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Sec. Gen.'s trip to Paris 1959

July 29

Memorandum for the Sec. Gen.

(Notes on the question of nuclear tests in the Sahara,

The Algerian question)

SECRET

Memorandum for the Secretary-General

29 July 1959

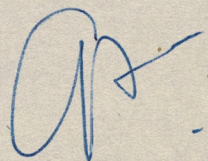
Your Visit to Paris

1. Attached is a draft Note, which has been prepared in the Department, on the question of nuclear tests in the Sahara. In the main it is a summary of the various expressions of protest by the independent Governments of West Africa. You may have noticed, in addition, today's report that Sudan had voiced a strong protest in the same sense in the Economic and Social Council. It is not difficult to imagine that other African States and their Arab and Asian associates would join in this protest, although perhaps with more moderation in some cases.
2. It has been suggested that the atomic bomb test by France might be carried out underground. This would limit the risk of fall-out and would tend to dissipate opposition among those countries, including European countries, which have expressed increasing concern about radiation hazards. At the same time an underground test, in the eyes of some experts at least, would not be as contrary to the trend in the tripartite talks in Geneva as an atmospheric test. US experts, for example, have already expressed doubt whether a ban on underground tests could be properly controlled and so they have urged that for the time being the suspension should apply only to atmospheric tests.

Algeria

3. I have only fragmentary information about the French attitude toward the forthcoming consideration by the General Assembly of the Algerian question. Of course, the basic attitude is one of opposition, based on the traditional French arguments. In private consultations the French have been urging (if not threatening) their allies to stand firmly behind French policy in Algeria. That policy, however, has hardly been defined. The main argument which French spokesmen have advanced is that the allies of France, like France itself, must depend on General de Gaulle to produce a solution in Algeria. In the absence of indication of General de Gaulle's views, however, even the closest friends of France are somewhat perplexed about the course which they should follow at the fourteenth session. In addition, there have been some suggestions in the press that it is extremists, like M. Debré, who are calling the tune on Algeria, and not General de Gaulle. This, of course, adds to the confusion and indecision.

4. Recently there has been some suggestion that the French Delegation at some stage, whether in the General Committee or at the opening of the debate in the First Committee, should make a formal statement of its position and policy in Algeria. Having done this, the Delegation would withdraw from the debate and the subsequent proceedings in the Assembly. The French have also sought from some friends advice on whether Moslem representatives from Algeria should sit with the French Delegation to the fourteenth session. The burden of advice in this regard has been negative to that idea, which would hardly impress African and Asian Delegations (or anyone else).
5. Friends of France are still trying to sort out their tactics. There has been a United Kingdom suggestion that the NATO Powers and perhaps others should remain silent during the Algerian debate and at the time of voting should not participate in the vote. One United States idea is that French friends should remain silent but should abstain at the time of voting. This would be preferable for allies of France who last year abstained on the Arab resolution (and it would allow the US itself to be consistent). In all probability, the French like neither of these approaches and will try to insist on outright opposition, especially at the time of voting.
6. At present, largely because of the lack of precision in the French attitude, there seem to be no suggestions for reconciling the opposing views. The assumption is that the Africans will be adamant in their insistence on such objectives as the right to independence and the need for negotiations. There may even be pressure for action to stop the fighting. Nevertheless, as in the past, there is undoubtedly a substantial body of opinion in the Assembly which would welcome some alternative to the extreme position of each side.
7. Because the outlook now is so confused, it is considered dark and difficult. In the circumstances there are undoubtedly those who hope that your visit to Paris will help to throw light, in several directions at the same time.



29 July 1959

Notes on the question of nuclear tests in the Sahara

This question was first dealt with, on the international level, in one of the resolutions of the Accra Conference of Independent African States in April 1958, which stated that the Conference viewed with great alarm and strongly condemned all atomic tests in any part of the world, and, in particular, the intention to carry out such tests in the Sahara.

In September 1958, the Government of Liberia protested to the French Government that the fall-out from a test in the Sahara would be very dangerous.

On 3 July 1959, Ghana transmitted a note to France, in which it appealed to the French Government to abandon the carrying out of atomic tests in the Sahara, and cited the warning of scientists that they would bring dangerous consequences to Africans generally and West Africans in particular.

On 6 July, it was revealed that the note had been rejected by the French Government. Two days later, it was announced that the Executive Council of the French Community had discussed the testing of atomic weapons and that it considered it necessary to produce an atomic bomb in order to safeguard its defense. It was indicated that President de Gaulle had reassured the Council on the possible dangers to the African population, and that it was even contemplated that the tests might be carried out underground so as to limit any risk of fall-out.

On 15 July, the Liberian Government renewed its protest to the French Government.

The Liberian and Ghana protests have received support in Nigeria, whose Federal Government requested the United Kingdom to appeal to the French Government on its behalf to call off the tests. On 27 July, in the course of debate in the House of Commons on an opposition request (which was rejected) to urge France not to go ahead with plans for tests in the Sahara it was stated that the United

Kingdom Government had not supported this appeal, but had merely passed it on. It may be noted here that The Times of London, in an editorial on 17 July, suggested that the tests might better be carried out in the Kerguelen islands, in accordance with what had been reported as the original intention of the French Government.

The question was dealt with in the communique issued on 18 July at the close of the Sanniquellie Conference by the Governments of Ghana, Guinea and Liberia, which deprecated "France's insistence on carrying out these tests in Africa...".

On 24 July, the Ghanaian Minister of External Affairs indicated that the question would probably be proposed for debate at the forthcoming conference to be held in Monrovia on 4 August by the Foreign Ministers of nine African States. It is understood that the possibility of submitting the matter to the United Nations General Assembly is among the aspects which would be discussed.