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Middle East conflict 1958 - July 8

Sec. Gen.'s Notes on talk with J. F. Dulles in Washington, D.C.

8 July 1958

Notes on talk with Mr. Dulles, 7 July 1958,
in Washington, D.C.

On Mr. Dulles' invitation I had lunch with him in Washington. The only one present at the luncheon was Lodge. Lodge left after lunch. For a specific purpose Mr. Rowntree was later called in. The first and main part of the discussion was between Dulles, Lodge and myself.

I started by giving Dulles the text of my notes on the talk with Nasser, my notes on my last talk with Chamoun, my letter from Beirut (New York) to Fawzi, his reply, and the cables from the Observation Group which referred directly to the question of the size of the present operation and the size of the operation intended to seal the border by military means. Dulles gave me for reading, while he was looking at my papers, a very lengthy memorandum setting out all information they had received on alleged infiltrations. The list was in substance impressive but seemed to put together information irrespective of sources and irrespective of verification.

In the following discussion, which turned mainly around what steps could be taken in order to safeguard Lebanon's "independence and integrity", Dulles mentioned that the US was under heavy pressure for military intervention from Iraq and Turkey, and also Iran. He felt that if, specifically, Iraq considered the outcome of the inner conflict in Lebanon to be a victory for Nasser, they might, together with Turkey, by their own steps try to create a situation in which the hand of the US would be forced. Another party who was eagerly pressing for US military intervention was Israel through Ben Gurion, with the argument that such intervention would increase the security of Israel (to which I added that it would certainly also add to Israel's tendency to overplay its hand in relation to the Arabs). Somewhat later in the discussion Dulles said that de Gaulle held that if the UK and US were to intervene, in a military sense, France must take part:

that was so because of France's traditional position in the Middle East, France's great interests in the area and, obviously, also because of France's right to be considered a big power. Dulles had pointed out that the close ties of France with Israel and its position in the Algerian conflict made it most unwise for France to think of any participation if an intervention came about; according to Dulles this was the only point in the discussion between him and de Gaulle where they came close to a "less pleasant" atmosphere.

It was quite clear that Dulles by now regarded an intervention as a major misfortune, only a little bit less bad than non-intervention in case of an acute crisis combined with a formal request for support from Lebanon. He, therefore, eagerly sought a way out.

I said to him that I had given the question which worried him quite some consideration. It was my impression that Nasser had on the whole told the truth to me. If this was so, Nasser would have no wish to see Lebanon join the Union. However, such a wish certainly was held by Sarraj and others on the Syrian side, just as it was a wish held by some groups in Lebanon. Under these circumstances the real risk was that Cairo, after a solution of the present crisis, might come under strong pressure from Syria supported by some opposition leaders, and that Nasser would give in to that pressure in order to keep the Union together.

With this analysis one should make an effort to create a situation in Lebanon which gave Nasser the strongest possible argument against the Syrians. I mentioned in this context Malik's words to me in December 1957 that the main political significance of the Unef was that it had given Nasser a long sought-for excuse for disinteresting himself in the Israeli question. In the same way I felt that the UN could create a situation which would give Nasser a perfect reason to "disinterest himself in Lebanon".

A UN guarantee for Lebanon's independence and integrity would not make sense, as it would, in fact, weaken the Charter which gives such a general guarantee for every Member country. I could also, for the present, leave aside a four power guarantee (a three power guarantee, obviously, would not mean anything and might even be harmful). In these circumstances

I felt that the best idea would be, at the proper moment, to declare that it was the intention to transform Unogil into a quasi permanent body on a more modest scale than now, but with the wider terms of reference which would follow from the motives given for such a step. The statement of motives might take the form of an expression of "the continuing interest of the United Nations in the independence and integrity of Lebanon".

I wanted to leave open the question when such a step might best be taken. The natural time would be after the elections, but there were reasons which might speak in favour of an earlier declaration of intentions. The matter could not be taken up formally by the US. Two ways seemed to be open: either, in the Security Council, as a proposal by the Swedish Delegation, or, in a public statement by the Secretary-General "welcoming" such a development.

This suggestion, obviously, interested Dulles very much and he, therefore, asked me if he could call for Rowntree so that he could get to hear about it straight from me. I, of course, agreed. Rowntree's observations on the point were without interest. Dulles and I agreed that the US would now think matters over. I would not take the matter up with any other delegation before knowing Dulles' final reaction.

The latter part of the discussion was taken up by a brief summary of Dulles' talks with de Gaulle, which he volunteered to give me.

At the end of Dulles and my discussion and before Rowntree arrived, Dulles had said that he felt that there was a "very considerable parallelism" between his way of thinking and mine on the Lebanese situation. He had previously in - for Dulles - quite warm terms expressed the US' appreciation of my "courageous, firm and highly useful demarche in Cairo". He said that the US had confirmation that strict orders had been given following my talks, to the effect that no further assistance would be given to the rebels. According to US information, there had, however, been a kind of addendum to these orders to the effect of encouraging the rebel leaders to carry on.

It may be noted that in the course of the discussion I pointed out the paradox in the situation facing the Observers because of the fact that the Government did not make the alleged Syrian prisoners available to the Group. Dulles replied that he was also struck by this policy. He asked me if I had thought of one possible explanation: that they did not want the Observers operation to succeed.