



## Security Council

S/1018  
28 September 1948

CABLEGRAM DATED 27 SEPTEMBER 1948 FROM RALPH BUNCHE  
TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL  
TRANSMITTING REPORT REGARDING THE  
ASSASSINATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR

For the President of the Security Council:

I have the honour, in response to the request of the Security Council of 18 September to the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision to submit a further report on the death of Count Bernadotte and Colonel Serot.

1. The ruthless assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte, United Nations Mediator in Palestine, and of United Nations Observer Colonel Andre Serot of the French Air Force, in Jerusalem on Friday, 17 September 1948, was the result of a deliberate and planned attack aimed at the person of the Mediator and at the authority of the United Nations in Palestine. Assassinations occurred in Territory controlled and administered by armed forces and officials of the provisional government of Israel. Foreign Minister of provisional government has informed me by letter dated 19 September 1948 that "as there seems to be little doubt that the group calling itself Hazit Hamoledet (fatherland front), which was acknowledged the authorship of the crime, is an arm of the dissident organization, Lohame Herut Israel (fighters for the freedom of Israel), the provisional government has proceeded to take action against this organization and its members".

2. Official view of the provisional government therefore is that the crime was planned and perpetrated by "fatherland front" of notorious terrorists long known as the Stern group (fighters for the freedom of Israel).

3. It has been well known the terrorist groups organized to pursue political ends by violent means have existed in territory controlled by provisional government of Israel. Such groups had operated in Palestine during mandate, and were responsible for many hideous crimes committed in name of political objectives. These organizations continued their activities after termination of mandate, and the provisional government of Israel found it necessary to take measures designed to circumscribe their independent military activities. Until 20 September, however, when new ordinance aimed at the prevention of terrorism was enacted following the Jerusalem assassinations, they continued to function openly, and without effective restriction or application of available legal sanctions against them in Jewish-controlled area of Jerusalem.

4. At the very beginning of the first truce, one of these organizations, the Stern group (fighters for the freedom of Israel), had issued general threats against United Nations Observers. On that occasion, representative of the Secretary General of United Nations and of Mediator in Tel Aviv immediately sought an interview with the Foreign Minister of the provisional government and asked for assurance that his Government would deal vigorously with any such threats against United Nations personnel and operations in Territory under its control. The Foreign Minister stated that such threats were contrary to the policy of the provisional Government, which would take view of any threats of this nature or any infringement of the truce. The Stern group, he explained, then existed within Israel only as a political organization, having disbanded itself as a military organization, and its members were being absorbed into the army as individuals.

5. Nevertheless, as late as 6 September 1948 fighters for the freedom of Israel, in their daily press bulletins issued in Tel Aviv, vigorously attacked both the United Nations Mediator and mediation effort, concluding with the words "The task of the moment is to oust Bernadotte and his observers. Blessed be the hand that does it." Particular significance should have been attributed to a statement of this kind precisely because it came from a group which had operated for a number of years as an underground force ruthlessly and notoriously employing assassination, kidnapping and other forms of violence, as a means to its ends.

6. Incidental development which had given concern to the mediator and his staff was the fact that in local Jewish press in recent weeks there had been steadily intensified attack against the mediator, mediation effort, truce supervision and the United Nations itself to the effect that the mediator was arbitrarily opposed to Jewish claims, and that supervision of truce deliberately discriminated against the interest of Israel. The provisional government of Israel in its official pronouncements did nothing to counteract these unfounded attacks on good faith of the United Nations and on the efforts of the mediator as its

representative. On the contrary, public statements were made by responsible officials in the government which cast reflection particular upon truce supervision. On several occasions, representations were made on behalf of the mediator to officials of the provisional government regarding potentially dangerous situation which might thus be created, this situation appeared all the more ominous by virtue of existence of organized groups of extremists which continued their campaign of agitation against the presence of truce supervision personnel.

7. It is not suggested that there was any cause and effect relationship between this unfortunate development and the specific crime in Jerusalem. But it was inevitable that the attitude of press and public pronouncements of high government officials would have an important bearing upon climate of Jewish public opinion as regards the mediation and truce supervision efforts. By the time of Jerusalem assassinations, widespread atmosphere of public suspicion toward motivations and objectives of mediation and truce supervision work had developed. This public suspicion, growing out of an assumption that a policy of discrimination between the two parties was being deliberately pursued, was entirely unjustified.

8. At the time of the fatal attack in Jerusalem, Count Bernadotte and his party had no armed protection of any kind. Official recognition of his presence in the Jewish area of Jerusalem was extended by Israel authorities in assignment of official liaison officer, who was travelling with mediator's party, in lead car, at time of the assault. This liaison officer however was unarmed.

9. Count Bernadotte's attitude toward armed protection on his numerous visits to Arab and Jewish territories was at all times clear and consistent, namely that provision unarmed escort for him and party was a matter entirely at discretion of local authorities in whose territory he was travelling. He, like the United Nations observers who served under his direction, was always unarmed. He considered that his protection and safe conduct, and theirs, were responsibility of local authorities who were best situated to know the extent of protection necessary. He never requested an armed escort, and lacking armed men at his disposal could provide none for himself. But whenever local authorities saw fit to provide an armed escort, it was accepted by him without question. In his visits to Arab countries and in Rhodes, such protection was often afforded him, as it had been on some of his earlier visits to territory under Israeli control.

10. At the time of the murders, responsibility for the safety of Count Bernadotte and his party rested upon the provisional government of Israel and immediately upon the military governor of Jewish-occupied area of Jerusalem. Prior notification of the visit was given to Israeli authorities. In fact, the mediator at the moment of attack was returning to YMCA building accompanied by an Israeli Liaison officer preparatory to an appointment with Dr. Bernard Joseph, military governor of Jewish occupied area of Jerusalem. According to the testimony of some members of Count Bernadotte's party, Dr. Joseph himself had been recognized, by the liaison officer, riding in an armoured car in the vicinity of the outrage a few minutes before it occurred. The failure on this occasion to provide the mediator and his party with armed protection would therefore appear the more pronounced. In the light of all the circumstances, the conclusion seems inescapable that there was negligence with respect to security precautions affecting the safety of the mediator.

11. By a proclamation issued in Tel Aviv on 2 August 1948, the provisional government of Israel, defined as an "occupied area", the "major part of the city of Jerusalem, part of its environs and its western approaches", and declared that the "law of the State of Israel applies to this occupied area". Area thus defined includes place at which assassinations occurred.

12. Resolution of Security Council of 19 August (document S/983) definitely places the responsibility upon each party for the actions of any irregular forces in its midst and obligates each party to use all means at its disposal to prevent violations of the truce by individuals or groups under its authority or in territory under its control. It is quite clear, therefore, that provisional government of Israel must assume the full responsibility for the action of these assassinations, involving a breach of the truce of utmost gravity. Official statements issued by the provisional government immediately after outrage, and previously communicated to Security Council (Documents S/1005, S/1007) would seem to indicate that provisional government accepts responsibility for these assassinations within an area under its control.

13. Essential facts of assassinations are clearly established by several corroborative eyewitness accounts. They are the following: At approximately five pm (Israeli time) mediator and his party left Government House area in Jerusalem to return to YMCA prior to his appointment at six thirty pm with Dr. Joseph. Party travelled in three cars proceeding in line. The first car which carried United Nations and white flags was driven by United Nations observer, and carried as passengers two Swedish officers attached to mediator's personal staff, his secretary, and Jewish Liaison officer. Second car painted with Red Cross insignia and flying red cross flag was driven by medical officer of international red cross committee, who was alone in car. Third car, flying both United Nations and white flags was driven by an officer of United Nations secretariat, with United Nations observer seated in front. seat beside him. In rear seat of this car Count Bernadotte was sitting on right, Colonel Serot in centre, and General Lundstrom on left. About five zero five pm in Qatamon quarter of Jerusalem, well within Jewish lines, convoy was stopped by a jeep which blocked the road. This jeep was similar in color to those used by Israeli army. As the convoy stopped, two men dressed in Israeli Army uniforms and armed with automatic weapons of sten or tommygun type, approached left side of car in which mediator was riding. Carefully scrutinizing passengers, one of them thrust his gun through rear left window and fired several bursts directly at mediator, killing him and colonel Serot. Two other men armed with similar guns approached mediator's car from right and fired, apparently for purpose of covering assault and preventing pursuit. Subsequent examination of car showed ten certain and two possible bullet perforations in back seat upholstery and right side of chassis, and in addition one bullet perforation through front of chassis and another through top of radiator grill.

14. Assassinations are now under investigations by authorities of provisional government, but to date no official report on progress or results of this investigation has been communicated to me. Provisional government has vigorously condemned this brutal act and has declared its intention to exert every effort to apprehend criminals and bring them to justice. Considerable number of arrests have been made in Jerusalem Tel Aviv and other places. Emergency measures outlawing all terrorist organizations have also been enacted.

15. These assassinations constitute a critical challenge from an unbridled bank of Jewish terrorists to the very effort of United Nations to achieve, by means of mediation, a peaceful adjustment of the dispute in Palestine. In a broader sense, they give evidence not only of contempt for the actions of the Security Council, but also of a cynical disregard for the United Nations as a whole. It is clearly imperative that urgent measures be taken to ensue that the aims of the United Nations in Palestine should not be frustrated by criminal bands or by any individuals or groups who might hope to profit from acts of such bands.

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