

Middle East. Correspondence with Egypt and United Arab Republic: Middle Eas...

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Dag Hammarskjöld's saml.

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Middle East

1956 - 61

Nasser, Gamal Abdel (President of Egypt
- U.A.R., Cairo)

- 3 letters from D.H.
- 1 message to D.H.

Nasser

I have received further clarification of the Egyptian stand from Ambassador Loutfi. While fully understanding the wish for all possible clarity, I must express my deep concern about the delay caused by the discussion in which in some respects I could only repeat what is already on record in the resolutions of the General Assembly and in my reports to the Assembly. However, that in itself would not be a sufficient reason for me to address you personally. What causes me to take this step is your stand, which I firmly hope to be only provisional, concerning the countries which in your view could be permitted to take part in the operation. It is on this issue that I would like urgently to bring the following to your notice.

As participants in a force under United Nations Command every group within the Force is under the ultimate authority of the General Assembly. That gives to the Force a purely international character. On the other hand the legal arrangements give Egypt an opportunity to react against any departure in its functioning from the truly international character of the Force. Not repeat not to recognize this fact and to introduce considerations extraneous to the aims of the United Nations in this operation, is to distort the character of the Force and to create difficulties which may lead to the failure of the whole initiative. I need not elaborate what such a failure might mean. For that reason I must ask you for the most serious reconsideration of your approach to the question of composition. Following up my own initiative as announced to you yesterday, I will come to Cairo with the first troops, which are likely to be Colombians, in order to straighten out what I must consider a misunderstanding of our efforts.

Even pending this discussion I must ask you to revise your standpoint as to the Scandinavian units. It is true that Sweden and Finland are in no "military alliances" while Norway and Denmark are members of NATO. However, this is in this context irrelevant, as evidenced also by the fact that the two first mentioned nations in this case themselves have accepted to co-operate within one and the same Scandinavian unit with the Danish and Norwegian troops. Quite apart from the general considerations set out above this fact should be sufficient to prove that once you accept Swedish and Finnish units, there cannot be for you any reason not to accept cooperating Norwegian and Danish units. By a failure to include Norwegian and Danish units, you may well risk the whole Scandinavian participation. I therefore entreat you, without prejudice to your general stand, to accept Danish and Norwegian units as integrated parts of the larger Scandinavian units. It is the standpoint taken by the Scandinavian countries, themselves, which in this case, quite apart from all United Nations considerations, should lead to the conclusion for which I plead.

I cannot end this message without expressing how deeply troubled I am by a stand which involves such risks for international cooperation for peace and for Egypt itself, the cause of which has been endorsed by so many who would fail to understand the line you now indicate.

8 August 1958

Mr. President,

As we are now reaching a new stage in the development which I had the privilege of discussing with you during my short visit in Cairo, I would like to approach you with a few personal observations.

When you receive this message, you will have learned of my effort at the beginning of the emergency session of the General Assembly to channel the discussions into such lines as for long have been engaging your attention and on which I have cooperated closely with Dr. Fawzi. I have a fair hope that we may get off to a new start, closing a chapter in history in which, again, within the United Nations we have been able to register important, although for natural reasons never publicised support of our efforts also from you. May I take this opportunity to thank you for your response to my recent appeals.

I am certain that you share my view that our renewed efforts to work in a constructive direction, and to assist toward a state of peace and progress in the Arab world, will require the full and attentive support of those who can influence the political atmosphere. This is of significance especially as regards the wounds inflicted by unfortunate recent events. These wounds have got a good chance of healing after the election in Lebanon. You will appreciate our wish to give, through our assistance, the newly elected President the best possible chance to straighten things out.

In the last-mentioned respect, the attitudes within opposition groups in Lebanon and the actions of individuals operating within the ranks of those groups, are of a special significance. Whatever elements from outside Lebanon might have been drawn into the picture, certainly, they now should get out of it. Their continued presence and their possible actions would represent a disturbing element, contrary to the best interest of all concerned. You will excuse me in this context if, in an attempt to be more specific, I base myself on a general impression; which, of course, may be mistaken. With this reservation I wish to add that I have in mind especially such specialists - I guess only a few - in bombing, mining and similar activities, who may be found, for example, in the Basta quarter, although not of Lebanese nationality. A quick withdrawal of such elements from the area would seem strongly indicated.

His Excellency,
Gamal Abdel Nasser,
President of the United Arab Republic,
Cairo, Egypt.

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Ref. UNOSG 629

handed to Count
2.30 of August '58

I have the impression that, following also our conversation, you have, indirectly, already used your influence to calm down reactions in the opposition groups. In view of the policies in Lebanon which are now emerging, and in view of the overriding interest for all, and for the Arab world in particular, to get over the crisis and pave the road toward such a policy as would provide for a better future along the lines to which I venture to refer in the General Assembly, I feel convinced that you will continue to exert such an influence and that you may even wish to strengthen your contribution in that respect.

I am looking forward with great satisfaction to the opportunity to discuss present possibilities with Dr. Fawzi. My renewed personal contact with him here in New York will help me to explain more fully to you how I think we can be of real assistance. However, the expression of my views in this letter, which are concerned with preliminaries to our further efforts, need not wait for the joint study of our way ahead in which I will be happy to engage with Dr. Fawzi, and through him with you.

In due time I hope to be able, again, to take advantage of a visit to Cairo for a personal exchange of views with you. In the meanwhile, I ask you, Mr. President, to receive my sincere and respectful regards.

Dag Hammarskjöld.

5 September 1961

Dear Mr. President,

As my friend, John Steinbeck, is going to visit your country, I wish to send with him my warm personal greetings.

Of course, he is in no need of an introduction. Such an introduction is provided by "The Grapes of Wrath", "Of Mice and Men", and most recently by "The Winter of our Discontent", not to mention his other works.

He is, as you will know, one of those observers of life in our generation, who feel that its survival will depend on our ability to know ourselves and to stick to basic human values with the will to pay what it may cost.

I know that you may have no time to receive him, but I also know that he would be very happy if you could -- and so would I.

With kindest regards,

Dag Hammarskjöld

His Excellency
Gamal Abdel Nasser,
President of the United
Arab Republic,
CAIRO.

XVI

EGYPTIAN MISSION
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

New York 12 November 1956

TEXT

MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT
GAMAL ABDEL NASSER TO
MR. DAG HAMMARSKJOLD

"Your message to me relating to the composition of the United Nations Force has been received today. I continue to trust that we all work for the same purpose of speedily ending the present crisis. With this in view and in my extreme desire to serve this purpose, the Government of Egypt accepts Danish and Norwegian participation. At the same time it earnestly urges acceptance of India, Indonesia and Yugoslave participation. The United Nations Force would thus be better balanced as composed of Colombia, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, India, Finland, Indonesia and Yugoslavia."

Talk with President Nasser

7 January 1959

The talk covered the whole area of the specific arrangements regarding Syria and Jordan which is reflected in later cables to Spinelli and von Horn etc. I have reason to put down here only the general political background as I presented it, discussing recent difficulties for UNEF.

I pointed out to the President that we now had achieved the miracle of having the UNEF run for more than two years without any serious frictions. That had succeeded, not only thanks to the good-will on both sides, but also, and especially, because we had stuck to the assumptions on which the UNEF was established in the fall of 1956. Were the conditions under which UNEF operated to be changed, we were bound to have difficulties. It seemed better to anticipate such a situation than to run into it unawares. I felt that recent events had brought us to the point where such an anticipation had become necessary.

In concrete terms the new situation had arisen because of the steps taken by Egypt in Sinai, and because of certain initiatives in Gaza. I had no right to pass any judgment on Egypt's recent military measures in Sinai as they were within the limits of Egyptian sovereign rights and as they, at least in view of the lapse of time, could not be said to go against any promise given to me by President Nasser in 1956 or 1957. The President said that these steps were, all of them, political reactions to the development on the Syria/Israel border and that, therefore, they did not involve any change of policies from Egypt's side as regards military arrangements in Sinai.

I then raised the concrete questions: the building of the strategical road up to El Auja; the deployment of troops back of our lines; the stationing of MIGs in El Arish; and the request for widened rights in the Gaza strip for Palestinian Police. I also referred to our difficulties to maintain the proper strength of UNEF short of recourse to new countries. Among these measures I, in a certain sense, gave the greatest significance to the suggestion for widened rights for the Police in Gaza but I wanted to comment in particular on the situation in El Arish. The legal position of the UNEF had now become very ambiguous and was not in line with what we had assumed from the beginning. It is true that there was no "joint operation" but we had "simultaneous physical presence", especially in El Arish. A new dog-fight among jets might easily take place and bring the Israelis down to El Arish. I did not believe that the Israelis would regard the UN as some kind of Red Cross and therefore avoid bombing the airfield if they found it convenient. In that situation the UNEF would become party to hostilities. I could not but look at the way in which the UNEF might get squeezed between Egypt and Israel with the deepest concern. On the other hand, we simply had to find a way forward as Egypt was in its right when stationing MIG's at El Arish, and as we for the time being could not withdraw from the airfield. The situation to which I had referred - which was only one example of what might happen - lead to much wider issues.

The UNEF might have to be liquidated for two reasons, either because there was no longer any need for the Force - I did not personally believe that we had reached that stage yet, nor did I believe that the President felt that we had reached it - or because I, as responsible for the UNEF, considered that the conditions under which the Force operated had been changed in such a way and to such an extent as to render a continued operation impossible.

I would not say that we were there yet, but if Egypt continued on the same line they had been following now for a while, we might easily be brought to a breaking point. Naturally, I hoped that Egypt would find it possible to withdraw again its troops and its aircraft (which anyway was in an indefensible position at El Arish), but the least I must expect that Egypt would do, would be not to move further in a direction squeezing UNEF or making it an apron for a military build-up. I had to make it clear that the situation as it was, gave rise to problems which I did not feel that I was entitled to handle on my own. They would therefore be reported to the Advisory Committee with all that this meant politically. Naturally, I hoped that the technicians would be able to elaborate such operational plans as would make it possible for me to take a positive stand in the Advisory Committee, but I had to reserve my position even on this point.

The President replied that there was one point he wished to make perfectly clear. He did not want UNEF to withdraw. The time might come when he had to ask the UNEF to leave, but he could assure me that he then would go straight for it and not try to operate by a change of working conditions which would force us to take the initiative. He had nothing to gain, once he reached the stage where he would have to ask for the withdrawal of UNEF, by going for the matter in a round-about way. Rather the opposite.

Regarding a new contingent he said that his reason to resist acceptance of new countries, was that the inclusion of such a new contingent, even if caused by the withdrawal of some other national contingents, would be interpreted as an indication that he and we counted on a long continued operation. I must however know that the UNEF in (inter-Arab and Communist) propaganda was a delicate issue and he had to avoid giving such an impression, especially at the present phase when he had opened an all-out war on the communists in the Arab world.

The President raised the question of the relations between UNEF and UNTSO. He said that he felt that our way of handling it, gave Israel a good argument for continuing its sabotage of the MAC, I explained the situation and the President's final word was that, after having made his observations, he left the matter to my judgment.

Talking about the imperative interest of Egypt, as I saw matters, to help us in reducing tension in the Huleh area, I used an argument concerning possible developments somewhat similar to the one which I used to Ben-Gurion, stressing especially the way border-line friction, involving also the Southern area, in the worst case might open the door to initiatives somewhat similar to those of last summer. The President made no difficulties in agreeing to the two points regarding Huleh on which I had got Ben-Gurion's acceptance.