



UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION
Progress Report dated 15 March from the
Advance Party

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15 March 1948

PALESTINE COMMISSION ADVANCE GROUP
PROGRESS REPORT
(To Dr. Bunche from de Azcarate)

1. GENERAL SITUATION

The general situation in Palestine is dominated by the three following factors: (a) Partition is already carried out, or is being carried out, not only in Palestine as a whole but inside Jerusalem. The Administrative services have been, or are being taken over by the Jewish Administration on the Jewish side, or by the Municipalities or other local authorities on the Arab side. This partition, of course, has little to do with the one planned in the [Resolution](#) of the General Assembly, and, obviously, the two zones are, so far, fluid in the sense that their boundaries not only are far from being well-established, but most of them are real war zones. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that partition is being carried out in fact, and that this partition is making progress every day.

(b) This partition is so effective that the two parts are not only separated but in a real state of latent or potential war. I do not think this point needs to be elaborated. Jerusalem offers, perhaps, the most typical example of the situation. The two districts, Arab and Jewish, are completely isolated and militarily organized as the two fronts of a battleground. Whether or not there is still time to enforce peace, or, at least, to prevent a real war from breaking out between the two parties, is difficult for me to say. But it is obvious that every day lost reduces these possibilities and with only two months before us prior to the termination of the Mandate it is quite legitimate and reasonable to doubt this possibility.

(c) Very much aware of the immense difficulty of forming an opinion on a situation so complex as the one prevailing in Palestine, particularly with such a short time of direct and personal experience, I would not hesitate to say, if I were asked for my opinion, that the present position, as far as the Arab attitude is concerned, is chiefly the result of political directives given by leaders, most of them living outside Palestine. It is undeniable that a considerable part of the Arab population of Palestine are today in a dangerous state of excitement against the Jewish population and particularly against partition. But it may be wondered whether this state of mind is really rooted in the mass of the population or whether it is rather a question of leadership. If this is the case, as I am inclined to think, there is a field open for political action.

2. JERUSALEM

As I have said above, Jerusalem is, in fact, divided into two districts, Arab and Jewish; the municipal services are being worked on this basis; no Jew is allowed into the Arab zone and no Arab into the Jewish zone; circulation is restricted and subject to continuous controls, not only by the British authorities in the Security Zones, but, I understand, by the Arab and Jewish military authorities in their respective districts; and, last but not least, there is between the two a real state of war; every night there is more or less intense firing between the two districts and around certain "enclaves" of Jewish population in the Arab zone and of the Arab population in the Jewish zone. This actual partition is the most characteristic feature of the present situation as compared with the one existing when UNSCOP visited Jerusalem. In the opinion of the present Mayor, Mr. Graves (a former official already retired and with exceptional experience and knowledge of conditions in Palestine and, particularly in Palestine) it will be inevitable to take this partition as a taste of the future administrative organization of Jerusalem. Two municipal organizations, one for each of the two districts, with a small central administration accepted by both as a sort of "trait d'union", seems to be in broad lines the shape of the municipal administration of Jerusalem with most likelihood of working satisfactorily. But obviously the immediate problem is to restore a minimum of order in the life of the City.

3. PUBLIC SERVICES

As regards the Public Services, we are concentrating our attention on the question of how the question of how these Services, given reasonable conditions of security in the country, could be more easily either taken over by the Commission for a certain period, or transferred to the new States. Mr. Stavropoulos and, in some cases, I myself, are holding conversations with the Directors and heads of all services and Departments; and we have also discussed the question several times with the Chief Secretary and Mr. Mills, Special Commissioner for the Withdrawal. My general impression is that if (and this is an important if) reasonable security conditions were restored, the technical operation of the transfer of services would not present very great difficulties. But, obviously, it will be unavoidable that for some time the whole administrative machinery will work in rather unusual conditions and even temporary collapse of services.

The favorable circumstance about the transfer of services is that, as it has already been said, in fact, many of them have already been, or are being, transferred to the two communities.

As regards the Jewish population, the transfer is surely being operated without great difficulties. I will be in a position to give more detailed information about this point in a few days' time, when we will have discussed it with the Jewish Agency representatives. But it is well known that the Jewish Agency disposes of a very complete and well-organized Administration and staff and will be able to take over a great number of public services without any difficulty whatsoever. In fact, even the most pessimistic British officials as regards the possibility of operating the transfer without provoking a collapse of the whole administration admit that as far as the Jews are concerned the operation is possible and even easy.

The Arab side of the picture is much more obscure. In the first place, we shall take into account the unco-operative attitude taken by the Arab population under the directives given by the Arab Higher Committee. I confess that I am not yet quite fixed about the real extent of this attitude. The British officials are taking every opportunity to impress upon us how for this non-co-operative attitude. But, on the other hand, some direct and personal observations as regards the attitude of Arabs, when for one reason or other they have come in contact with the Mission or some of its members makes me a little doubtful about the whole thing. At any rate

it is evident that this attitude of the Arab population will be one of the major factors in the operation of transfer of services.

One of the aspects of the problem on which this Arab attitude is most probably going to have a direct and, in cases, decisive influence is the one connected with staff. In all our conversations about the transfer we have stressed the importance of this side of the problem. All the heads of Departments have been requested to put to every member of their staff the question whether they are or are not ready to continue serving under the Commission. It has been arranged with the Chief Secretary that the answers to these enquiries should be sent to us by the heads of Departments. Therefore, it is to be expected that in ten days or two weeks' time we will have in our possession a first hand and full account of the members of the present staff who are willing, in principle, to continue serving under the Commission. But, in fact, and whatever may be the result of this enquiry, the standard answer to our question by the heads of Departments is always the same: the Jewish staff as a whole will stay; the Arab staff will go; and as regards the British staff, a small proportion will be ready to continue if (always the same, if) reasonable security conditions are restored.

The practical consequences of this attitude by the Arab and British staff are not the same for all the services. We are told, for instance, that the Postal and Telegraph services will not be possible to be worked without the Arab staff. For the hospitals the arrangement with the International Red Cross [See my telegram No. UNPC4] would have the problem. The Director of the Public Information Office assured me that as regards this service no difficulty was to be foreseen: the Jewish staff and the British who are ready to continue would be able to assure the functioning of the Service. The Railways could not be operated without the Arab staff. As regards services such as Health, Education, Agriculture, Social Welfare, Labour, etc., the question does not arise, or at any rate, arises with much less gravity than in the great "economic" services such as the Postal Service, Railways, etc. The second is that these services have been, or are being, transferred to the Jewish administration and to the local Arab authorities and organisations. The very close connection between this question and the one concerning the restoration of reasonable conditions of security is obvious. In the first place, the continuation in the service of the Commission of the small (but very valuable) group of present British officials will depend on the conditions of security prevailing at the end of the Mandate.* In the second place, if reasonable security conditions were restored, not exclusively by military means but also by political action bringing some change in the present Arab attitude of non-co-operation, the whole situation would obviously change for the better. In this particular case, as in everything else, the paramount importance of the Security aspect of the whole question appears clearly. The last point I would like to mention on the general question of transfer of services is the following. Since my first call on the Chief Secretary and later on in the course of our conversations with the heads of Services and Departments, I got the impression that in order to secure a smooth transfer of services between the present administration and the Commission it could be a great help if the man who was going to be called on to take responsibility for the control of a given service could come to Palestine fairly soon in order to be able to gain the necessary experience and knowledge not only of the working of the service but also of the local conditions. As I said, this idea has been the object of our conversations with British officials over and over again and, in principle, they have always welcomed it. Before submitting it to you I wanted, however, to know the personal opinion of the Chief Secretary, and to this effect Mr. Stavropoulos and I called on him last Friday afternoon. Without any hesitation he approved the idea and said that the Administration would give all possible help to these "shadow" Directors and heads of services in becoming familiar with the working of the services and the local conditions.

I then raised the question of their security, and the Chief Secretary said that first of all the Commission may be, perhaps, interested to know his opinion regarding the particular services to which this scheme should be applied. He explained that with the exception of five, namely, Railways, Ports, Postal Service, Customs and Civil Aviation, the rest of the public services have already been, are being or will be transferred at once to the administrations, Arab and Jewish. Now, as regards Railways, he explained something to the effect that in fact it could be impossible to continue their working for some time, but their interruption would not be very seriously resented either by the Jews or by the Arabs. As for the port of Haifa, he declared that if anybody else yet not ready to take it over, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces will be quite ready to operate it, and it would be very easy to make practical arrangements for the Civil traffic. The three services, therefore, for which, in his opinion, the Commission will be bound to take direct responsibility on 15 May, are the Postal and Telegraph, the Customs and Civil Aviation (including the Control of Lydda Airport).

As regards these three Services, his suggestions were as follows: The "shadow" Postmaster-General could come to Jerusalem, but it would be impossible for him to work in the Post Office as all the Arab staff would immediately abandon the service. He could be located somewhere else and facilities would be given for the Chief of Service and other personnel to get in close touch with him. As for the Customs, there will be no difficulty for the "shadow" Director to go to Haifa where the offices were located and work there.

4. JUDICIARY

Mr. Stavropoulos and I spent the morning of Saturday 13 March visiting the Courts of Justice in Jerusalem. Before visiting the different Courts, Offices, Library etc. the Chief Justice made us a very full and detailed statement about the present, organization of the judicial system of Palestine. In fact, the Judiciary has also been divided in two branches: one Jewish for the Jewish districts and population; the other Arab for the Arab population. At the end of the Mandate the Jewish Courts will continue to function without any difficulty either under the new Jewish State or under the Commission's authority. The position as regards the Arab Courts is more difficult to foretell, but the Chief Justice was inclined to believe that they would continue to function under the authority of some vague "shadow" Arab administration and ignoring the Commission. As far as Jerusalem is concerned there was some doubt whether the Arab judges would be ready to continue sitting, but on the whole the Chief Justice answered us very emphatically that the Commission need not be worried about the Judiciary. Such as it is organized at present, there is every reason to believe that the risk of collapse is non-existent.

5. Financial and Security Questions

Mr. Ghoth and Col. Roscher Lund are holding conversations with responsible officials and their notes about the special questions they are dealing with are annexed to this report.

6. ACCOMMODATION OF THE COMMISSION

Since the very day of our arrival at Lydda we have been delivering this question with the appropriate officials. In view of the great difficulties we were meeting in the way of finding satisfactory accommodations from the beginning, we have divided the question into two separate items: (i) Final accommodation after the departure of the British Administration; (ii) Provisional accommodation for the period between the arrival of the Commission in Palestine and the moment when the "definite accommodation" will be ready. For the item (i) (final accommodation) we consider that the most satisfactory solution, from every point of view, consists in taking over the King David Hotel as soon as the British Administration has gone. Mr. Stavropoulos is holding conversations with the manager, Mr. Hendburger, and it seems possible not only to establish the offices necessary for the Commission and the Secretariat, but also to provide them with a suitable and convenient lodging. I will keep the Commission informed of any further development about this important question.

As regards items (ii) (governmental accommodation) we were entirely in a deadlock as we have finally refused to continue considering Wilhelm as a possibility as the Administration insisted on saying that they could not make any other proposal. In view of this rather unfortunate position I called very seriously the attention of the Chief Secretary to the matter during our call on him last Friday, adding that I knew that the Commission attached a great importance to the question and I could not delay any more sending to them my report about the situation. Mr. Stavropoulos, moreover, emphasized the necessity of finding some accommodation in Jerusalem; it was difficult to imagine the Commission functioning somewhere in the country without the necessary means to carry out its work. The Chief Secretary said that he realized very well the importance of the question and he mentioned as the only possibility some of the big buildings in the Jewish district of Jerusalem. Mr. McGrath, our Liaison Officer with the Administration, who was present at our conversation, suggested Rehavia, and the Chief Secretary approved at once of the suggestion. It was arranged that Mr. Stavropoulos and I should visit the place on Sunday 14 March but as the result of some misunderstanding about necessary transport arrangements, the visit had to be cancelled. I will report to the Commission as soon as the visit has taken place.

Endnotes

*My personal impression is that in important services such as the police, for instance, the proportion of British ready to stay may appear to be higher than what the British now say.