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QUESTION OF THE DISPOSAL OF THE FORMER ITALIAN COLONIES

Memorandum on Libya by the delegation of the National Council for the Liberation of Libya

NOTE: The following memorandum by the delegation of the National Council for the Liberation of Libya is circulated for the information of members of the General Assembly at the request of the delegation of Iraq.

16 May 1949

We, the Libyan delegation of the National Council for the Liberation of Libya, have already reiterated our demands of independence and unity for all Libya in the various notes and memoranda submitted by the National Council, as well as in the statements made by the Libyan delegation in the First Committee of the General Assembly.

In the debates of the First Committee and of Sub-Committee 15, we listened patiently to all kinds of arguments and proposals advocating the subjugation of a partitioned Libya under the domination of colonial Britain, France and Italy. In this memorandum we have deemed it a waste of time and effort to attempt a disputation of the false assertions of those who, while giving lip service to the lofty ideals and high principles of the United Nations Charter, are obviously determined, in order to further their own ends, to violate these lofty ideals and high principles.

However, we believe it our duty for the sake of simple clarification to acquaint with our answer to certain of the points that were raised in connection with the British resolution that was adopted in Sub-Committee 15 of the First Committee (A/C.1/466) those of the delegations who seemed to have been persuaded of the possibility of bartering away the future of the Libyan nation by mere rhetoric and a shameful pretence that, when subjecting partitioned Libya to colonialism of the worst type, they were upholding the praiseworthy principles of the Charter.

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I.

In the first place, it was amazing that, in order to secure support for the British resolution embodying the Bevin-Sforza backdoor agreement, Mr. McNeil should pretend that the various associations and organizations invited to state before the First Committee the demands of their compatriots, thereby expressing in accordance with the provisions of the Peace Treaty with Italy and the provisions of the United Nations Charter the wishes of the population, were not the true representatives of the people.

We should like to ask Mr. McNeil: Is the British Government after all, in his belief, the true representative of the Libyan people?

II.

Perhaps Mr. McNeil is the one who should know best that the National Council for the Liberation of Libya is the true representative of the population in Tripolitania. He is acquainted, no doubt, through the British Administration functioning now in Tripolitania for a number of years, with the fact that our National Council does represent the population in Tripolitania.

Besides, we should like, at this juncture, to lay stress on the fact that, as a true representative of the people, the National Council for the Liberation of Libya has never hesitated, since its inception in March 1947, to tender advice and to express its opinion on matters connected with the running of the Administration in Tripolitania, and what is more significant is the fact that the advice and the opinion of the National Council have always been given weighty consideration by the British Administration in the territory.

Obviously, the motive behind the inaccurate assertions of Mr. McNeil must be a determination to frustrate our national aspirations, since it is a well-known fact that the National Council for the Liberation of Libya has always claimed independence and unity for all Libya.

III.

In the second place, it has been bruited about by the sponsors of this Bevin-Sforza agreement, the basis of the British resolution, that the Libyans in Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan have always been divided, and that a rejection on the part of Tripolitania of the Emirate of Sayyid Idris Es Senoussi over all Libya has always been a stumbling-block in the way of unity. Needless to say, as has already been demonstrated before the First Committee, such assertions are pure fiction, invented merely to persuade delegations unacquainted with the facts that splitting up the country and placing it under the separate administration of the colonial

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powers of Britain, France and Italy is a feasible as well as a practical solution for a supposedly intricate problem.

IV.

In the third place, it has been argued by certain delegations in support of the British resolution that its adoption would ensure peace and security and guarantee stability in this important area of the Mediterranean. Such argumentation, however, is incorrect. For it is presumed that, for the sake of the maintenance of peace and security, first, Britain and the United States of America should retain strategic bases in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, and second, Tripolitania should be handed over to Italy in order to strengthen the dubious Pact of the Western Powers. Yet, by disdaining and ignoring the wishes of the population, thus creating by this very action a strong movement of national resistance in Libya, the British and the sponsors of the British resolution are in actual fact destroying all chances for any successful military operations in future in these particular territories.

Indeed, in the last war it was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that a "home front" not hostile to the Allies is no less a decisive factor than the victory of their arms in the field in bringing about the defeat of the enemy.

V.

In the fourth place, it has been distressing and mortifying for the Libyan delegation of the National Council for the Liberation of Libya that, in spite of the many assurances repeatedly given by the British during the past two years to the Libyans in Tripolitania and to Bashir Bey Sadawi, the President of the National Council, that under no condition would the British Government agree to a return of an Italian Administration to Tripolitania, the British Government should now betray the cause of the Libyan people and so bluntly go back on their reiterated assurances, which must have been made with the sole purpose of misleading the Tripolitanian people.

VI.

In the fifth place, the British resolution was adopted in the First Committee, as is abundantly clear, because of the mistaken belief of those delegations who voted for it that the Libyans, especially in Tripolitania, would be easily persuaded to acquiesce and accept the dictates of the colonial Powers. As has already been pointed out in our last statement of 12 May 1949 before the First Committee, this belief is erroneous.

/With a view

With a view to indicating the extent of tension caused by adopting the British resolution and explaining the seriousness of the situation in Tripolitania, and with a view to warning beforehand the delegations who seemed inclined to support the British resolution of the gravity of the consequences of such a venture, the Libyan delegation circulated on 11 May 1949 the text of certain cablegrams received from Tripoli. Moreover, in our statement of 12 May was inserted the text of another cablegram from Tripoli. Yet no heed was taken of this warning, and no attention was paid to the appeal which was made in our statement.

No sooner had the British resolution embodying the Bevin-Sforza agreement become known in Tripolitania, than demonstrations and serious riots took place in protest against the action of the Americans, the British and the Italians. The details of these incidents have already been published by the American press on 12 and 15 May 1949. Simultaneously cablegrams have kept pouring in to our headquarters here from Tripoli, and formal protests have been lodged by the National Council for the Liberation of Libya with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Samples of these cablegrams are given below.

To the Secretary-General of the United Nations:

"New York, 10 May 1949

"The original British proposal of 3 May and other proposals advocating the various forms of trusteeship over Libya have caused great distress among the Libyans, who reject all such solutions in contradiction with the wishes of the people and ignoring their legitimate demand of independence and unity for all Libya. It is inconceivable that while discussions are still going on, an agreement should be reached outside United Nations circles between Britain and Italy settling the future of ex-Italian colonies and that such an agreement should be submitted in the form of new British suggestions for consideration in Sub-Committee 15 of the First Committee, dividing up Libya and placing its three component parts under International Trusteeship System with three distinct administering authorities separate in Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan, providing in the meantime for placing Tripolitania at end of 1951 under Administering Authority of Italy. We vehemently protest against British proposal of 10 May and again stress our firm demand of independence and unity for all Libya. Contrary to British allegation that we are not representing our people we have the full support of our compatriots who cabled from Tripoli to lodge protest with United Nations against Bevin-Sforza agreement in following terms: 'Following statement by Count Sforza in which it is alleged Mr. Bevin promised him to restore

/Italy

Italy in Tripolitania, population stood up against such alleged promise, highly remonstrating against the bargaining our future by British Foreign Minister outside United Nations. Tripolitanian people will defend its sacred right for freedom and for opposing with its own life any restoration of Italy's rule. There is no alternative but our independence. In the interests of peace and security, we request that this, our present protest, should be made known to all United Nations honorable Members. - Mansour Kaddara, Head, delegation, National Council for the Liberation of Libya."

A. To the Secretary-General of the United Nations:

"New York, 11 May 1949

"In connexion with our last cable forwarded to your Excellency on 10 May carrying our protest against all British proposals and suggestions submitted with a view to partitioning Libya and placing it under trusteeship, entrusting Italy with administration in Tripolitania at end of 1951, we find it our bounden duty to forward to United Nations text of cablegram just received from Tripoli calling attention to state of unrest, forboding serious disturbances in Tripolitania if British proposals and suggestions are carried through, flouting legitimate demands of Libyan people and ignoring their lawful right to independence and unity.

"Text of cablegram as follows:

"We cabled to Bevin and Trygve Lie protesting and remonstrating at that wrong agreement Bevin assured Sforza with population in ferment. Communicate our remonstrations any restoration Italian administration our beloved country. - Mizran, President National Party."

"And again for the sake of peace and security in this troubled area, we request respectfully that our protest and contents of Tripolitanian cablegram be known to United Nations honorable Members. - Mansour Kaddara, Head, Delegation, National Council for Liberation of Libya."

B. To the Libyan delegation:

"Tripoli, 11 May 1949

"As Great Britain has abandoned the Tripolitanian people in the last hour and has deceived their hopes that she would stand beside justice and protect the freedom of peoples the Tripolitanians therefore have decided with effect from today not to co-operate with the British Administration in Tripolitania in any manner or form. The Tripolitanian people finds itself compelled to declare civil resistance if Great Britain does not change her attitude and modify her last proposal which tends to throw the Tripolitanian people to the Italian floggers. The Tripolitanian /people

people is (sic) obliged at the same time in face of this attitude of Great Britain to take whatever steps it considers necessary in order to defend itself and its cause and places the responsibility of the consequences which may accrue as a result of the situation on Great Britain. Please accept our respects Mahmud Burekis Grand Kadi Mohd Aboul Assad El Alem Mufti Ahmed Oan Souf Taher Murrayed Mustafa Mizran Mohd Krekahi Ali Karamanli Bakir Treish Kheir Din Giddara Soliman Dahan Negmeddin Farhat."

On 14 May, the Libyan delegation of the National Council for the Liberation of Libya was supplied with information contained in a letter addressed to it from Tripolitania on 11 May 1949. A summary of the contents of this letter reads as follows:

"The British resolution based on the Bevin-Sforza agreement has caused widespread discontent among the population in Tripolitania. Monday morning, 9 May, a demonstration in protest against the British resolution took place in Tripoli. No sooner had the adoption by the Committee of the British resolution become known in Tripolitania than a national congress was convened in Tripoli with all political leaders and prominent notables assisting. The congress sat up through all the night of 10 May to discuss measures to be taken in order to meet the situation. After deliberation in the early hours of Wednesday, 11 May, certain decisions were unanimously reached. A demonstration took place in the morning of 11 May and civil resistance was proclaimed together with non co-operation with the Administration. Thousands of people protesting against the British, the Americans, the French and the Italians were shouting 'Down with British Colonialism! Down with American Colonialism! Down with French Colonialism! Down with Italian Colonialism!' As a result, emergency and curfew regulations have been resorted to in vain by the British Administration in order to suppress the expression of free opinion. The whole country is seething with discontent and is still in a state of fermentation."

C. To the Libyan Delegation:

"Tripoli, 14 May 1949

"General National Convention representative all districts of Tripolitania assembled in Tripoli today decided civil resistance as protest against Sforza-Bevin agreement stop First decision disobedience of emergency and curfew regulations imposed by authorities stop Peace will first be maintained but we do not hesitate to adopt violence if justice is not fulfilled. - Tahar Marayed"

/In this cablegram

In this cablegram two things are made clear:

First, civil resistance against the British Administration has already begun in Tripolitania; second, resort to violent measures of protest in the event of the United Nations finally adopting this British resolution has been pledged by the Libyans in Tripolitania.

VII.

News of these occurrences was reported by the press. In its issue of 12 May the New York Times reported:

"PROTESTERS IN TRIPOLI TEAR U.S. FLAG TO BITS

"Tripoli, Libya, 11 May (United Press) - Demonstrators tore to shreds a United States flag in front of the United States Consulate in Tripoli today and set fire to a number of Italian establishments.

"The demonstrators, demanding full independence for this former Italian colony, shouted 'Long live Russia! Down with America and the United Nations!'"

In its issue of 12 May the New York Herald Tribune reported:

"U.S. FLAG TORN UP BY MOB IN TRIPOLI

"CONSULATE DEMONSTRATORS ACCLAIM RUSSIA

"Tripoli, 11 May (United Press) - American service men from nearby Wheelus Airfield were issued firearms today after demonstrators tore up an American flag in front of the American Consulate in Tripoli and set fire to a number of Italian establishments.

"The demonstrators, demanding full independence for this former Italian colony in North Africa, shouted 'Long Live Russia! Down with America and the United Nations!'"

"They cheered as an American flag was ripped to shreds while American personnel watched from the Consulate windows.

"The American Air Force personnel were allowed to come into town from the near-by American-built air base only if they carried sidearms.

"(A U.N. Sub-committee tentatively approved on Tuesday a British-Italian plan to continue British administration of Tripolitania, Libyan area of which Tripoli is the capital, until the end of 1951, when an Italian trusteeship would be instituted.)

"The demonstrators first massed in front of British military headquarters before marching to the American Consulate."

In its issue of 14 May, the New York Times reported:

"LIBYAN ARABS ASTIR IN ANTI-U.N. PROTEST

"Tripoli, Libya, 14 May (Associated Press) - Police today dispersed groups of Arabs demonstrating against the United Nations action regarding distribution of Italy's pre-war colonies.

/ "Some incidents

"Some incidents of vandalism and rock throwings occurred. A state of emergency was proclaimed and a nightly curfew has been enforced.

"Members of the United States Air Force at Wheelus Field who live in Tripoli were sent home and told to stay there to protect their families. All British families were advised to remain in their quarters and to have armed military guards when they went marketing.

"Local police and British military police patrolled the city. Mounted police barred the road from the Senussi Mosque to the British Administration headquarters.

"There have been a series of demonstrations here since Wednesday, growing out of Arab demands that all Libya receive independence. Today's demonstrations were touched off by broadcast accounts of the action taken yesterday by the United Nations Political Committee at Lake Success."

VIII.

As can be seen from the last paragraph of the report of the Associated Press of 14 May, information in connection with what is happening at Lake Success has been suppressed by the British Administration in Tripolitania, since the report goes on to say in the last paragraph that:

"Today's demonstrators were touched off by broadcast accounts of the action taken yesterday by the United Nations Political Committee at Lake Success."

Commenting upon this particular item of news, we should like to point out that immediately the British resolution was formulated and submitted before the Committee, cablegrams carrying the information were sent to Tripoli by the Libyan delegation.

IX.

In conclusion, we believe it is our sacred duty in the interest of peace and security and to prevent the further shedding of blood that we should appeal to the honourable members of the delegations sponsoring and supporting this dangerous and unjust British resolution to give this matter more serious consideration and to ponder the facts at greater length before committing themselves to a final decision upon such unwarranted transactions.

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The following cablegram was received a few hours ago from the National Convention of Tripolitania, a newly organized nation-wide representative body as a result of the latest development of the Libyan case before the United Nations:

/"Following our cable

"Following our cable yesterday demonstrators increasing number and anxiety clashed with civil police who opened fire to disperse people but failing British troops took over stop Wounding of several patriots led only to incite more public who today continued demonstrations leading to create critical situation stop People in Suk Jumaa (Important town near Tripoli) attacked Government Palace destroying it and several thousands attempting enter Tripoli stop Over forty seriously wounded and still shots filling air stop Beseech you and United Nations oppose Bevin-Sforza agreement. - MARAYED, For National Convention Tripolitania"

News of these serious occurrences in Tripolitania is reported by the Associated Press. In the New York Times issue of 16 May 1949 appears the following:

"ARABS DEMONSTRATE AGAINST LIBYA PLAN

"Tripoli, Libya, 15 May (Associated Press) - Shooting and stabbing incidents today marked Arab demonstrations against United Nations plans for Italy's prewar African colonies, including Libya. Some Arab leaders threatened non-co-operation with the British Administration.

"Arab marchers milled through the streets shouting pro-Russian slogans and demands for immediate independence for Libya. They carried banners reading: "Down with British Foreign Secretary Bevin, we will fight for freedom!"

"Police threw two tear-gas bombs in dispersing a mob that rushed toward the British administration headquarters this morning. A Jewish policeman was shot in the hand and an Arab policeman was stabbed during the outbreak.

"British troops were called out following a similar disturbance yesterday. Stones were thrown then, and an Arab fired on two British police inspectors outside the headquarters. The police returned the fire. Nine Arabs were wounded, one seriously. A series of demonstrations have been in progress here since Wednesday.
