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16 March 56

Pro Memoria (2) by D.H.

16 March 1956

PRO MEMORIA

At various times during the last weeks I was approached by Egyptian, Syrian and Israeli delegates concerning my interpretation of the legal situation around Banat Yakoub. I gave one and the same reply to all parties:

1. The decision of the Security Council was still valid as there was no fixed time limit, nor any reconsideration. So was the decision of General Bennike until and unless changed by the present Chief of Staff.

2. The Chief of Staff acted primarily under his authority according to the general Armistice Agreement, but obviously had to take into consideration the decisions of the Security Council and of his own predecessor. However, under the general Armistice Agreement he was free to chose his own line on the basis of his understanding of the situation and his interpretation of these decisions and the legal texts.

3. General Burns was in a case like this one directly responsible to the Security Council, and I would therefore not interfere with any kind of instruction, nor did I feel that I should anticipate what might be his decision. All I could say was that I had no indication of any departure from previous attitudes.

4. On the level of substance I must point out that the consideration in the Winter of 1953/54 had been somewhat bypassed by developments. Time had certainly run beyond what was covered by the word "urgent" and, at the same time, the Arabs had backed out of the Johnston plan. Both these circumstances necessarily were of significance in a new appraisal of the rights and wrongs, irrespective of legal positions.

5. The matter could also be considered in purely political terms and, given the present tension, I would strongly deplore any resumption of the conflict around the Banat Yakoub.

During my stay in Honolulu I had a talk with Eric Johnston who told me that Eban had assured him that the work on the canal would not be resumed before Johnston's return to the United States at the beginning of April and pending a possible decision on a new journey of Johnston's to the Middle East for the resumption of negotiations. Johnston felt that the promise could be relied upon.

Labouisse, seeing me the 17, said that he had been warned that a new visit of Johnston was likely to provoke very serious trouble in Jordan.

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16 March 1956

PRO MEMORIA

On Tuesday, 13 March 1956 the US Mission asked in the morning for an appointment for Ambassador Lodge on his arrival from his journey to Libya. The time was set for 4.30 p.m.

At the agreed time Mr. Lodge came in the company of Mr. James Barco, Mr. Francis Russel and a further representative from the State Department. Also present were Sir Pierson Dixon and Mr. P.M.Crosthwaite.

At the beginning of the meeting Mr. Russel said that they had come in order to inform me about the line of action for the United Nations on which the United States and the United Kingdom had agreed. The line was as follows. The Security Council would be convened on Monday 19 March and the three powers (two powers?) would put before the Council a draft resolution establishing an Agent General of the United Nations in the Middle East with far-reaching political authority. He would report directly to the Security Council and make such proposals as he found warranted in order to safeguard peace in the region. Mr. Russel mentioned in this context especially the question of the implementation of the Dulles proposals of August 1955. I replied that what at first sight appeared as an empty gesture^{and} had struck me as most unconvincing, might be more understandable if they would give me the arguments which had led

to their conclusion. Mr. Russel replied in his turn that the idea emanated from Mr. Dulles and had the approval of the President. It was felt that something simply had to be done. With all due respect for the UNTSO and General Burns, his authority was limited and during the last 6 months or so his efforts had been brought to a standstill through the resistance of the parties. There was an absolute need for such new arrangements as would make it possible to pursue the discussion of the major issues as well as of the political aspects of General Burns' work.

I said that I could only give a first reaction and wanted to get back to the question after having thought it over. My first reaction remained sharply critical. To send out an Agent General to the area would mean undercutting General Burns' efforts in a way that might prove fatal. Burns was after all accepted by both parties and had a legal status clearly defined by the Armistice Agreement. A new man would have no such legal basis and it was an open question if and under what circumstances he might be accepted. The new arrangement thus involved a risk for a loss of something we had. I also had to point out that the evaluation of the contribution of UNTSO seemed to indicate a lack of knowledge of the real developments. The implementation of the General Armistice Agreement was inextricably combined with general political issues, and Burns had in the combined field registered progress which could not be disregarded.

As to the new man who ~~cannot~~ ^{could not} be put in his position on the initiative of the 3, he had no chance to succeed unless his appointment were endorsed by the Soviet Union and also by the Arabs. Such endorsement and acceptance, however, would undoubtedly require negotiations which might be difficult and certainly could not be concluded before the meeting on Monday. The main obstacle to successful negotiations would be that with the proposal emanating from the 3, the Agent General would be suspected as somehow representing Western interests or attempts at control. The personality came heavily into the picture and even if it all worked without the Soviet veto and with Arab formal acceptance, it would take a new man, if he could be found, considerable time to build up the necessary degree of confidence. I feared that he would find his task hopeless; it was very difficult in itself and would be ~~rendered~~ impossible unless the circumstances under which he worked were in a political sense entirely favourable.

It was explained that the difficulties I had pointed out were also recognized, but that it was felt that they could be overcome. It would not be a question of somebody residing in the area, but somebody ^{relating to the area} with a key responsibility. What was wanted was ~~to get~~ a man who was universally respected and whose position in the international field was very strong, to be in charge in relation to the Security Council. It was vaguely indicated that the type of man the sponsors had in mind was some ex-president of the General Assembly.

I commented on these observations that I really did not see any way to ~~a~~ quick solution along the lines under discussion. Laying myself open to serious misunderstandings, I had to say that I feared that the only man with a task ^{like the one} suggested who would be swallowed by the Soviet Union and tolerated by the Arabs, was the Secretary-General as Secretary-General. However, if that conclusion was reached, it made another most difficult discussion open up. I further wanted to stress that the possibility of success for a political operation of the kind envisaged, was closely tied to problems outside the scope of the United Nations responsibility: ^{primarily} ~~the~~ balance emerged ^{ing} from the re-shaping of the Arab world, and the Arab effort to oust all representatives of the big powers. The problem of Israel in fact came into the picture third, as a touch-stone, an argument and a target. This, if ^{true} ~~tried~~, could not ^{but} ~~be~~ indicated with how little hope the negotiation in question could be opened from the UN side.

Later in the discussion we got to the question of the character of the present war risk and agreed that the differences between the more pessimistic view of Washington and my own view as well as between their analysis of the dynamism and my own, referred only to ^{the} possible timing of an outbreak which the Americans tended to regard as imminent after the recent approach of Nasser to the most activist elements in the Arab world. I said that undoubtedly as concerns the last month Washington had much more complete information than I could possibly have, but that on the other hand I felt that the situation was extremely difficult to evaluate and that for that reason

we must count with all sorts of surprises which often might go in a direction contrary to ~~those~~^{at} which more superficial events led them to believe.

The same evening I called up Ambassador Alphan and arranged for a meeting with him at 9 o'clock the following morning. I also called Mr. Barco and asked him to tell Mr. Lodge that I insisted on having a meeting with him before he met again with his colleagues or before any discussion of the issue was resumed.

In my discussion on Wednesday morning the 14th with Ambassador Alphan, he told me that he had been contacted in the matter only on Tuesday. The question had not in any way been discussed between Eden and Mollet at their recent meeting. It all seemed to him to be a purely American initiative, with ~~the~~^a somewhat ambiguous role played by the British. How improvised the story was, appeared from the fact that obviously no candidate had been discussed. Mr. Alphan was obviously strongly irritated by the way in which France had been kept outside and had himself taken a sharp critical stand. He also said that he had told the others that he anticipated that I would reject the idea. After Tuesday's afternoon meeting Mr. Lodge had called him and had said that "I" had been very critical but that everything obviously could be arranged provided that they made the Secretary-General the Agent General". Mr. Alphan added that he had pointed out the very great risk for a veto, but that he had got the reply that ~~the~~ veto from the Russian side might be all to the good.

At 10:- a.m. I saw Ambassador Lodge together with Mr. Barco. I told him as I had told Mr. Alphand what my positive views were (as later set out in a letter to the two and to Sir Pierson Dixon, sent in the afternoon of Wednesday). Mr. Barco and Mr. Lodge both said that one difficulty was that the American administration had to give the public an impression of an active American intervention for protection of the peace and that for that reason my condition that they should not appear in the picture, was embarrassing. They could understand that I did not want them to take an initiative at the Security Council meeting, but somehow ^{a way} ~~they~~ should be found to indicate that this was their contribution. (In the talk with Mr. Kidron to which I refer later in this memorandum, Kidron said that he had been told that in the discussion/^{of} my proposal different undercurrents had been obvious. He felt himself that the Americans ^{looked for} ~~needed~~ something that pleased not only their own public, but which could satisfy the Arabs so as to provide an excuse for the administration to send arms to Israel.)

At the luncheon given by the Italian President the same day, Sir Pierson asked me if I really believed that I could do something in the area. I replied that I considered that most uncertain, but that I thought the risk worth while, indeed necessary, in order to counter an American proposal which I considered ^{it} necessary to kill at any price, and which, to my surprise, the British had backed. It ^{seemed} ~~was obvious~~ that the morning meeting between the 3 had not led to any result, but that my reaction had created considerable confusion. It ^{also seemed} ~~was also obvious~~ that Lodge's presentation of my alternative line had been ~~anything~~ ^{something less than} but clear.

On Thursday morning the New York Times and the Christian Science Monitor carried stories emanating from Washington, which clearly indicated that the State Department was partly leaking, partly attempted to give the impression that they took a strong lead and would carry the ball in the United Nations. M. Alphand called me and was very upset about these articles which he considered most harmful to the further development. I agreed with him and said that ~~under worse~~ ^{if worse} circumstances/I would have to make some kind of counter-move against the impression that I was led along by the Americans.

In the afternoon I saw Mr. Sobolev. After discussing other matters, I brought up the newspaper articles and said to him that I could not say what was right and what was wrong as I had no idea what was the present stand of any of the 3. The articles impressed me only from the point of view of being a symptom of an increasing pressure which was sensed all over the Western world and might well put the UN against the wall. I felt that under these circumstances I had to give some thought to what could be done if the UN were forced to act. My own conclusion was that the only useful action just now, which, of course, could be staged in many different ways, would be somehow to start sounding out the parties about possible intensification and broadening of the UN assistance towards a settlement. I had the impression that a need for greater UN assistance was felt on both sides, and that need might provide an opening. I felt, however, that such sounding out would present difficulties unless welcomed by the parties.

Probably I would have to do them myself and I did not believe it possible to do them here. However, all this was purely hypothetical and only a question of thinking aloud. We were not yet at a point where any stand had been ^{or had had to be} taken, and I only wanted to follow up my habit of letting him, as one of the chief delegates, ^{to some extent} ~~know a little bit more~~ ^{follow} about how I looked at UN problems from the inside. If and when a situation arose which would call for any ^{device} ~~change~~ of line, I would, of course, try to find an opportunity to get in touch with him again.

The same afternoon Kidron came to see me before his departure for Israel the next day. I approached him in the same way as I approached Sobolev. He then replied that after all the pressure had already come to the critical point and that I should know that he knew all about the discussions of the 3 Western powers. The version he had got concerning my attitude, was, as he had thought, ^{somewhat} misleading, and he was grateful to have got a correct picture. I asked him how and from whom he had got the story. He replied that he Wednesday morning had sensed something in the air and for that reason started a round of the 3 delegations. That round had given him sufficient basis for an attack on a junior member of one of them who had given him the full story.

Later, after a second Thursday meeting of the 3 on the basis of my paper, M. Alphand came to see me. He said that my stand had been approved ex officio by the French Government. Cabot Lodge personally was strongly in favour, but could, of course, not take a stand on a completely new line until the matter had been checked with Dulles. All sorts of odd questions had been brought up, Could the

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Secretary-General discuss the Baghdad Pact? Could he take up the arms issue, etc.etc.? It was obvious that all these questions emanated from the British Delegation which had in no way tied its hands.

M. Alphand's appraisal of the situation was that with some slight modifications my stand would be approved. The 3 parties would accept that the Secretary-General called the Security Council meeting. They would also accept that the draft resolution was put forward by the Secretary-General, but they would expect the Secretary-General to check the resolution with the 3 so as to avoid trouble over the table. It was further felt that a condition for approval must be a much more explicit mandate setting out what problems should be tackled and enumerating possible administrative solutions including the assignment of a civilian official, perhaps from the Secretariat, with a position parallel to that of General Burns in relation to the Security Council and the Secretary-General. Of course, no stand would be taken in the resolution but only examples given. It was further felt that the resolution should request the Secretary-General ^{both} to report on the political situation in the area and on positive measures. M. Alphand did not expect that anything could happen before the end of next week, and for that reason felt that he could go to Paris for a few days. Somewhat later Sir Pierson Dixon

Somewhat later Sir Pierson Dixon called me and said that the matter had been referred back to the three governments and for that reason he could not say anything about it, but that he must underline how essential it was that complete discretion be maintained.

Also Ambassador Lodge called in order to say that different viewpoints

had been presented and that "we might get into trouble" if anything became known about the discussion.

After new indiscretions from Washington, I called Sir Pierson urgently to intervene with Washington in order to avoid any further flagging of whatever might happen, as an American operation, as that would fatally limit even the modest chances for success that might exist. He replied that Washington had to bring something out every week to which I reported that even if that were so, I could not see that their interest could take priority before the other very serious interests which were at stake.

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