cairo -- included the regular Egyptian armed forces, together with certain locally recruited military elements; the other constituted the civilian administrative authority, which will be outlined in Part II below. This civilian administration was, in fact, military in character, for its chief officer -- the administrative governor-general -- was a Major-General and most of its senior personnel held officer rank in the Egyptian armed services -- and they were normally in uniform. However, use was made of certain local civilian (Palestinian) administrative units.

Applicable Law: The laws applied in the Strip were, for the most part, those of the former British Mandate; however, various Egyptian military government decrees were issued from time to time.

II. GAZA UNDER EGYPTIAN ADMINISTRATION

(Division of Responsibilities between
that Administration and UNRWA)

The following describes, in general terms, the functions of the Egyptian administration and of UNRWA, and shows how certain functions were divided between the two. The description also generally applies to the present division of responsibility between UNRWA and the Israel administration, although certain matters have not, for reasons inherent in the temporary arrangements with those authorities, been settled, e.g., subsidies for hospitals and education.

CIVIL ADMINISTRATION

ROLE OF UNRWA

1. Central Administration

Under the Administrative Governor-General, the Egyptian Government maintained 7 main departments, each headed by an Egyptian, with Egyptian and Palestinian staff. These were:

- a. The Attorney General's Office
Generally responsible for legal problems of the administration.

CIVIL ADMINISTRATION

ROLE OF UNRWA

b. Public Security

Responsible for, inter alia, civilian police (largely Palestinian and estimated at about 800 in number) but not military units, the latter being under a separate command reporting to Cairo.

c. Finance and Economy

Responsible for such matters as currency control, broad supervision of the banking system (there having been three banks in Gaza: Barclay's, the Arab bank, and an Egyptian bank), and supervision of commerce.

d. Public Works

Broadly responsible for public utilities, road construction and the like.

UNRWA was frequently asked to finance various public works such as the construction of a port, roads, and a drainage system for Gaza town. It did not do so as it does not have the authority to spend money on such projects whose only justification, from the Agency standpoint, would be to provide temporary employment. The Agency has requested such authority from the current session of the General Assembly.

UNRWA has in being an afforestation project to stabilize the sand dunes and to protect land that is or could be brought under cultivation.

UNRWA also has started an experimental programme of well digging for irrigation purposes.

e. Social Affairs and Refugees

This department had three main duties:

- (i) Liaison with UNRWA.
- (ii) Relief for the needy (about 60,000) non-refugee population, consisting mainly of a distribution of 6 kilos of flour per month, plus some donations from CARE, UNICEF, etc.
- (iii) Welfare activities for the non-refugee population.

UNRWA distributes a basic food ration of 10 kilos of flour per month (plus other items such as rice, pulses, sugar, etc.) to 215,000 refugees. It also maintains a supplementary feeding programme (hot meals) for about 11,000 medically selected refugees, and a milk programme for all children, nursing mothers and TB patients.

UNRWA also distributes to all refugees a monthly ration of soap, a new blanket every three years, and, in winter months, a ration of kerosene.

CIVIL ADMINISTRATION

ROLE OF UNRWA

Social Affairs and Refugees
(continued)

UNRWA has constructed and runs 8 camps providing accommodation for 130,000 persons.

UNRWA has a clothing programme that provides employment for about 2,000 weavers and is intended to provide each school child with one set of garments a year.

UNRWA provides welfare services to all the refugees (hardship case work, sewing and embroidery centers, community centers, etc.)

f. Public Health

Generally responsible for public health regulations throughout the Strip.

Specifically responsible for running four hospitals in the Strip (300 beds); and asserted supervisory authority over the 92-bed Baptist Mission hospital (the best equipped surgical hospital) and the TB hospital (250 beds), which was administered jointly with UNRWA.

UNRWA maintains a comprehensive system of preventive medicine for all refugees which includes inoculation and vaccination, instruction in elementary hygiene, periodic examination of school children, etc., sanitation and garbage disposal in camps.

UNRWA maintains 9 clinics which provide simple medical care and maternity care for the refugee population.

UNRWA was paying a subsidy at the annual rate of about \$100,000 to the Egyptian Government to cover the hospitalization of refugees in the Egyptian run hospitals. The Egyptians claimed UNRWA should cover 2/3 of the cost of running the hospitals (on the theory the refugees are 2/3 of the population) and that the actual subsidy was something less than 2/3. They were, however, never willing (or possibly able) to produce a satisfactory budget of expenditure.

UNRWA subsidises 85 of the 92 beds in the Baptist hospital.

UNRWA pays 60% of the cost of operating the TB hospital which it established a few years ago in cooperation with the Egyptian authorities.

UNRWA trains nurses for hospitals and clinics in the Baptist hospital.

CIVIL ADMINISTRATION

ROLE OF UNRWA

8. Education and Cultural Affairs

Generally responsible for, or at least interested in, the education problems of the whole Strip.

Specifically responsible for -

- (1) Elementary education for the non-refugee population;
- (11) Secondary education for the entire population, and for refugees, the last 3 of 5 years.

UNRWA maintains 65 elementary and secondary schools (first 2 of 5 years) with about 1,000 teachers.

UNRWA paid a subsidy to the Egyptian authorities of \$40 per student for secondary education (last 3 of 5 years) for refugee students. In 1956, about 37,000 students received elementary education (all those qualified) and about 7,000 students received secondary education (about 19% of the number of students in elementary classes). The Egyptians claimed the real cost to be \$75 per student and that more students should be allowed to go to government secondary schools at Agency expense.

UNRWA subsidized 1,000 students in teacher training and commercial training courses in Gaza run by the Egyptians.

UNRWA provides 90 university scholarships per year for study in Cairo or Beirut.

UNRWA has a programme of handicraft training in its elementary schools which is in addition to the usual curriculum.

UNRWA has built and runs a Vocational Training Centre and an Agricultural Training Centre accommodating together about 400 students per year.

2. Local Administration

a. District Officer

The post of "District Officer", which existed under the Mandate, was retained by the Egyptian administration, but with somewhat modified functions. The District Officer himself was a Palestinian who formed part of the Egyptian Central Administration, and in respect of his main functions was responsible to the Department of Public Works and the Department of Finance and Economy respectively, while also having a liaison function with the municipal administrations.

b. Municipal Administrations

Gaza Municipality and the few other municipalities within the Strip each had their own local (Palestinian) administration.

Municipal Administrations (cont'd)

administration under a Mayor assisted by a group of Town Councillors, who were, at least in theory, elected. Responsible to the Mayor and Town Councils were Palestinian municipal administrations.

The municipalities and villages were under the overall supervision of local Egyptian Governors, who were in every case military officers, and who were, in fact, the local representatives of the Administrative Governor-General. The civil police within each area were under the direct control of the local Governor.

c. Camp Administration

Egyptian camp commanders (who were in every case military officers) were stationed in or near to each camp, and had special responsibility for security matters.

The refugee camps (which accommodate approximately 130,000 refugees) are directly administered by UNRWA, each camp being under the direct control of a UNRWA camp administrator.

d. The Courts

The judicial system in force under the Mandate was largely retained. Thus, in the civil courts, which were theoretically independent of the Government and of the Attorney General's Office, included:

- (i) An assize court (i.e., formerly the Palestine High Court on circuit, but which came to exercise a permanent jurisdiction in Gaza). Both the President and the Member were Egyptians.
- (ii) A Supreme Court (with mainly appellate jurisdiction). The President, alternate President, and one Member were Egyptian, while the remaining Member was Palestinian.
- (iii) A District Court (being a court of first instance) of which both the President and the Registrar were Palestinian.
- (iv) Three Magistrates Courts, all three Magistrates being Palestinian.

In addition, the Sharia Courts were retained and exercised jurisdiction over matters of family law.

To the above were added Egyptian Military Courts with military jurisdiction only.

It will be seen from the foregoing that in at least three fields — food, health and welfare and education — the civil administration and UNRWA shared operational responsibility from the point of view of administration of the Strip as a whole. In these fields, UNRWA's role was, perhaps, the more important by virtue of the fact that it dealt with two-thirds of the population.

It may also be worth comparing here the financial and economic contribution of the two administrations. UNRWA spent last year about \$6.5 million on its operations for the refugees in the Strip, of which about \$2.7 million were spent locally. It would appear from information available to us (although this is not at all conclusive) that, during the same period, the Egyptian administration spent something between \$2 and \$3 million, exclusive of its expenditures for the military establishment. UNRWA is also the largest employer of labour in the Strip, with some 3,000 Palestinians employed, plus casual labour, compared with about 1500 Palestinians employed by the Egyptians.

III. SUGGESTED ARRANGEMENTS UNDER A UNITED NATIONS ADMINISTRATION

1. Outline of Organization Needed

If a United Nations administration is to be established for the Gaza Strip, it must be capable of dealing with all of the functions referred to in Part II. It would appear that the existing United Nations bodies in the field could handle only a part of them: UNEF could provide the armed forces and UNRWA could, with some expansion, and with adequate financing, manage to take care of the relief (food and clothing), health, education and social affairs functions for the entire population.

It would, therefore, be necessary to create a new organization of competently trained officials, which should, in the first instance at least, roughly parallel the Egyptian organization described above. If UNRWA were to be asked to undertake the tasks within its competence for the entire population, and if UNEF were to provide the armed forces (corresponding to the separate military garrison maintained by the Egyptians), there would still be the need of recruiting additional United Nations personnel to man the new civilian administration. These would include the following:

A Governor-General, or Commissioner, with necessary subordinates.

A chief legal officer, with necessary legal staff, to fulfill the functions of Attorney-General, etc.

A chief public security officer, with necessary aides, to deal with police and internal security matters not normally within the competence of UNEF.

A chief economic and financial officer, with necessary assistants, to deal with currency and banking matters, and general problems relating to trade, industry and finance.

An official, with necessary assistants, to be responsible for public utilities, road construction and the like.

I have not attempted to prepare a detailed manning table for the above-listed functions, as this can best be done by a planning staff assigned especially to the task.

If a new civilian administration is set up on the above lines, UNRWA could undertake to perform for the entire population the remaining functions mentioned under "Central Administration" in Part II. It would, however, naturally have to strengthen its staff somewhat to cope with the increased work load.

2. Alternative Suggestions for Operational Responsibility

The fact that a large part of the total United Nations activities in the Strip would be those normally performed by UNRWA raises a question as to the most effective organizational relationship among UNRWA, UNEF and the new administrative organization suggested in 1. above. The following appear to be the most practical alternatives:

Alternative (a)

Place full responsibility for all United Nations operations in the Gaza Strip in one person. This would mean transferring the entire UNRWA Gaza staff to the new administrative organization, and presumably subjecting the UNEF forces in Gaza to that organization. This would appear to have the advantage of clear-cut, centralized control in the Strip. It would, however, so far as the UNRWA operations are concerned, require considerable strengthening of the local UNRWA apparatus: the present one is geared to receiving a high degree of general and technical guidance and logistic support from its Beirut headquarters.

Alternative (b)

Have each of the United Nations components, i.e., UNRWA, UNEF and the new administrative organization, maintain their individual identities, coordinating closely at the local level. This alternative would avoid the disadvantage of the first, and, so far as UNRWA is concerned, would have the inherent efficiency of making use of the established apparatus and techniques, and would facilitate the maintenance of UNRWA standards if this is agreed as an objective for the new administration.

Under either alternative, this matter of relief standards should receive careful attention. What is involved is, as I have pointed out in an earlier memorandum, the fact that, if the United Nations assumes full responsibility for the Strip, it will come under heavy pressure to raise relief standards. In the past, these had been justified on the grounds that UNRWA only assists host Governments and must live within the limits of voluntary contributions. If, however, the United Nations had sole responsibility for the administration of the Strip, this justification of continued UNRWA standards would be much more difficult.

While some improvement in relief standards would, in my judgment, be justifiable on any grounds, it must also be borne in mind that, should such an improvement be made for the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, there would be mounting pressures upon UNRWA throughout the other host countries to bring about a similar improvement for the rest of the refugees. If UNRWA, because of its limitations on its funds, were not able to do this, the conditions of work in those countries might become intolerable.

It would, therefore, be important that there be an agreement between the United Nations commissioner and UNRWA as to the standards of relief to be applied in the Gaza Strip before the United Nations took over full responsibility. Whatever decision is reached, it would probably be easier to enforce that decision if the second alternative mentioned above -- that of the maintenance of the UNRWA apparatus in Gaza under Beirut supervision -- were adopted.