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D.H.s memorandum

21 May 1957

MEMORANDUM

The 11th of March 1957 the news of the appointment of an Administrative Governor in Gaza reached me when, before lunch, I was saying good-bye to Dr. Fawzi. In the conversation during this farewell visit I had already raised with Fawzi the question of Helmy's visit to Gaza, pointing out that, while neither Burns nor I had refused him to come as liaison officer with Burns, I considered it premature and unwise for him to go. With that background the news of the appointment of Latif came as something like a shock. I was very emphatic with Fawzi and said that I foresaw that, if the cards were being played this way, we would very soon have a meeting of the General Assembly. Fawzi obviously fully appreciated the serious impact of the move. He said that he felt that it was best that he went home in spite of all, but that, of course, he could be called back to New York even en route. It was obvious that this whole question of Egyptian moves in relation to Gaza would be raised by Fawzi on his arrival in Cairo, Wednesday the 13th, with a vivid impression of how matters stood in the United Nations.

In the afternoon of Monday the 11th the Advisory Committee was convened. The development of the discussion in the Committee is clear from the verbatim records.

The same evening an extensive instruction was sent to Burns and Bunche. This was in part a reply to a cable of the same morning where Bunche expressed fears that the situation could not be held under control until my scheduled arrival on the 21st. Another part of the background was that Bunche was going to Cairo for talks during Tuesday and Wednesday, in the first instance with Gohar. Under the new instructions sent by us, he should see also President Nasser (we were informed the 12th that an interview with the President had been requested for Wednesday).

The relevant parts of the cable of instructions to Bunche, which should serve as background for his talks with the President, read as follows:

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"We consider that no steps should be taken which prejudge a settlement of problems mentioned in the Secretary-General's statement in the General Assembly, 22 February, prior to such a settlement. We further consider that, if such steps are decided upon, they should not be implemented until after a settlement. In the present case we do not deny that a liaison group may be useful or that there should be an Egyptian "administrative" governor in Gaza, but we consider it politically inadvisable and in relation to us a serious complication if such administrative arrangements were to be put into effect before understanding reached on the whole set of problems regarding future cooperation."

"I feel you should strive for these points with great insistence but basing yourself on the line that they, together with a delay in implementation of all administrative measures until after an agreement with me, are essential if Egypt is not to blow its cooperation with the United Nations to pieces."

Tuesday morning, the 12th, we received a cable from Bunche on a conversation with Gohar. In that conversation Gohar was reported to have said that it was the Government's intention to send Latif and "9 or 10 administrative personnel" to the Gaza Strip, Wednesday.

The following parts of the cable should be quoted:

"Enquiring very seriously if UNEF would 'resist' their entry, I (Bunche) assured him that UNEF has no such role".

"To his direct question whether UN would 'object' to Egyptian administrators in Gaza, I (Bunche) replied that we were not in position to do so".

Knowing how many times Gohar had been "more royalistic than the King" and had had his declarations disavowed on higher levels, knowing further that the next day Fawzi would come to Cairo, and counting on a discussion between Bunche and the President on the basis of our instructions of Monday, I felt that I should regard this statement of Gohar's as something which would be taken care of in due course on the right level.

In a meeting of the Advisory Committee the same afternoon I, therefore, did not refer to this part of Bunche's report on his talk with Gohar, which, however, caused me to stress the need to get reactions on top level and the difficulty in forming judgements on statements made down the line. The principle all through had been not to bring the Committee in on early and unreliable reactions in the course of talks but to inform them fully of what we knew to be a definite basis for action.

After the Advisory Committee meeting a new cable was received from Bunche, reporting on a second talk with Gohar. In this talk Gohar had confirmed the news concerning the entry of Governor Latif. However, his group now was said to be reduced to 5 administrative officers. They would "most probably" come on Thursday.

A cable received in the morning of the 13th reported that Bunche was going to see the President at noon (that is to say 5 a.m. N.Y. time). Bunche said that he would base his talk on our instructions of the 11th. Considering this and also the arrival of Fawzi in Cairo, I did not consider that the later information from Gohar changed the picture. The decisive factor would still be Bunche's talk and what came out of his presentation to the President of our request for a delay with all measures of implementation until after my arrival. We should have a report on that talk, theoretically, in the early afternoon.

However, I informed Ambassador Lodge and Ambassador Engen as well as representatives of the French and British delegations of what Gohar had said, in the case of Lodge with the implication that I hoped for U.S. support in my delaying action, in the case of the others in order to give them an opportunity to react and, perhaps, report home.

For the reasons already given I considered, on the other hand, that I should wait with a new meeting of the Advisory Committee itself until I had received the expected report from Bunche. An added reason for this was that the question of principle had already been thoroughly discussed by the Committee on previous occasions, and that the Committee then had taken the stand that we had no legal basis on which to refuse an Egyptian "return", at least not in the form indicated, but should work for a delay and for such restrictions as would be called for in order to maintain an appropriate position for UNEF and to approximate as much as possible the Israeli line. If convened before the receipt of Bunche's report on his talk with the President, it was, therefore, obvious that the Committee would only approve of the instructions given and postpone further reactions until after the receipt of the report. While keeping the possibility

of convening the Committee in the afternoon of the 13th open we, under all these circumstances, kept the initiative back pending the arrival of the expected report.

Due to a series of circumstances - the length of the report and the way of communication chosen were the most important - the Bunche report was not received until in the morning of the 14th (N.Y. time), a couple of hours before the expected arrival of the Governor in Gaza. The time table thus worked out in such a way that no consideration of the situation after Bunche's talk with the President and in time to intervene before the arrival of the Governor was possible. The Advisory Committee was convened in the afternoon of the 14th, and on that occasion was briefed on the latest developments. Its reaction confirmed my interpretation of its stand on Wednesday.