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Middle East

Meeting of Advisory Committee on UNEF

16 Dec. 57

Mr. Hammarskjöld 1.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON UNEF

(Meeting held in the Secretary-General's Conference Room
on Monday, 16 December 1957, at 11:00 a.m.)

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: By way of explanation, I may say that the official business for this meeting may perhaps not look so impressive, as it were, but I think that as the discussion develops you will see that we do have very good reasons for asking you to come here this morning.

In the first place, it seems appropriate, now that the twelfth session of the General Assembly has ended, that we should meet again to take stock of the present situation in various respects concerning UNEF.

At the outset, I should like to recall what all of you know very well -- namely, the development in the General Assembly. Thanks to the very good and strong assistance of the countries members of this Committee, and of other countries, we got the basis laid for a sound rule for financing the expenses of UNEF. This will carry us on and has straightened matters out so that we are again, so to speak, on a strictly legal and normal basis so far as the budget is concerned. In other words, the improvisation of last autumn is now finally overcome.

In this connexion, as you know, we had General Burns here for a while. He took part in the deliberations in the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, where he rendered most valuable assistance in clarifying the situation -- the practical needs, and so forth. In other words, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has now been briefed to the greatest extent possible on the substantive problems arising in the field of finance for General Burns as the Commander.

The second point in connexion with the General Assembly debates which I should like to put on record is the way in which the question of deployment was treated. I feel that we are all happy that it was treated with what I would characterize as the utmost restraint. It was mentioned in one single sentence by Mr. Fawzi in the general debate; and later on in the debate on UNEF, the representative of Egypt, as you will remember, limited himself to quoting the two sentences in the report on UNEF which referred to deployment; he did not elaborate the theme in any way -- that is to say, he simply put it on the General Assembly record that this was the state of affairs as explained in the report, and he did so in the very words of the report. This means, of course, that we

have got round another difficult and potentially dangerous corner in this operation.

I had an opportunity to look at the Israel reactions when I was in Jerusalem a couple of weeks ago. I did not raise the question of deployment on that occasion, since it did not seem to make much sense, the political situation being what it is, and, on the other hand, everyone being perfectly clear about the stand of the United Nations in principle and, consequently, my stand in principle. The important, and I must say the highly encouraging, thing which I noted both with the Prime Minister and with the Commander-in-Chief, General Dayan, was that, unhesitatingly, they considered UNEF a major factor for the maintenance of reasonably peaceful conditions - not only round Gaza, where UNEF's contribution was fully recognized, but also in the whole region.

We have in this respect travelled some distance in eight months. I think that this makes for another kind of stability, a kind of stability round UNEF as such. It really does mean that our main problem now will be one of the proper running of the operation - something which does not worry me at all - and the proper maintenance of a sufficient force in the field: a problem which necessarily will become more acute as time passes. On this latter point, there may be much to be said. I do not think that there is any need to raise these questions now in any detail, because there is nothing urgent in this respect.

There is a much more minor matter on which you might wish to have some information - namely, on the present state of rotation. On that point, I shall invite Mr. Bunche to give us the latest information.

I would add one thing. The complete absence of any incidents makes me jump the whole story of the degree of quiet. For the period that has passed since our last meeting, there is nothing to record in this respect.

Mr. BUNCHE: The rotation situation can be indicated very briefly.

The Yugoslav contingent has completed its rotation. This was done on 10 December. They came in two ships, in two stages.

The Indian rotation has been completed, the last man arriving by ship on 25 November and the veteran contingent leaving on 2 December by ship.

The Canadian rotation has been virtually completed, except for 174 men. This rotation was completed on 17 November by air. The remaining 174 men are to be rotated some time between now and March.

The next contingents bringing in replacements are the Colombian and Brazilian -- the Colombians will come by air and the Brazilians by ship. We have asked the Colombian representative here to intercede with his Government to arrange, if possible, for this air rotation to take place in February rather than in January because of the difficulties of landing at the El Arish airfield during the rainy season.

For the information of Mr. Engen, I should like to give the following bad news. A Norwegian member of the Force, a private, died on Sunday morning as a result of wounds incurred when he attempted to catch thieves raiding the Norwegian soldiers' quarters at the camp at Rafah. His name was Asborn Ingolf Gjerdren. He was twenty years old and was from Bjerkeim in southern Norway. We are told that the Egyptian police have given UNEF full co-operation in investigating the death.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Of course, we shall make a formal report on this death to the Norwegian Government.

Mr. BUNCHE: This is, of course, the first such fatality UNEF has had.

Mr. ENGEN (Norway): It is the first casualty which the Norwegian contingent has had.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: This is obviously completely in the field of accidents. This kind of thing, as we know, can happen anywhere, even in New York.

This brings us to an item that will require treatment in three stages. I would invite Mr. Cordier to give an explanation of the problem into which we have run and on which we shall have to have your co-operation.

Mr. CORDIER: Thirteen months ago, when the difficulties started in Egypt, one way in which the Secretariat wished to deal with the matter was to develop a film on the experience of UNEF and the clearance of the Canal. DPI went into this problem and pursued it with a very great degree of diligence, securing the services of experts of the Canadian Film Board. Quite a number of problems developed with respect to the film. Therefore, several editions have been made.

At a rather late stage, we assisted the technicians in attempting to establish a balance, so that the story of UNEF would emerge in a perfectly balanced way and the story of the Canal would be presented adequately and properly. As is perhaps natural with people in the screen world, the first edition did not lay a properly balanced emphasis on the United Nations aspect of the matter. This aspect was played too lightly, presented in too frivolous a manner.

We now have a film in which it is attempted to put the United Nations into the picture in a solid, substantial manner -- showing the speed, the energy, I would say even the intelligence, with which the United Nations approached this matter last year. I think that this does not in any way detract from -- in fact, I think it adds to -- the public interest in the film, and it certainly adds a great deal of stability and strength to the film.

Now, at a very early stage we began to feel that this film ought to include some shots of this Committee, because the Committee has played so great a role in the development of UNEF and in connexion with the Canal operation. Our original intention was to have this room filled with movie equipment this morning and to take the shots here and now. We decided, however, that a much better procedure would be to have the members of this Committee see the film first so that they would know more precisely what aspects of the film were involved; and then to have the shots of the Committee taken tomorrow. There will be two sequences of the film in which the Advisory Committee on UNEF will be brought into the picture. One sequence covers the latter part of November and deals with the problems of building up UNEF and with the policies regarding that narrow issue of building up UNEF. The other sequence covers the Canal. The people who will be present at the showing of the film for you will be able to explain precisely where these shots would fit into the total film.

Naturally, there have been very serious political problems, which, we feel, have now been brought into a much better balance than before.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Perfection has still not been achieved. There are some things which could be improved.

Mr. CORDIER: The present film, however, does represent a great improvement over the original film. It is felt that it would be very, very desirable indeed if the members of this Committee could spend three quarters of an hour in the film room this morning viewing the film. That will provide the

necessary background for our meeting here tomorrow -- perhaps again at 11 o'clock -- in order to do what we had originally planned to do this morning. Many of us have the very strong feeling that since this body has played such an important part in the evolution of UNEF, no film on the subject should go out without a visual representation of the Committee, plus some dialogue.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I would only add one observation, which really follows from what Mr. Cordier said. Our meeting tomorrow at 11 o'clock will be for the purpose not only of taking these shots, but also of securing all the advice we can secure from you on where you feel that the film is out of balance, either because of the comments or because of the choice of pictures or because of the length of presentation of certain aspects, and so forth. Such advice would be most valuable indeed. Of course, we have to take the responsibility Secretariat-wise. On the other hand, this is very much a joint undertaking and, since you have shared all the trouble with regard to UNEF, I think it would be very nice to have your advice also in respect to the film.

I have a very orderly suggested agenda for this meeting before me. Point 2 reads: "Explanation of the film situation"; Point 3: "Adjournment to see UNEF film". We have now reached Point 3. Point 4 reads: "Meeting for film sequences on Tuesday at 11 a.m." I take it that there is no objection to meeting at that time.

Thus, we should be most grateful if you would take the trouble to see this film now. I may say that it will also be a pleasure for you, because it is curious to relive those days. Seeing these things makes quite an impact -- at least it did on me -- and I think you will not regard it as time lost.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.