

**Middle East conflict -
correspondence with
participating countries:
Middle ...**

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Middle East

17 June 57

Merter, Christian A. (Under-Secy of State)
USA

- 1 letter from O.H.

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17 June 1957

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Mr. Herter,

....

It was a great pleasure, indeed, to see you the other day at Harvard and to have an opportunity to exchange a few words. There was one matter which I would have liked to discuss thoroughly with you but, of course, an occasion like this one does not give any opportunities for serious shop talk. Instead, let me send you the enclosed memorandum concerning the matter I would have liked to bring up with you. I ask Harry Labouisse to put this letter and its annex in his pocket as I learn that he is going to see you tomorrow.

I hope that in due time I shall have a chance of talking things over with you, although I do admit that the conditions under which you, on your side, and I, on my side, have to work make me a little bit pessimistic.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Dag Hammarskjöld,
Secretary-General.

The Honorable Christian A. Herter,
Under-Secretary of State,
Department of State,
Washington, D.C.

MEMORANDUM

17 June 1957

1. On the assumption that we manage to maintain the present degree of quiet around Israel, there may be a chance to approach the bigger problems of the area so as to consolidate the situation. This should not be done until after a reasonable period of quiet. On the other hand, it would be dangerous to wait for too long, as experience shows that sooner or later after a change for the better the quiet established tends to thin out, throwing the region back into an acute period of fever. Under such circumstances it seems necessary now to do some serious thinking about possible approaches to the major problems. This should be done irrespective of whether or not we have yet reached the time for action.

2. Leaving aside, for the moment, the matter of tactics and considering only the substance of the problems which we have to face, I would say that any approach to the Palestine situation must take the refugee question as its starting point. Other questions, like the one about utilisation of Jordan waters, may tactically give better starting points for presentation, but they are subordinated, although unavoidably related, to the refugee question.

3. The refugee problem is of a secondary nature in Lebanon and Syria. It presents even in those two countries aspects which have to be seriously considered. However, it will be relatively easy to solve there, provided we can get progress in the countries where the refugee question meets us in its full strength. This is the case in Gaza and in Jordan. In Gaza the problem of the refugees must, primarily, be solved through

migration, as there is no possibility of absorption in Gaza. Also in Jordan migration will be necessary. The migration question in this latter case may be somewhat less pressing than in Gaza, but it is all the same of disturbing proportions.

4. If it is recognised that migration must be a major element in the solution of the refugee problem in Jordan and Gaza, an immediate practical problem is where the surplus population could be re-settled. At least for the time being, it seems reasonable to leave Egypt out of account, as the population problem of that country and related economic questions are such as to make it unlikely that any major contribution to a re-settlement of refugees could be made from the Egyptian side. For somewhat different reasons this is likely to apply also to Saudi Arabia. Under these circumstances, the main interest must be directed towards the possibilities of a re-settlement in Iraq, perhaps with financial assistance also from Saudi Arabia.

5. Iraq has a key position also for two other reasons. As a leading country, together with Saudi Arabia, in a policy attempting to stabilise domestic conditions in the area, Iraq should take great interest in the liquidation of the refugee problem. Further, Iraq is possibly strong enough to take a lead in this direction, provided that an assurance can be given that Egypt would not politically exploit the Iraqi initiative. This last proviso may not be unrealistic, as Egypt is likely to be rather anxious to get the refugee problem lifted off its shoulders, if that can be done without a loss of national prestige in the Arab world. I don't know, of course, what the chances may be for an Iraqi move just at this stage, even with quiet from Egypt's side.

6. It is likely that the political situation in Jordan is still far too shaky to make it possible for the country to take a front line position on this question. On the other hand, it should be strong enough to act, if it can do so behind a shield of an initiative from another and more powerful Arab country. Thus, while it seems unpolitic to try to break the back of the refugee problem by provoking an initiative from the Jordan Government, it seems reasonable to believe that the necessary co-operation would be forthcoming if the Government could present its policy as one in line with the stand already taken by Iraq (and Saudi Arabia). To try to push Jordan to spectacular action without such protection might well risk the success of the whole effort.

7. As a matter of course, an understanding would have to be reached with Israel, that Israel would not in any way exploit the first tentative initiatives which may be forthcoming from the Arab world. In fact, the very opposite is needed, as it is certainly necessary to get some action from Israel recognising its share in the responsibility for the refugee problem before even Iraq could be forced into the field.

8. If the previous observations are accepted, it would follow that a diplomatic initiative is necessary in order:

to get a desirable lead from Iraq, (if possible with support from Saudi Arabia),

to safeguard against complications of the situation from Cairo or Jerusalem, and,

to stage a move by Jerusalem balancing an Iraqi initiative by recognition, in some appropriate form, of Israel's share in the responsibility.

In such a setting it might be possible to count on the necessary action in Jordan. The diplomatic approaches to the countries concerned should, of course, in due time extend beyond the area indicated and would have to cover also Syria.

9. The necessary diplomatic action cannot be staged without some few ideas about initial practical steps for re-settlement. As a prerequisite to the diplomatic approaches it is, therefore, necessary to develop some concrete thinking on, initially, modest lines regarding the re-settlement operations, recognizing the basic need for migration.

10. It is likely that a discussion of the Middle East situation cannot be avoided at the twelfth session of the General Assembly. Planning of practical action and of diplomatic approaches must take this into account, both time-wise and so as to give the best possible substantive background for whatever action the General Assembly may decide to take.

11. On the basis of what has been said, the present consideration of the refugee problem would appear to fall into three parts:

- a) diplomatic moves in order to promote the necessary initiatives and safeguards;
- b) development of some limited concrete plans; and,
- c) preliminary planning of General Assembly action.

12. Apart from the very general observations made above, the discussions in the Secretariat have so far not led to any concrete conclusion concerning practical arrangements. Regarding the diplomatic operation, we have to find some form in which the matters could be discussed in Bagdad, etc., without publicity, and without any commitments, until the ground has been explored

and the stage set for more open initiatives. It is, therefore, necessary that the initial diplomatic contacts be entrusted to somebody whose task and position does not lend itself to any sensationalism and speculation. Especially in the first stage governments are likely to prove extremely sensitive, and this would seem to exclude all those who, in the public mind, are, or recently have been, linked up with the Middle East problem in key positions. If the right man could be found, I don't think it would be very essential what kind of hat he wears. We could certainly integrate him into a United Nations operation, if that is considered desirable, but it may be that another arrangement would be preferable. This formal aspect of the matter, however, strikes me as of much less importance than the question of the personality. By way of illustration, I would like to mention Philip Jessup, who strikes me as an ideal type of man for the task, both because of his personal qualities and because of the fact that he is outside government service, can move around inconspicuously and is unrelated to the problem. One possibility might be to use Ahmed Bokhari, who might fit the operation into the framework of a visit to his home country and thus avoid the publicity, which his strong position in the Secretariat and his links to the Arab world else would be only too likely to provoke. Bokhari has, of course, the advantage of intimate first hand contact with most of the personalities involved.

13. Timewise, the most urgent matter seems to be the development of concrete ideas on a limited scale and the choice of a spokesman. I would be afraid of a delay beyond, let us say, mid-August.

14. In summing up I would, on the negative side, warn against:
- a) overburdening the position of Jordan;
 - b) using anybody as a spokesman who, in the initial stage, would attract undue attention to the approaches or cause the governments concerned embarrassment; or,
 - c) establishing diplomatic contacts without well-considered practical suggestions about how the re-settlement should be started.
15. This is, as stated above, only an attempt to define the framework for the necessary thinking and planning, and does not enter upon the presentation problem. It is quite possible that the first public move should be in the field of utilization of water resources, with the ensuing automatic absorption of refugees in the area where they are at present living. It must be re-emphasized that such an approach would be a purely tactical one, as it does not touch upon the crucial difficulties, either of a practical or of a diplomatic nature.