

Speeches, statements and press conference by Dag Hammarskjöld concerning Mi...

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Middle East

5 Sept. 57

Press conference by D.H. at U.N. HQ.

PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL HELD AT UN
HEADQUARTERS ON THURSDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 1957

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Ladies and gentlemen: before we engage in today's exchange of views, I think that I speak for all of us in renewing here the expressions of regret at the passing of one of our colleagues and good friends, Peter Freuchen. It is quite unnecessary for me to characterize him to you. I am sure that you were happy to count him, as I was, as one of our friends.

You have had before you since yesterday the Introduction to the Annual Report, which, as you know, is the paper in which I try to spell out what I feel I can and should say concerning the major problems facing the United Nations. I have nothing to add; I hope it is clear enough. However, I feel that it might be useful for the emphasis at this press conference to be on whatever explanations and clarifications you might like to have on various statements in that introduction. Far be it for me, however, to try to direct your questions. This is just an expression of my own reaction in thinking of the possible scope of our discussion today.

Mr. Gershon SWET (Maariv, Tel Aviv, Israel): On page 1 you state: "The presence of UNEF, incomplete though its present deployment..." Could you tell us what "incomplete" means?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: As you know, the resolution of 2 February asked for deployment on the demarcation line, that is/ ^{to say,} the same on both sides. You know that until now we have had it deployed only on the Egyptian side of the demarcation line. As to the other arrangements, we started out developing this and that kind of detail as to their functions. The discussions have never been followed up to the very end, so to say, because, as conditions improved and the authority of UNEF seemed to be quite sufficient, there was no reason to carry on discussions which, in such a situation, would develop a mildly academic flavour.

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Mr. Alexander GABRIEL (Transradio News Agency): Mr. Hammarskjold, I direct myself, as you suggest, to your report and particularly to the Middle East aspect of it, and I am genuinely seeking enlightenment here in respect to what appears to me a rather difficult point. I get the impression in your successful operations within your own scope, within the jurisdiction of the UN, that you are operating slightly under the handicap of a man who has control of his own floor in a building that is on fire and all the other floors are seemingly about to be subject to great conflagration. I know that you know too that you cannot separate one problem crisis in the Middle East from the other. I want to ask you, sir, if you think you would bring this report up to date if you rewrote it today in the light of recent reports of the last seven days; and, secondly, whether you think that, if this whole thing presents an inter-related series of problems, the unanimity of the big Powers might not be a great master key solution to the whole thing?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: On the first point, I would like to say that I doubt whether the developments that you have in mind are ripe for any comments in the form which you find in this report. On the second point, I excuse myself for finding that the reply is implied in your question. Of course everything in international politics is much easier when the big Powers are agreed, especially if their views are supported by the great majority of the small Powers.

Mr. Saul CARSON (Jewish Telegraphic Agency): I hope you will forgive me if I bring up something which is not strictly mentioned in your report, but it is a collateral problem. I wonder whether you have heard from any of the Middle East Member States about their stand on aggression. There were requests by Israel last winter and fall for Egypt to declare itself on that particular point. It is certainly, in the minds of some of us, tied up with your request for UNEF to be on both sides of the line. It is tied up with your reiteration of your feeling that there is a will to peace, and some of us feel that possibly a will to peace might be demonstrated by a renunciation of aims of aggression.

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The SECRETARY-GENERAL: The exact situation is this one: I have transmitted questions to the effect you mentioned from the Israel Government to the Government of Egypt and to the Government of Syria. I have also myself -- it was in April -- addressed letters to the Government of Egypt and the Government of Israel concerning their stand on Article I of the Armistice Agreements. There has so far been no reply to any of these four communications.

Miss Mary Francis HARVEY (Quincy Patriot Ledger): My question is related to clarification of two points in the report which seemed to be related, at least broadly in theory. On page 1, you say that the United Nations can "also help by providing an objective judgement of the rights and interests involved." You do not further elaborate as to say whether this objective judgement comes from the Legal Department of the United Nations as regards treaties such as the Armistice Agreements or from a majority vote of the General Assembly or from decisions by fact-finding units such as the MAC.

I wonder what you meant in that case; and then, given the facts that there is such a thing as an objective judgement rendered by or through the United Nations, I wonder then about a statement made on page 3 which says: "Nor do I see justification for talk about the responsible and the irresponsible among the nations." If there is such a thing as an objective judgement, cannot the responsibility or irresponsibility of a nation be validly related to what degree this nation takes into consideration such a judgement of the international community?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: On the first point, I think that you covered fairly well the field I had in mind. If you put up a truce observation organization supported by both sides and by the United Nations as such, it is of course, just as with a court of law, a foregone conclusion that what they put on paper must be considered objective, and I do not think that any of the parties have challenged the objectivity of the United Nations representatives. Of course, they have always challenged the objectivity of the other side. But in what lawsuit don't you do that?

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As to the Secretariat, of course the same requests and the same conditions apply. The Secretariat has a role to fulfil if it does act objectively. And again, if we are not objective and not considered to be objective, I would say that the parties should criticize us, and publicly, and we would have to defend our stand as best we can. I am happy to note, therefore, that on the whole I think it is recognized that at least there is an unfailing will to objectivity in the Secretariat.

When you come to the Security Council, which has functions similar to, although in no sense identical with, that of a court of law, we know that all sorts of interests conflict in the Council. But I think that if you go to the fact-finding and the basic interpretation of law, the same idea prevails; it should be an objective judgement; that is to say, it should not be an ex parte judgement. You can continue in that way through the various United Nations organs. That is what I mean the United Nations can provide. It is just the same as having a mediator or a judge in regular life. At a certain point it is valuable to get somebody who has nothing at stake, and who has some training in studying both facts and law, to say: well, this seems to be the situation. It helps towards a solution. That is really what is meant.

As regards your other question about "responsible" or "irresponsible," I would like to be what you sometimes love to call in the Press "philosophical." I think that we are all momentarily irresponsible in our actions and reactions, especially if we are engaged heavily, with our interests, in an issue. But that does not mean that we are irresponsible in a general sense. What I react against is the idea that there is a kind of class distinction between members who cannot be expected to react responsibly and members who are supposed to react responsibly. But that does in no way exclude -- and I include myself in the judgement, of course -- that we, all of us, momentarily can act under such and such pressures in a way which is, in that specific case, perhaps, somewhat short of responsibility. That is an entirely different issue.

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Miss HARVEY: In other words, nations may or may not be responsible within a certain context, and yet you would not divide nations into classes?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I do not think we should go too deep into it. The distinction I make, and which I think should be obvious from the text, is ^{between} the sweeping judgement that somebody is irresponsible, and a much more narrow one, that we personally, individually, may feel that in such and such specific situation a reaction falls short of that standard. In that nobody, I think, can exclude himself from the risk of running into that kind of judgement.

Mr. Joseph P. LASH (New York Post): Sir, your report deals with the Middle East primarily in terms of the Arab-Israeli situation, understandably so. But in recent weeks that conflict has been dwarfed by the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union in the area. Do you see any way in which the United Nations can do something useful about this latter problem?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: In a sense I have already replied to your question when I said that I felt that these problems -- which obviously Mr. Gabriel had in mind -- were raised a little bit too early for me to be in a position to say very much about them. I would like to have the water a little bit more clear before having views on how to fish.

Mr. Pasupuleti G. KRISHNAYYA (P. G. Krishnayya's News Service and Publications, Madras and Benares): In your Introduction, I think justifiably, you are proud of the work done by the United Nations police force in the Middle East and you indicate that the United Nations would be given more sound foundation should such a force become permanent, at least on a standby basis. Can you give us more information on the steps taken in the Secretariat for a study of the "standby plan for a United Nations peace force that could be activated on short notice in future emergencies"?

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The SECRETARY-GENERAL: As to the steps taken, we have had under discussion for/^{some} time the best way to handle it procedurally in the Secretariat, and it is quite likely that one of these days I will make public the composition of a special Secretariat committee/^{which is,} so to say, digesting all the details of our experience with UNEF. We have not so far formalized this. In fact it is started and the time is soon ripe for a formalization of this study. I may perhaps, in order to avoid misunderstandings, clarify what is said in the report. When I say on a "standby" basis, I do not mean that such and such forces are reserved in such and such^a country. What I mean is really that we have the full set of, so to say, master agreements, master legal texts, master plans for transportation arrangements, and so on and so forth, which are completely flexible. That would mean that we would not have any current costs for this standby arrangement, but we would have a booklet where everything is set out in black and white. So that if we were to run into a situation like the one we had last year, we need not create from day to day; we need not approach Governments with a lack of clarity as to the conditions under which they will make contributions. We could just press the button and say: With this set of documents -- once approved, I hope, by the General Assembly -- and all the legal texts, and so on and so forth, would you be willing to do this or that. That is the modest standby idea which is covered by the phrase in the report.

Mr. Morris RIVLIN (The Day-Jewish Journal): Can you tell us in a few words what you expect of the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the Hungarian question?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I would not like to comment on that question. We are only a few days before the opening of it and I leave it to the members of the General Assembly themselves to present their views.

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Mr. D. VLASTO (Atlantis): In view of the unanimous resolution of the General Assembly of 25 February 1957 on the question of Cyprus for a peaceful, democratic and just solution, would you receive the Archbishop of Cyprus, Makarios III, if he expresses a desire to have an audience with you during his visit to the United Nations?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I know that Archbishop Makarios is coming. There is no arrangement made.

Mr. Simon MAILLEY (Al Gomhouria; Le Progrès Egyptien): In your report you speak of the constructive help to the Palestine refugees which constitutes an obligation of first priority resting upon the Organization and its Member Governments. I wonder whether you can tell us whether the Secretary-General himself has done anything in this regard, particularly in the light of some news reports saying that you may have contacted the Israel Government on the issue of the properties of the Palestine refugees.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: The last point to which you refer is a kind of -- I would not call it routine, but a kind of normal operation, a follow-up operation which, you know, has been going on for years and is not covered by the phrase to which you refer here.

As to your broader question, this is a problem to which I, frankly, have given very much thought. I would not be ready to say that this and that should be done. The consideration is intended only to provide me, and to provide us in the Secretariat, with a solid basis on which free discussions can be taken up and continued with the Governments interested. That is to say, it is in self-preparation more than in preparation of proposals that this Secretariat thinking has been going on.

Miss Pauline FREDERICK (NBC): In connexion with your experience with UNEF, if this organization is put on a more permanent basis, would you say that it should have a stronger military character or a less strong military character? In other words, should it be more heavily armed than UNEF? Should it be able to meet military situations as well as police situations?

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The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I think one should start out from the concrete experience we have had; that is to say, trim it for police functions. That does not, of course, in any way exclude the possibility of further study which looks at additional problems which would arise if such a force were given wider functions. But you see, here again it is a question which is raised fairly early. I go on record with the General Assembly with the fact that we digest in the Secretariat the experience we have had so as to prepare, let me call it, the master texts necessary, and then, of course, we frame them on this specific experience. Whether or not this is considered to be a good idea to be followed up by the General Assembly, it is for the General Assembly to decide, and then the General Assembly may give terms of reference for a follow-up study, after we have ended our part of the job, which may very well bring up the broader aspects which you have in mind. But we start out from the hard facts, and that, of course, will give us quite enough to do, even with the very modest frame which UNEF has got constitutionally.

Miss Pauline FREDERICK (NBC): You usually make recommendations; I wondered if you might recommend to the General Assembly that UNEF should have a stronger military character.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: UNEF as such -- no. What a standby organization should be, I have not gone very deeply into. My own feeling would be that a standby organization -- so to speak in a printed booklet, as I expressed it -- should be as flexible as possible, should cover as many alternatives as possible. That is to say, it might cover also the case where a more definite military character is given to the force.

Miss Phyllis GREENE (International Review Service): In your report you mention the report of the Radiation Committee which will come out next year. Several reports on radiation have already come out from national sources, and these talk about threats presented to mankind if the levels of radiation in the earth are raised. It is possible that the report of the United Nations Committee will do the same. Suppose a complaint were brought to the Security Council based on these reports, against any government or governments which, because of any

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particular activity such as bomb tests or dumping radioactive waste, were to be a threat to the international peace and security of mankind, do you think this would be within the competence of the Security Council?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: That is a very hypothetical question, and I would rather leave it to the Security Council to decide. It would depend, you see, on the factual circumstances, and for that reason I am afraid that, raised in the very general form in which you raised the question, there is nobody who could give a clear reply.

Mr. Jovan SCEKIC (Radio Belgrade): Do you think, or do you hope, that it will be possible, during the next two General Assembly sessions, to do something in order "to blunt the edges of conflict among the nations, not to sharpen them?"

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Most definitely I think that has been done also, paradoxically enough, in the last two General Assembly sessions. It is something which goes on all the time. The very fact of what goes on, for example, in this room during the General Assembly has that effect. Comparison of notes at a table and in the corridors necessarily influences the thinking and blunts the edges.

Mr. Jovan SCEKIC: Do you think it will apply to the special session of the Assembly?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I hope so.

Mr. Saul CARSON (Jewish Telegraphic Agency): The annotated agenda for the twelfth session of the General Assembly carries an item pointing out that the Secretary-General's term expires next April. Would the present Secretary-General accept reappointment to his post?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: When the Security Council puts that question to me I shall have to reply.

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Miss Mary Frances HARVEY (Quincy Patriot Ledger): The Introduction to the Report states that there are some questions still pending regarding nationalization of the Suez Canal. I recall that, in the body of the Report, there seems to be an inference that negotiations or some kind of mediation are still continuing regarding the point of insulating the Canal from domestic politics. That seemed to be implied in the language of the body of the report itself. Does this statement in the introduction, referring to differences -- some of which are still pending -- refer to that particular point of insulation of the Canal from domestic politics, and are there negotiations or mediation under way in your office regarding this particular problem?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: The whole field of differences of opinion which became clear in the Security Council in May is, so to speak, under continual debate. You know that some Governments gave /^{their} acceptance provisionally. Some of those problems were such that they could be tackled directly; others are more far-reaching, raising questions of principle. What is said here is, first of all, of course, that there is this lack of general acceptance of the regime as established by the general declaration -- it is a well known fact -- and, secondly, that problems which are left pending in this context are subject to continued negotiations -- informal negotiations. I would not say that all the controversial points which emerged in the Security Council are handled in that way. I felt that it should be first things first. There are some practical issues which should be brought out of the picture as soon as possible, and for that reason I would not say that my own activities cover the whole field. They have been concentrated at one or two points which seem to me to be of special urgency.

Miss Mary Frances HARVEY: Would you be prepared to say what those points are?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: One point where the basic approach is clear, but where some things remain to be done, is the one of settlement between the shareholders of the old Company, ^{or the old Company,} and the Government of Egypt -- the settlement made necessary by nationalization. You know the point is covered in the general

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declaration, and considerable attention was given to it in the Security Council.

That is a practical issue of immediate significance to quite a lot of people and, for that reason, something where I, usefully, can try to follow up as quickly as possible.

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Mr. Alexander GABRIEL (Transradio News Agency): Sir, you may recall that at one time I raised the question of some missing money in the United Nations as a result of certain Governments' not paying their I.O.U.s. I am referring specifically to the repeated pledges of the big Powers, from year to year, to enter in a more co-operative spirit into the economic development programme which you outlined in your report if they secured this money from savings on their national armament budgets. They have repeated those pledges, as you know, at the last session of the Economic and Social Council. Now, as we all know, they have effected some savings. That is true in the Congress of the United States and, I think, in London, and I believe the Soviet Government has admitted making savings. How do you visualize that this money can be transferred from the I.O.U. stage to the paid-up stage? Just what is the moral and legal and procedural pressure that we can put on these rich boys to come across (if I may use Brooklyn language, which they apparently understand better)?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I really do not know how to reply, because I thought that this was something which was not in need of an explanation. This is a matter which is entirely in the hands of the Governments. You asked what kind of moral pressures, and so on, can be applied. That is not my business: I do not apply moral pressures. I spell out a need, and the Governments respond or do not respond to the need. The idea of any kind for lobbying of our needs with the various Governments is completely foreign to me.

Mrs. Kay GRAY (Greenwich Time): In connexion with your report on the International Court, you mentioned, in your appeal to Member Governments to accede to compulsory jurisdiction of the Court, that there were many disputes that would be further along toward solution if the legal aspects had been the subject of judicial determination. I wonder whether you would be a little more specific on whether or not you would include the six-year-old question of Israeli shipping in the Suez Canal among those matters.

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The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Well, that may be included. Generally speaking, the recent tendency -- the tendency after the Second World War -- to treat every international conflict primarily as a political one is, I think, unfortunate. There was an old tradition which was in the opposite direction: to treat it primarily as a legal matter, and then to resolve the remaining political issue in political terms. I believe we would gain by a switch back to the older tradition. One consequence, of course, would be that, when there is a legal element in a conflict, like this Suez matter, there is quite a lot to be said for bringing it to the Court /if the general tendency is in that direction. On the other hand, the general tendency is now in the opposite direction, and thus a recommendation that it be taken to the International Court is, in a certain sense, a departure from present trends. If I therefore reply to your question in the affirmative: it is the type of question which could have been treated, first of all, in legal terms, and, secondly, in political terms -- it does not for that reason mean that I would sit here now and say that it should be taken to the Court. Do not give it that interpretation.

Mr. Joseph LASH (New York Post): Have you received a recent communication from the Hungarian Government?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I received a communication some time ago, but it did not introduce any new facts.

Mr. Jovan SCEKIC (Radio Belgrade): In that connexion, does your offer to go to Hungary still stand?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I said at the previous press conference that there is this invitation. I have an open mind.

Mr. CHAIM ISAAK (Davar): When you stated in the introduction to your report that you believe that there is a general will for peace in the Middle East, were you referring to some popular sentiment or were you referring to basic attitudes of present leaders of Governments despite whatever statements to the contrary they may make?

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The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I am on safe ground because I refer to leaders with whom I had the pleasure of having personal contact.

Miss Phyllis GREENE (International Review Service): The 1954 resolution which sent you to Peking in connexion with prisoners in China requested you, "in the name of the United Nations, to seek the release, in accordance with the Korean Armistice Agreement, of these eleven United Nations Command personnel, and all other captured personnel of the United Nations Command still detained". Do you consider that your mandate in that respect is still open and, if not, when did it close -- and, in any case, when is the last time you communicated with Peking, or Peking with you?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: The history of the case is as follows: Absolute priority within the mandate was given, as you know, to the fifteen American flyers, who subsequently were released in 1955. At about that time, the United States Government started discussions in Geneva with representatives of the People's Republic of China, discussions which covered part of the ground which could be read into my mandate. It was not a good idea to cross wires and have discussions going on in two different forms or in two different directions. There was therefore a very clear indication that, as long as these discussions continued, initiatives on my side should be left pending. There was no reason for me to butt into a discussion that was going on. That means that the decision, to the extent that there is not, so to speak, full compliance with it on my side, remains alive, of course, like all such decisions of the General Assembly. But, on the other hand, the situation has been and remains such that no immediate action on my side would be indicated.

Miss GREENE: What about the second part of my question, concerning your communications with Peking? When was the last time that you --

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Sometime early last year.

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Miss GREENE: Early in 1956?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Yes.

Mr. Arthur FLETCHER (Worldwide Press Service): I detect in some delegations a hope for fresh thinking during this coming session of the Assembly in breaking the stalemate between the industrial and the industrializing countries on such questions as SUNFED and expanding the Technical Assistance Programme to a level closer to what Governments would like to have. While I respect your dislike for lobbying, you are a sensitive barometer, and I wonder whether you anticipate any innovations in this economic sphere during this coming session of the Assembly.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Not on any major scale at all. I think that all the useful ideas that should be considered are more or less on the table, and for that reason any innovations are not very likely. Within the framework set by these various ideas and the proposals before the General Assembly, there may be possibilities for concrete initiatives by the Secretariat or by delegations which would perhaps carry further in the same direction. As is the case with any Government or any nation, we always have competing approaches: the generalized one, establishing the pattern and then trying to fill out the framework, and the more modest one of step-by-step building. Delays concerning progress in the first respect never exclude attempts in the second respect. I, for one, and my colleagues in the Secretariat continue that with quite some hope.

Mr. Alexander GABRIEL (Transradio News Agency): Is there any reason in your mind why you would feel that you should reject an offer to continue to serve as Secretary-General if you are invited?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Mr. Gabriel, I think my previous reply clearly indicated that I do not like to discuss the issue at all.

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Mr. Simon MALLEY (Al Gomhouria): Mr. Secretary-General, on behalf of my colleagues here, may I express to you our thanks for your expression of grief at the passing of our most distinguished colleague, Peter Freuchen. Thank you, sir.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Thank you.

The press conference rose at 11.40 a.m.

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