

7/1-022

August 6, 1948

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To: Governor Dewey

From: J.F.D.

I have your memo of August 2nd, relating to the Italian colonies. This is a most complicated matter, with a history that goes back to the first Council of Foreign Ministers meeting which I attended with Byrnes in September 1945.

The present position is that under the Italian peace treaty either the Big Four (U.S., U.K., France and U.S.S.R.) are to agree by this September on future disposition, or the disposition will be determined by the United Nations General Assembly.

This is turning out to be a bad way of solution because the Soviet Union can and will block Big Four agreement and throw the matter into the Assembly, and in the Assembly the Soviet Union can almost always get its way on colonial matters, for the overwhelming majority of the members are strongly against "colonialism". However, this way of solution was agreed to at the Paris Conference attended by Senator Vandenberg and it would be unfair now to attack it in the light of hindsight.

I am now studying the matter actively with the State Department in connection with the forthcoming U.N. Assembly.

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The British would like to have a trusteeship in Cyrenaica particularly as they must evacuate their position in Egypt under their new treaty with Egypt. The British would like to see us accept a trusteeship for Tripolitania but this seems out of the question.

It is as near certain as anything can be that the Assembly would not approve a British trusteeship, as the Assembly is overwhelmingly against any extension of the British colonial system. It would, I think, also oppose Italian trusteeship. This is also strongly opposed by the natives, and the British through a war-time Churchill-Eden declaration are formally committed against putting the Senussi (of Libya) again under Italian administration. The British are in occupation and will not use their troops to subject the natives to Italian administration. If an Italian administration should be determined upon, they would probably withdraw their troops, leaving the Italians to fight for control. Under the peace treaty Italy does not have the military strength to carry on such a fight, nor has it the economic resources.

The only solutions which we could propose without giving the Soviet a field day against us in the Assembly would be either independence or a trusteeship by the United Nations as an organization, with an advisory or administering group representing three or four of the nations principally concerned, presumably U.K., France, Italy and U.S.

Under the circumstances, I have been inclined to favor a U.S. position before the Assembly which would advocate trusteeship by the United Nations through the Trusteeship Council with an executive or advisory group which would include Italy and try to get the best possible opportunity for economic development and emigration by Italians.

Probably no definitive solution can be arrived at at this forthcoming Assembly, but certain lines of policy may have to be discussed by the Assembly so that detailed preparatory work can be carried forward by the Trusteeship Council after the Assembly adjourns.

It is true that the Soviet have indicated that they might support a proposal for Italian trusteeship. But it is very doubtful that the Assembly would approve this and if they did, it would open up fighting and give the Soviets the opportunity for intervention which has been the object of their Palestine police.

I believe that if, as is probable, the Assembly opposed Italian trusteeship, the Soviet would then switch to independence, it would be carried. This would probably mean that the Italians would be wholly driven out of their former colonies and that the Soviet, as sponsors of independence would have a position in North Africa which would be of great strategic value and enable them further to stir up unrest in the French North African colonies.

The above deals with Libya (Cyrenaica and Tripolitania) which is the important colonial area. There is also Italian Somaliland and Eritrea, which involve many additional complica-

tions in relation to Egypt and Ethiopia, but these areas are economically and strategically of less importance.

Under the circumstances, I think we could indicate that we would seek a solution which would as far as possible give the Italians an opportunity to realize emigration to, and development of Libya, and particularly Tripolitania, but that we ought not to commit ourselves to a program in favor of Italy which would fail in the Assembly with very bad consequences both for Italy and for the U.K., U.S. and France.

J.F.D.