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27 February 1948

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

Communication Received from the United Kingdom
Delegation Concerning Militia in Palestine

The following communication, concerning the formation of militia in Palestine prior to the termination of the Mandate, has been received from Mr. Fletcher-Cooke of the United Kingdom Delegation..

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UNITED KINGDOM DELEGATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

27th February 1948

Dear Bunche,

You will be aware that on Wednesday, 4th February, Senator Francisco on behalf of the Commission called at this office and raised a number of points in connection with the preparatory steps which the Commission might wish to take as regards the formation of militias prior to the termination of the Mandate.

I have been asked to bring to the notice of the Commission the following observations of His Majesty's Government on the various points raised by Senator Francisco.

(1) As the Commission are aware, the proposed Jewish State already possesses an armed and well organised militia in the form of the Haganah, although this is a purely racial and not a national force. The Commission can no doubt obtain information as to its numbers and equipment from the Jewish Agency.

(2) As has already been brought to the notice of the Commission, they will require their own security force after the termination of the Mandate on 15th May, 1948. The proposal that the Commission should go to Aqir was made on the basis that British forces would not be available to guard them there.

(3) The Mandatory Power, as has already been stated, will take whatever steps may be possible in regard to the protection of the Commission during the overlap period up till 15th May.

(4) In the course of the discussion referred to above, Senator Francisco stated that among the preparatory steps which the Commission has in mind were

- (a) Designation of cantonment areas;
- (b) Recruiting by the Commission itself or by either Provisional Council of Government;
- (c) Training with or without arms;
- (d) Equipping;
- (e) Establishment of Cadres.

Generally speaking, none of these activities can be permitted in Palestine prior to the termination of the Mandate, although it is possible that some preliminary steps might be taken during the last fortnight of the Mandatory period.

(5) Senator Francisco raised a number of questions relating to arms and equipment and the answers to these questions are as follows:-

- (a) It is not

Dr. Ralph J. Bunche,
Principal Secretary to the United Nations
Commission on Palestine,
United Nations,
Lake Success,
New York.

(a) It is not proposed, prior to the termination of the Mandate, to withdraw from local Palestinian Police Forces recruited by Municipalities or otherwise handed over to Local Authorities the equipment and stores made available to them to enable them effectively to carry out their duties. These Municipal Police Forces are being formed to ensure as far as possible at least a measure of local security during the period between the termination of the Mandate and the organisation by the successor authorities of some machinery for the preservation of law and order. All other equipment, stores, buildings, posts and depots of the Palestine Police Force will be available to be taken over by the Commission with effect from 15th May and the Government of Palestine are ready to discuss the procedure as regards this taking over of arms, equipment, stores, etc., with representatives of the Commission's staff. All arms, equipment, stores, etc., of the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force are the property of the British Army and none of them will be handed over to the Commission.

(b) Before expressing any views on the question as to whether the Commission would be permitted to build up a store of arms and equipment under seal in Palestine prior to the date of the termination of the Mandate, His Majesty's Government would wish to know what types of arms the Commission have in mind and what guarantees they could give as to the safe custody during the period up to 15th May. Any arrangements for such safe custody would, of course, have to be undertaken from the Commission's own resources. When His Majesty's Government have the answers to these questions, they will consider whether it is possible to relax the embargo upon the import of arms into Palestine as appears to be implied in the Commission's original questions.

(c) As regards the enquiry as to whether if the Commission decided to recruit a Police Force outside Palestine prior to the date of the termination of the Mandate, such a Force would be permitted to enter Palestine prior to that date, His Majesty's Government wish to point out that the recruitment from outside Palestine of a Police Force for Palestine (other than Jerusalem) is not contemplated in the General Assembly's resolution. If the Commission proceeds to Palestine, they will require a Police Force for their own security and there is no objection to such a Force entering Jerusalem at any time on the understanding that they will comply with any orders of the Government of Palestine regarding its location and activities and that it will not include either Jewish or Arab members.

(d) As regards the similar question which was raised in respect of a Police Force for Jerusalem to be recruited outside Palestine, it is presumed that the Commission will concert arrangements for a Security Force for Jerusalem with the Trusteeship Council and the Governor of Jerusalem to be appointed by the Council, since it is upon the Governor that the responsibility under the Plan of recruiting such an International Police Force to assist in maintaining law and order in the City falls.

(e) Information as to

- (i) Arms and ammunition
- (ii) Motor vehicles
- (iii) Police buildings with their locations
- (iv) Any other major items of equipment

belonging to the Police Force will be furnished by the Government of Palestine as soon as possible.

(f) As regards

(f) As regards Senator Francisco's remarks about the Jewish Mishmar and Arab Municipal Police Forces, the Commission may be assured that the creation of such Municipal Police Forces, far from adding to the dangers of conflict between the Jews and Arabs or affecting the formation of militias, will represent the best contribution that could be made to the maintenance of security in purely Jewish or Arab areas.

(g) There is no objection to the arrival at any time of military or police advisers to be sent to Palestine by the Commission, provided that they are few in number and that they confine themselves to matters connected with the formation of future Security Forces.

(h) His Majesty's Government has no suggestions to make as to how security could best be maintained in the period between the termination of the Mandate and the formation of the militias.

Sincerely yours,

Sd) John Fletcher-Cooke