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Middle East conflict 1958 - August (2)

Immediate approach to the present Middle Eastern situation

by Sec. Gen.

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SECRET

1 August 1958

An immediate approach to the present Middle Eastern situation should, in my view, cover four aspects:

- a) The status of Gaza, Jordan and Lebanon;
- b) The policy of the big powers in relation to the Middle Eastern region;
- c) Arrangements for inter-Arab cooperation of the type "mutual assistance - non-interference"; and
- d) Safeguards for Western oil supplies.

Ad a)

Gaza

The present status with the fait accompli that the UN "assists" the Egyptian Government in its "control" of Gaza, as a territory outside Egyptian sovereignty and with no Egyptian military units present, is satisfactory. It is, to our knowledge, not threatened from the Egyptian side. It may get more stable as time passes, and should not be discussed in public unnecessarily.

Jordan

The hard fact is that, while Jordan, on the one side, is a necessity in the Middle East, it is, on the other hand, the most complicated and, in a certain sense, the most vulnerable spot. Two facts emerge: the prestige of King Hussein depends very much on his ability to maintain his stand in relation to Israel, and further, a heavy-handed UN move within Jordan may so undermine Hussein's prestige in other respects as to be strongly counter-productive as a step toward stabilisation of the area. It may further be noted that Amman's main fear probably still is that Israel will attack

the West bank on some pretext. It may be assumed that a hard core of the Jordan army remains loyal to the King, at least provided that he maintains a strong anti-Israel stand, and does not too sharply antagonise other Arab countries.

In these circumstances a first reasonable step would be to establish an office of UNTSO in Amman, with a kind of deputy to the COS, heading on the one side a small group of his own in Amman, and, on the other hand, newly established groups in Aquaba, Jericho, Nablus/^{Ramalleh./} The reason for this arrangement, which would put the West bank situation under fairly good UN observation and increase the prestige of Amman, would be that in the present tense situation the risk of serious incidents within the sphere of competence of the UN is considerably increased, and that, therefore, the UN must reinforce its position in order to be able to live up to its obligations under the Armistice Agreements.

A highly desirable additional feature would be the re-establishment of the UN position on Mount Scopus.

Given the above arrangements, it should be possible for Amman to use its army in protection against possible infiltration from Syria and/or Iraq. The Jordanian problem seems basically to be one of freeing the Jordan forces for what in the present situation should be its main task, but this requires unburdening Jordan from its fears in relation to Israel without, therefore, giving Hussein the appearance of turning his forces from Israel against other Arabs. How, in what direction and to what extent the new UN representation in Amman should be expanded remains to be seen in the light of further developments; it would, in all events, present a valuable nucleus for a properly organised and "adequate" UN presence in Jordan.

Lebanon

It seems likely that at a fairly early stage Chehab, as President, would try to reduce the UNOGIL operation, as unnecessary after the pacification of the country. He may even go to the point of asking its withdrawal. I believe that it is essential that such a withdrawal is not approved before a successor arrangement has been considered. Such an arrangement might take the form of a UN Commissioner in Beirut with appropriately equipped staff. The office of such a Commissioner should be established through such a decision that his continued presence becomes the outward expression of a "special status for Lebanon as recognised by the UN". I find it difficult to believe that a four power - Arab group joint text regarding a special status for Lebanon could be achieved in anything but platitudinous terms, either at a summit meeting or at the General Assembly. I do believe, on the contrary, that the desirable effect might be achieved if what has to be said is inserted, so to say, in a preamble to a resolution establishing a new UN representation in Lebanon.

"The three point system"

With the arrangements for Gaza, Jordan and Lebanon mentioned above, the UN would in fact have established a kind of "cordons sanitaires" around Israel. It would, at the same time, for the present, have "contained" the refugee problem, "lifted Lebanon out of the Arab picture" and broken the present trend toward a military encirclement of Israel.

Ad b)

The problem facing a summit meeting, the Security Council and, in fact, the UN as regards the big powers' policies in the Middle East, is whether it is possible to achieve a kind of gentlemen's agreement on "self-discipline".

An arrangement among the four big powers would not be one through which anything would be "imposed" on lesser powers or on the region; it would be much more in the nature of a concession to the general interests. Ideally, an arrangement of this kind of shared self-discipline should include an arms embargo. It may, however, be seriously doubted that the time is ripe for such an embargo, especially in view of the Israel attitude.

Ad c)

The UN approach, from December onwards, to the question of economic cooperation in the Middle East, which led to the drafting of the blueprint in May, should be revived. One should thus aim at getting an inter-Arab agreement, on Arab initiative, regarding the setting up of the necessary institutions for receipt of assistance and distribution of credits, as outlined in the UN blueprint. The UN proposals cover only institutional arrangements, so to say at the receiving end. The question of availability of funds is left open. I do not believe that it is possible to get very far concerning the financing at this stage, but I believe that the agreement on institutional arrangements could be carried sufficiently far to provide a vital step for the creation of interest among such governments or groups as might be willing to supply the necessary funds for the beginning of economic development plans.

However, as things have developed I do not believe that an agreement on financial institutions for Middle Eastern economic cooperation can stand by its own. It must be combined with, and incorporated in a wider agreement on relations among Arab states. I can see it getting a considerably added weight and solidity if it were, so to say, the financial side of a joint inter-Arab declaration on non-aggression, non-interference and mutual assistance. The agreement on the financial institutions would be the main annex to such a declaration. I do not believe that, with the arrangements under a), it would

present unsurpassable political difficulties to arrive at such a declaration now. However, in this respect, as with regard to the institutions for economic cooperation, the formal initiative must be given to the Arabs. Obviously, their work would be considerably facilitated by an expression of interest in agreements along the lines mentioned here from the big powers within the framework of the UN.

Ad e)

The predominant Western interest in the Middle East, which I believe has to be safeguarded if the rest of the plan is to survive, is tied to the oil supplies for a certain period of time ahead. Provided that the British Gulf positions can be reasonably well safeguarded within the framework mentioned in d) above, and provided that Egypt will not depart from its policy in the Suez Canal (as shown most recently by their non-interference during the Lebanese crisis) the problem is one touching Iraq and the Syrian part of the UAR. I would, for my part, envisage an agreement between oil-producing and oil-transiting Arab countries, in the first instance Iraq and UAR, guaranteeing non-interference with oil deliveries or oil transit. If such an agreement were reached, it should be registered with the UN so as to establish it as an international agreement to be respected by all Members. With the use of this formula it could be avoided to bring the USSR into the picture. However, the arrangement would be strengthened by the recognition by the USSR, at a summit meeting, of the Western interest in the oil supplies.

I guess that the arrangements mentioned would be within reach with both Iraq and the UAR without any outside pressures but with some assistance of the same type as was necessary in order to arrive at the compensation

agreement on the Suez Canal.

In the four point plan set out above I have left aside the questions of the refugees and of a possible territorial arrangement. In my view, those two questions should be left outside discussions arranged at this stage, as they would unduly complicate the efforts to reach conclusions on the four points, which seem to require the most immediate attention.

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