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Middle East / Suez story - 8

28 Oct. 55

D.H.'s aide - memoire conc. meeting  
with M. Fawzi, Foreign Minister of Egypt.

28 October 1955

AIDE MEMOIRE

I saw Dr. Fawzi this morning at my home.

1. First I brought up the Gaza story and asked him what was his reaction to the barbed wire fence being put up by the Israelis. He replied that there were no objections against such a fence at certain specific points of the demarcation line.

I said that what I wanted was his reaction to a complete fence put up by the Israelis. I did need his assurances that such an operation could go on undisturbed, i.e. I asked him for a commitment that Egypt should at least close its eyes. Fawzi replied that he could not give me such a commitment in the course of our discussion, but he promised to bring the issue up with the Premier. He would himself speak in favour of "acquiescence" from the Egyptian side in the erection of the barbed wire fence. However, I should not ask him for any commitment in writing, as such an agreement would be impossible for him in view of the reaction of the other Arab countries. On the other hand the commitment he expected to be able to give me after a talk with the Premier, would be such that we would be able to indicate to the Israelis that they could go on undisturbed. He added that Egypt would never agree to put up a fence itself.

(I understood that we may take an informal declaration of the kind referred to for granted, but that Fawzi had to bring Nasser into the

picture before making his personal commitment definite. I believe that he was sincere in his explanation that they found it possible to pursue a de facto policy of acquiescence, while in view of the reaction in other Arab countries they could not authorize the step by a formal agreement, giving a kind of legal sanction to the demarcation line.

2) Next I brought up El Auja. Fawzi stated that he considered it obvious that the Armistice Agreement had been violated by both sides. To Egypt it was obvious that the Kibutz, plus the civilian police for its protection, constituted a hidden military occupation. On the other hand, Egypt's positions constituted just as much of a violation. Fawzi himself would prefer a return to the letter and spirit of the Armistice Agreement, but feared that such a return would not be possible without a political fight - possibly in the Security Council - which he would find most unfortunate in a situation so tense as the present one. For that reason he felt that "for the moment" one would have to accept the status quo.

I replied that my stand obviously had to be in favour of the strict implementation of the Armistice Agreement. On the other hand I recognized that "for the moment" such an implementation might meet with insuperable difficulties. If for that reason, temporarily, I closed my eyes to the status quo it did not mean that I gave up my position of principle. Nor, however, did it mean that I excluded that as a result of further discussions we might all find that ~~scrapping of the Demarcation line~~ <sup>an acceptance of the status quo</sup> would establish a situation more easy to stabilize than the one we had at present.

I then turned to the question of the <sup>making information</sup> survey of the Western frontier.

Fawzi repeated his declaration that Egypt was agreeable to such an operation

if made by the United Nations. I pointed out to him that even that attitude gave rise to serious political difficulties in view of Israel's well known position. If the matter could be negotiated, I could in principle accept that the United Nations assume the responsibility. I had, however, to repeat that the result must depend on a negotiated arrangement with the Israelis. I further pointed out that when the survey was completed, the Egyptians would have to withdraw inside the line, as UN could not assume responsibilities for the <sup>map</sup> working of the line if contradicted in fact by the position taken by the Egyptians. On the last point Fawzi was non-committal, but indicated that he did not "feel it necessary to press this issue now". The impression he gave was that the matter would be settled in due time, provided we got the marking arranged in the way he hoped for.

3) I further brought up the question of Burns' contacts with Gohar and the local commanders. Fawzi said that he yesterday, after his talk with Burns, had had a discussion with Gohar in order to straighten matters out. He could sum it up in a phrase which I should not repeat to Burns: Fawzi had told Gohar that after the instruction given, he would consider Gohar to be in fault if any new difficulties arose between him and Burns (This statement - which indicated Fawzi's authority over Gohar - was accompanied by the warmest words of appreciation for Burns personally). When I pressed Fawzi for promises as to Burns' contacts with Cairo and the local commander, he said that he personally would always be available for Burns. He further promised to keep this specific problem under observation.

4) Fawzi then went into a long discussion of the arms deal and his talks with the Western foreign ministers. He stressed sharply that Egypt must insist on its right to buy arms wherever it liked and on the fact that the total armaments of 50 mill. Arabs <sup>of</sup> would not be put on a level with 1 1/2 mill. Israelis. On the other hand, he felt that he must have made it clear to the Western foreign ministers that he and Egypt considered a war as suicidal and that they willingly "accepted retaliation measures" from the Western powers if they were to embark on any such adventure. He stressed his and his government's anti-communist attitude (on a previous occasion he told me that the Egyptian Government had put its vote strongly in favour of an acceptance of the Jordan plan).

5) As concerns the colonial issues in the United Nations he felt that it was unwise to press them. He did not want any speedy action, but could on the other hand not accept what he called "turtle pace".

Finally he went at great length in praising the Secretariat which he at present found "well balanced" and helpful, characterized by what he called "style". He said that he felt this development to be reflected in all aspects of the Secretariat work with which he this time had been in contact.

He renewed expressions of his hope that I would come to Egypt if and when he asked me to do so and said that he in his turn would be willing to come whenever I asked him to come to the United Nations. He would bring out whatever specific problems he might have in relation to the United Nations in private letters to me if that seemed to be the most fruitful way of approaching the issue.

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(I understood that we may take an informal declaration of the kind referred to for granted, but that Fawzi had to bring Nassar into the

picture before making his personal commitment definite. I believe that he was sincere in his explanation that they found it possible to pursue a de facto policy of acquiescence, while in view of the reaction in other Arab countries they could not authorize the step by a formal agreement, giving a kind of legal sanction to the demarcation line.

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