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A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL
FROM SINAI AND SHARM EL-SHEIKH
October 1956 - March 1957

by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Preface	
Chapter I - Background of the Israeli Campaign 1949-1954	1
The Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Agreement, with reference to El-Auja.	
The Armistice Agreement with reference to Israeli shipping in the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba.	
Immediate background of the campaign: 1954-1956	
International context	
Egyptian context	
The Suez Canal crisis: July 1956- October 1956	
Chapter II - Objectives of the Israeli Campaign.	41
Declared Objectives	
Actual Objectives	
Chapter III - The Cease-Fire	78
Military operations v.s. Political pressures	
The World Crisis: November 5 - November 7	
The Cease-Fire declaration	

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter IV - Initial withdrawal, November 8, 1956 - January 22nd, 1957	104
Israeli irredentism and with- drawal pledge	
The negotiated withdrawal	
Withdrawal on the field of operations	
Chapter V - The "instrumental" withdrawal	141
Political "guaranties" v.s. irredentist claims	
First stage in the guaranties campaign, January - February 11th, 1957	
Second stage, February 11 - February 27, 1957	
Third stage, February 27th - March 6th, 1957	
The return of the Egyptian adminis- tration to Gaza	
Conclusion	220
Bibliography	225

PREFACE

The object of this thesis is to try to analyze the events and developments that accompanied, accelerated or slowed down Israel's withdrawal from Sinai and the concessions gained by Israel as a result of her military action against Egypt in October-November 1956.

The writer of this thesis found it convenient to include a chapter dealing with Egyptian-Israeli relations from the date of the establishment of Israel in 1948 until the Suez Crisis of 1956, with special emphasis on the points of friction in the relations between the two countries.

It must be emphasized that this is not a military or diplomatic history of the Sinai war. The focus has been on pressures and counter pressures that influenced the timing of the cease-fire, the stages of the Israeli withdrawal and what may be described as the strategy of Israel's surrender of territory occupied during the period of military operations.

The writer is aware of his limitations with particular regard to the Israeli sources, both because of his ignorance of Hebrew and because of the difficulty of consulting Israeli periodicals and documentary material in Lebanon. The writer however has depended primarily on UN documents

and publications while writing Chapters III, IV and V, and has found the memoirs of General E.L.M. Burns,¹ Sherman Adams² and Sir Anthony Eden³ particularly valuable for the insights they give into the activity that went on behind the scenes during the period under study.

¹ Burns, E.L.M., Between Arab and Israeli, London: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd., 1962.

² Adams, Sherman, First Hand Report, New York: Harper, 1961.

³ Eden, Sir Anthony, Memoirs, Full Circle, London: Cassel, 1960.

CHAPTER I

I. Background of the Israeli Campaign: 1949-1954

The Security Council resolution of November 16th, 1948 called upon the parties directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict to negotiate an armistice settlement including, inter alia, the delineation of "permanent armistice demarcation lines beyond which the armed forces of the respective parties shall not move."¹

The first Palestine General Armistice Agreement was signed at Rhodes on February 24th, 1949 between Egypt and Israel. But, many points of friction between Egypt and Israel were soon to rise due to the different interpretations of the nature of the Armistice Agreement. Egypt considered the Agreement as an incident of war establishing conditions of a temporary character. This attitude would seem to conform with Oppenheim's analysis of the nature of an armistice agreement. In his opinion, "armistices or truces in the wider sense of the term, are all agreements between belligerent forces for a temporary cessation of hostilities. They are in no wise to be compared with peace and ought not be called temporary peace, because the condition of war remains between belligerents and neutrals, on all points beyond the mere cessation of hostilities."²

¹ UN Document S/1080.

² Oppenheim, L. - "International Law" - Vol. II, Lauterpacht Editions, pp. 546-547.

Israel, in turn, invoked the Security Council's resolution of November 16th, 1948, and particularly the clause calling for the "withdrawal and reduction" of Egypt's and Israel's armed forces as a step to ensure "the maintenance of the armistice during the transition to permanent peace in Palestine."¹ Israel interpreted this clause as implying that the Armistice Agreement is a percursory measure towards the conclusion of formal peace. In her concept of the Armistice, Israel maintained that the "transiency" of the agreement should not be confused with any "temporariness." In this respect, the agreement was concluded for an indefinite duration and implied a far-reaching political character, wider than the mere desire to end active hostilities. Consequently, Israel considered the Armistice Agreement as virtually implying a non-aggression pact. In the long run, two controversial points took a particular importance in Egyptian-Israeli relations: the problem of sovereignty over the El-Auja Demilitarized Zone, and the problem of shipping in the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba.

A) The Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Agreement with Reference to El-Auja

Article 5, para. 2, of the Egyptian-Israeli Armistice

¹ UN Document S/1080, (Op.cit.).

Agreement stipulated that the armistice demarcation line "is not to be construed in any sense as a political or territorial boundary, and is delineated without prejudice to the rights, claims and positions of either Party to the Armistice as regards ultimate settlement of the Palestine question."¹ On the field, the delineation of the Egyptian-Israeli demarcation line was influenced by demographic and strategic considerations, with a tendency to give priority to the strategic considerations. This strategic bias is apparent in the establishment of a system of semi-demilitarized zones along both sides of the demarcation line, and a totally demilitarized zone in the El-Auja area. The semi-demilitarized zones coincided with areas where "defensive forces" were allowed. Thus Article 7, para. 4, of the Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Agreement provided for the stationing of Israeli "defensive forces" only in the area west of a line running, roughly, through Hatta Al-Faluja-Beersheba and ending north of Bir-Asluj. The number and type of these forces were defined in a special annex (Annex III) attached to the Agreement. On the Egyptian side, Article 8, para. 3, of the Agreement prohibited the presence of Egyptian "defensive forces" further east than a line running through El-Arish El-Quseima-Abu 'Ageila.

The El-Auja strategic road complex and its vicinity were, however, completely demilitarized. As stipulated in

¹ UN Document S/1264/Rev. I.

Article 8 of the Armistice Agreement, this meant that "both Egyptian and Israeli armed forces shall be excluded therefrom."¹ Article 8 further stipulated that any advance by the military or para-military forces of either party into the El-Auja demilitarized zone would constitute "a flagrant violation" of the Armistice Agreement. The Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission was made responsible for ensuring the "full implementation" of the demilitarization provision. Article 10 of the Agreement established the headquarters of the Mixed Armistice Commission at El-Auja itself.

From the point of view of International Law, demilitarization is a security measure of a limited liability, established by treaty between two or more states, its purpose usually being, according to Oppenheim, "to prevent war by removing the opportunity of conflict as the result of frontier incidents, or to gain security by prohibiting the concentration of troops on a frontier."² Both aims were probably envisaged in the demilitarization of El-Auja, considering its strategic position on the Egyptian-Israeli frontier. Oppenheim's definition did not cover the problem of sovereignty within a demilitarized zone, but it could be inferred from his discussion that this problem is essentially

¹ Ibid.

² Oppenheim, L., Op.cit., p. 244. (nl)

one of the interpretation of the text establishing such a zone, i.e., in the case of the El-Auja, the relevant Armistice Agreement itself. The main concern of the Armistice Agreement being, at the time, the liquidation of the Egyptian-Israeli conflict on a military level, the Agreement did not specifically provide for the juridico-administrative status of the demilitarized zone.

The issue of sovereignty within the demilitarized zone was soon to be raised, in 1951, in a different though relevant context, with regard to Israel's attempts to drain the Huleh marshes which lay partly inside the demilitarized zone along the Syro-Israeli border.

Article 5, para. 2, of the Syro-Israeli Armistice Agreement assigned two roles to the demilitarized zone. These were the separation of the armed forces of the two parties "in such a manner as to minimize the possibility of friction and incident,"¹ and the provision for "the gradual restoration of normal civilian life in the area of the Demilitarized Zone, without prejudice to the ultimate settlement."² The first of these roles falls within the usual aim sought by the act of demilitarization, as defined by Oppenheim, namely preventing the opportunities of conflict. The second

¹ UN Document S/1353/Rev.1.

² Ibid.

provision concerning the "gradual restoration of civilian life" in the zone was interpreted by Israeli authorities to mean the restoration of the situation that had existed in this zone "prior to the breakdown of the British Administration."¹ Accordingly, the Israeli representative at the United Nations informed the Secretary-General on April 16th, 1951, that Israel considered that "all the legal criteria, separately and together, both those derived from the Palestine Mandate, later confirmed by the Israel legislation, and those based on the Armistice Agreement - all establish the full legality - of Israel control, limited only by the specific reservations of the Armistice Agreement."² The Syrian authorities, considering that the drainage works in the Huleh marshes would affect some of the topographical features of the region in such a manner as would influence the military situation in the Demilitarized Zone, contested Israel's right to carry out works in the demilitarized zone.³ During the course of the legalistic debate that ensued, the Chief-of-Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) presented to the Mixed Armistice Commission, on March 7th, 1951, a memorandum stating that, according to his interpretation of the Armistice Agreement clauses his view was

¹ Rosenne, Shabtai, Israel's Armistice Agreements with the Arab States, Tel-Aviv, 1951, pp. 54-55.

² UN Document S/2089.

³ Syria also challenged Israel's right to the drainage works, on the grounds that they were being conducted on Arab-owned lands.

that "neither party to the Armistice Agreement (therefore) enjoys rights of sovereignty within the demilitarized zone."¹ He further declared that "any laws, regulations or ordinances in force prior to the Armistice Agreement which affected any areas included in the demilitarized zone are null and void."² When the question was taken to the Security Council, on April 25th, 1951, the Israeli representative contested the right of the Chief-of-Staff to make recommendations on the matter and contented that the Chief-of-Staff's thesis "finds no support in international law and practice."³

The Arab attitude, as expounded by the Syrian representative, maintained that the provisions of the Armistice Agreement "should prevail over any previous regulations."⁴ Under these conditions, he affirmed the right of the Chief-of-Staff to be the "sole judge" of the existence of a conflict over the works conducted inside the demilitarized zone. The Syrian representative maintained that his government considered the area where the demilitarized zone existed to be "Syrian territory" because this territory was "under Syrian occupation until the time the Armistice Agreement came into force."⁵

¹ UN Document S/2049.

² Ibid.

³ Security Council's 542nd meeting, April 25th, 1951.

⁴ UN Document S/2105.

⁵ UN Document S/PV541.

The Syrian army had evacuated the area only to supply the place for the demilitarization of the zone. In the light of this situation, the Syrian representative endorsed the opinion of the Chief-of-Staff that the Israeli works within the zone constituted a violation of the Armistice Agreement. In its resolution of May 18th, 1951,¹ the Security Council ordered the cessation by Israel of the drainage operations in the demilitarized zone without, however, pronouncing on the legal aspects of the issue.

Israel's official attitude towards the demilitarized zones on her Syrian border, as enunciated in the note handed by the Israeli representative in the United Nations to the President of the Security Council on April 16th, 1951, and particularly its assertion that the main distinction between the demilitarized zone and "the rest of Israel territory" is that "no activities of a military character are permitted in the former, while no such restriction affects the latter,"² were the premises underlying Israel's justification of her attempts to control the El-Auja Demilitarized Zone. Israel further justified her action on the Egyptian border by reference to Article 5, para. 2 of the Armistice Agreement - a provision which appears solely in the Egyptian-Israeli

¹ UN Document S/2157.

² UN Document S/2089.

Agreement. This is the provision stipulating that the Armistice Demarcation Line should not prejudice the "rights, claims and positions" of both Egypt and Israel as regards "ultimate settlement of the Palestine question."¹ Israel regarded this provision as tantamount to a judicial acknowledgement of Israel's right to the former international frontier with Egypt. Shabtai Rosenne, the legal Advisor to the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, maintains in his interpretation of the Egypt-Israel Agreement, that the effect of inserting paragraph 2 is to underline that "neither party is estopped by the Armistice Agreement from raising in the future any arguments it likes regarding the final delimitation of the frontier."²

Thus, beginning August 20th, 1950 - i.e. in the year preceding the incidents of the Demilitarized Zone on the Syrian border - it was reported by the Chairman of the Egypt-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission that Israeli authorities had started "a vast army operation aimed at chasing out of the El-Auja area all the Bedouins living in the demilitarized zone and its surroundings."³ By September 1950, the Chief-of-Staff estimated the number

¹ UN Document S/1264/Rev. 1, Op.cit.

² Rosenne, Shabtai, Op.cit., p. 49.

³ UN Document S/PV 514.

of displaced Arabs from El-Auja zone at four thousand.¹ He reported the incident to the United Nations Secretary-General on September 18th, 1950. On November 17th, 1950, the Security Council adopted a resolution requesting the Egypt-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission to give urgent attention to the expulsion of "thousands of Palestine Arabs"² and called upon both Egyptians and Israelis to give effect to "any finding of the Israel-Egyptian Mixed Armistice Commission regarding the repatriation of any such Arabs who in the Commission's opinion are entitled to return."³ However, Israeli authorities persisted in refusing the repatriation of the displaced Arabs in El-Auja. The Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission proposed an informal exploration, by both parties, of the situation with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable solution. The Chairman of the Commission reported to the Chief-of-Staff of UNTSO on March 12th, 1951, that the Egyptian delegation agreed to the proposed informal discussion of the issue, while the Israeli delegation rejected the suggestion on the grounds that "a compromise solution to this problem would be a dangerous precedent for Israel. Should a compromise be found on this matter, all other questions

¹ UN Document S/1797.

² UN Document S/1907.

³ Ibid.

would similarly be resolved by compromise."¹ Throughout 1951, Israeli authorities carried on their operations aimed at expelling the remaining Arab settlers out of the El-Auja area. On November 3rd, 1951, the Chief-of-Staff reported that the expelled Arabs reached a number "estimated at between six thousand and seven thousand."²

Israel's interest in the El-Auja zone was primarily strategic. This diamond-shaped area contains the road complex that connects central Sinai to Beersheba and Jerusalem; and the Negev to El-Arish and Ismailia. In 1948, the Israeli army used the road running through El-Auja in its Sinai-El-Arish offensive of December 1948. The strategic importance of El-Auja was recognized during the Rhodes negotiations,³ for in this zone lies the key to the defense of the Negev and - conversely - of the Sinai Peninsula. Its strategic value was also appreciated by the United Nations Military Observers who were given a special position in the area under the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement.⁴ The UNTSO Chief-of-Staff expounded the strategic importance of El-Auja, in a report he submitted

¹ UN Document S/2049.

² UN Document S/2388.

³ Rosenne, Shabtai, Op.cit., p. 51. (note)

⁴ Article 10 of the Agreement - Document S/1264/
Rev. 1, Op.cit.

to the UN Secretary-General, as follows: "The strategic importance of the roads radiating from El-Auja is such that if one side or the other should contemplate aggression on a large scale against the territory of the other, primary or secondary lines of operation should certainly be established through the Demilitarized Zone."¹ In relation to Israel, the control of El-Auja had an important bearing with respect to the consolidation of the Negev. In September 1948, the UN mediator in Palestine, Count Folke Bernadotte, suggested as part of a new basis for the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, that the Negev, allocated to the Jewish State by the UN partition resolution, be re-allocated to the Arabs. Israel vehemently rejected any plan involving an Israeli "concession" in the Negev which it considered "as one of the most important parts of its lawful heritage." Bernadotte was murdered on September 17th, 1948 by Zionist terrorists, and by October 1948, the Israelis had invaded the Negev which they have retained ever since. The expulsion of the Arabs from the El-Auja zone proved, in fact, to be the first stage in Israel's gradual extension of her full sovereignty over the zone.

The next stage followed on September 28, 1953, when elements of the Israeli armed forces advanced beyond the

¹ UN Document S/3435.

demarcation line of the demilitarized zone, killed a number of bedouins and their cattle,¹ and occupied a position which they soon fortified and called Ketsiot, where they established a "police post" inside the zone.² Egypt claimed that the new Israeli settlement was the base for a unit of Israel's armed forces, while Israelis claimed that Ketsiot was a pioneering farming kibbutz. Upon Egypt's complaint, the Mixed Armistice Commission called on Israeli authorities, on October 2nd, 1953, to remove the new Kibbutz "as soon as possible" and decided that the Israeli act constituted a "violation of Article 4, para. 1, and Article 8 of the General Armistice Agreement."³ The Israeli slowness in complying with the decision of the Mixed Armistice Commission led the Egyptian Government to report the matter to the Security Council. The Egyptian representative emphasized that the new kibbutz gave the Israelis "military and political advantages"⁴ in the zone. Further, he drew the attention of the Security Council to the fact that "El-Auja area is one of the areas within the Arab sector provided for in the partition plan."⁵ On February 5th, 1954 Egypt placed

¹ Burns, E.L.M., Between Arab and Israeli, London, 1962, p. 93.

² UN Document S/3101.

³ UN Document S/PV 630.

⁴ UN Document S/3101, Op.cit.

⁵ Ibid.

a second complaint on the Security Council Agenda¹ against the Israeli settlement. This complaint was listed on the Council's agenda under serial number 2 (b) and was to be discussed, according to the Agenda's order, after Israel's complaint on interference with navigation on the Suez Canal, listed as complaint 2 (a). But the President of the Council asked that both complaints be discussed separately, priority being given to Israel's complaint.² Following this classification, the Egyptian complaint was never discussed.

The Egyptian contention about the military nature of Ketsiot was incidentally confirmed when, on October 6th, 1954, a member of the Kibbutz drove a water truck across the international frontier and gave himself up to the Egyptian post at Abu- Ageila. The Chief-of-Staff of the UN Truce Supervision relates that the Israeli deserter was questioned "in the presence" of a UN Military Observer and said he was "a private in a certain... battalion of the Israel Army."³ He also revealed that "all the inhabitants of the kibbutz were soldiers in this unit."⁴ Upon the disclosure of the nature of the kibbutz, Egypt placed a

¹ UN Document S/A658.

² UN Document S/PV 658.

³ Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 93.

⁴ Ibid.

complaint to the Mixed Armistice Commission. The Egyptian complaint was discussed in the Commission's meeting held on September 30th, 1954. The Commission found that the Israeli settlement was organized as a unit of the Israel armed forces which was "inconsistent" with Article 4, para. 1 of the General Armistice Agreement. It called on the Chief-of-Staff of UNTSO to see that this article was implemented. This decision was later appealed by the Israeli representatives, and, pending decision of the appeal, the Israelis kept their "settlement" in the Demilitarized Zone, and thus established a de facto control of the zone.

B) The Armistice Agreement with Reference to Israeli Shipping in the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba

Another controversial point in both Egypt and Israel's conception of the Armistice regime resulted from their interpretation of their respective relations with "third states", particularly in connection with the exercise of "belligerent rights" against neutrals. This aspect of the Armistice became a major point of contention due to the Arab states' restrictions on Israeli shipping through the Suez Canal and, later, the Gulf of Aqaba.

From the point of view of International Law, it is admitted that "although cessation of hostilities may in effect mark the cessation of war... it does not formally

bring the state of war to an end."¹ Accordingly, Oppenheim asserts that the right of "visit and search" over neutral merchant men remains intact, as does likewise "the right to capture neutral vessels attempting to break a blockade, and the right to seize contraband of war."²

Egypt's blockade measures were carried in implementation of the League of Arab States' decision of April 1950 forbidding the member states "to provision or carry cargo on ships on which are impounded contraband goods or which carry Jewish immigrants to Palestine,"³ and further forbidding "to provision or carry cargo on ships which are known to carry immigrants or contraband goods to Israel."⁴ Egypt's exercise of "belligerent rights" affected, in particular, Israel's commercial relations with the Afro-Asian states. On July 11th, 1951, the Government of Israel requested "urgent" consideration by the Security Council of the restrictions imposed by Egypt on the passage of Israeli-bound shipping through the Suez Canal, claiming that the Egyptian measures constituted a breach of the Armistice Agreement. In the course of the debate, the Egyptian representative declared that the Egyptian authorities apply a

¹ Oppenheim, L., Op.cit., p. 597.

² Ibid., p. 547.

³ Resolution 300, session 12, April 8, 1950, pp. 63-64, Translation of Khalil, M., The Arab States and the Arab League, Beirut, 1962, p. 166.

⁴ Ibid.

"system of visit and inspection" in relation to a small number of war materials. He affirmed that Egypt was within her lawful rights under the Armistice Agreement which "terminated only the hostilities and not the legal state of war"¹ between Egypt and Israel. On September 1st, 1951, the Security Council adopted a resolution calling upon Egypt "to cease all interference with such shipping beyond that essential to the safety of shipping in the Canal itself."² The Egyptian Government considered that this resolution related to a matter which is outside the Council's jurisdiction, and the Egyptian representative informed the Security Council that his Government "fully reserved its rights"³ in this issue. However, between September 1951 and February 1954, Egyptian authorities allowed transit through the Canal for Israeli cargos and ships of third states, provided these ships did not carry "war materials."

On February 5th, 1954 the Israeli Government placed another complaint to the Security Council against Egypt's restrictions on the passage through the Canal and the Aqaba Straits, of ships trading with Israel. During the debate, the Egyptian representative declared that since the adoption

¹ UN Document S/PV 550.

² UN Document S/2322.

³ UN Document S/PV 558.

of the September 1951 resolution till February 1954, out of 32,047 ships passing through the Canal, only 55 suspect ships had been inspected, or 0,17% of the total; and out of 267 ships that had passed through the Gulf of Aqaba in the same period, only 3 were actually visited and searched "although a great number of these ships carried cargoes destined for Israel."¹ The Egyptian representative further claimed that the convention of 1888 regulating navigation in the Canal, had reserved Egypt's "full rights" with regard to: 1) The measures which Egypt may deem necessary for ensuring "the defence of its territory and the maintenance of public order;"² 2) The measures which Egypt may take "for ensuring the execution of the Convention."³ In the event, the Egyptian representative remarked that the defensive rights reserved for the Ottoman Empire under the Convention had since accrued to Egypt. The debates were concluded on March 23rd, 1954 following the Soviet veto of a draft resolution calling upon Egypt to comply with the resolution of September 1st, 1951.

II. Immediate Background of the Campaign 1954 - June 1956

The development of events between the signature of the

¹ UN Document S/PV 659.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Armistice Agreement and Israel's invasion of Sinai, were direct or indirect results of both parties' attitude towards the Armistice, and the interpretation of their respective rights under the Agreement. Between 1949 and late 1954, the main issues were the El-Auja Demilitarized Zone and the problem of Israeli shipping through the Suez Canal. Beginning with late 1954, the Egyptian-Israeli conflict took a more violent course. This course may be studied within the general international context and in the more specific context of Egyptian-Israeli relations.

The International Context

This period witnessed the gradual deterioration of Egyptian-Western relations due, mainly, to Egypt's opposition to the Baghdad Pact, her support of the Algerian nationalist rebellion, the Czech arms deal, her recognition of Communist China, the US withdrawal of the High Dam loan, and finally the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company.

Egypt's relations with Great Britain during the post-World War II period were, on the whole, tense due to two main Egyptian grievances: 1) the presence of British troops in Egypt and 2) the problem of the Sudan.

Beginning with 1953, Anglo-Egyptian relations took a turn for the better following the conclusion of an Agreement on self-government and self-determination for the Sudan on

February 12th, of that year. The Sudan Agreement cleared the way for a settlement of the Anglo-Egyptian issue over the Suez Canal base. After lengthy negotiations, an Evacuation Agreement was initialled on July 27th, 1954. There followed a period of Egyptian-Western rapprochement manifested in the conclusion of the Anglo-Egyptian Evacuation treaty on October 19th, 1954, and the signature of an economic aid agreement with the United States Government, on November 1954. But this Egyptian-Western rapprochement came to an abrupt end by mid-January 1955, on account of the impending conclusion of the Baghdad Pact between Turkey and Iraq. Egypt based her defense policy on the Arab League's Collective Security Pact,¹ and, on an international level, the Egyptian revolutionary regime championed a "no pacts" policy.² Despite Egyptian opposition, Iraq concluded the Baghdad Pact with Turkey on February 24th, 1955. On April 5th of that year, Britain formally acceded to the Pact accentuating thereby Egyptian opposition to this Pact.

Two days after Britain's accession to the Pact, Egypt re-asserted her departure from the Western line of policy. President Nasser and Dr. Fawzi, Egypt's Foreign Minister, attended the neutralist conference of Bandoeng where they

¹ "Treaty of Joint Defense and Economic Co-operation," signed by the majority of Arab League members on June 17, 1950.

² Egypt also claimed that Iraq's adherence to the Pact would "divide" the Arab countries.

advocated a policy of non-alignment with both world blocs. An immediate result of this trip was - according to the press companion of President Nasser, M.H. Haykal - Nasser's contacts with the Chinese Premier Chou-En-Lai during which the latter proposed to inquire whether the Russians would sell Egypt modern arms.

On September 27th, 1955, President Nasser announced the conclusion of a barter deal with Communist Czechoslovakia whereby Egyptian cotton was to be exchanged for an undisclosed quantity of heavy armaments. The deal became a decisive event in the development of the Suez-Sinai crisis. It increased the Western-Egyptian tension and particularly raised the question of the status quo in the Middle East as envisaged by the Western Tripartite Declaration of May 25th, 1950. Israel considered the Czech arms deal a departure "liable to bring about a revolutionary and ominous change in Israel's security situation,"¹ as Prime Minister Sharett declared to the Knesset. To the Tripartite powers, the deal also raised the question of Egypt's alleged "other commitments" to the Soviet bloc.

Anglo-Egyptian relations were exposed to a further strain by the failure of the Templer mission in Jordan, in

¹ "Israel Digest," Israel Office of Information, New York, reproduced in "Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East," Hurewitz, J.C., 1956, Vol. II, p. 409.

December 1955, the dismissal of General Glubb from command of the Arab Legion in March 1956, and the incidents accompanying the visit of the British Secretary of State, Selwyn Lloyd, to Bahrein, in the same month. In the British Conservative press, all these incidents were seen as Nasser inspired.

On the other hand, the French Government was becoming increasingly disturbed by the Algerian nationalist rebellion. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Christian Pineau, went to Cairo on March 14th, presumably to convince President Nasser to cease supporting the Algerian nationalists. He returned unsatisfied with Nasser's attitude. The events of the spring and early summer of 1956 led to a hardening of the Western attitude vis-a-vis Egypt. On April 17th, 1956, Dulles declared the United States' approval of a Canadian delivery of Sabre jets to Israel. On April 19th, the US joined the "Economic and counter subversion Committee" of the Baghdad Pact, thus consolidating the Pact in the face of Egyptian opposition. On May 12th, France announced that she had received the US approval for a delivery of Mystere jets to Israel. On May 10th, Secretary Dulles told a press conference that it had become "improbable" that Egypt would be granted a US loan for the High Dam project. On July 19th, coinciding with the conclusion of the Brioni neutralist conference attended by Nasser, Nehru, and Tito, Secretary Dulles

issued a statement withdrawing the US Dam offer, due to developments "unfavorable to the success of the project." The repercussions of the United States' announcement were stronger than expected. Since late 1952, the Revolutionary Council had considered the Dam project as the cornerstone of Egypt's economic progress. In retaliation for the West's offense, Nasser publicly announced on July 26th, 1956, the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company whose revenues - estimated at \$100 million yearly - would pay for the building of the Aswan Dam. The nationalization act was the climax in the mounting deterioration of Western-Egyptian relations.

The Egyptian-Israeli Context

In late 1954, two specific incidents activated the Egyptian-Israeli conflict: the Bat-Galim incident and the Lavon Affair.

On September 28th, 1954 the Israeli merchant man, the Bat Galim, presented itself for transit through the Canal. It was the first Israeli-owned ship to try passage since 1949. The Egyptian authorities seized the cargo of the Bat Galim and arrested the crew, charging them with having opened fire on Egyptian fishing boats. The issue of the Bat Galim was first discussed by the Mixed Armistice Commission which decided, on November 19th, 1954 that the Israeli vessel had committed no violation of the General Armistice Agreement.

Following this decision, the Egyptian Government dropped her charge against the crew of the Bat Galim, on December 4th, 1954, but refused to let the ship through the Canal. Israel raised the issue in the Security Council which discussed the Israeli complaint in several meetings in January and February 1955. Egypt, however, maintained her refusal to let the ship through on the grounds of the necessity of maintaining the safety of the Canal from sabotage acts. Also, the Egyptian Government claimed that the powers conferred on Egypt under the principle of "belligerent rights" permitted her to prevent Israeli shipping through the Suez Canal. These blockade measures were later reinforced in the Gulf of Aqaba, too. On July 1955, a British ship, the Anshun, was shelled by Egyptian batteries based on Ras Nasrani as it entered the Gulf. Following this incident, Egypt announced that any ship proposing to enter the Gulf, in the future, had to give 72 hours notice to the Egyptian authorities. On October 18th, 1955, Israeli Prime Minister Sharett, referring to the latest Egyptian regulations in Aqaba, declared in a speech delivered to the Knesset that "here, too, we reserve for ourselves full freedom of action at the time and in the manner we shall find suitable."¹

In late 1954, Egyptian authorities rounded up an Israeli

¹ "Israel Digest," Op.cit., p. 407.

espionage ring operating in Egypt under the alleged leadership of the Israeli 1954 Defense Minister, Pinhas Lavon. The Israeli ring was charged with the organization of an ostensible "Egyptian" sabotaging of American and British buildings and official properties in Cairo and Alexandria. Some of its members were executed and the rest imprisoned. Israeli reaction to this debacle - later known as the "Lavon Affair" - was bitter. Minister Lavon resigned in February 1955, and on the 17th of the same month, David Ben-Gurion - considered a leader of "activist" tendencies - succeeded Pinhas Lavon in the Defense Ministry. Eleven days later, i.e. on February 28, Israeli troops raided the Egyptian military Head Quarters at Gaza in the most serious breach of the Armistice since its establishment, killing 38 Egyptians and wounding 31. To Egypt, as Erskine Childers puts it, "the Gaza Raid was a shock of quite historic dimensions."¹ Israeli authorities alleged that the attack was a reprisal against increased raids from Gaza into Israel. However, the records of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation contradict this claim and point out that "comparative tranquility"² had reigned along the Egypt-Israel demarcation Line between November 1954 and February 1955. Furthermore,

¹ Childers, Erskine, The Road to Suez, London, 1962, p. 132.

² UN Document S/3373.

the UNTSO report on the Gaza Raid asserted that on February 25th, i.e. three days before the Raid, the chairman of the Egypt-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission "had to draw the attention of the Israeli delegation to the fact that Israel patrols had provoked the Egyptians by cursing them in Arabic or shouting and laughing at them."¹

The Gaza Raid started a chain of incidents along the Demarcation Line, especially cases of firing on the Israelis patrolling - in General Burns account - "immediately next to the demarcation line!"² in what he describes as "an unnecessarily provocative manner."³ General Burns appealed to both Egyptian and Israeli authorities to ease the border situation. The Egyptians requested that the UN Military Observers (UNMOs) be posted on the Egyptian side of the Armistice Demarcation Line in positions from which they would be able to detect who was really starting incidents. The Israelis pressed Egypt to accept a conference at "high level" to discuss the means of "improving security measures" in the Gaza Strip. They advanced the name of the Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Walter Eytan, as their representative and asked that Egypt appoint a representative

¹ Ibid.

² Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 75.

³ Ibid.

of equivalent status. Upon Egypt's request, the Israelis - as the Chief-of-Staff relates - produced "a very vague formula"¹ of the topics that would be discussed in the proposed conference. This raised the Egyptian suspicions that the Israelis insistence on "high level" negotiations was more of a "peace offensive" than a workmanlike approach to the border incidents as such.

On May 30th, 1955, an Egyptian post near kilo 95 fired on an Israeli jeep. Israelis retaliated and the clash extended into an exchange of mortar and small arms firings between both sides. The following day, Israeli authorities revived their demands for "high level" talks, and asked the Chief-of-Staff to contact President Nasser and impress on him the dangerous situation along the Gaza border. President Nasser told the Chief-of-Staff that since the Gaza Raid he could no longer rely on the good intentions of the Israelis. However, he proposed that a troop-free zone of one kilometer be established along both sides of the Demarcation Line, and asserted that he himself was ready to put this measure into immediate effect. The Chief-of-Staff reports that, following this meeting with President Nasser, and during the next three months no serious incidents were reported. Furthermore, Egypt agreed to participate in talks on a local commanders' level

¹ Ibid., p. 77.

with the Israelis instead of the proposed "high level" talks. According to the Chief-of-Staff, these talks were intended to permit the local commanders of each side to handle, together, the unimportant incidents instead of invoking "time-consuming MAC procedure."

In the course of his talks with Israelis during this time, the Chief-of-Staff, however, formed the impression that the Israelis were interested in eliminating any form of United Nations' presence from the proposed arrangements for local commanders meetings. The negotiations, therefore, stalled till August 22nd, 1955 when, in "retaliation" for a skirmish near kilo 95, an Israeli armoured unit again drove into the Gaza Strip and occupied the Egyptian post at hill 79, killing and wounding a number of Egyptian soldiers. In protest Egypt decided to suspend the talks on a local commanders' agreement. At this stage, the Chief-of-Staff mentions that he repeated his appeal to Israel to stop her provocations.¹

At the request of the Chief-of-Staff, the Egyptian authorities agreed, on August 28th, 1955, to post UNMOs at specific points within the Gaza Strip, as a means of improving security measures on the border. However, on August 31st - three days later - UN personnel were detained

¹ UN Document S/3430.

by Israelis in Beersheba. During the same night, Israeli armoured units attacked Khan Yunis in the Egyptian controlled zone killing 36 and wounding 13 soldiers, policemen, and civilians. The Chief-of-Staff reported the incident to the Security Council and proposed the erection of a physical barrier along the Armistice line, and the withdrawal of the patrols and outposts of both sides to 500 meters behind this barrier. The Security Council passed a resolution, on September 8th, 1955, in which it endorsed the Chief-of-Staff's view concerning the separation of the armed forces of both parties, and called upon the Egyptians and Israelis to desist from further raids. The Security Council resolution also urged that "freedom of movement must be afforded to UN observers in the area to enable them to fulfill their function,"¹ thus strengthening Burns' hand and condemning by implication Israel's behavior.

In the autumn of 1955 the centre of Egyptian-Israeli clashes shifted to the El-Auja area. The Chief-of-Staff relates that he did not understand "the character" of the settlement at Ketsiot which Israel had established within the Demilitarized Zone in 1953 - until "later in the autumn of 1955,"² i.e. when Israel resumed the systematic expansion of her control over the Zone. As a countermove to Israel's

¹ UN Document S/3435.

² Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 94.

maintenance of Ketsiot, Egypt had set up "checkposts" at her common frontier with Israel, early in the summer of 1955. The Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission requested the Egyptian authorities, on August 15th, 1955, to remove these posts. General Burns relates that nothing was done in this respect. The Israelis, in their turn, now erected a number of markers despite UNTSO discouragement of such a move. On September 13th, 1955, UN Military Observers found that most of the Israeli erected pillars were overturned. Seizing this excuse, the Israelis reacted by invading the Demilitarized Zone on September 21st, 1955, and occupying the headquarters of the Mixed Armistice Commission established in the zone, under the terms of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement. The Chief-of-Staff demanded immediate withdrawal of the Israeli troops. On October 2nd, 1955, Israelis agreed to withdraw their troops if they were allowed to station a number of "civil police" in the zone for "the protection" of Ketsiot. The Chief-of-Staff agreed to the Israeli request as a means of getting at least some of the overtly military units out of the Zone. Egypt complained that the "police force" was actually a unit of the Israel Defense Forces, and its presence in the Demilitarized Zone was a violation of the General Armistice Agreement provisions for the demilitarization of the zone. The Israelis claimed that the Egyptian checkposts along the

frontier were defensive positions and their presence in the area adjacent to the demilitarized zone was contrary to the armistice clauses concerning the defensive-zone, and that some of them were encroaching on the demilitarized zone. On October 26th, 1955, the Egyptians raided an Israeli "civil police" post near Bir Ain, and captured two prisoners. The prisoners revealed during their interrogation that they were soldiers posing as policemen.

The Chief-of-Staff flew to New York on October 26, 1955, and reported the deteriorating situation in El-Auja to the Secretary-General. The Chief-of-Staff relates that he informed the Secretary-General that "the troubles in the demilitarized zone would go on as long as the Israelis maintained Ketsiot."¹ He further relates that Mr. Hammarskjold promised to ask the representatives of the signatories of the Tripartite Declaration "whether it would be possible to get the Security Council to rule on the exclusion of the kibbutz from the zone."² But, according to the Chief-of-Staff, preliminary contacts with the representatives of the signatory powers at the UN had shown that they were not ready to take "any forceful action to remedy the dangerous state of affairs."³ However, they agreed to endorse a plan - later known as the "Secretary-General's

¹ Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 97.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 98.

Three Points" - urging that, a) The UN Truce Supervision Organization should mark the International Frontier along the El-Auja demilitarized zone, b) Egypt should withdraw her posts encroaching on the demilitarized zone, c) Israel should withdraw all forces, military or civilian, exceeding the number that had been in the zone prior to the Bir-Ain raid of October 26, 1955. By this plan, the Security Council actually put its official seal of approval on Israel's stationing of military units in the Demilitarized Zone.

The Chief-of-Staff tried to press the Tripartite powers to take a firmer stand in relation to the situation at El-Auja. He relates that he told the British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, on November 4th, 1955 that "it would take extraordinary pressure to get the Israelis out of El-Auja zone."¹ But the Security Council failed to stabilize the situation in El-Auja, and nothing more than the Three-Points plan was ever advanced. The negotiations on the implementation of the Three-Points plan itself went on for a month. Both Egyptians and Israelis maintained their positions while avoiding to reject openly the Secretary-General's plan.

In the meantime, the situation along the Gaza demarcation line was deteriorating. The Israelis complained to the

¹ Ibid.

Security Council on August 29th, 30th and 31st of Egyptian "attacks" along the Gaza borders. In the night of August 31st - September 1st, the Israelis "retaliated" by attacking Khan Yunis. This attack, following the Gaza Raid and a number of minor border incidents, faced the Egyptian Government with a dilemma expounded by Commander Hutchison as follows: "to take military action would be courting defeat and to take no action would cause the government to lose face, not only at home but in the other Arab countries as well."¹ For the first time, small groups of "Fedayeen" units were sent into Israel in late August 1955,² in reprisal.

On November 2nd, Ben-Gurion resumed the premiership of the Israeli Cabinet and retained the portfolio of the Defense Ministry. On the same day, UN observers in El-Auja were compelled to keep their huts by the Israelis, and during the night the Israeli army raided El-Sabha in Egyptian territory, in an attack that exceeded the Gaza Raid in its intensity.

Early in February 1956, the US and UK governments issued a joint communique in which they expressed the wish that Egypt and Israel should settle their differences

1

Hutchison, E.H. Violent Truce, New York, 1955, p. 119.

2

Israelis claimed, for the first time, that a group of fedayeen units had operated inside Israel during the night of August 25-26, 1955, in their complaints to the Security Council on August 29, 30, and 31, 1955.

peaceably. They declared that they favoured the enlargement of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization and the improvement of its capabilities in order to handle more adequately the situation on the demarcation line. Israel violently attacked this suggestion. The "Jerusalem Post" - considered a semi-official organ of the Israeli Government - criticized the proposal contending that it amounted to the creation of a "United Nations force" and treated this suggestion as a proposal that can not be accepted "by a sovereign state."¹

In the spring of 1956, the Egyptian-Israeli border situation further deteriorated. On April 5th, 1956, Israeli forces shelled Gaza on a market day with 120-mm mortars. The Israeli attack, described by the Chief-of-Staff as being conducted with "unjustifiable savagery,"² killed 56 Arabs and wounded 103 men, women and children. Egypt, in retaliation, sent a new wave of fedayeen units into Israel. The deterioration of the Armistice led the Security Council to assert, once again, its previous request for "full freedom of movement for observers along the armistice demarcation lines, in the demilitarized zones and in the defensive areas."³ The Secretary-General was requested to report to

¹ "Jerusalem Post," issue of February 3, 1956.

² Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 140.

³ UN Document S/3597.

the Council on the implementation of this resolution.

Mr. Hammarskjold flew to Lydda on April 10th, and to Cairo on the following day. He secured the acceptance by both sides of a provision to keep their patrols some distance from the demarcation line in order to prevent provocations, and to the posting of an equal number of fixed UN observer posts on each side of the demarcation line. But the Secretary-General was unable to secure Israel's withdrawal from El-Auja demilitarized zone. However, he secured her permission to concede UN observers freedom of access to and movement inside the Zone. But when, beginning mid-May 1956, the UNTSO proceeded to mark the demarcation line, Ben-Gurion refused them his permission. Also, he refused the Mixed Armistice Commission to hold regular meetings in the El-Auja demilitarized zone, as provided by Article 10 of the General Armistice Agreement, and despite another Security Council resolution passed on June 4th, 1956, reasserting its previous request for "full freedom of movement" for the UN observers "along the armistice demarcation line and the demilitarized zones."¹ On July 5th, 1956 - i.e. three weeks before Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company - the Israeli Government informed the Chairman of the Egypt-Israel Mixed Armistice

¹ UN Document S/3605.

Commission that "movement of UN Military Observers in the El-Auja Demilitarized Zone would be restricted to the use of the road from Beersheba, through the Demilitarized Zone, to the MAC Headquarters. No movement on other roads would be allowed in the Demilitarized Zone, and radio messages sent would be restricted to administrative reports."¹ The Chief-of-Staff protested, only to be told by the Israeli Ministry for Foreign Affairs that "the presence of UN observers in the Nitzana (El-Auja) area was, in the view of the Israeli Government, altogether superfluous."² Israel's complete control of El-Auja ended the cycle that had started six years earlier with Israel's expulsion of the Arab settlers from the Zone.

The exploding situation in the Middle East led Mr. Hammarskjold to pay another visit to Jerusalem on July 19th, 1956, where he tried to convince Ben-Gurion to remove the restrictions on UN observers. But he made no progress in this direction, and the restrictions remained till Israel invaded Sinai.

III. The Suez Crisis July 1956 - October 1956

Beginning with the Gaza Raid of February 1955, the

¹ UN Document S/3659, Annex 1, Sec. 1, para. 2.

² Ibid., Para. 7.

Egypt-Israel border situation seemed, at least partly, to reflect the impact of Ben-Gurion's accession to power in Israel and more generally, the deterioration of Egyptian-Western relations. Some observers maintain that Israel's military pressure over Egypt, between 1954 and 1956, tended to increase with Egypt's mounting difficulties with the West. This opinion might reflect an extreme causal inference. However, even if we discard a "cause and effect" relationship, as we must, it still is a matter of common observation that the deteriorating armistice situation on the Egyptian-Israeli border during the mentioned period coincided with a continuously widening rift in Egypt's relationships with the Tripartite powers. This became conspicuous in the development of events following Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company in July 1956.

With regard to Israel, the nationalization of the Canal Company had definitely reduced her chances of securing freedom of navigation to her ships through the Canal. This increased the importance of opening the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping. Ben-Gurion had already promised the opening of Eilat to Israel maritime commerce during his electoral campaign of July 1955. He reaffirmed his intention in his declaration to the New York Times' correspondent on April 25th, 1956.

Throughout March - April 1956, there were revived mutterings in Israel about the necessity of launching a "preventive war." On March 6th, it was the subject of an important debate in the Knesset, following a non-confidence motion by the Herut party urging an immediate preventive war. Again, "preventive war" was the main theme of debate in the meetings of the World Zionist Congress held in Jerusalem¹ during the last week of April 1956. In the meantime, the Israeli Government was promoting close relationships with the French Government. By early August 1956, Israel reached an agreement with the French Government for a major arms delivery. This was later complemented by a Franco-Israeli political entente. By early October 1956, the terms of a close military co-operation between both countries were apparently settled in Paris by Mr. Abel Thomas, on behalf of the French Government, and Mr. Simon Perez on behalf of Israel. The Bromberger brothers reveal in their narrative of the Sinai war that sometime in October 1956, Ben-Gurion allegedly went incognito to France where he met Mr. Mollet, the French Premier.² According to the Brombergers, "the last details" of the

¹ "New York Times," issues of April 25th, till 30th, 1956.

² Bromberger, Merry et Serge, Les Secrets de l'expédition d'Egypte, Paris, 1957.

Franco-Israeli co-operation were agreed upon at this meeting. On the other hand, Egypt was promoting a unified Egyptian-Syrian-Jordan "high command" whose formation was announced on October 25th, 1956.

By mid-October 1956, American officials in the Middle East had noticed that usual consultations with their partners in the Tripartite Declaration had suddenly ceased, due to the uncommunicative behavior of the French and British officials. In Washington, President Eisenhower drew the attention of the Israeli Ambassador - who was leaving for Israel - to his opposition to any Israeli military action against her neighbors. He told the Ambassador that if he thought that any "sentiment" in the United States would have any "iota of influence" on elections or on the President himself, he should "disabuse his mind of it."¹ The reports of a continuous Israeli military build up led President Eisenhower to send Mr. Ben-Gurion, in late October 1956, a personal message expressing his "grave concern" over the news of Israel's mobilization. This message was followed by a statement on October 28th, in which President Eisenhower renewed his hope that "no forcible initiative would endanger the peace."² But Eisenhower's pre-occupation

¹ New York Times, January 27, 1960. (Press conference by President Eisenhower)

² Department of State Bulletin, November 5, 1956.

with presidential elections, the United States' concern over the Hungarian events, the Soviet Union's angrossement with the revolution in Hungary, Egypt's embroilment with Britain and France over the Suez Canal issue, presented an adequate opportunity to Ben-Gurion to start an extensive military action against Egypt.

On October 29, Israeli armoured units, starting from El-Auja demilitarized zone and moving in considerable force, crossed the Egypt-Israel international frontier, while Israeli transport planes - reportedly French planes hastily camouflaged - dropped a paratrooper battalion at the eastern end of the Mitla Pass, some 15 miles from the Suez Canal.

The Sinai war had begun.

CHAPTER II

I. Objectives of the Israeli Campaign

a) Declared Objectives

Israel's declared objectives in Sinai were formulated in a series of statements made by:

- 1) The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 2) The Chief-of-Staff of the Israel Defense Army.
- 3) The Prime Minister of Israel.

The Israeli communiqués and declarations presented a spectrum of motives for the invasion of Sinai. These ranged from a "limited" retaliatory action of a tactical nature, to an all-out war with strategic and political objectives.

1) Statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

In a brief communique issued on the day of the invasion, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the military intervention in Sinai in terms of both a preventive war and a retaliatory action. Two main "strategic" reasons were mentioned as the causes of the campaign. The first allegedly derived from Egypt's containment of Israel with a "ring of steel" crowned by "the setting up of a Syrian-Jordan-Egyptian military command under the Egyptian military chief."¹ The

¹ Text as reproduced in "United States Policy in the Middle East" (Documents), U.S. Department of State, Washington, 1957, pp. 135-136.

Israeli communique alleged that this command was established for the purpose of "annihilating her at the appropriate moment."¹ The second referred to Egypt's pursuit of "a one-sided state of war" which was intended "to strangle" Israel's "economy and life by illegal blockade at the Suez Canal."² Both of these policies of Egypt implied in the view of Israel the overthrow of the existing power relation between Israel and Egypt, and hence the preventive war character of the Israeli action. On the other hand, the Israeli invasion of Egypt was also defined in terms of a limited retaliatory action. Thus, the immediate "tactical" reason for the campaign was declared to be the destruction of Fedayeen bases in Sinai. The Israeli communique asserted that in the weeks previous to the invasion, 24 Israeli casualties in dead and wounded had been allegedly caused by mines planted by the Fedayeen in the Negev territory. However, UNTSO records did not confirm this charge. The Chief-of-Staff, commenting on the Israeli allegation, reported that practically all the casualties complained of resulted from one alleged incident when two military vehicles were blown up in the El-Auja demilitarized zone, and that first reports were that three soldiers had been killed and 27

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

wounded. The Chief-of-Staff further contended that Israelis had refused to allow the UNMOs to investigate the El-Auja incident "as well as others which the Foreign Ministry Statement included under the heading of fedayeen activities in the Negev."¹ In the absence of impartial investigation of these incidents, it was intimated by the Chief-of-Staff that "it was open to the Israeli authorities, if they wanted a *cassus belli*, to exaggerate or falsify any incident, or even to invent incidents."²

On the same day of the invasion - October 29th - the Director General of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Walter Eytan, broadcast the news of the Israeli attack. In explaining the causes of the attack, Eytan tended to minimize its aggressive aspect and to define it in terms of a limited retaliatory action: "Israel is not out to wage war or to conquer territory, her aim is to defend her security and the lives of her people against the constant attacks of Egyptian guerrilla forces."³ On October 31st, Eytan reasserted the "limited" character of the campaign: "Israel had undertaken a military engagement, but she is not embarked on war."⁴

¹ Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 181.

² Ibid.,

³ "Jewish Observer", issue of November 9, 1956.

⁴ "New York Times", issue of November 1, 1956.

2) Statements by the Army

News originating from military sources indicated that the objectives of the Israeli invasion exceeded those publicly declared in the statements of the Israeli Ministry for Foreign Affairs on October 29th and 31st. General Dayan's D-Day order to his troops stated: "To day the Southern forces will fight across the border and will enclose the Nile army in its own country."¹ Dayan's order implied a strategic motive, namely the disruption of the Egyptian army and hence a radical change in the existing power relation between Egypt and Israel.

Israeli military sources seemed more outspoken about the actual objectives of the Sinai invasion. The UNTSO Chief-of-Staff, General Burns, relates that upon hearing the news of the Israeli drive into Sinai from "Kol Israel", he instructed his senior military assistant to inquire about the veracity of the news from the Israel army Liaison Officer for Armistice Affairs. The Chief-of-Staff reports that the Israeli Officer confirmed the radio announcement and said that "this was not just a retaliatory raid, but that Israel forces were going to stay in Sinai."² The remark of the Israeli officer suggested that the Israeli invasion also

¹ "Jewish Observer," issue of November 9th, 1956.

² Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 180.

had underlying expansionist motives.

3) Statements by the Prime Minister

Prime Minister Ben-Gurion explained the aims of the Israeli invasion in two consecutive speeches delivered on November 7th and November 8th, 1956.

a) Address of November 7th: On November 7th, cease-fire was implemented and Sinai was under Israeli control. Ben-Gurion took the rostrum of the Knesset to make a survey of the Israeli campaign. He portrayed the Sinai invasion as a national campaign for the "liberation" of an occupied portion of the Ancient Homeland. He announced to the Knesset that "the (Israeli) Army... limited its operations to free the area from northern Sinai to the tip of the Red Sea."¹ Referring to the capture of the Egyptian gun emplacement in the island of Tiran, he told the Knesset that this island was "liberated by Israel Defense Forces."² Ben-Gurion gave the impression of contemplating a long-range Israeli occupation of Sinai by openly rejecting any proposal for the stationing of United Nations forces on Israeli soil "or in any area held by Israel."³ This attitude to the UN forces was

¹ Text as reproduced in "United States Policy in the Middle East," documents published by the U.S. State Department in 1957, p. 199. This speech was also printed in the "Jewish Observer," issue of November 16th, 1956.

² Op.cit., from "Jewish Observer," November 16th, 1956.

³ Ibid.

consonant with the desire to consolidate the Israeli occupation of Sinai, if such a desire existed at all. Ben-Gurion, also, presented to the world, "with full moral force and unflinching determination," a seven-point declaration for the "settlement" of the Egyptian-Israeli conflict. Each of the declaration's seven points demanded an Egyptian concession to an Israeli claim, the sum total of both concessions and claims being tantamount to surrender of Sinai by Egypt and the de facto extension of Israeli jurisdiction over the Peninsula. The Prime Minister, it would appear, hoped to anticipate United Nations intervention by the imposition of a direct settlement upon Egypt.

The seven-points opened with Ben-Gurion's interpretation of the juridico-political consequence of the Israeli military fait-accompli: "1. The Armistice Agreement with Egypt is dead and buried and can not be restored to life."¹ There followed Ben-Gurion's repudiation of the Armistice status juris: "2. In consequence, the Armistice lines between Israel and Egypt have no more validity."² In return for the invalidated status of the Armistice regime, Ben-Gurion offered a moral "concession" to the Egyptian "people": "3. There is no dispute whatever between the people of Israel

¹ Op.cit., from "U.S. Policy in the Middle East," pp. 203-204.

² Ibid., p. 204.

and the Egyptian people."¹ Then, Ben-Gurion proposed to replace the previous order he disrupted through his repudiation of the Armistice lines with a new settlement and new borders. This he planned to achieve provided an international "hands off" was secured, and the politico-juridical vacuum created by Israel's nullification of the Armistice Agreement and border was admitted de facto by Egypt. Upon fulfillment of both requests, Israel would be willing to negotiate a stable peace: "4. We do not wish our relations with Egypt to continue in the present anarchic state and we are ready to enter into negotiations for a stable peace, cooperation and good neighbourly relations with Egypt on condition that they are direct negotiations without prior conditions on either side and are not under duress from any quarter whatever."² The likely possibility of extending the favourable terms of the new settlement with Egypt to all the partners of the Armistice Agreement was hinted at by Ben-Gurion: "5. We hope that all peace-loving nations will support our desire for such negotiations with each of the Arab States, but even if they are unprepared for a permanent peace, so long as they observe the armistice agree-

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., p. 204.

ments, Israel, on her part will do so, too."¹ But, if international contribution was welcomed at this later stage, this would not imply any eventual concession with regard to Israel's sovereignty over Sinai, nor any limitations to Israel's undisputed right to settle the fate of Sinai: "6. On no account will Israel agree to the stationing of a foreign force, no matter how it is called, in her territory or in any area occupied by her."² Finally, upon implementation of the above mentioned claims, Israel undertook to refrain from attacking the Arab countries: "7. Israel will not fight against any Arab country or against Egypt unless she is attacked by them."³

In short, Ben-Gurion was seeking an imposed Egyptian-Israeli peace which he obviously considered practicable given the military circumstance, but to the exclusion of any UN influence which might unfavourably qualify the power position he had acquired through the Tripartite invasion of Egypt and the consequent Israeli military occupation of Sinai.

He concluded his speech with a declaration of faith: "we shall not submit to powerful world forces when right is

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

not on their side."¹

Throughout his November 7th speech, Ben-Gurion gave a clear indication of Israel's annexationist objectives in Sinai, as evidenced by his irredentist terms of reference. In this respect, Ben-Gurion's attitude could have been the result of his elation over the Israeli victory in Sinai, or of his desire to set the bases of a bargaining position, or actually a genuine reflection of his contemplated objectives in Sinai. This last probability will be investigated in detail in a separate section below.

b) November 8th, 1956

On midnight of November 8th, 1956, and following a nine hour meeting of the Israeli Cabinet, Ben-Gurion took the air to broadcast to the "Israeli nation" on the developments that supervened since his Knesset speech of November 7th. He read two letters he had received from the U.S. President and the Soviet Premier urging withdrawal, and his respective answers. In his reply to President Eisenhower, he declared: "we shall willingly withdraw our forces as soon as suitable arrangements have been made by the United Nations for the entry of an international force into the Suez Canal zone."² Then, he went on to assert

¹ Ibid.

² "Jewish Observer," issue of November 16th, 1956.

that in the Sinai operation, Israel had three principal aims:

- " 1. The destruction of forces which all the time attempted to subdue (Israel),
- " 2. The liberation of that part of the homeland which was occupied by the invaders,
- "3. Ensuring freedom of shipping in the straits of Elath and also in the Suez Canal." ¹

Thus, Israeli objectives in Sinai were again described in terms of a retaliatory action, a preventive war, and a national liberation campaign with ulterior politico-economic motives. Actually, the re-incorporation of the retaliatory motives among the reasons for the invasion amounted to an initial retreat from the position he had assumed the previous day when he spoke of the Israeli invasion exclusively in terms of a national liberation campaign.

In general, the tone of Ben-Gurion's address of November 8th was more conciliatory than the tone of his Knesset speech of November 7th. He omitted any reference to the invalidated Armistice Agreement and to his request for direct negotiations with Egypt with a view to securing Egypt's acknowledgement of this forceful change of the Armistice status quo. Emphasis was shifted to the limited military advantages which he

¹ Ibid

claimed Israeli forces had achieved in the Sinai invasion. However, the possibility of securing further gains exceeding these immediate military advantages was not entirely renounced by Ben-Gurion. This was apparent in his reference to the "liberation" of "that part" of the "Homeland" occupied by the "invaders." It is important to note that Ben-Gurion considered that the campaign had hitherto fully achieved only the first of its three principal aims, i.e. the destruction of Egyptian forces. As to the other two aims, he declared: "we are certain that the other two aims, as well, will be attained in full."¹

b) Actual Objectives

News leaking out of military sources and insinuations in Ben-Gurion's addresses, gave an indication of Israel's actual objectives in Sinai. Varying with political circumstances, these objectives ranged - actually regressed - from a territorial maximum aim, to a territorial minimum and finally to a non-territorial minimum with political guaranties.

Territorial maximum. Zionist interest in Sinai goes back to the early days of the movement. In October 1902, Theodor Herzl approached the British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain,

¹ Ibid.

with a scheme for the colonisation of the El-Arish territory, covering most of the Sinai peninsula. At the time, it was thought that a Jewish buffer state in Sinai would prevent Turkey from gaining control of the territory adjacent to the Suez Canal, and would thus secure the support of British colonial authorities. The scheme was discarded due to the opposition of the British Resident in Egypt, Lord Cromer, who feared that the plan would revive the unsettled 1892 border dispute with Turkey. However, Zionist interest in the Peninsula did not falter. It was kept alive by a combination of historio-religious claims, best given expression to, perhaps, in Ben-Gurion's speeches of November 7th and November 8th, 1956. On November 7th, Ben-Gurion divested Egypt of her sovereignty over Sinai by asserting: "our forces did not infringe upon the territory of the land of Egypt and did not even attempt to do so... Our operations were restricted to the area of the Sinai Peninsula."¹ Ben-Gurion thereby implicitly excluded the area situated East of the Suez Canal from "the land of Egypt." Moreover, he went on to say: "Our forces were given strict orders not to cross the Suez Canal or to attack Egyptian territory proper and remain entirely within the

¹ "U.S. policy in the Middle East," p. 199. Also in the "Jewish Observer," issue of November 16th, 1956.

limits of the Sinai Peninsula."¹ Along this line of thought, Ben-Gurion clearly considered Sinai not a part of "Egypt proper" and the Israeli invasion a national campaign designed to liberate an integral part of the Homeland occupied by invaders. He spoke explicitly of "freeing" Sinai and of "liberating" Tiran, on November 7th, 1956. On the 8th, he spoke of the "liberation of that part of the Homeland." He congratulated the Israeli troops who had occupied Mount Sinai by saying: "You have brought us back to the place where the Law was given and where we were commanded to be a Chosen People."² The "New York Times" reported that, preceeding the Israeli columns advancing into Sinai, the Israel Chief Rabbi placed a Torah in the leading jeep and said to Israeli soldiers: "you are about to enter holy soil. For in this land Moses, our teacher, received the Law."³ Ben-Gurion recorded in the Israeli Year Book of 1959/60 the impact of such emotional motivation on his policy making. He wrote: "we have indeed an emotional attitude towards Yotvat (Tiran), but I am prepared to give that up."⁴ Again, he laid

¹ Op.cit., (from "Jewish Observer").

² "Jerusalem Post," issue of November 8th, 1956.

³ "New York Times," issue of November 4th, 1956.

⁴ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, p. 31.

claim to the island of Tiran in the Gulf of Aqaba on the grounds that "until the middle of the 6th century of the European calendar... an independent Hebrew state existed on the island of Yotvat... later called Tiran."¹ By excluding Sinai from "Egypt proper" and by evoking its historic Jewishness, Ben-Gurion laid the modern bases to the traditional Zionist territorial claim. This was complemented by his initial refusal of the presence of any foreign authority on the soil of Sinai, even a United Nations presence.

Consistent with this irredentist trend, there were also frequent official references to the "historical frontiers" of Eretz Israel, in different directions outside the international boundary of Mandated Palestine. Actually, since the early 20th century, Zionist leaders were preoccupied with the boundaries of the projected Jewish homeland. Following the Balfour Declaration, the delimitation of the future frontiers of Palestine was given serious attention by Zionist leaders, prompted by strategic and economic motives. In a book entitled "Eretz Israel," published in New York in 1917, Ben-Zvi and Ben-Gurion devoted a chapter to the frontiers of Palestine. This interest was kept alive after the establishment of the state of Israel within the

¹ "Jewish Observer," issue of November 16th, 1956.

1948 de facto frontiers. In 1952, Ben-Gurion wrote: "in July 1922, the country (Palestine), both in principle and practice was cut into two parts (i.e. Trans-Jordan and Palestine West of the Jordan)... The State of Israel has been restored in the Western part."¹ He contended further that this restoration did not meet Zionist wishes: "Israel... is a state identical neither with its land nor with its people... it has been established in only a portion of the land of Israel."² Again, in 1955, there were further official references to Eretz Israel: "the creation of the new state by no means derogates from the scope of Eretz Israel."³

Another underlying motive behind the campaign was the Israeli belief in the eventuality - even the necessity - of a 'concluding round' with the Arab states. Such a belief was apparent as early as 1948. On April 6th, 1948, Ben-Gurion outlined to the Zionist Executive meeting, his concept of Israeli military strategy as follows: "Let us resolve not to be content with merely defensive tactics, but at the right moment to attack all along the line and not alone within the confines of the Jewish State and the border of Palestine, but to seek out and crush the enemy wherever

¹ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1952, reprinted in "Rebirth and Destiny of Israel," New York, 1954, p. 463.

² Ibid.

³ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1955, p. 320.

he might be."¹ Repeated references indicate that Ben-Gurion did not give up this belief. On July 23rd, 1948, commenting on the UN Truce, Ben-Gurion warned the elated Israelis by saying: "beware of hasty self congratulations and concentrate on the concluding round ... take heed that only destruction of the enemy is the final verdict. That verdict we won against the Arabs of Palestine... But, it is, as we knew it would be, a duel between us and the Arab states; and though they have taken a hard beating, they are not knocked out."² Twelve years later, Ben-Gurion re-asserted his advocacy of the concluding round which he viewed in terms of a preventive war: "The wonderful victory of the Israel Defense Forces over the Arab armies in the first years of existence of the State and the expansion of our borders did not blind us or lull us into complacency, and we knew all the time that a 'second round' was in store."³

The Zionist advocacy of a "concluding" or "second round" was prompted by strategic considerations. There is, for example, the Israeli contention that the "anomaly" of the armistice borders is a cause of strategic vulnerability to the state. Ben-Gurion reveals the inherent strategic

¹ "Rebirth and Destiny of Israel, "Op. cit., p.239

² Ibid , p. 266

³ "Israeli Government Year Book, " 1959/60, Op. cit., p.11.

character of even the Zionists' advocacy of historic Eretz Israel by asserting that "some are hesitant as to the restoration of our historical frontiers, fixed and set from the beginning of time, but even they will hardly deny the anomaly of the new lines... But, even within those lines, State and Land do not coincide."¹ The "unfinished" battle of 1948 was greatly blamed for this anomaly. There was an actual attempt to make up for this unconcluded battle. The leading Zionist British publicist, Jon Kimche, reveals in his book "Both Sides of the Hill"² that Operation "Shin-Tav-Shin" designed to seize the "Western Bank" was actually put on paper in 1949. It was suspended at the last moment due to unfavourable political circumstances. Since then, the 'concluding round' - as Ben-Gurion wrote in the Israeli Year Book of 1959/60 - was, all the time, "in store" pending the "right moment."

In the 1950s, Egypt's predominant political and military role in the Arab world, and the rise of Nasser, re-oriented the attention of Israeli leaders towards the South. It may also be assumed that Ben-Gurion's "meditations" in the Negev increased his interest in Sinai and Egypt. The

¹ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1952, reproduced in "Rebirth and Destiny of Israel," p. 466.

² Kimche had access to documents and sources of first hand importance in writing this book.

Sinai orientation of Ben-Gurion's thinking was a subject of public muttering in 1955. General Burns mentions that following Ben-Gurion's return to the Defense Ministry on February 1955, "rumours began to spread that as a result of his meditations in the wilderness, he had developed new ideas of the direction Israel policy should take."¹ The activation of the Gaza - El-Auja border situation right after Ben-Gurion's assumption of the Defense Ministry was another indication in this direction. By 1955, "Shin-Tav-Shin" had definitely switched southwards. The motives behind this Sinai oriented switch were many. Predominant among these motives was Israel's interest in consolidating the Negev which affords Israel access to a Southern port - Elath - facing Africa and Asia.

In particular, the consolidation of the Negev became an important issue to Israeli strategists in 1955, when the West advanced two proposals suggesting an Israeli land concession in the Negev, reminiscent of the Bernadotte proposals of 1948. The first proposal was advanced by the United States in August 1955, following the deterioration of the armistice situation and the rumours of a Communist arms offer to Egypt. The American Secretary of State, Mr. John Foster Dulles, speaking "with the authority of President

¹ Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 102.

Eisenhower," suggested in his address to the Council on Foreign Relations, on August 26th, 1955, a basis for a negotiable solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This suggestion pertained, inter alia, to a re-adjustment of the Arab-Israeli boundaries. He intimated that the difficulty of the task "is increased by the fact that even territory which is barren has acquired a sentimental significance."¹ Dulles' hint to "barren territories" was understood in Israel as a suggestion for an Israeli land concession to Egypt in the Negev. Three weeks later, Israeli forces occupied El-Auja Demilitarized Zone, the gateway to the Negev. Three months later, Sir Anthony Eden, Prime Minister of Britain, proposed in the traditional Guildhall speech on November 9th, 1955, the activation of Dulles' proposals. He asserted: "if for instance there could be accepted an arrangement between (Arabs and Israelis) about their boundaries, we, and I believe the United States and perhaps other powers also would be prepared to give a formal guarantee to both sides."² The Guildhall speech aroused instant criticism from Israel. Moshe Sharett, the Israeli Foreign Minister, declared that he could "only deplore" Eden's statement, for it "encourages

¹ "New York Times," issue of August 27th, 1955.

² "London Times," issue of November 10th, 1955.

people to nurture illusions and excites appetites which can never be satisfied."¹ Ben-Gurion rejected the proposals on the grounds that they have "no legal, moral or logical basis" and claimed that "one fact that is in contradiction of the United Nations resolutions is the presence of the Egyptian army in Gaza."²

Apart from these considerations, a combination of economic and strategic reasons increased Israel's interest in the Negev. These were perhaps partly revealed by the Tel-Aviv correspondent of the "London Times" on November 14th, 1955. Conveying Israelis' criticism of Dulles' and Eden's proposals, he wrote: "This particular barren area has oil at one end, copper at the other, and substantial phosphate deposits in the centre; and from the military point of view is regarded as an essential area of manoeuvre in the event of war."³

Also behind Ben-Gurion's Sinai thinking figured a body of practical factors. The urbanisation of the Negev necessitated the diversion of the Jordan waters into pipelines, and the opening of Elath to maritime traffic with Asia and Africa. The investment, the pipe-lines, the workers, the new settlers,

¹ Ibid., same issue.

² Quoted by Ben-Gurion in the "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, p. 20.

³ "London Times," issue of November 14th, 1955.

the freight route to Eilat were all long-range commitments that needed protection. Also, the Gulf of Aqaba was the country's alternative to the Suez Canal. To open Eilat to traffic, Arab blockade measures at the South-Eastern tip of Sinai had to be removed.

There was also the impact of the memory of the brief Sinai thrust of 1948-1949 on Israeli military circles, and on Ben-Gurion in person. It was from El-Auja that this thrust had taken place; and El-Auja was completely occupied by Israel on September 1955. Jon Kimche - who had interviewed Israeli political leaders and military commanders in collecting the data for his narrative of the 1948 Sinai thrust - reveals the magnitude of this impact on Israeli strategic thinking. Describing the speculations that followed the capture of El-Auja on December 27th, 1948, and the disruption of the Egyptian eastern axis, Kimche relates: "The road into Sinai lay open before the victorious Israelis who hastened to exploit this opportunity. Alon (then commander of the expedition) had already decided that if political circumstances were favourable he would continue the advance and capture the entire Sinai peninsula, if not, he would return, not to Beersheba, but to Gaza."¹ But, in 1948, political circumstances ran counter to Zionist object-

¹ Kimche, Jon and David, Op.cit., p. 260.

ives, and Ben-Gurion was compelled to order the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Sinai. According to Kimche, "this was perhaps the most difficult decision of the entire war for Ben-Gurion to take... Once more, Yigal Alon pleaded with him to withdraw his order; Ben-Gurion assured him: 'from a military point of view you are correct; from a political point of view you are wrong. The Egyptians refuse to go to Rhodes unless we withdraw the wedge'."¹

The Israeli 1948 Sinai campaign had also the advantage of furnishing valuable military experience for future use. The occupation of El-Auja was the first conclusion Israeli strategists drew from the 1948-49 thrust.

In 1956, Britain and France were hostile to Egypt, and Western public opinion generally favourable to an Israeli action against Egypt. In this respect, an Israeli attack on Jordan would have probably activated the Anglo-Jordanian treaty. In the light of Israel's 1948-49 experience, this would have re-exposed Israeli military "achievements" to the play of unfavourable political factors.

A mass of circumstantial evidence indicates that the Israeli campaign was not a decision of the moment. In this regard, it should be remembered that Israel's restrictions

¹ Ibid, p. 263.

on the movements of UN Observers, first begun in 1955, were maintained throughout 1956, despite repeated demands from the UN Security Council urging freedom of access and movement for the Observers. Also worth remembering is the fact that Israel notified the Chairman of the Egypt-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission on July 5th, 1956 - i.e. three weeks before Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company - that movements of UN Observers would be restricted to the use of one road only, and that "no movement on other roads would be allowed in the Demilitarized Zone."¹ Nor were Observers allowed to send any radio messages other than "administrative reports."

On April 1956, Mr. Hammarskjold was delegated by the Security Council to negotiate permanent ceasefire arrangements between Egypt and Israel. He proposed, for this end, the establishment of fixed UN Observers' posts on both sides of the Gaza Demarcation line. Reporting on his mission, the Secretary-General stated: "in accepting this arrangement, the Government of Israel set a time limit of six months - until 31st October 1956 - for its operation... the Government of Egypt, for its part, sets no time limit on its adherence to the arrangements."² No official explanation was

¹ UN Document S/3659.

² UN Document S/3596, par. 76.

given for the reason of the Israeli reservation. However, the set "time limit," due to expire on October 31st, 1956, coincided with the date of the Israeli invasion of Sinai. This, of course, may have been only a coincidence.

The international situation following the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company provided a favourable background for an Israeli armed intervention in Egypt. By July 26th, 1956, the elements of the "right moment" for an Israeli military action against Egypt were finally available. By mid-October 1956, the prospects of a negotiable solution of the Suez crisis were increasing. The fear of losing the favourable political background presented by the complete deterioration of Western-Egyptian relations perhaps prompted Ben-Gurion to act. Consonant with Franco-British schemes, Israel's occupation of Sinai and the Eastern bank of the Suez Canal would amount to a de facto internationalization of the waterway. In relation to Israel, the Canal would provide her with the least vulnerable Western frontier. Such an international frontier could hardly be crossed by Delta Egypt without provoking a world-wide reaction.

The Zionist speculations about the legality of Egypt's sovereignty over Sinai are also relevant in this respect. The theme was widely publicized from the first week of Israel's occupation of Sinai. This led the UN Secretary-

General to specify, before the UN General Assembly on November 7th, 1956, that in connection with the Assembly's resolutions urging the withdrawal of Israeli troops from 'Egyptian territory', "it goes without saying that 'Egyptian territory' (in this context) must be understood in the sense which follows from International Law and the Armistice Agreement."¹

Speculation about Egyptian sovereignty in the Negev was also taken up by the Suez Rebels in the House of Commons on December 5th, 1956, and Captain Waterhouse declared that Sinai had never "properly been part of Egypt at all."²

But, this theme is perhaps developed in the greatest detail by L.M. Bloomfield who published a legal study about the Gulf of Aqaba, right after the launching of the Sinai campaign, in April 1957. Bloomfield asserted that in 1892, Turkey granted Egypt only the "administration" of Sinai and never recognized that area as forming part of "Egypt proper." It followed that "the question of Egyptian sovereignty does not arise and can not be supported either in law or in fact."³

Parallel to the legal interpretations, there were Zionist unofficial attempts aimed at probing the West's willingness

¹ UN Document A/PV 567, p. 135.

² Hansard, (Parliamentary Debates), 5th Series, Vol. 561, December 5th, 1956, p. 1300.

³ Bloomfield, L.M., "Egypt, Israel and the Gulf of Aqaba," Toronto 1957, p. 141.

to concede Sinai to Israel. The "Jewish Observer" wrote on November 9th, 1956: "Nato bases in Sinai could doubtless be discussed with Israel, but hardly with Egypt."¹

Finally, an indication that Ben-Gurion's attitude towards Sinai was not the result of momentary elation could be inferred from his retrospective account of the Sinai invasion. Four years later, he wrote in the Official Israeli Year Book of 1959/60 that the Sinai "offensive" was planned to be limited to the Sinai area, "without crossing the Suez Canal or touching the territory of Egypt."² In the process, Ben-Gurion clearly delineated the area covered by his reference as that area situated East of the Suez Canal.

Did Ben-Gurion really envisage the integration of Sinai into Israel? No categorical proof is available to answer this question. However, in the light of the previously mentioned indications, it is perhaps not far fetched to claim that, among Israeli objectives in Sinai figured the possibility of integrating Sinai permanently into the Israeli Homeland. At least by November 7th, 1956, this possibility was not ruled out by Ben-Gurion, especially that such annexation was not detrimental to Franco-British

¹ "Jewish Observer," issue of November 9th, 1956.

² "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit. p. 31.

interests in the Suez Canal. Zionist press comments on Ben-Gurion's victory speech certainly conveyed this impression. The "Jewish Observer" wrote: "Ben-Gurion had spoken... and had left no one in doubt about his intentions to keep Israel troops in Sinai, in the Gaza Strip and on the island of Tiran... No one any longer imagined for a moment Israel would give up any of the territory she had occupied during the campaign."¹ The "New York Times" also wrote: "Most listeners agreed that Mr. Ben-Gurion in his speech before the Knesset Wednesday (November 7th, 1956) talked as if Sinai was already part of Israel."²

Territorial Minimum. On December 3rd, 1956, under strong international pressure, the Israeli Government started withdrawing its forces fifty kilometers from the Suez Canal. By then, Israel's optimum aim was definitely circumscribed by events. At this stage, what was - or became - Israel's minimum territorial objective in Sinai?

There is no explicit Israeli declaration in this respect. Only strong inferences based on circumstantial evidence: general Zionist attitudes towards Sinai, and Israeli press

¹ "Jewish Observer," issue of November 9th, 1956.

² "New York Times," issue of November 8th, 1956.

reports and official insinuations indicating that the Eastern confines of Sinai - including Gaza - were of particular interest to Israel. Two factors were at work behind this interest: strategic imperatives and economic needs.

In a series of articles published between 1917 and 1921 in the Zionist organ of the British Palestine Committee - i.e. "Palestine" - by the leaders of the Zionist movement, it was admitted that "Security considerations showed that Palestine would have to include the desert areas to the south and the east from which most of the nomad invaders had come."¹ In particular, Zionist leaders wanted access to the Gulf of Aqaba - for economic reasons - and in the South-West they hoped, by an amicable arrangement with Great Britain, to incorporate El-Arish region in the Jewish Homeland.²

On November 6th, 1918, the Advisory Committee on Palestine, which included most of the leading Zionist personalities, advanced a proposal for the boundaries of Palestine. The Committee proposed that the Southern frontier be delineated following "a line from a point in the neighbourhood of Aqaba to El-Arish."³ On January 9th, 1919, the Zionist leaders

¹ "Palestine," issues of 23/6/1917 and 21/7/1917 - Text quoted in H.F. Ra'anan's "The Frontiers of a Nation," London, 1955, p. 36.

² "Palestine," issue of 9/11/1918, from Ra'anan, Op.cit.

³ Documents of the Office of the Zionist Organization at London (Zionist Central Archives, Jerusalem) - Unpublished - Vol. 1586, 6/11/1918, Quoted by H.F. Ra'anan, Op.cit., p.101.

approved the final draft statement of their claims.¹

The Foreign Office was not favourably inclined towards the Zionist boundary suggestions. Consequently, the Zionist leaders accepted the fact that the Southern frontier should remain unchanged for the time being. Thus, the final draft worked out by the Zionist Organization stated that the country's South-Western frontier should be settled by negotiations with the Egyptian Government.²

The final delineation of the frontiers of Mandatory Palestine in 1923, were considered detrimental to Zionist aspirations. Frischwasser - Ra'anan asserts that "for the Jewish national movement, the frontiers of Mandatory Palestine constituted a severe limitation on territorial and settlement aspirations."³ In particular, Zionist leaders considered that the Egypt-Palestine frontier was established "farther to the north" of the original Palestine boundary of 1892 or of Biblical days, thus "reducing" the territory of the National Home by several thousand square miles. The "Mandate" boundary was first established in 1906 in response to Britain's desire to shift the frontier as far as

¹ Op.cit., Unpublished Document, Quoted by Ra'anan, (Op.cit.), p. 102. (Document: Vol. 57 II, 9/1/1919.

² "Statement of the Zionist Organization," London Bureau, Vol. 57 III, S/2/1919, Quoted by Ra'anan, Op.cit., p. 106.

³ H.F. Frischwasser - Ra'anan, Op.cit., p. 142.

possible away from the Suez Canal.

In 1951, Rosenne intimated that "doubts are sometimes heard whether the international frontier should lie north or south of the El-Arish oasis (the Biblical Brook of Egypt)."¹ In 1955, F. Ra'anan wrote: "The south-western boundary... was a purely arbitrary line drawn across the desert to suit the strategic convenience of the British garrison in the Suez Canal area." From the Palestinian point of view, the boundary would have to be drawn "farther West, along the natural geographic and historic dividing line of the Wadi el-Arish, the 'Brook of Egypt', and thence southward to the southernmost tip of the Sinai peninsula at Ras-Mohammed."²

Moreover Zionist leaders considered that the Egypt-Israel armistice agreement reserved Israel's right to a final delimitation of the demarcation line. Paragraph 2 of Article V of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement, stipulating that "The Armistice Demarcation Line is... delineated without prejudice to the rights, claims and positions of either party to the Armistice as regards ultimate settlement of the Palestine question" was viewed by Rosenne - the Legal Advisor to the Israel Ministry for Foreign Affairs -

¹ Rosenne, Shabtai, Op.cit., p. 48.

² H.F. F-Ra'anan, Op.cit., p. 144.

as an assertion that neither party is estopped by the Armistice Agreement from raising in the future "any arguments" it likes regarding "the final delimitation of the frontier."¹ In this spirit, Ben-Gurion repudiated the Armistice Agreement in his speech of November 7th, and asserted that "Israel does not intend to revive it."² Thus, on 7th November 1956, the "final delimitation" of the Armistice line with Egypt became a possibility.

An optimum alternative to the Demarcation Line would be the Suez Canal, Israel's least vulnerable frontier. By November 8th - November 9th, under the pressure of world forces, Ben-Gurion promised withdrawal from Sinai, without however specifying the extent of this withdrawal. However, Israel's chances to remain on the right bank of the Suez Canal were lost beyond doubt. A second best frontier would be around El-Arish (the Brook of Egypt) - El-Quseima area, along the 1892 border of Palestine. Implicit indications of such an intention were many:

a) There was Ben-Gurion's assertion in his November 8th midnight speech that a principal objective of the campaign is "the liberation of that part of the homeland occupied by the invaders." He deliberately did not specify the area

¹ Rosenne, Shabtai, Op.cit., p. 49.

² "Jewish Observer," issue of November 9th, 1956.

covered by his reference. But, in the event - Israeli maximal aims being lost - it is safe to assume that Ben-Gurion referred, at least, to the nearest parts of Sinai to Israel.

b) There was Ben-Gurion's authoritative re-judaisation of Eastern Sinai in the tradition of countries restoring occupied territory to the original fatherland. Referring to Sharm el-Sheikh, Ben-Gurion said: "The Egyptians stationed an armed force... at the place called Sharm el-Sheikh... whose name is now Mifratz Shlomo."¹ Again, Ben-Gurion contended: "the island of Yotvat (the ancient Hebrew name)... was later called (i.e. by the Egyptians) Tiran."²

c) There was his evocation of the ancient Jewishness of Eastern Sinai: "Israel's maritime commerce began in the Red Sea 3,000 years ago in the reign of King Solomon. The port of Elath was the first Hebrew port in the time of the Kings of Judea."³ Drawing on the Torah, he claimed: "Until the middle of the 6th century of the European calendar... an independent Hebrew State existed on the island of Yotvat (Tiran), south of the Straits of Elath (Straits of Aqaba)."⁴

¹ "Jewish Observer," issue of November 16th, 1956.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

g) With regard to Gaza, Israeli irredentism was officially given expression to in Israel's plan, transmitted to the UN Secretary-General on January 23rd, 1957, for an Israeli administration of the Strip "in suitable relationship" with the United Nations.

The strategic importance of the El-Arish-Abu 'Agheila-El-Quseima area was recognized at the Rhodes negotiations. By virtue of Article VIII, paragraph 3 of the Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement, Egypt was prohibited from having defensive positions in the area. Rosenne, in his analysis of the Egyptian-Israeli Armistice clauses, describes El-Quseima and Abu-'Agheila as being "strategically situated on the scanty road system connecting Auja and the Eastern Negev with Lower Egypt."¹

Further, the strategic importance of the area was tested during the invasion of Sinai. The Egyptian posts in this area, especially Rafah and Abu-'Agheila, staunchly held back the progress of the Israeli armies for a crucial period variously estimated between 36 and 72 hours.² A clear indication of Israeli intentions towards this area was given by the "New York Times" correspondent in Tel-Aviv

¹ Rosenne, Shabtai, Op.cit., p. 52, Note 1.

² Bromberger, M & S, also O'Ballance, E. and Childers, E. The Brothers Bromberger relate that Rafah held the Israeli advance until French warships, notably the "George Leygues" shelled the Rafah fortifications from the sea, opening thus the way to Israeli occupation of the town.

who, quoting from Israeli sources reported, on November 13th, 1956: "The Israelis are saying El-Arish, Abu-'Agheila and Nakhl, communication centers deep inside Sinai, the Eastern half of the lower Sinai Peninsula and the island of Tiran at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba must be retained for national security."¹

To sum up: a combination of inferences and insinuations indicate that the area east of a line running southwards from El-Arish-Quseima till Ras Abu-Mohamed on the Western tip of Sinai was - to say the least - the center of Israeli interest in the period extending from October 1956 till January-February 1957. The integration of this area into the Israeli homeland would meet Zionist territorial and economic aspirations sought since 1917. It would provide Israel with a better defendable frontier and secure the approaches of the Gulf of Aqaba. It would render the task of a further advance in the direction of the Suez Canal, if ever the need should arise for that, infinitely easier.

Political Alternatives to Annexation. In terms of Zionist irredentist desiderata, a complete or partial annexation of Sinai would, consequently, secure the immediate objectives set forth in the Statements of the Ministry of Foreign

¹ "New York Times", issue of November 13th, 1956.

Affairs, namely the insurance of freedom of navigation for Israeli shipping through Aqaba and the elimination of Fedayeen bases in Gaza and Eastern Sinai. But in case Israeli intervention failed to secure the permanent annexation of all, or part, of Sinai, what demands would Israel then seek to fulfill in addition to the Status Quo ante bellum? Ben-Gurion revealed in the Israeli Year Book of 1959/60 that Israel's objectives in Sinai were weighed up against the reaction of world opinion before the launching of the invasion, at the Cabinet meeting of October 20, 1956. The Israeli Prime Minister pointed out at that meeting that there would be a number of "forces" in the area as "will compel us to evacuate."¹ These forces ranked, in order: the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Nations, Nehru, Asia and Africa, and Ben-Gurion added that he was "more concerned about America than about all the rest."² Even while taking into account Ben-Gurion's tendency to justify, in retrospect, the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, it could still be inferred from the discussions of the Israeli Cabinet on October 20th, 1956 that the Sinai offensive was also discussed in terms of expedient "political" advantages. This could be confirmed by Ben-Gurion's recogni-

¹ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit., p. 31.

² Ibid.

tion in his November 8th address that Israel was facing "a twofold struggle, military and political, and nobody yet knows whether either of them has already ended, or with what result."¹ Ben-Gurion thus admitted the influence of political circumstances in determining the extent of Israel's achievements.

Israel's "political" alternatives to the permanent annexation of Sinai - as set forth during the last stage of Israel's withdrawal - were defined in relation to two major issues: a) the insurance of freedom of navigation in Aqaba and, eventually, the Suez Canal - preferably by way of a formal peace treaty - and b) the elimination of Egyptian control from Gaza, either through direct Israeli occupation of the Strip, or joint UN-Israeli administration, or, in the last resort, exclusive UN administration. The pursuance of these "political alternatives" started the Israeli drive for "firm guarantees" throughout January and February 1957. The political struggle that followed Israel's occupation of Sinai traces, in a way, the chronology of Israel's attempts at retaining as many advantages as prevailing circumstances made possible.

¹ "Jewish Observer, Op.cit., issue of November 16th, 1956.

CHAPTER III
THE CEASE-FIRE

A. Military Operations v.s. Political Pressures

On the desert stretches of Sinai, Israel Defense Forces were pursuing a military offensive that went through three phases, varying with the intensity of world pressure and Egypt's military resistance.

I. From October 29th, till October 30th, 1956.

From October 29th, 1700 hours, till October 30th, 1800 hours, Israeli forces were - in Major O'Ballance's terms - "sparring for an opening." They were opposed, militarily, by Egyptian defences, and diplomatically by the United States' resolution S/3710 "hastily drafted"¹ by President Eisenhower, in person, and Mr. Dulles. The resolution urged "immediate cessation of the Military action of Israel in Egypt."² The American resolution was followed by the Soviet resolution S/3717 calling upon Israel immediately to withdraw its forces behind the armistice lines. Both resolutions were blocked by the negative votes of two permanent members: France and the United Kingdom.

¹ Adams, Sherman, First Hand Report, New York, 1961, p. 255.

² UN Document S/3710.

II. From October 30th, till November 1st 1956: The Tripartite War.

At 1800 hours on October 30th, France and Britain issued a joint ultimatum summoning Egyptian and Israeli forces to withdraw ten miles from the Canal within twelve hours, Franco-British forces would then occupy key positions in Port Said, Ismailia and Suez. In short, Israel was virtually "invited" to occupy the whole Sinai Peninsula short of ten miles on the eastern bank of the Canal. Franco-British forces were, in effect, to consolidate Israel's hold of Sinai by sealing off the Peninsula from the Egyptian mainland through military occupation of Port Said, Ismailia and Suez, i.e. the main roads from Delta Egypt to Sinai.

Egypt rejected the Franco-British ultimatum, while Israel, of course, accepted it. Under the cloak of the Franco-British ultimatum, and in contradiction to the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of October 29th limiting Israeli action to the elimination of Fedayeen bases in Sinai, Israeli troops were pursuing an extensive military operation designed to achieve the occupation of the entire Sinai Peninsula.

The Franco-British ultimatum imposed a new strategy on Egypt. By October 31st, 19:30 hours, Franco-British straffing of the Egyptian airfields and military targets transformed

the Egyptian-Israeli strife into a Tripartite war against Egypt. Immediately - on October 31st, 21:00 hours - all non-engaged Egyptian units in Sinai were ordered to withdraw to the West of the Suez Canal, and reinforcements were held back. In relation to Israel, this period, described by Major O'Ballance as the "Main Battles" phase, was the most favorable for achieving Israeli military tasks in Sinai, both from a strategic and political point of view, since world attention was now focussed on Franco-British action. Thus the Israeli advance was stepped up, particularly in the direction of the Suez Canal. But Franco-British intervention introduced another dimension into the Egyptian-Israeli crisis: the traditional consideration of the East-West balance of power and spheres of influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Consequently, world reactions to the intervention were swift and violent.

In Washington, President Eisenhower declared in a Radio and Television address delivered on October 31st that the United States Government "was not consulted"¹ about the Franco-British action which he deemed "to have been taken in error."² He asserted his opposition to the use of force as an instrument for the settlement of international disputes.

¹ Department of State, United States' Policy in the Middle East, (Documents), Washington, 1957, p. 142.

² Ibid.

In the United Nations, Mr. Hammarskjold proposed to resign from the post of Secretary-General as a sign of protest against the aggression.

In London, Eden was booed by the opposition in the House of Commons. Mr. Anthony Nutting, Minister of State at the Foreign Office and responsible for United Nations and Middle East Affairs resigned from his post. This resignation was followed by that of Sir Edward Boyle from the Secretary of the Treasury. Both resignations undermined the Government's position and aroused speculations about Eden's difficulties. Moreover, the majority of the British press was either critical or vehemently opposed to the British intervention. The Labour party was waging a nationwide campaign on the theme of "Law not war." The majority of the Commonwealth countries condemned the British move. Canada issued a statement "regretting" Britain's action and asserting that she had not been consulted about it. The Prime Ministers of Pakistan, India and Ceylon condemned in a joint statement, the Anglo-French "aggression" in Egypt.

In the Security Council, the Franco-British intervention was considered as the most imminent challenge to world peace. On October 31st, the Yugoslav delegation submitted draft resolution S/3719 calling for "an emergency special session" of the General Assembly as provided in the General

Assembly's resolution on "Uniting for Peace"¹ in order to make "appropriate recommendations."² As Eden puts it, "this move by the Yugoslav delegation was fateful in its consequences."³ By submitting the Middle East crisis to the General Assembly, the permanent members, France and Britain, were dispossessed of their right of veto in the Security Council. Moreover, England, France and Israel had to face a General Assembly overwhelmingly hostile to the Tripartite intervention in Egypt.

III. From November 1st, Till November 5th, 1956.

The General Assembly convened on November 1st, 1956. On the following day, the United States' Secretary of State Department, Mr. Dulles, addressing the General Assembly, declared that Egypt's provocations "serious as they are, cannot justify the resort to armed force."⁴ Then Mr. Dulles introduced a draft resolution urging all parties to cease-fire and withdraw behind the armistice lines. But, at the conclusion of his reading of the resolution, and for the first time since the beginning of the Israeli invasion, he declared that a recommendation which merely sought to restore the status quo ante bellum was "not an adequate or

¹ Resolution 377 (v).

² UN Document S/3719.

³ Eden, Sir Anthony, Memoirs, London, 1960, p. 531.

⁴ Department of State Bulletin, issue of November 12, 1956, p. 752.

comprehensive treatment of the situation."¹ The draft resolution he submitted to the Assembly was, however, devoid of any explicit reference to a conditional withdrawal of the Israeli armed forces. The United States' policy in this respect seemed to primarily aim at the containment of the armed conflict. Dulles made it clear that "the important thing is to limit and extinguish the fighting insofar as it is possible and as promptly as possible... Then we shall turn with renewed vigor to curing the injustices out of which this trouble has arisen."²

On November 2nd, the General Assembly by a roll-call vote of 64 to 5, with 6 abstentions - one of the largest majorities in its history - adopted the United States draft resolution as resolution 997 (ES-I). The resolution urged all parties "new involved" in hostilities in the area, to agree to "an immediate cease-fire;"³ and urged the parties to the armistice agreements "promptly to withdraw all forces behind the armistice lines... and to observe scrupulously the provisions of the armistice agreements."⁴ The Secretary-General was requested to report "promptly" on the compliance with this resolution.

¹ Ibid, p. 754.

² Ibid, p. 755.

³ UN Document A/3256, also listed as document A/RES/390.

⁴ Ibid.

On the evening of the same day, November 2nd, the Egyptian representative transmitted to the Secretary-General an Aide-Memoire informing him of his Government's acceptance of the United Nations resolution 997 (ES-I) "on the condition of course that it could not implement the resolution in case attacking armies continue their aggression."¹

Eden rejected the General Assembly's resolution and submitted an alternative course of action with respect to the cease-fire. He proposed in a speech addressed to the House of Commons on November 1st, as a pre-condition to the stoppage of British and French military action in Egypt that both the Egyptian and the Israeli Governments agree to accept a "United Nations force to keep the peace," and that the United Nations decides to constitute and maintain such a force "until an Arab-Israeli peace settlement is reached" and "until satisfactory arrangements have been agreed in regard to the Suez Canal, both agreements to be guaranteed by the United Nations."² In the meantime, and until the United Nations force is constituted, Eden proposed that both combatants agree "to accept forthwith limited detachments of Anglo-French troops to be stationed

¹ UN Document A/3266.

² Hansard, 5th series, Volume 558, pp. 1857-1858.

between the combatants."¹

In the House of Commons, the Opposition vehemently criticized Eden's rejection of the United Nations resolution. But his stand gave a thrust to the Israeli military campaign in Sinai. As of November 1st, roughly half the Sinai Peninsula was under Israeli control. But the growing hostility of world opinion to the Tripartite intervention, and the mounting pressure of the United Nations' General Assembly, made Israel realize the necessity for achieving her military tasks before direct United Nations intervention, and before the American elections - momentarily occupying the American administration - ended. Israel accentuated her military operations. As from November 2nd, the Israeli forces were engaged in a race against time. At this stage, Israel seemed to be seeking a military fait-accompli of the kind it had achieved in the Negev and elsewhere during the 1948-49 war.

On November 2nd, at noon, the military governor of the Gaza Strip formally surrendered. But, it was not until November 3rd that the last defences in Khan Yunis and the Mitla Pass were silenced, and the Red Sea islands of Tiran and Sanafir occupied. The persistence of the Israeli military operations was "covered" by a delaying action in the

¹ Ibid.

United Nations. Israel's attempt at postponing the cease-fire hour was particularly aimed at securing enough time for the Israeli forces to occupy the strategic stronghold of Sharm-el-Sheikh that governs the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba, and to make effective the widely publicized Franco-British landing at Port-Said. Thus beginning November 2nd there was an unusual delay in Israel's official communications with the UN Secretary-General. Significantly, Israel's reply to the General Assembly's resolution of November 2nd, although dated November 3rd, only reached the Secretary-General on November 4th,¹ i.e. two days after his receipt of the Egyptian reply to the same request, and following the General Assembly's twin resolutions of November 4th (draft numbers A/3275 and A/3276) concerning cease-fire and the proposed United Nations Forces.

What had happened in the meantime?

Eden's suggestion in the House of Commons on November 1st, concerning the setting up of a United Nations force that would "keep peace" in the Middle East had gained momentum. As Mr. Eden puts it "this idea was taken up in

¹ The Israeli aide-memoire dated November 3rd, was listed in the United Nations documents under serial reference number A/3279 on the date of November 4th, 1956. Mr. Hammarskjold refers twice to the Israeli aide-memoire in his official report of November 4th (evening) as the "aide-memoire of 4th November 1956." (UN Document A/3287).

Assembly the next day by Mr. Lester Pearson
1 i.e. it became the theme of a Canadian
tion on November 3rd.² The Canadian Govern-
e lead in sponsoring a United Nations Force
ons would exceed the mere task of implementing
nd withdrawal operations to the long-range aim
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es. On the occasion, Mr. Lester Pearson declared
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der "to link a cease-fire to the absolute necessi-
tical settlement in Palestine and for the Suez."³
Department of External Affairs later explained
attitude by maintaining that a return to the
nte bellum was not adequate. In this respect
a's proposal that the Secretary-General be autho-
e arrangements with member governments for "a
ns Force large enough to keep (Egyptian-Israeli)
peace while a political settlement was being worked

Sir Anthony, Op.cit., pp. 535-36.
resolution A/3276, November 3, 1956.
document A/PV 562.

the General Assembly the next day by Mr. Lester Pearson and others,"¹ i.e. it became the theme of a Canadian draft resolution on November 3rd.² The Canadian Government took the lead in sponsoring a United Nations Force whose functions would exceed the mere task of implementing cease-fire and withdrawal operations to the long-range aim of working out a political settlement for the Middle East problems. In point of fact, the Canadian delegate had abstained from voting in favour of the General Assembly's resolution of November 2nd, urging immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces. On the occasion, Mr. Lester Pearson declared that the UN should use the opportunity of the Egyptian-Israeli crisis in order "to link a cease-fire to the absolute necessity of a political settlement in Palestine and for the Suez."³ The Canadian Department of External Affairs later explained the Canadian attitude by maintaining that a return to the status quo ante bellum was not adequate. In this respect it was Canada's proposal that the Secretary-General be authorized to make arrangements with member governments for "a United Nations Force large enough to keep (Egyptian-Israeli) borders at peace while a political settlement was being worked

¹ Eden, Sir Anthony, Op.cit., pp. 535-36.

² Draft resolution A/3276, November 3, 1956.

³ UN Document A/PV 562.

out."¹

In relation to the British predicament, the International Force would be Eden's face-saving device for an eventual retreat from the area. Within such considerations, Eden viewed Canada's adoption of what was originally his own suggestion, as a kind of personal success. He asserts in his memoirs that to have proposed such a force in advance of the outbreak of hostilities "would have evoked no response."² However, in the circumstances, "there was a chance, not only to create a force, but to use it to bring about a permanent settlement in the Middle East."³

Thus, on November 4th, the Canadian delegate to the United Nations headed in the General Assembly a movement aimed at "duplicating" the Afro-Asians' urge for an unconditional withdrawal from Egypt by introducing a third party in the process, and therefore, a requirement of some sort prior to the Israeli-Franco-British cease-fire and withdrawal.

On Sunday, November 4th, 1956, the General Assembly witnessed an apparent divergence in the attitudes of the Afro-Asian bloc and the Canadian sponsored bloc regarding

¹ Canadian Department of External Affairs, Canada and the United Nations 1956-1957, Ottawa, 1957, p. 21.

² Eden, Sir Anthony, Op.cit., p. 536.

³ Ibid.

the modalities of cease-fire and withdrawal of troops from Egypt. A chronological account is needed in order to understand the development of events on November 4th.

In the early morning of November 4th, two resolutions were submitted to the General Assembly. The Afro-Asian bloc submitted draft resolution A/3275 and Canada submitted draft resolution A/3276. The Canadian draft resolution requested the Secretary-General, "as a matter of priority," to submit to the General Assembly, "within forty-eight hours," a plan for the setting up of "an emergency international United Nations Force to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities"¹ in accordance with the terms of the General Assembly resolution of November 2nd, (i.e. resolution 997 ES-I). The Canadian resolution was adopted by a roll-call of 57 to 0, with 19 abstentions. Egypt alone of all Arab countries abstained from voting in favour of this resolution. Then the General Assembly, by roll-call vote of 59 to 5, with 12 abstentions, adopted the Afro-Asian resolution by which the Assembly reaffirmed its resolution of November 2nd (997 ES-I) and, "once again," called upon the parties concerned "immediately to comply with the provisions of the said resolution."² Furthermore, the Afro-Asian resolution requested the Secretary-General

¹ UN Document A/RES/391.

² UN Document A/RES/392.

to report compliance with the resolution within "twelve hours" after its adoption. Finally, it requested the Secretary-General "with the assistance of the Chief-of-Staff and the members of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, to obtain compliance of the withdrawal of all forces behind the armistice lines."¹

In short, the Afro-Asian resolution demanded immediate withdrawal of all forces and the assistance of the UNTSO in obtaining compliance of the withdrawal of these forces, while the Canadian resolution virtually drove the original resolution of November 2nd, concerning immediate cease-fire and withdrawal, into the background.

As of November 4th, the main efforts of the General Assembly centered around the composition and dispatch of the proposed United Nations Force, as the most adequate means to implement withdrawal. The Secretary-General was requested by the Canadian resolution 998 (ES-I) adopted on November 4th, to submit within 48 hours a plan for the establishment of a United Nations Force. In this way resolution 997 (ES-I) on unconditional and immediate withdrawal was relegated to the background by the evolution of events in the General Assembly.

It was at this stage, in the afternoon of November 4th, i.e. after the General Assembly's adoption of the

¹ Ibid.

Canadian draft resolution concerning UNEF, that the Secretary-General received the Israeli government's reply dated November 3rd to resolution 997 (ES-I) of November 2nd. By then, immediate and unconditional withdrawal had been in effect surpassed. The main theme of the Israeli reply was the assertion that the Israeli Government considered the Armistice Agreement with Egypt as null and void, and that "a return to the Armistice Agreement would be a return to a system which has served as a cover for the victimization, the boycott and the blockade of Israel."¹

Israel's disavowal of the Armistice Agreement at this point was meant of course to evade paragraph 2 of resolution 997 (ES-I) which - inter alia - urged the parties to the armistice "to observe scrupulously the provisions of the armistice agreement." Consequently the Israeli stand meant the delaying of the cease-fire hour urged by the Assembly's same resolution. The Israeli aide-memoire explicitly declared that "the Government of Israel suggests that paragraph 2 of the General Assembly's resolution adopted on 2 November does not serve the basic purpose of the United Nations as expressed in its Charter, to maintain international peace and security, to develop friendly relations amongst nations and to achieve international

¹ UN Document A/3279.

cooperation in solving international problems."¹ Furthermore, Israel's denial of the Armistice Agreement was hoped to lead to the substitution of a peace treaty for the repudiated Agreement. This end Israel sought to achieve through linking her withdrawal to Egypt's acceptance of her proposed peace negotiations. The Israeli aide-memoire stated that "the Government of Israel feels that the only answer to this situation is the establishment of peace between Israel and Egypt by direct negotiations between the two countries."² But, foremost of all, Israel's disavowal of the Armistice Agreement was meant to necessitate a reconsideration of the Arab-Israeli relations and particularly Israel's status. Consequently, a revision of Israel's de facto boundaries would ensue. This would open to Ben-Gurion an opportunity for restoring as much as possible of the Zionists' claims in the Sinai Peninsula, all the more so since this revision would be enforced by the military fait-accompli. From a juridical point of view, paragraph 2 of Article 5 of the Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Agreement provided for the revision of the 1949 frontiers.³ This provision was held by

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Article 5, paragraph 2 of the Agreement stipulated: "The Armistice Demarcation line is not to be construed in any sense as a political or territorial boundary, and is delineated without prejudice to the rights, claims and positions of either Party to the Armistice as regards ultimate settlement of the Palestine question." (UN Document S/1264)

Israeli authorities as a juridical assertion of Israel's right to the former international frontier with Egypt.¹ Thus, in an attempt to stabilize the de facto situation to Israel's advantage, the Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a press conference in Jerusalem on the 4th of November 1956 in which he declared that "the Armistice Agreement with Egypt is dead and Israel does not intend to revive it."² To make the claim effective, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization to order UNTSO personnel out of the Gaza area on the grounds that the Armistice Agreement no longer had validity.³ But Mr. Hammarskjold took a firm stand against any withdrawal and advised General Burns that since the duties of UNTSO under the Armistice Agreement were not suspended, the personnel of UNTSO were required to remain at their posts.⁴ On the same day, the Secretary-General

¹ Rosenne's legal interpretation of the Egyptian-Israeli Agreement in "Israel's Armistice Agreements with the Arab States," p. 49. See Chapter one.

² "Jewish Observer," issue of November 9, 1956.

³ Mr. Hammarskjold's report A/3284.

⁴ General Burns, "Between Arab and Israeli, Op.cit.," p. 184.

reported on the implementation of the resolutions of November 2nd and 4th, 1956. He declared that only Egypt had communicated her acceptance of the cease-fire resolution of November 4th. Later on that day, the Secretary-General submitted his first report on the plan for an international United Nations Force. Mr. Hammarskjold suggested the setting up of a United Nations Command for the purpose in question. The first elements of such a command were to be drawn from the staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. He also proposed that the Assembly should further appoint "on an emergency basis."¹ Major General E.L.M. Burns, the Chief-of-Staff of the UNTSO, to be chief of the new command. Finally, he proposed that the necessary troops "should not be drawn from countries which are permanent members of the Security Council."²

The General Assembly approved Mr. Hammarskjold's plan on November 5th as resolution 1000 (ES-I), by roll-call vote of 57 to 0, with 19 abstentions. The Egyptian delegate, once more, abstained from voting in favour of this resolution. The French and British also abstained from approving Hammarskjold's plan on the formation of International Force. But, later in the same day, the Egyptian

¹ UN Document A/3289.

² Ibid.

Foreign Minister sent the Secretary-General a cablegram informing him that "the Egyptian Government accepts the resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 5th, 1956,"¹ i.e. resolution 1000 (ES-I) establishing a United Nations Command. Later, the Secretary-General considered, in his report of November 20th, that Egypt had "accepted the Force in principle"² by accepting resolution 1000 (ES-I) on the establishment of a United Nations Command.

In the evening of November 4th, the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs had received Mr. Hammarskjold's cable requesting Israel to bring to a halt "all hostile military actions in the area by 20:00 GMT, Sunday 4th, November 1956."³ By then, November 4th, Israeli forces had not yet subdued the Egyptian garrison at Sharm el-Sheikh commanding the sea-route through Aqaba. Also, the Franco-British landing had not materialised yet. Consequently, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent an evasive reply to the Secretary-General's request for a cease-fire. The Israeli reply requested an apriori clarification of four points as a pre-condition to the cease-fire, namely

¹ UN Document A/3295.

² UN Document A/3375.

³ UN Document A/3287.

whether Egypt: a) Still maintained that it was in a state of war with Israel. b) Was prepared to negotiate with Israel with a view to the establishment of peace. c) Agreed to cease its economic boycott against Israel. d) Agreed to recall Fedayeen units under her control in other Arab countries.

In their turn, the representatives of France and the United Kingdom informed the Secretary-General that they were willing to respond to the Canadian sponsored resolution and, particularly, that they "warmly" welcome the idea which "seems to underlie" the request to the Secretary-General in the resolution sponsored by Canada, that an international force should be interpolated as a shield between Israel and Egypt, "pending a Palestine settlement and a settlement of the question of the Suez Canal."¹

However, Mr. Eden reluctantly accepted the UN plan for the projected International Force. He had hoped the UN would play an "active physical part"² in the Middle East by compelling Egypt to accept freedom of passage in the Canal as an "international obligation."³ Eden mentions that on November 4th, the reports reaching him from the United Nations "indicated that the purpose and composition

¹ UN Document A/3293.

² Eden, Sir Anthony, Op.cit., p. 53.

³ Ibid.

of the force might not conform to our ideas."¹ Consequently, Sir Pierson Dixon was instructed to present Britain's reservations about the resolution and abstain on the vote if they were not met. Eden also thought that a 24 hour postponement of the paratroop landings in Port Said "would give Egypt and Israel an opportunity to accept a United Nations force and allow time for the General Assembly to consider whether the Anglo-French forces might be accepted as its advance guard."² Thus, by November 4th, the functions of the United Nations Force were still at issue. The United Nations resolution on UNEF did not meet all of Eden's requirements, and it is in this light that Eden's insistence on landing troops in the Canal Zone should be viewed. By securing a foothold on the Canal, Eden would secure a better bargaining position from which he could dictate his conditions for the composition and functions of the United Nations Force. Furthermore, the Franco-British landing would make the dispatch of an International Force to Egypt inevitable, and would force Egypt's acceptance of the United Nations scheme. Likewise, by occupying Sharm-el-Sheikh, Israel secured a privileged position for negotiating the future of navigation in the Aqaba Straits.

¹ Ibid, p. 551.

² Ibid.

But the international repercussions of Israel's evasion of the cease-fire resolutions and the Franco-British persistence in their military operations, were driving the Middle East crisis to a climax. This climax was soon reached on Monday morning, 5 November, when French and British paratroopers landed in Port-Fuad and Port-Said, and, at the same time, Israeli forces captured Sharm el-Sheikh thus completing their control over the whole Sinai peninsula.

That same night, the military situation in Egypt was eclipsed by the news of a threatening Soviet statement. Moscow had intervened.

b) The World Crisis: November 5th - November 7th, 1956.

By November 5th, political pressures got the upper-hand over military operations in Egypt. Radio Moscow broadcast the texts of three, almost identical notes, sent by the Soviet Premier Bulganin to the Prime Ministers of Israel, England and France. The Message addressed to Ben-Gurion pointed out that "the Government of Israel is criminally and irresponsibly playing with the fate of the world, with the fate of its own people... such as can not but leave its mark on the future of Israel and places in question the very existence of Israel as a state."¹ Bulganin announced

¹ Text as reproduced in the "Israeli Government Year Book," of 1959/60, p. 34.

in his letter that, in view of the situation, the "Soviet Government has asked its Ambassador in Tel-Aviv to leave Israel and set out for Moscow without delay."¹ And, he added: "we hope that the Government of Israel will fully understand and appreciate this warning of our."²

Parallel to the Soviet threatening message, the United States Government, and President Eisenhower in person, were exerting a strong pressure on Israel to comply with the General Assembly's resolution on cease-fire and withdrawal. Eden mentions that he knew, on November 6th, that "the heaviest pressure had been put upon Israel during the last forty-eight hours to accept the Assembly's resolution."³ He asserts that the United States Government had applied pressures and given "promises" too, in order to induce Israel into compliance with the resolutions of the General Assembly. According to Eden, President Eisenhower sent a "personal appeal" to Ben-Gurion in which he intimated that once Israel had withdrawn from Egypt, "new and energetic steps would be taken to solve the basic problems which had given rise to

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Eden, Sir Anthony, Op.cit., pp. 557-558.

the present difficulty."¹ In this letter, President Eisenhower actually intimated to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion that he need not "recall the various elements of US policy of support to Israel in so many ways."² He added: "it is in this context that I urge you to comply with the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly."³

The impression of Eisenhower's letter was recorded by Ben-Gurion in person in the Israeli Year Book of 1959/60. He described the letter as "couched in courteous even friendly terms but firmly demanding a withdrawal to the armistice lines."⁴ The "New York Times" asserted that the letter was given "much greater force"⁵ by a verbal warning transmitted through the US Ambassador to Israel. The "New York Times" related that the American Ambassador "gave Mr. Ben-Gurion a strong inference that unless Israeli forces withdrew from Egypt, public opinion in the US would be so adverse that private contributions to Israel would

¹ Ibid.

² Text as reproduced in the "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, pp. 35-36.

³ Ibid., p. 35.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "New York Times," issue of November 10th, 1956.

dwindle."¹ Almost simultaneously the Israeli Minister in Washington - at the time, the Ambassador was in Israel for consultations - was summoned to the State Department where he was told by the Under-Secretary (textually as recorded by Mr. Ben-Gurion): "we are on the brink of war. Israel's refusal to comply with the Assembly's decision is endangering the peace of the world. Israel's attitude will inevitably lead to grave consequences, such as the stoppage of all governmental and private aid to Israel and sanctions by the United Nations, and perhaps even expulsion from the United Nations Organization."²

Along with American pressure on Israel, President Eisenhower was exerting a strong moral pressure on the British Government to compel it to accept the cease-fire resolutions. But, by November 5th, the function and composition of the UN force were, with relation to Eden's views, still at issue. He asserts in his Memoirs that "throughout the day of November 5th, we were being continually pressed to accept a United Nations command in the Suez area as meeting all our conditions for a cease-fire. This it did not do."³

¹ Ibid.

² "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, p. 35.

³ Eden, Sir Anthony, Op.cit., p. 554.

c) The Cease-fire Declaration

Israel, having accomplished its military tasks by November 5th, was the first country to yield to pressure. On this day, the Israeli representative transmitted to the Secretary-General a cable from his government, dated November 6th, 01:46 hours (Jerusalem time) informing him that "Israel agrees unconditionally to cease-fire."¹

The Israeli cease-fire had made the Franco-British "police action" preposterous. In Port-Said and the Suez Canal, Egyptian resistance lasting more than expected, contributed in exposing the Franco-British intervention to a hostile world opinion.

Within the Western camp, the Franco-British persistence was endangering the Nato alliance and widening the rift between them and their powerful partner, the United States. The re-election of President Eisenhower on November 6th by a large majority was a clear indication of the continuation of the United States policy of opposition to the Tripartite aggression. Eden relates that immediately after the re-election of President Eisenhower, he received a telephone call from him. This call was followed on the same day - November 6th - by a cable urging him to accept "the United Nations plan for an international force... in order to prevent

¹ UN Document A/3301.

what he considered to be developments of the greatest gravity in Egypt."¹

In the United Nations, the overwhelming majority that condemned the aggression proved the unpopularity of the Israeli-Franco-British military action. France and Britain were morally isolated. The majority of the Commonwealth countries, too, were opposed to the Franco-British intervention. India took the lead in promoting the Afro-Asian resolutions condemning the aggression. At home, in England, Labour opposition was coupled with the threat of a Tory split-up.

The blowing up of the oil pipelines in Syria, had seriously diminished Britain's oil supplies. On the other hand, the blocking of the Suez Canal had considerably raised transport costs and freight rates. A most serious threat was confronting Britain's economy as a result of the run on the pound that developed in the world's financial markets. The gold and dollar reserves of the United Kingdom fell by \$279 million in November 1956. This amount represented about 15% of the total gold and dollar reserves of England.

On November 6th, the United Kingdom and France notified the United Nations Secretary-General that cease-fire would be effective at midnight, 6-7 November 1956.

¹ Eden, Sir Anthony, Op.cit., p. 561.

CHAPTER IV

INITIAL WITHDRAWAL

November 8th, 1956 - January 22, 1957

a) Israeli Irredentism and Withdrawal Pledge

The immediate result of world pressure on Israel was manifested in Ben-Gurion's retreat from the position he assumed in his victory speech of November 7th with regard to the Sinai Peninsula. By November 8th, Ben-Gurion was eager to appease world reactions to the irredentist insinuations broached in his address of November 7th. He asserted to President Eisenhower, in a message dated November 8th, that he had "never planned to annex the Sinai Desert."¹ He also gave the same assurance in his reply to Mr. Bulganin's letter of November 5th. Moreover, Ben-Gurion affirmed, in his letter to President Eisenhower that Israeli forces will "willingly" withdraw as soon as "suitable arrangements have been made by the United Nations for the entry of an international force into the Suez Canal zone."²

Thus, November 8th - officially at least - marked the

¹ "Jewish Observer," issue of November 16th, 1956.

² Text as quoted by Ben-Gurion in his midnight speech of November 8th, 1956 and reproduced in the "Jewish Observer," issue of November 16th, 1956.

recession of Israel's optimum irredentist desiderata in Sinai. But, to what extent? Ben-Gurion's letter of November 8th to President Eisenhower did not specify, nor even refer to the area that would be covered by Israeli compliance with UN resolutions. This evasion becomes significant if contrasted with the General Assembly resolutions of November 7th, November 4th and November 2nd calling upon Israel to withdraw all forces "behind the armistice lines." Moreover, if we remember that Ben-Gurion insisted on November 7th that "on no account" would Israel agree to the stationing of a foreign force "no matter how it is called" - by hypothesis including UNEF - in her territory or "in any of the area occupied by her," then Ben-Gurion's specific reference to the entry of the UN force to the "Suez Canal Zone," raises another question mark as to the extent of Israel's "willful" compliance with the UN withdrawal resolutions, at least at the time. Actually, it was not until December 3rd that Israel officially communicated to the Secretary-General her acceptance to withdraw to a distance of "50 kilometers" to the East of the Canal - a withdrawal which was not completed, on the field, until December 22nd, i.e. at the rate of 2 kilometers and a half per day.

The Israeli reluctant withdrawal throughout November and early December 1956 seemed to be aimed at providing

Israel with a breathing spell needed for an appropriate re-orientation of Israeli claims over Sinai, in the light of prevailing political circumstances. Thus, Israeli compliance with the withdrawal resolutions was adjusted, throughout the Franco-British occupation, to the pace of the Franco-British compliance with the same resolutions. In fact, the withdrawal of Franco-British forces, monopolizing world attention and UN efforts at this period as they did, "covered" Israel's delay in Sinai.

Britain and France held themselves bound by the Argentina sponsored resolution of November 7th, 1956 to which they had voted. This resolution accepted the Secretary-General's plan for the Emergency Force, established the Advisory Committee and, in Mr. Eden's interpretation, allowed the Franco-British forces "to remain at Port-Said while the United Nations force was built up."¹ Consequently, Britain and France considered, in Eden's terms, that they "were committed to the withdrawal of (our) forces from the Canal, but not by any particular date."² Actually, Eden still hoped to obtain "an international agreement for the Canal"³ and he attempted to use the withdrawal issue as a

¹ Eden, Sir Anthony, Op.cit., p. 564.

² Ibid t., p. 564.

³ Ibid t., p. 543.

lever with which to compel Egypt to negotiate a Suez settlement. The decisive test of strength between Egypt, backed by the Afro-Asian and Soviet blocs, on one side, and the West European bloc on the other, came in the vote on the "Spaak amendment." Belgium's Foreign Minister Henri Spaak, backed by the West European bloc, moved on November 23rd to strike out the call for "withdrawal forthwith" from an Afro-Asian resolution presented the same day. The "Spaak amendment" was not carried and the Afro-Asian resolution¹ was adopted by a roll-call vote of 63 to 5 against - including France, Britain and Israel - with 10 abstentions. The Assembly's rebuff of the Spaak move, added strength to the United States' insistence on withdrawal first and Egypt's refusal to allow any Canal clearance before completion of Franco-British withdrawal, and considerably decreased the Franco-British bargaining position. Both countries concluded they had no alternative but to withdraw. On December 3rd France and Britain confirmed to the Secretary-General their intention to complete the withdrawal of their forces. On the same day, the Israeli representative announced his Government's decision to withdraw Israeli troops to a distance of some 50 kilometers "along the length of the Canal."² On December 22nd the last Anglo-

¹ UN Document A/RES/410.

² UN Document A/3500.

French transport sailed from Port-Said. Also on the same day, the announced initial withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Canal area ended.

In relation to Israel, the Franco-British unconditional evacuation of the Canal zone definitely reduced Israel's chances to remain in Sinai permanently. Non-compliance with the UN withdrawal resolution was now increasingly unlikely to succeed. Moreover, Franco-British evacuation meant the loss of the Canal as an international buffer with Egypt, and the loss of hope for the passage of Israeli shipping through the Canal. On the other hand, the opening of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping became more than ever an imperative of the Israeli invasion of Sinai. Hence the necessity of securing Israeli claims in Eastern Sinai, as a whole.

But, at this juncture, a proof of good will was needed in order to demonstrate to world public opinion Israel's respect for UN resolutions.

b) The "Negotiated" Withdrawal

Israel's "unnegotiated" retreat to a distance of 50 kilometers to the East of the Canal ended, on the field, on December 22, 1956. It was to be followed by another stage of "negotiated" withdrawal that ended on January 22nd, 1957.

On December 21st, the Israeli representative at the UN

presented to the Secretary-General a withdrawal schedule in two phases. The first phase would secure the removal of all Israeli forces "west of El-Arish" by the end of the first week in January 1957. The second phase would involve "full withdrawal" at an unstated date. This plan revealed:

- a) the recession of Israel's irredentist claims to Eastern Sinai;
- b) the special importance that Israel attached to that part of Sinai situated to the "east of El-Arish;"
- c) Israel's desire to separate the settlement of the future of this area from her willful compliance with the General Assembly resolutions. In this context, it is worth noting that the Israeli plan avoided any reference to the phraseology of the General Assembly resolutions, namely to the request for withdrawal "behind the Armistice Line."

The first phase of the Israeli withdrawal plan was carried out in stages. Each stage required negotiations on two levels: at the United Nations, between the Secretary-General and the Israeli representative, and in the field between the Commander-in-Chief of UNEF and the Commander of the Israeli expedition. Throughout these negotiations - as General Burns asserts - it became apparent that the Israelis were "inclined to drag their feet."¹

In the meantime, Israel was undertaking diplomatic

¹ Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 240.

démarches with a view to securing concessions from Egypt.

I. The Drive for "Guaranties"

As a primary "political" objective, Israel sought to obtain recognition embodied in a formal instrument. With this aim in view, Israeli diplomacy started a "peace offensive" intended to substitute a peace treaty for the Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Agreement unilaterally revoked by Israel after the Sinai invasion. This "peace offensive" was activated in November 1956 and took the form of an Israeli demand for a direct confrontation with Egypt.¹

The significance of the Israeli peace campaign at this stage of the Sinai crisis was later revealed by the Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Mr. Walter Eytan. Israel, according to Eytan, wanted to throw the UN weight behind a peace resolution in the tradition of the resolution presented at the 7th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1952, urging both Egyptian and Israeli governments "to enter at an early date, without prejudice to their respective rights and claims, into direct negotiations"²

¹ On November 5th, 1956 Ben-Gurion declared to the "New York Times": "if Nasser wishes peace, let him send his authorized representative to meet our request" ("New York Times," issue of November 6, 1956). This "peace appeal" was renewed in Ben-Gurion's Knesset speech of November 7th and his midnight broadcast of November 8th.

² Eytan, Walter, "The First Ten Years, London, 1958, p. 105.

for the establishment of a peace settlement. In November 1956, such a settlement would have been endorsed by the Israeli military fait-accompli in Sinai. But, in the circumstances, the Israeli demarches lacked the support of the United Nations General Assembly whose majority was requesting compliance with the withdrawal resolutions first.

Egypt's refusal to deal with Israel except through the channel of the United Nations and on the basis of the General Assembly's resolutions urging withdrawal of foreign troops from her territory, thwarted the Israeli request for direct peace negotiations. Moreover, the attitude of the United States Government was explicitly unfavourable to the Israeli demarche. This attitude was outlined by Mr. Dulles in the news conference held on December 18th, 1956. Answering a question concerning the existing chances of a peace settlement between the Arab states and Israel, he declared: "the atmosphere at the present moment is not... conducive to bringing about such a settlement at an early date."¹

The unsuccessful peace campaign induced Israel to resort to a more practicable alternative. The new Israeli approach attempted at installing a "peace situation" short

¹ Department of State press release 624, December 18th, 1956. (quoted in New York Times, December 19th, 1956).

of a formal peace treaty. Israel sought to reach this end through the enlargement of the UNEF powers so as to turn it into a peace enforcing corps whose withdrawal from Egypt would be subjected to the termination of the state of war. Such a broadening of the functions of the Force was vehemently opposed by Egypt, backed by the Afro-Asian and Communist blocs. This issue became a decisive factor in determining Israel's willingness to withdraw.¹

The Israeli Government, throughout the "good will" withdrawal, omitted any specification of the area to be covered by the projected withdrawal. In all its communications with the Secretary-General, the Israeli Government avoided any literal commitment to the Assembly's terms of reference concerning withdrawal "behind the Armistice line" and concentrated instead on withdrawal from "Egypt". The phrasing of the Israeli communiques on compliance with the Assembly's resolutions presumably reflected, both, Ben-Gurion's consideration of the Armistice Agreement as being "null and void" and his personal conception of the territorial limits of "Egypt proper." Thus, on November 8th, the Israeli representative informed the Secretary-General that Israeli forces would be withdrawn from "Egypt"

¹ This aspect of the Force is discussed separately, in a later part of this chapter.

upon conclusion of "satisfactory arrangements"¹ concerning the Emergency Force. On the same day, Ben-Gurion asserted to President Eisenhower that Israeli forces would withdraw - without specifying from which territory - upon entry of UNEF to the "Suez Canal area." On November 21st, an Israeli aide-memoire transmitted to the Secretary-General reiterated Israel's promise to withdraw her forces "from Egypt" upon the conclusion of "satisfactory arrangements"² with the United Nations in connexion with the Emergency Force. Moreover, despite repeated requests from the Secretary-General, UN observers and UNTSO observers were forbidden entry to the Gaza Strip by Israeli occupation authorities. Finally, on January 14th, 1957, the representative of Israel transmitted to the Secretary-General a communique stating that by January 22nd, the "Sinai Desert" will be "entirely evacuated"³ by Israel forces "with the exception of the Sharm el-Sheikh area."⁴ In connexion with the evacuation of this area, the communique asserted Israel's willingness "to enter forthwith into conversations with the Secretary-General."⁵ The Israeli attitude

¹ UN Document A/3320.

² UN Document A/3384.

³ UN Document A/3500.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

led the Secretary-General to remark, in his report of January 15th, 1957 that "it is to be noted... that the Israel communication is silent about withdrawal from the Gaza Strip which... falls on the Egyptian side of the armistice demarcation line."¹ He further noticed that the Assembly's resolutions made it clear that the withdrawal of Israeli forces "must be behind the armistice line as it has been established in the Egypt-Israel agreement."² In answer to the remarks made by the Secretary-General, Mrs. Golda Meir declared in a speech delivered to the General Assembly on January 17th 1957, that throughout her talks with the Secretary-General "it was mutually understood at all times that the Sharm el-Sheikh and Gaza areas were reserved for discussions at a later stage in the withdrawal process."³ Mrs. Meir's statement was a clear indication of Israel's intention of separating Gaza and Eastern Sinai from the area covered by Israel's promise of withdrawal.

Israel's reluctance to comply with the resolutions of the General Assembly was denounced by the majority of the Assembly. The representative of Ceylon submitted a joint draft resolution on behalf of 25 members at the Assembly's meeting of January 17th, 1957. By this, the

¹ Ibid.,

² Ibid.

³ UN Document A/PV 638.

General Assembly, recalling its previous resolutions on withdrawal, would: 1) note with regret and concern the failure of Israel to comply with those resolutions; and 2) request the Secretary-General to continue his efforts for securing the complete withdrawal of Israel in pursuance thereof and to report on such completion within five days. On January 19th, the Assembly adopted the draft resolution by 74 votes to 2, with 2 abstentions, as resolution 1123 (x1)¹.

Despite UN pressure, Israel maintained her troops in the Gaza Strip and at the Sharm el-Sheikh area, along the Gulf of Aqaba, evacuating by January 22nd only the part of Sinai previously designated by the Aide-Memoire of January 14th, 1957.

II. The UNEF Problems

Israel's diplomatic demarches at the United Nations centered around two principal aspects of the Emergency Force: the legal and the strategic, i.e. the functions of the projected forces and their location. Israeli diplomacy dealt with both issues with a view to securing for Israel as many concessions as possible from the General Assembly - the legislative authority on UNEF questions - through active

¹ Also listed as UN Document A/3501/Rev. 1.

lobbying both inside and outside the United Nations. These concessions were envisaged in support of Israel's claims in the Sharm el-Sheikh and Gaza areas.

1) Functions of UNEF: It was clear that the General Assembly, in its resolution of November 5th, 1956 (1000 ES-1) had wished to reserve to itself the full determination of the tasks of the International Force, and of the legal basis on which it should function. The particular circumstances in which the Emergency Force was formed did not allow the Secretary-General to elaborate in details all the aspects and implications of the UNEF, particularly its post-withdrawal assignment. The Secretary-General admitted in his report of November 6th, that on "several matters" connected with the functions of the Force, "it has been necessary to leave the question open."¹ He explained that this resulted from "a lack of time" and "the need for further study."²

Egypt requested unequivocal clarifications regarding the function and deployment of the UNEF. Egypt's Foreign Minister, Dr. Fawzi, explained in his meetings with General Burns on November 8th and 9th, 1956, the functions of the Force as being "the carrying out of the resolutions of the

¹ UN Document A/3302.

² Ibid.

General Assembly."¹ In this connexion, he requested from the Commander-in-Chief of UNEF clear answers to the following points: a) if it was understood that when the force would reach the Armistice Demarcation Line, the areas to be occupied by the Force would be agreed to by the parties concerned; b) the duration of the stay of the Force in the area of the Armistice Demarcation Line, c) the function of the Force in Port-Said after the withdrawal of the Anglo-French forces. The Commander-in-Chief reveals that, in particular, Egypt was demanding unequivocal statement on the status juris of the Force, specifically that the Force would not have the powers of civil administration concurring to an invading army in occupied territory.

The status of the Force was clarified by the Secretary-General in his second report on the setting up of the Force. In this report, he noted that the Assembly had decided in its resolution of November 5th, that the Force should be set up on the basis of principles reflected in the constitution of the United Nations itself, with its responsible officers appointed by the United Nations and fully independent of the policies of any nation. The Secretary-General pointed out that the recruitment procedure for officers authorized in resolution 1000 (ES-I) afforded an important

¹ Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 197.

indication of the character of the Force to be set up: "on the one hand, the independence of the Chief-of-Command in recruiting officers is recognized. On the other hand, the principle is established that the Force should be recruited from Member States other than the permanent members of the Security Council."¹ A closer analysis of the concept of the UNEF also indicates that "the Assembly intends that the Force should be of a temporary nature, the length of its assignment being determined by the needs arising out of the present conflict."² The Secretary-General asserted further that "there is no intent in the establishment of the Force to influence the military balance in the present conflict and, thereby, the political balance affecting efforts to settle the conflict."³ Then, the Secretary-General defined the functions of the force. He noted that while the General Assembly was enabled to establish the Force "with the consent" of those parties which contributed units to the Force, it could not request the Force "to be stationed or operate on the territory of a given country without the consent of the Government of that country;"⁴ it followed that the functions of the Force

¹ UN Document A/3302.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

would be to enter Egyptian territory "with the consent of the Egyptian Government, in order to help maintain quiet during and after the withdrawal of non-Egyptian troops."¹ Consequently the Force would be "more than an observers' corps, but in no way a military force temporarily controlling the territory in which it is stationed."²

A new element in the functioning of the UN Force was introduced on the initiative of Argentina and Denmark. Both countries sponsored a draft resolution establishing "an Advisory Committee" to the Force composed of one representative from each of the following countries: Brazil, Canada, Ceylon, Colombia, India, Norway and Pakistan. This Committee, whose Chairman would be the Secretary-General, was requested to undertake "the development of those aspects of the planning for the force and its operation not already dealt with by the General Assembly."³ Paragraph 9 of the same resolution stipulated that, in the performance of its duties, the Advisory Committee shall be empowered to request the convening of the General Assembly and to report to the Assembly "whenever matters arise which, in its opinion are of such urgency and importance as to require consideration

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ UN Document A/3308.

by the Assembly itself."¹

The Advisory Committee, in effect, assumed a concurrent authority of a legislative and executive nature with that of the General Assembly. The formation of the Committee was considered by Egypt as providing for an increase in the authority and functions of the UNEF. The Egyptian representative was instructed to abstain from voting in favour of this resolution.

The Egyptian Government, consistent with its original attitude requesting "immediate" and "unconditional" withdrawal of the invading forces from Egypt, backed the Afro-Asian resolutions to that effect. The Afro-Asian bloc, acting parallel to the Western countries but in apparent divergence with them as to the modalities of withdrawal, introduced draft resolution A/3309 calling "once again" upon Israel "immediately to withdraw all its forces behind the armistice line"² and calling "once again" upon Britain and France "immediately to withdraw all their forces from Egyptian territory."³ The Afro-Asian draft resolution was adopted by 65 votes to 10, Egypt voting in favour. The attitude of the invading countries towards the Assembly's

¹ Ibid.

² UN Document A/3309.

³ Ibid.

resolutions is worth noting. In their replies to the UN resolutions, Britain, France and Israel showed more willingness to comply with the Western-sponsored resolutions requesting withdrawal under the supervision of UNEF, than with the Afro-Asian sponsored resolutions urging immediate withdrawal. This was reflected in the respective votes of the interested parties. Egypt backed the Afro-Asian resolutions and abstained from voting in favour of the resolutions concerning the formation of UNEF. Britain, France and Israel voted against the Afro-Asian sponsored resolutions requesting immediate withdrawal, and abstained from voting in favour of the UNEF resolutions till November 7th, i.e. till Argentina and Denmark introduced draft resolution A/3308 establishing the Advisory Committee. From then on, the opposition of the invading countries to "immediate" withdrawal took the form of linking withdrawal with the competence of UNEF troops. This was explicitly stated in the replies of all three countries to the Aide-Memoire transmitted to them by the Secretary-General on November 19th urging compliance with the General Assembly's resolutions. Both the French and British Governments expressed their readiness to withdraw their troops as soon as the UNEF would be in a position "to assume effectively the tasks assigned to it under the Assembly resolution."¹ The Israeli Government asserted

¹ UN Document A/3384.

in its turn that it would withdraw its troops upon the conclusion of "satisfactory arrangements" with the United Nations in connexion with the Emergency Force. This was particularly significant due to Egypt's opposition to the unqualified entrance of UNEF troops to her territory, and to her vetoing of the participation in the UNEF of contingents from countries member in the British Commonwealth or in military alliances in which Britain is a partner.¹

The necessity of clarifying the issues raised by Egypt in connexion with the function, location and formation of the UNEF, led the Secretary-General to fly to Cairo on November 16th, 1956. There, he undertook extensive negotiations with President Nasser and Dr. Fawzi on the proposed bases governing Egypt's relations with the UNEF. The results of these negotiations were published in an Aide-Memoire annexed to the Secretary-General's report of November 20th, 1956. The Egyptian Government notably declared that "when exercising its sovereign rights on any matter concerning the presence and functioning of UNEF, it would be guided, in good faith, by its acceptance of the General Assembly resolution 394 of 5 November 1956."² This resolution

¹ Egypt was particularly opposed to the participation of troops from Pakistan and Canada. After considerable pressure from General Burns and Mr. Hammarskjold in person, Egypt consented to Canada's participation in the UNEF, but declined to accept Pakistani contingents.

² UN Document A/3375.

pertained to the establishment of a United Nations Command for an emergency international Force "to secure and supervise" the cessation of hostilities, and the appointment of the UNTSO Chief-of-Staff, Major-General E.L.M. Burns, "on an emergency basis," as the Chief of the new Command authorized, by the same resolution, to recruit "a limited number of officers" from UNTSO and from various Member States "other than the permanent members of the Security Council."¹

The United Nations took note of the Egyptian declaration and asserted, in return, that the activities of UNEF would be guided, "in good faith" by the task established for the Force in Resolutions 394 - establishing a UN Command - and 395 - by which the General Assembly approved the principle that it could not request the Force "to be stationed or operate" on the territory of a given country "without the consent of the Government of that country." Furthermore, the United Nations, "understanding this to correspond to the wishes of the Government of Egypt,"² reaffirmed its willingness "to maintain the UNEF until its task is completed."³ This aspect of the Force was of a special importance to Israel, and raised the question of

¹ UN Document A/3354 (also listed as document A/Res/394).

² UN Document A/3375, Op.cit.

³ Ibid.

determining the authority responsible for terminating the assignment of the UNEF. Israel sought to subject it to the General Assembly in order to avoid leaving this right to the discretionary judgment of the Egyptian Government. At this point, Israel's attitude towards the Emergency Force, since its formation, is worth recapitulating. Throughout November 1956, and prior to Egypt's acceptance of UNEF contingents on her territory, Israel was linking the withdrawal of her troops upon the conclusion of "satisfactory arrangements" with the United Nations in connexion with the Force. These were defined on November 21st, 1956 as being the arrangements which would "ensure Israel's security against the recurrence of the threat or danger of attack, and against acts of belligerency by land or sea."¹ Following the entrance of UNEF troops into Egypt, Israel became interested in determining the "duration of the tenure" of the Force, and in designating the General Assembly as the sole authority responsible for terminating the tasks of the Force. This legal aspect of the function of the Force became the subject of a special inquiry on the part of Israel. On January 23rd, 1957, the Israeli representative transmitted to the Secretary-General an Aide-Memoire in which he stated, inter alia, that if UNEF was

¹ UN Document A/3384.

to carry on the functions assigned to it by the UN resolutions, then, "above all," more clarity and precision were needed in defining "the duration of its tenure and the conditions for the terminations of its assignments."¹ Specifically, Israel was insisting upon subjecting the withdrawal of UNEF troops from the Aqaba Straits and the Sharm el-Sheikh area to the consent of the General Assembly, as the minimum acceptable condition for an eventual withdrawal of her troops from the area. This was further complemented by an explicit demand to maintain the Force on Egyptian soil "until" a peace settlement was reached with Egypt.

Israel's attempt to modify the UNEF status was strongly opposed by Egypt, backed by the Afro-Asian and Soviet blocs. This led Israel to request that the withdrawal of the Emergency forces from Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh be subjected to the prior approval of the General Assembly. On this question, the Secretary-General declared, on February 26th, 1957, that "an indicated procedure" would be "to inform the Advisory Committee on the United Nations Emergency Force, which would determine whether the matter should be brought to the attention of the Assembly."² The

¹ UN Document A/3511.

² UN Document A/3563.

termination of the UNEF assignment was thus indirectly linked to the matters which "are of such urgency and importance as to require consideration by the General Assembly itself," as stipulated by paragraph 9 of resolution 1001 (ES-I) of November 7th, 1956.

Immediately after its establishment, the Advisory Committee had taken in charge the functions entrusted to it by virtue of Resolution 1001. The Committee - as reported by the Secretary-General - approved the interpretations of the Secretary-General on the function and location of the UNEF, as stated in his reply to questions addressed by the Government of Egypt between November 7th and November 20th, 1956. The Secretary-General mentions that after approving these interpretations "the Advisory Committee recommended that the Secretary-General should proceed to start the transfer of the United Nations Emergency Force."¹

The various aspects of the operation of the Force that had not been dealt with by the General Assembly were decided in a series of meetings between the Advisory Committee and the Secretary General. The United Nations Year Book of 1956 relates that "all important policy decisions were taken with that Committee's concurrence."²

¹ UN Document A/3375.

² "United Nations Year Book," 1956, UN publications, p. 41.

2) Location of UNEF

The problem of the location of the UNEF troops was the object of special attention by both Egypt and Israel.

The General Assembly's resolution in this respect stipulated that while the Assembly was enabled to establish the Force, it "could not request the Force to be stationed or operate on the territory of a given country without the consent of the Government of that country."¹ In his report of November 7th, the Secretary General stated that the functions of the Emergency Force would be to enter Egyptian territory with the consent of the Egyptian Government, and to secure compliance with the terms of the General Assembly resolution of 2 November 1956. This would mean that the functions of the Force could be assumed to cover an area "extending roughly from the Suez Canal to the Armistice Demarcation Line."² In the discussion that followed the reading of the report, the Secretary-General made an important clarification concerning the future location of the UNEF. He asserted that "United Nations activities will have to start close to the Suez Canal, but that after the expected compliance with the recommendations of the General Assembly, they would end up at the Armistice Demarcation

¹ UN Document A/3302.

² Ibid.

Line."¹

The Egyptians discussed the deployment of the UNEF troops in the meetings held between Dr. Fawzi and General Burns on November 8th and 9th, 1956. General Burns reports that Dr. Fawzi intimated, in these meetings, that "the force would commence to operate close to the Canal, and would end up, in accordance with the General Assembly resolution at the Armistice Demarcation Line."² At this stage, the Egyptian authorities were eager to remove the force away from the Suez Canal as far as possible, preferably to the Demarcation Line. The Egyptian Government aimed at insulating the clearance of the Canal from the UNEF functions. Moreover, the Egyptian Government suspected that the UNEF might remain in Port Said and along the Canal after the British and French had withdrawn, and would constitute the international control which the British and French had been demanding since the Canal had been nationalized. Egypt sought to prevent the emergence of such a de facto international control of the Canal by subjecting the stationing of the UNEF in Egyptian territory to the agreement of "the parties concerned." In this respect, General Burns reveals that there was considerable argument between the Secretary-

¹ UN Document A/PV-567,

² Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 197.

General and the Egyptian Government over the powers which were given to Egypt by virtue of the General Assembly's resolution of November 4th, particularly the stipulation concerning the entrance of the Emergency Force "with the consent of the Egyptian Government." The Egyptians wanted it to mean, as General Burns mentions, that "they had a right to say what nations should send contingents, where units of the force should be stationed, that their consent would be required whenever a unit was moved."¹

On January 15th, 1957, the Secretary-General declared in a report to the Assembly, that by January 22nd UNEF would reach the Armistice Demarcation Line "wherever it follows the north-eastern boundary of the Sinai Desert."² He left the Gaza Strip outside the area to be reached by the UNEF. But the Secretary-General remarked that under the terms of the General Assembly resolutions, Israeli forces should be withdrawn from Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh. In relation to Sharm el-Sheikh, the Secretary-General stated that Israeli withdrawal from this strip should be "a preliminary and essential phase" in a development through which "a stable basis may be laid for peaceful conditions in the area."³ He suggested that consideration

¹ Ibid., p. 193.

² UN Document A/3500.

³ Ibid.

be given to the question of "the extent to which the (UNEF) might assume responsibilities so far carried by the Truce Supervision Organization."¹ He considered that the basic function assigned to the UNEF, "to help maintain quiet" gave the Force "great value as a background for efforts toward resolving such pending problems, although it is not in itself a means to that end."²

This remark - whether thus implied by Mr. Hammarskjold or not - was taken by Israel as an opening for requesting that the Force be assigned the duty of "maintaining quiet" in the Sharm el-Sheikh area. On January 17th, 1957 Mrs. Meir requested from the General Assembly the deployment of UNEF along the Gulf of Aqaba to prevent "belligerency" and secure "free navigation." On January 23rd, the Israeli Government proposed that, upon the withdrawal of Israeli forces, "the positions evacuated along the Western coast of the Gulf of Aqaba would be held by the UNEF."³ The Force should remain in the area "until another effective means was agreed upon... for ensuring permanent freedom of navigation and the absence of belligerent acts."⁴ In

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ UN Document A/3511.

⁴ Ibid.

reply to the Israeli suggestion, the Secretary-General proposed in a report submitted to the General Assembly on January 24th, 1957, that "with the demilitarization of the El-Auja zone in accordance with the Armistice Agreement, it might be indicated that the Force should have units stationed also on the Israel side of the Armistice Demarcation Line, at least, in that zone."¹ Following this report, it became evident that the Secretary-General and the Israeli Government were at cross purposes in relation to the UNEF deployment along the Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Demarcation Line. However, in relation to the Israeli proposed deployment of UNEF in the Sharm el-Sheikh area, the Secretary-General declared that Israeli withdrawal from the area "would be followed by the UNEF in the same way as in other parts of Sinai."² But, if need be, "it may be agreed that units of the Force - or special representatives in the nature of observers - would assist in maintaining quiet in the (Sharm el-Sheikh) area."³

On February 2nd, 1957 the General Assembly adopted Resolution A/Res/461 stipulating, inter alia, that the scrupulous maintenance of the Armistice Agreement "requires

¹ UN Document A/3512.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

the placing of the UNEF on the Egyptian-Israel armistice demarcation line."¹ By its designation of the location of the Force "on" the Armistice Demarcation Line, the General Assembly actually evaded the issue of whether or not the Force should be on both sides of the Line. The resolution also considered that after "full withdrawal" of Israel from the Sharm el-Sheikh area, the scrupulous maintenance of the Armistice Agreement required "the implementation of other measures as proposed in the Secretary-General's report"² of January 24th. This was interpreted as a reference to the Secretary-General's proposal for the deployment of units of the UNEF along the Gulf of Aqaba.

On February 4th, 1957 the Israeli Government took note of the Assembly's resolution and requested from the Secretary-General, clarifications on whether "immediately" on the withdrawal of Israel forces from the Sharm el-Sheikh area, "units of the United Nations Emergency Force would be stationed along the Western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba."³ In answer to the Israeli Aide-Memoire, the Secretary-General asked the Israeli representative to seek clarification from

¹ UN Document A/RES/461.

² Ibid.

³ UN Document A/3527 - Annex I.

his Government, once more, on whether it agrees to the stationing of units of the UNEF "on the Israel side of the Armistice Demarcation Line."¹ The Secretary-General pointed out that there had been no reference to this question in any of Israel's official communications with him. He concluded: "in the circumstances, I must assume, at least for the present, that the reply of (your) Government... is specifically negative."² Again, Israel avoided answering the request of the Secretary-General and insisted on receiving "effective guaranties" concerning the freedom of navigation in Aqaba and the prevention of the "renewal of hostilities."

The Secretary-General remarked that the deployment of the UNEF in the Sharm-el-Sheikh area, "under such terms as those mentioned by Israel, would require Egyptian consent."³ He pointed out that "progress toward peaceful conditions," following the general policy suggested in his report of January 24th, on which the resolution of February 2nd was based, "has to be achieved gradually,"⁴ not as a condition sine qua non for the withdrawal of

¹ Ibid, Annex III.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Israeli troops. He further pointed out that "it is still an open question whether Israel accepts the stationing of units of the United Nations Emergency Force on its side of the Armistice Demarcation Line."¹

The efforts of the Secretary-General to obtain from the Israeli Government the permission to station units of the UNEF on the Israel side of the Armistice Demarcation Line failed in their purpose, despite several attempts and lengthy communications. Thus, closing the dialogue on the location of UNEF, the Secretary-General stated in a Note addressed to the General Assembly on February 26th, 1957, that the representative of Israel informed him that his Government did not consider the deployment of the UNEF on both sides of the Armistice Demarcation Line "as related to the problems of Gaza and Aqaba" which, in the Israeli Government's view were "the urgent problems" because "it was from there that the withdrawal of forces was envisaged."² The Israeli attitude amounted to a rejection of the Secretary-General's plea.

c) Withdrawal on the Field of Operations.

Israel's declaration of her acceptance to withdraw

¹ UN Document A/3527 - Annex IV, Op.cit.

² UN Document A/3563.

from Egypt, on November 8th, 1956, linked the carrying out of the proposed withdrawal with the formation of the UNEF. This led the Secretary-General to speed up the formation and dispatch of the UNEF troops to Egypt.

The first UNEF troop contingent reached the staging area at Capodichino Airport in Italy, on November 10th, 1956. On November 12th, the first ten observers from UNTSO were transferred for service in Egypt, and on November 15th, the first UNEF unit was flown to Abu-Sueir, near Ismailia, on the Suez Canal. By November 20th, a contingent of 696 UN soldiers had arrived at Abu-Sueir. They were joined by the Commander-in-Chief on November 22nd.

On December 3rd, Britain and France announced the eventual withdrawal of their troops. On the same day, the Secretary-General informed the General Assembly of Israel's willingness to withdraw her troops to a distance of 50 kilometers to the east of the Suez Canal.

The complete withdrawal of Franco-British forces took place on December 22nd, 1956, under the supervision of UN forces.

Meanwhile, upon the instructions of the Secretary-

General, the UNEF Commander was pressing the Israeli commander to pull back. On December 16th, 1956, the UNEF Commander-in-Chief conferred with the Israel Commander in order to agree to specific withdrawal arrangements. The Israel Commander proposed a withdrawal rate of 25 kilometers per week, which would mean the lapse of up to six weeks before Israeli forces would reach the Armistice Line. General Burns asserted to the Israeli Commander that such a schedule would not be acceptable to the Secretary-General. Several alternative proposals were discussed. Finally, the Commander-in-Chief informed the Israel delegation, on December 20th, 1956, that a schedule of withdrawal which had no completion date would be inconsistent with the resolutions of the General Assembly, and unacceptable to the Secretary-General. On December 21st, the representative of Israel submitted a new schedule proposing withdrawal in two phases. In the first phase, all Israeli forces would be withdrawn from the area situated "west of el-Arish" by the end of the first week in January 1957, with the exception of the Western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba and the island of Tiran. The second phase would involve withdrawal behind the Armistice Lines, at an unstated date.

By December 22nd, 1956, Israeli forces completed

their initial, "unnegotiated" withdrawal to a line roughly fifty kilometers east of the Canal, then south-west to Sudr on the Gulf of Suez. The Israeli retirement took place along the three main roads across the Sinai Peninsula. On December 23rd, UNEF troops began to withdraw from Port-Said and redeploy for the advance across Sinai, following the phased withdrawal of the Israeli troops. Units of UNEF were concentrated on the three routes along which Israeli retirement took place:

- 1) The North Road: El-Qantara - El-Arish - Rafah.
- 2) The Center Road: Ismailia - El-Auja.
- 3) The South Road: El-Nakhl - Ras El-Nagb.

The Israeli "good will" withdrawal lasted till January 22nd, 1957. It was subdivided by General Burns into four stages later followed by a final fifth stage completing Israel's full withdrawal.

- a) Stage I was a withdrawal on the North and Centre roads till a point ten kilometers west of El-Arish. This stage ended on January 6th, 1957.
- b) Stage II saw UNEF advance on January 7th and 8th, to a line from a point five kilometers west of El-Arish - Bir Hassana - El-Themed and a road junction 35 kilometers north west of the St. Catherine Monastery, and El-Tor.

- c) Stage III saw the Israelis retirement on January 15th, 1957 behind a line running due south from a point 25 kilometers east of El-Arish, to a point about 40 kilometers north of the Southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, and then to a point 30 kilometers south-east of El-Tor.
- d) Stage IV, Israeli forces evacuated all of Sinai by January 22nd, except the Gaza Strip and an area about 25 kilometers in breadth, parallel to the shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, extending from the International Frontier, down to a point thirty kilometers south-east of El-Tor. This plan represented the limits of Israel's willful compliance with the withdrawal resolutions of the General Assembly.

There was no further withdrawal until stage V saw the complete retirement of Israeli forces behind the Armistice Line on March 6th, 1957.

The withdrawal program was discussed in a number of meetings, held at El-Arish and Lydda, between General Burns and General Dayan. During these meetings were designated the successive lines behind which Israel forces would withdraw in their phased retirement. Each stage was followed up by the UNEF troops to a line approximately five kilometers to the west of the retiring forces. The UN Military

Observers assured the liaison task between the UNEF and the Israeli forces.

In the course of their withdrawal, Israelis undertook a systematic destruction of the surfaced roads, the railway, the telephone-lines as well as the buildings along the railway and road junctions. More than 60 kilometers of surfaced roads were thoroughly demolished before Mr. Hammarskjold's protest induced the Israeli forces to stop the destruction. The extent of the demolition works indicated that they were undertaken both as a punitive action against Egypt and in the aim of delaying the UNEF advance across Sinai. General Burns relates that UNEF logistics were compelled to restore a temporary surface to the North Road with the assistance of Egyptian labourers, to enable the transport of the Emergency Force over it.

By mid-January 1957, UNEF troops entered El-Arish and were enthusiastically greeted by the Arab inhabitants. On January 22nd, the UNEF troops advancing on the North and Center Roads reached the International Frontier.

Throughout this period, no Egyptian forces were sent to Sinai, although none of the Assembly resolutions had placed any restrictions on the redeployment of Egyptian forces in the area. However, it was revealed by General Burns that in December 1956, the Secretary-General had negotiated "a sort of Gentleman's agreement" to this effect

with Dr. Fawzi, and only civil police were sent to keep order in El-Tor and El-Arish, the only populated places in the evacuated area, in addition to units of the frontier force.

CHAPTER V

THE INSTRUMENTAL WITHDRAWAL

I. Political "guaranties" versus Irredentist Claims

The completion of the Israeli "good will" withdrawal on January 22nd, 1957, was followed by a long pause that lasted till March 6th, 1957. Israeli troops still retained the Gaza Strip in addition to a coastal strip of land along the Gulf of Aqaba, about 25 kilometers in breadth, extending from the International frontier in the north, near Gabal el-Safra, down to a point on the Gulf of Suez, 30 kilometers south-east of El-Tor, in addition to the islands of Tiran and Sanafir, at the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba. These were the last entrenchments from which Israel was determined to fight her decisive battle for "guaranties."

Israel's partial evacuation of Sinai, throughout December 1956 and January 1957, was coordinated with a Zionist propaganda release in the United States designed to "distinguish" between the background and motives of the Israeli and Anglo-French operations - as Mr. Ben-Gurion put it - in "Israel's favour."¹ Ben-Gurion considered that, during this period, "general sympathy (towards Israel) increased."² However, the American official attitude was - as Mr. Dulles put it - that

¹ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit., p. 34.

² Ibid. . . .

it was "hard" for the United States "to help in one direction without creating suspicions in another."¹

Faced with the reserved attitude of the United States Government, and confronted with a hostile majority at the United Nations, Israel reformulated, at this stage, her claims over Sinai.

In a speech delivered to the Knesset on January 23rd, 1957, Ben-Gurion stated, in relation to Gaza, that Israel must retain control of the "internal security" of the Strip "by maintaining a civilian police force"² in it. He opposed the entry of UN forces into Gaza on the grounds that this would "adversely affect Israel's security and would cut the Strip off from all possibility of economic development."³ This in effect was tantamount to permanent annexation of the Gaza Strip and its incorporation in Israel.

Concerning the Gulf of Aqaba, Ben-Gurion requested a complete change of the status quo ante and its replacement with a new order that would be endorsed by a "legal" instrument conducive to the acknowledgement of the right of passage for Israeli shipping through the Gulf of Aqaba. The suggested legal instrument would be either a treaty "safeguarding free-

¹ Department of State Press Release 7, January 7th, 1957. (quoted in "New York Times," issue of January 8th).

² "New York Times," issue of January 24th, 1957.

³ Ibid.

dom of navigation through the Gulf, between Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt,"¹ or, in case this is not immediately practicable, the stationing of UNEF at Sharm el-Sheikh "until" a final settlement is reached between Israel and Egypt, or "until" some "special arrangement with Israel"² is reached.

With regard to Sinai, Ben-Gurion proposed the demilitarization of the Peninsula "as another means of preventing future hostilities between Egypt and Israel."³

The Israeli requests were officially conveyed to the Secretary-General in an Aide-Memoire dated January 23rd, 1957. In line with Israel's attitude of revoking, unilaterally, the Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Agreement, the Aide-Memoire requested the installation of a "legal" instrument, in lieu of the revoked Agreement, tantamount in effect to an Israeli peace settlement since it called for Egypt's renunciation of the right of belligerency and the opening of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping.

In relation to Sharm el-Sheikh, Israel's general policy aimed at the "simultaneous reconciliation of two objectives - the withdrawal of Israel forces and the guaranteeing of permanent freedom of navigation."⁴ In an

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ UN Document A/3511.

effort to divert the General Assembly's attention from her present non-compliance with the withdrawal resolutions, Israel linked the achievement of her twin objectives with: a) Egypt's compliance with the decision of the Security Council of September 1st, 1951¹ as having "legal and chronological priority over Israel's duty to fulfil recommendations in which Egypt has an interest,"² or b) the stationing of UNEF along the Western coast of the Gulf of Aqaba "until" another "effective means"³ was agreed upon between the parties concerned. Israel would deem that such effective means had been established either when "a peace settlement" was achieved or when her right of passage through Aqaba was guaranteed "by other international instruments to which Israel was a party."⁴ In other words, Israel requested either an Egyptian-Israeli bilateral agreement or a multilateral agreement to which both Egypt and Israel would be parties. In advancing the latter proposal, Israel thought that by eliminating her variant condition for a direct confrontation, Egypt would be more agreeable to sign a peace treaty.

¹ Concerning the right of ships of all flags to enter the Suez Canal.

² UN Document A/3511, Op.cit.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

In relation to Gaza, Israel's Aide-Memoire offered a ten point program for the future administration of the Strip by Israel "in suitable relationship with the United Nations." This program provided for an Israeli police force to be kept in the Strip. Moreover, Israel would continue to supply "administrative services" including "agriculture, education, health, industry, labour, welfare."¹ Israel undertook to support "the development of means of livelihood for the local population"² estimated at "about 80,000"³ only. This meant that Israel would allow the residence of 80,000 Arabs in the Gaza Strip, out of a total of 300,000.

At the Assembly's meeting of January 28th, the Israeli representative Mr. Ebba Eban, expounded the reasons which, in his Government's opinion justified Israel's permanent control of the Gaza Strip. Starting from the assumption that Egypt's administration of Gaza was "the artificial result" of the Palestine war of 1948, he claimed that there was "no compulsion in international law, past or present, in favour of restoring Egyptian administrative control to the Gaza area."⁴ He supported his allegation with a combination of strategic, economic and irredentist motives.

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ UN Document A/PV 645.

He brought the Assembly's attention to the fact that the distance from Gaza to Tel-Aviv was 40 miles, and to Jerusalem about 30 miles, while the distance from Gaza to Cairo was 250 miles. On the other hand, a "broad desert" separated the Gaza Strip from Egypt while "Gaza and the Israel villages surrounding it are part of a single topographical region."¹ Besides, the Gaza Strip was "primarily" an agricultural area. Egypt, being also an agricultural country, "can not absorb the agricultural production of Gaza."² Israel was, on the contrary, an industrial country and "the natural market for the agricultural surpluses of Gaza."³ This justification of Israel's incorporation of regions originally allotted to the Arabs under the partition resolution of 1947 represented an open rejection of the United Nations' resolution and an official acknowledgement of "irredentism" as the momentum of Israeli policy.

Israel's official declaration of her proposals for "withdrawal" from Sinai and Gaza, on January 23rd, 1957, marked the beginning of a political struggle between Israel and the General Assembly that lasted until March 6th, 1957. The struggle centered around the "nature" and "timing" of the "guaranties" that Israel was demanding. Backed

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

by the military fait-accomplis in Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh, Israel attempted to exact concessions of a permanent and binding nature, as a "guarantee" that her war aims would not be completely frustrated. The receipt of such "guaranties" prior to any eventual evacuation was made a condition of Israel's future compliance with the General Assembly resolutions concerning withdrawal. On the other hand, the General Assembly urged Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh first, following which the Assembly would ensure the creation of "peaceful conditions" compatible with the status juris existing prior to the Israel invasion. However, by entering into a dialogue with Israel on the basis of Israel's arguments for "guaranties", the General Assembly implicitly admitted Israel's "right" to negotiate concessions from a position of strength gained as a result of a military fait-accomplis. Moreover, it clearly departed from its own resolutions adopted earlier in which the only "condition" to withdrawal was the scrupulous observance¹ of the provisions of the Armistice Agreement.

This phase of Israel's "instrumental" withdrawal was later subdivided by Ben-Gurion into three main stages. The first stage lasted till February 11th, 1957, the second stage continued till the end of February 1957, and the last

¹ Resolutions 997 (ES-I) of November 2nd, 1956 and 999 (ES-I) of November 4th, 1956.

stage ended on March 6th. The criteria underlying Ben-Gurion's classification were the scope and extent of concessions secured by Israeli diplomacy at each stage.

II. The First Stage in the "Guaranties" Campaign

In Ben-Gurion's assessment, the first stage was marked by the opposition of "almost the entire world"¹ to Israeli demands. The most significant opposition, according to Ben-Gurion, was the "obdurate attitude" adopted by the UN Secretary-General against Israel. Ben-Gurion affirmed that the Secretary-General "stubbornly refused to discuss Israel's demands... until Israel's forces should withdraw behind the Armistice line."² In point of fact, Israel had obtained a preliminary concession from the Secretary-General on January 15th, 1957, in his acknowledgement of the "international significance" of the Gulf of Aqaba which, in his opinion, "may be considered to justify the right of innocent passage through the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf in accordance with recognized rules of international law."³ The Secretary-General avoided a specific declaration on the legal status of the Straits of Tiran which fall within Arab territorial waters by broadly referring to the "international significance"

¹ "Israeli Government Year Book", 1959/60, Op.cit.
p. 44.

² Ibid.

³ UN Document A/3500.

of the Gulf of Aqaba. However, on January 24th, 1957, he asserted that a "legal controversy" existed as to the right of passage through straits "forming part of the territorial sea of one or more states"¹ and, thus, hinted at the non-finality of the Arab legal point of view vis a vis the Straits and, indeed, the Gulf itself. Nevertheless, the Secretary-General considered that the discussion of this matter did not fall within his mandate as established for him in the Assembly's resolution of November 4th, 1956.

With regard to the Gaza Strip, the Secretary-General rejected the proposal for an Israeli administration on the grounds that the Strip had been placed by the General Armistice Agreement under Egypt's control, and that the United Nations "can not condone a change in the status juris resulting from military action contrary to the provisions of the Charter."² However, he pointed out that any changes which the General Assembly might propose in the status juris of the Gaza Strip, or any "widening of the United Nations administrative responsibilities"³ in the area would have to be "based" on agreement with Egypt. This suggestion was

¹ UN Document A/3512.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

actually a departure from the Secretary-General's assertion on November 6th that the United Nations presence in Egypt would be of a "temporary nature," and that such a force would, "in no way," be a military force temporarily controlling the territory in which it is stationed, "nor... have military functions exceeding those necessary to secure peaceful conditions."¹ However, the Secretary-General proposed the deployment of UNEF units in the Gaza Strip, along the Armistice line, and opposite El-Auja zone. If the demilitarization of the Zone were actually restored, then, in the Secretary-General's opinion, "it might be indicated" to station UNEF troops in the Zone, i.e. on the de facto Israel side of the border. But such decision would require a resolution by the General Assembly and the consent of Israel. For the restoration of peaceful conditions, he suggested full observance of the Armistice Agreement provisions. He urged Israel to withdraw her forces "behind" the Armistice line in order to render the Armistice regime "operative." Upon completion of this step, both parties should be asked to give "assurances" that they will not assert any belligerent rights "including, of course, such rights in the Gulf of Aqaba and the Straits of Tiran."² In this respect, the Secretary-General's

¹ UN Document A/3302.

² UN Document A/3512, Op.cit.

emphasis on the Armistice Agreement is significant in view of Israel's rejection of it. Also worth noting is the sequence implied in the Secretary's anticipation of the future development of Egyptian-Israeli relations, in which he seems to give to the restoration of the "Armistice regime" chronological priority over the "assurances" that both countries would be asked to give. In relation to the questions involved in the Sharm el-Sheikh area, the Secretary-General asserted that UNEF troops would not be deployed in the area in such a way as "to protect any special position."¹ But, he suggested that, "at least transitionally," the UNEF "may function in support of mutual restraint."² The Secretary-General revealed that he has been informed of the desire of the Government of Egypt that "all raids and incursions across the armistice line... be brought to an end, and that United Nations auxiliary organs afford the effective assistance to that end."³

The basic points in the Secretary-General's attitude towards Israel's demands for "guaranties," as inferred from his report of January 24th, 1957, could be outlined as follows: The General Armistice Agreement should be acknowledged as the juridical framework for Egypt-Israel relations.

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

In the light of this principle, Egypt and Israel were entitled to obtain all possible "guaranties" which he considered compatible with the maintenance of the validity of the Armistice Agreement. Consequently, the Secretary-General abstained from deciding on problems involving legal controversy or rival political claims. However, along with this reservation, he proposed "guaranties" tantamount to a concession to the Israeli claims. The compatibility of a number of these "guaranties" with the Armistice Agreement is controversial, particularly those "guaranties" implying a change in the status juris existing prior to the Israeli invasion. Thus, the Secretary-General recognized the "international significance" of the Gulf of Aqaba, justified Israel's right to "innocent shipping" in the Straits, proposed the deployment of the UN forces along the Egyptian shore of the Gulf, and assigned to these forces a "restraining function."

Israel's answer to the Secretary-General's proposals, transmitted on January 25th, 1957, was limited to the confirmation of her previous position in rejecting the General Armistice Agreement. The Israeli reply stated that Egypt's "consistent violations" of the Agreement "have brought the Agreement to nought."¹ However, the Israeli Government was willing to replace this Agreement with a pact of "non-

¹ UN Document A/3527, Annex V.

belligerency and mutual non-aggression"¹ but rejected any return to the Armistice Agreement. This amounted to a request for "firmer" concessions on the issue of Israeli navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba and a bid for a new "settlement" concerning the "administration" of the Gaza Strip.

Israel's non-compliance with the withdrawal resolutions was rediscussed at seven meetings held by the General Assembly between January 28th and February 2nd, 1957. The attitudes adopted by the major blocs of the Assembly towards Israel's request for "guaranties" decided the fate of Israel's demands in the General Assembly. A broad outline of the respective attitudes of these blocs would be as follows:

The United States, backed by the Latin American and the majority of the West-European countries, endorsed the Secretary-General's report of January 24th, 1957 urging Israel's withdrawal behind the Armistice line, but recognized that withdrawal must be followed - in Mr. Lodge's² terms - by "positive action which assures progress towards the creation of peaceful conditions in the region."³ This bloc gave primary emphasis to the disputed questions of: 1) shipping rights through the Gulf of Aqaba; 2) the right of a coastal state to take certain steps for defending its

¹ Ibid.

² The U.S. representative at the United Nations.

³ UN Document A/PV 651.

security in the narrow waters of gulfs presenting similar traits to the Gulf of Aqaba; and 3) the development of the situation in the Gaza Strip. The general trend manifested by the major members of this bloc towards the Gaza Strip seemed to favour the maintenance of the Egyptian administration in the Strip,¹ but endorsed an "effective" UN control of the Armistice status juris through UNEF presence in the Strip. The role that this bloc attempted to assign to the UNEF inside the Strip actually represented a change in the status quo ante. With regard to the Straits, this bloc supported the "guaranteeing," on a de facto basis, of Israel's right of "free shipping"² through the Gulf of Aqaba.

The attitude of this group of nations is best illustrated by the statements made by the representative of the United States. a) In relation to the General Armistice Agreement, the United States representative, Mr. H.C. Lodge, agreed that "the strict observance" by both Egypt and Israel of the provisions of the Armistice Agreement, and "the fullest respect" for the resolutions of "the Security Council and the General Assembly are the keys to the restoration of peace and stability."³ Mr. Lodge's reference to the resolutions

¹ France and Canada, however, were more agreeable to an Israeli administration of the Strip in "suitable relationship" with the United Nations.

² France and Canada urged a more declared UN support of Israel's right of shipping.

³ UN Document A/PV 645.

of the "Security Council" is worth noting. Actually, the Security Council took no resolution of direct relevance to the present crisis during its meetings of October 30th and 31st, 1956, due to the negative votes of France and Britain. Mr. Lodge most likely was referring, in this context, to the Security Council resolution of September 1st, 1951, concerning passage of international commercial shipping and goods through the Suez Canal. b) With regard to the Gaza Strip, the US representative supported the recommendations of the Secretary-General concerning the deployment of UNEF troops inside the Gaza Strip and El-Auja zone, "without necessarily endorsing all the legal points contained in his report."¹ c) Concerning the Gulf of Aqaba, the United States representative expressed his Government's belief that units of the UNEF be stationed at the Straits of Tiran "in order to achieve there the separation of Egyptian and Israel land and sea forces."² This deployment of the UNEF forces was not originally contemplated by the General Assembly resolutions. Moreover, the U.S. representative considered that the UNEF assignment of separating Egyptian and Israeli forces at the Straits of Tiran was essential "until" it became clear that "the non-exercise of any claimed belli-

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

gerent rights has established in practice the peaceful conditions which must govern navigation in waters having such an international interest."¹ This remark of Mr. Lodge does not seem to imply a prompting for an immediate Israeli withdrawal from the Sharm el-Sheikh area. If anything, it might convey the impression of overlooking the presence of Israeli forces there "until" non-belligerency could be established "in practice" in the Gulf of Aqaba. This impression would seem to be strengthened by Mr. Lodge's demand that, "to be effective, the UNEF must serve as a restraint against any attempt to exercise belligerent rights and to engage in hostile actions contrary to the Armistice Agreement,"² as a prerequisite for the establishment of peaceful conditions in the area. But, with regard to Israel's request for a legal instrument to guarantee Israeli shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba, Mr. Lodge declared that "the sort of assurances that are sought in this connection can be given effect - and they must be given effect - only after Israel completes the withdrawal of its forces behind the Armistice lines."³

The Arab bloc, backed by the Soviet and Afro-Asian blocs, urged the prompt withdrawal of Israeli forces and supported

¹ Ibid.

² UN Document A/PV 649.

³ UN Document A/PV 645, Op.cit.

an unconditional return to the status quo ante bellum. This group of nations considered the allusion to a future action aimed at "the creation of peaceful conditions" or at future "assurances" as an "imposition of a condition sine qua non for the withdrawal of Israel forces,"¹ as phrased by the representative of the Sudan. The Arab bloc and its allies also opposed Israel's attempts to impose the conditions outlined in her Aide-Memoire of January 23rd, 1957, particularly the proposals concerning the modification or enlargement of the functions of UNEF without Egypt's consent, as this would be, in their view, rewarding aggression. In his turn, the Egyptian representative warned the General Assembly against turning the UNEF "into an instrument of collective domination and coercion."² In relation to the right of passage in the Gulf of Aqaba, it was the view of the Arab bloc and its allies that a distinction should be made between military operations and the exercise of the rights of belligerency. As expounded by the representative of the Sudan, the Arab theory upheld that "under the Armistice Agreement, the parties are obliged to suspend their hostilities and to cease all military operations. This, however, does not affect

¹ UN Document A/PV 644.

² UN Document A/PV 649.

the exercise of their rights to defend their security and to take all the necessary measures towards this end."¹

"Many delegates of the Afro-Asian and Communist countries felt that the right place for resolving the question of the right of passage in the Gulf of Aqaba was the International Court of Justice. Finally, the Arab bloc and its allies backed Egypt's position as to the deployment of the UNEF. The Egyptian representative repudiated the Israeli and Western proposals for the deployment of the UNEF at the Sharm el-Sheikh area and pointed out that, following Israel's withdrawal, the stationing of the UNEF should be "exclusively on both sides of the Armistice Demarcation Line."² In this respect, the Egyptian Government reasserted that, in its understanding of the General Assembly resolutions, "the entry, the stationing and the deployment of UNEF must be with the consent of the Egyptian Government as an indispensable prerequisite."³

Both the Western and Afro-Asian trends found expression in the twin resolutions submitted by both parties in the General Assembly on February 1st, 1957. Under draft resolution A/3517, co-sponsored by the Afro-Asian and Soviet

¹ UN Document A/PV 644.

² UN Document A/PV 651.

³ Ibid.

blocs and supported by the United States, the Assembly would: 1) deplore the non-compliance of Israel with the Assembly's repeated requests to her to complete her withdrawal "behind" the Armistice Demarcation Line; 2) Call upon Israel to complete her withdrawal "without further delay." Under the second draft resolution sponsored by the Western countries and also supported by the United States, the Assembly, recognizing that withdrawal by Israel "must be followed by action which would assure progress towards the creation of peaceful conditions,"¹ would: 1) note with appreciation the Secretary-General's report of January 24th, 1957; 2) call upon Egypt and Israel "scrupulously" to observe the 1949 Armistice Agreement; 3) consider that scrupulous maintenance of that Agreement, after full withdrawal of Israel from the Sharm el-Sheikh and Gaza areas, required placing UNEF on the Egyptian-Israeli armistice demarcation line and "the implementation of other measures"² proposed by the Secretary-General's report of January 24th, with a view "to assist in achieving situations conducive to the maintenance of peaceful conditions in the area;"³ and 4) request the Secretary-

¹ UN Document A/3518.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

General to take steps to carry out those measures and to report to the Assembly. On the authority of Joseph P. Lash, both draft resolutions "incorporated"¹ the views of Mr. Hammarskjold also. The first draft resolution was adopted by roll call vote of 74 to 2, with 2 abstentions, as Resolution 1124 (xl). The USSR representative attempted to defer voting on the second draft resolution until February 5th, but the General Assembly rejected the Soviet motion and the draft resolution - unsupported by the Arab and Soviet blocs - was adopted by 56 votes to 0, with 22 abstentions, as Resolution 1125 (xl).

By adopting resolution 1125 (xl), the General Assembly - mainly the Latin American and West European blocs, supported by the United States - gave Israel a firm assurance that withdrawal of her troops "must" be followed by action which would assure "progress towards the creation of peaceful conditions." Under this broad denomination were included all the measures proposed by the Secretary-General in his reports of January 15th and January 24th, 1957. Moreover, it should be remembered that the Resolution's reference to the necessity of implementing the "other measures" proposed in the Secretary-General's report of January 24th, was understood to convey

¹ Lash, Joseph P., "Dag Hammarskjold," (Biography), London, 1962, p. 105.

the Assembly's endorsement of the Secretary-General's suggestion of placing the UNEF in the Sharm el-Sheikh area (para. 29 of Report A/3512).¹

The United States representative deemed the promises contained in the second resolution of February 2nd as sufficient guarantee for Israel. Ambassador Lodge declared on the same day that he could not "predict the consequences which can ensue if Israel fails to comply with the will of the General Assembly."²

Israel considered the second resolution of February 2nd, as a victory, but not an adequate one. Thus, following a Cabinet meeting on February 3rd, a spokesman of the Israel Foreign Ministry issued a statement noting "with appreciation the growing understanding" of the United Nations as reflected both in the debate and in "the second of yesterday's resolutions" that the "status quo ante of violence and blockade may not be restored."³ But the spokesman concluded that there was no intention "of altering the stand taken by the Knesset on January 23rd."⁴ Actually, Israel was not satisfied with the General Assembly's acknowledgement of the validity of the General Armis-

¹ Concerning the developments of the location of the Force, see Chapter IV.

² UN Document A/PV 651.

³ "New York Times," issue of February 4th, 1957.

⁴ Ibid.

tice Agreement as the proper framework for Egyptian-Israeli relations. Furthermore, Israel was insisting on obtaining "concessions" prior to any eventual withdrawal. On February 4th, Mr. Eban officially notified the Secretary-General of Israel's rejection of the General Assembly's demands. As Joseph Lash puts it, Mr. Eban had a two hours and fifteen minute of "protracted discussions" with the Secretary-General during which he transmitted to the Secretary-General an Aide-Memoire subjecting Israel's implementation of the Assembly's resolutions to the receipt of a "positive response" to the following questions: a) whether Egypt agrees to "the mutual and full abstention from belligerent acts, by land, air and sea, on the withdrawal of Israel troops;"¹ and b) whether "immediately" on the withdrawal of Israel forces from the Sharm el-Sheikh area "units of the UNEF will be stationed along the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba"² in order to act as "a restraint against hostile acts, and will remain so deployed until another effective means is agreed upon... for ensuring permanent freedom of navigation."³ In short, Israel was requesting two assurances: 1) that units of

¹ UN Document A/3527.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

UNEF would be deployed in Sharm el-Sheikh to guarantee Israeli shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba; and 2) that this deployment would be an interim measure - or a precursory step towards a formal "peace" settlement with Egypt.

The situation created by Israel's rejection of the United Nations twin resolutions of February 2nd called for a pressure action, from outside the UN, in support of the Assembly's demands. There developed a situation similar to that which prevailed early in November 1956, when the General Assembly resolutions on cease-fire provided a "legal" basis motivating the exercise of power politics in support of UN demands. In this respect, diplomatic demarches were undertaken both within and outside the United Nations.

a) Demarches within the UN

As the Israelis refused to yield, pressures were mounting in the Assembly for sanctions. At this stage, the Secretary-General undertook a series of meetings with the Israeli representative, and among the leading members of the different blocs in order to avoid a complete deadlock. As discussed in Chapter IV, much of the negotiations and communications centered around the definition and clarification of the function and location of the UNEF. The Israeli Government was particularly interested in seeking a clarifi-

cation of the "potential role of UNEF in the creation and maintenance of peaceful conditions" ¹ in the area, and specifically along the Gulf of Aqaba. In his turn, the Secretary-General was seeking Israel's approval of the stationing of units of the UNEF on the Israel side of the Armistice line, and an acknowledgement that her future withdrawal from Gaza "must cover elements of administration as well as military troops, forces and units." ²

On February 11th, 1957, Mr. Hammarskjold reported that Israel's reply to his twin requests was "specifically negative in one instance and essentially so in the other." ³ Moreover, it was the Secretary-General's view that the action "to assure progress towards the creation of peaceful conditions" - proposed by Resolution II of February 2nd - required, as an initial step, withdrawal of Israel forces behind the Armistice Demarcation Line. This withdrawal would be followed by the implementation of "various measures within the framework of the Armistice Agreement." ⁴ The Secretary-General reminded the General Assembly that it had stressed, time and again, in its resolutions on withdrawal, "the key

¹ Un Document A/3527.

² Ibid - Annex III

³ Ibid., Annex III

⁴ Ibid.

importance it attaches to scrupulous observance by both parties of the terms of the Armistice Agreement."¹ In this respect, he reported that the Government of Egypt "reaffirms its intent to observe fully the provisions of the Armistice Agreement to which it is a party."² Concerning Israel's request for the stationing of UNEF along the Gulf of Aqaba, it was the Secretary-General's opinion that such a step "would require Egyptian consent."³ Referring to the proposals made by a number of Arab-Asian countries for the application of sanctions against Israel, the Secretary-General reminded the General Assembly that, under the Charter, "the right to take decisions with mandatory effect" was reserved to the Security Council.

In brief, throughout the period between mid-January and February 11th, 1957, the Israeli drive for UN granted "guarantees" succeeded in obtaining the General Assembly's recognition of the need for such "guaranties" along with the recommendation that these "guaranties" should be implemented "upon Israel's complete withdrawal." On the other hand, the General Assembly upheld the validity of the General Armistice Agreement as the proper instrument providing for Egypt's rela-

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

tions with Israel. But, to what extent was the Assembly's acknowledgement of Israel's right to "guarantees" really a return to the status quo ante is indeed controversial.

b) Demarches outside the UN

The United States Government played a decisive role in the demarches carried outside the framework of the United Nations. Since the Suez Crisis - as President Eisenhower stated to the bipartisan meeting of Congressional leaders on August 12th, 1956 - the United States had worked "in close conjunction" with the United Nations. Actually, by throwing her weight behind the UN resolutions, the United States provided a counterpoise to the ineffectiveness of the General Assembly's executive machinery. As a co-sponsor of both resolutions of February 2nd, 1957, the United States took the lead in pressing Israel to abide by the UN demands for withdrawal. By early February, the US Government had cut off all aid to Israel from Governmental sources. General Burns reports that the "Jerusalem Post" published an article on February 4th, "based on information from the Finance Ministry"¹ in which it stated that as a result of losing the US official aid, Israel would have to reduce her budgetary expenses by 90 million Israeli Pounds² out of a total of 850 million. This measure, combined with the

¹ Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 249.

² Almost 50 million US dollars.

increased expenditures resulting from the Sinai campaign, intensified the inflationary dangers in Israel. Moreover, Mr. Dulles told a press conference on February 5th, that "if there was action by United Nations calling for sanctions, we would, of course, have to give them very serious consideration."¹ It was later related by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, in his introduction to the Israeli Year Book of 1959/60, that American pressure on Israel was applied by the United States President in person, in a series of letters addressed to the Israeli Prime Minister. President Eisenhower sent a letter to Ben-Gurion on February 8th, 1957. This letter has not been published either by the White House² or by the Israeli Government. However, Ben-Gurion's reply to it was published in the Israeli Year Book of 1959/60. From this reply it can be inferred that President Eisenhower had

¹ "New York Times," issue of February 6th, 1957.

² Also, this letter has not been published among the documents on the Middle East crisis that were published by the State Department in August 1957 under "United States policy in the Middle East." The letter coincided with King Saud's visit to Washington and bears the date of the American-Saudi joint communique in which the United States Government declared that "any aggression against the political independence or territorial integrity of the (Middle East) nations... would be considered endangering peace and stability. Such actions should be opposed in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations." (White House news release, February 8, 1957).

referred in his letter to "procedures" to be taken against Israel. Ben-Gurion treated this prospect, in his reply, as "inconceivable" and "unthinkable" on the part of the United States, and protested that "no such 'procedures' were ever invoked against Egypt."¹ He expressed his wish for the "continuance and deepening of the friendly relations between the United States and Israel,"² and affirmed that Israel had started the evacuation of Sinai in response to President Eisenhower's appeal of November 7th, 1956 "despite the fact that Egypt refused to abandon its state of war against Israel."³ Finally, he reiterated Israel's conditions for withdrawal from Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh, namely the "guaranteeing" of Israeli shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba and Israel's retention of the "civil administration" of Gaza, including the police force.

Meanwhile, Zionist influence in the United States and the countries of Western Europe was mobilized in the service of the Israeli campaign for "guarantees." In Washington, Senator Knowland attacked the idea of sanctions and labelled it as "immoral" and "insupportable"⁴ unless

¹ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, op.cit., p. 43.

²

Ibid.

³

Ibid.

⁴

"New York Times," issue of February 10th, 1957.

sanctions were also imposed against the Soviet Union for its refusal to comply with the UN resolutions against its intervention in Hungary,

In Israel, mass demonstrations were organized by the coalition parties of the Government on February 9th - a Sabbath day - and staged in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa, to protest UN demands for withdrawal. On February 10th, it was revealed in the "New York Times" that "at least one Presidential appeal for Israeli withdrawal had been turned down."¹ The "New York Times" further remarked that "there seemed little chance that Israel would yield to further US entreaties."²

Despite the hardening of Israel's stand and the increasing pressure of the United States Government, the scope of the US-Israel controversy was limited by intrinsic checks and balances. Ben-Gurion portrays this situation by asserting that, on the Israeli side "every effort was made not to close the door to further talks,"³ and on the other side, "the American Government too showed a considerable degree of good will throughout the period."⁴

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ "Israeli Government Year Book", 1959/60, op.cit., p. 45.

⁴ Ibid.

Assessing the outcome of the Zionist propaganda campaign in the US, Ben-Gurion wrote: "the tremendous efforts of our Embassy in Washington and our delegation to the United Nations left their mark on American public opinion. The press, Congressional circles and leaders of thought showed considerable understanding of Israel's attitude and the justice of her cause, and the pressure of public opinion led to a change in the United States policy which marked the beginning of the second stage of our struggle."¹ The news of this "change" was reported by the "New York Times" in its issue of February 12th, 1957 which referred to the United States' efforts "to work out a compromise solution for the deadlock."² The "New York Times" revealed that "specific proposals" were made to the Egyptian and Israeli Governments by the State Department. These proposals were formulated in an official Aide-Memoire that was handed to the Israeli Ambassador Eban, by Secretary of State Dulles, on February 11th, 1957.³ The State Department Aide-Memoire was considered by Ben-Gurion as a major concession marking the second stage of Israel's struggle for "guaranties."

¹ Ibid, p.47

² "New York Times", issue of February 12th, 1957.

³ This Aide-Memoire, although dated February 11th, was only released on February 17th - i.e. six days later.

III. Stage II - February 11th - till February 27th, 1957

The State Department Aide-Memoire defined the United States' attitude with regard to the problems of Gaza and the Gulf of Aqaba.

With regard to the Gaza Strip, the U.S. attitude was identical with the view adopted by the Secretary-General. The Aide-Memoire asserted that "the United Nations General Assembly has no authority to require of either Egypt or Israel a substantial modification of the Armistice Agreement."¹ But the settlement of the future of Gaza in co-operation with the United Nations was not ruled out, and it was the view of the State Department that the future of the Gaza Strip should be "worked out through the efforts and good offices of the United Nations,"² following Israel's "unconditional" withdrawal. To the extent that this proposal represented a departure from the unconditional return to the status quo ante in the Gaza Strip, it actually amounted to a concession to Israeli views. But the timing of the implementation of such a measure was linked to Israel's full withdrawal behind the Armistice Line, and, in this respect, represented both a promise and a pressure.

In relation to the Gulf of Aqaba, the State Department

¹ Department of State press release, February 17th, 1957, from "US Policy in the Middle East," (documents), 1957.

² Ibid.

took a clear stand in support of Israel's claims for the right of passage through the waters of the Gulf. This stand was in basic divergence from the Secretary-General's attitude maintaining that "a legal controversy" existed as to the right of passage in the Gulf, despite his recognition of the "international significance" of the Gulf. The U.S. Aide-Memoire unequivocally considered the Gulf as comprehending "international waters" and warned that "no nation has the right to prevent free and innocent passage in the Gulf and through the Straits giving access thereto." ¹ The Aide-Memoire further asserted that the United States "is prepared to exercise the right of free and innocent passage and to join with the others to secure general recognition of this right." ² The "New York Times" related on February 12th - from "reliable reports" - that the United States Government will test the "good will" of the Egyptian Government by sending its own ships into the Gulf of Aqaba. The "New York Times" added : "it can be said that this will be intended as a demonstration of Washington's determination to support freedom of navigation by force, if necessary. " ³ This attitude on the part

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ "New York Times", issue of February 12th, 1957.

of the United States Government seemed to be prompted by the desire of denying Egypt the monopoly of the oil routes between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Thus, on February 13th, it was reported by the "New York Times" that the US support of freedom of passage through the Gulf of Aqaba was meant "to break not only the Arab-Israeli deadlock in the United Nations, but also Egypt's monopoly over maritime traffic between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean."¹ Finally, the Aide-Memoire expressed the US Government belief that the General Assembly and the Secretary-General should seek that the UNEF "move into the Straits area" upon withdrawal of Israeli forces.

The United States willingness to support Israel's claims in the Gulf was not only verbal. It was revealed by Sherman Adams that Secretary Dulles "offered to send an American ship through the Strait to establish the right of free passage to the Gulf of Aqaba."² According to Ben-Gurion the Israeli Government expressed "its appreciation"³ of the efforts of President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles "to seek a solution"⁴ to the problems of the Gulf of Aqaba

¹ "New York Times," issue of February 13th, 1957.

² Adams, Sherman, Op.cit., p. 277.

³ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit., p. 48.

⁴ Ibid.

and the Gaza Strip. But, as Mr. Ben-Gurion further revealed "the Government of Israel did not regard Mr. Dulles' aide-memoire as satisfactory, since it insisted on the condition that we should first withdraw."¹

Israel's adamant attitude prompted a number of Arab-Asian countries to press for sanctions against Israel in the General Assembly. In its turn, the Egyptian Government was holding up the clearing of the Suez Canal until the completion of Israel's withdrawal. This measure proved to be costly to the countries of Western Europe and, consequently represented a serious burden to the United States.

Israel's refusal to withdraw, despite the "assurances" given by the American State Department on February 11th, faced the United States Government with a precarious alternative: either the United States would uphold the United Nations attitude and join the 27 member states demanding the imposition of sanctions against Israel, or retreat even more openly from her declared position and thus allow Israel to blatantly realize the fruits of her aggression. The implications of both choices were not easy. To borrow Adams description: " supporting Nasser... would be unpopular both in Congress and throughout much of the nation, but all the legal arguments favoured it,"² and, on the other side, " if

¹ Ibid, p. 48

² Adams, Sherman, Op.cit., p.279.

the US Government opposed the sanctions, it would undo all the progress Eisenhower had been making... and push many Asian and African nations towards the handsome proposals which were being made by Russia."¹ Within the Congress, the "guarantees issue" caused an unusual configuration in partisan affiliation and both Republican and Democrat leaders opposed sanctions and looked favorably to giving Israel the "guarantees" she was requesting. The politico-emotional trends that found ground in the Congress during the Eisenhower administration, made the majority of the Congress susceptible to Zionist pressure. According to Sherman Adams' description of the forces at work in the Congress, "any attempt to give aid to the Arabs met with opposition behind the scenes in Washington, where the members of Congress were acutely aware of the strong popular sentiment in this country for Israel."² Adams asserts: "Had the members of Congress either underestimated or overlooked the strength of such feeling they would have been quickly reminded of it by the alert representatives of the many well organized pro-Israel lobbies that were always effective and influential in the Capitol."³

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., pp. 247 - 48

³ Ibid., p. 248

Prompted by the favorable attitude of a considerable section of American public opinion and the majority of the Legislature, the Israeli Government turned down the pleas of the United States Government for a reconsideration of the "solution" put forward by the State Department's Memorandum of February 11th. The reaction of the State Department to the Israeli confrontation was quick and active. Mr. Dulles and Ambassador Lodge flew to Thomasville (Georgia) where President Eisenhower was vacationing in order to induce him to take "a stand against Congress and against Israel,"¹ according to Adams' report. Following this meeting, President Eisenhower made a statement on February 17th, from his vacation retreat in Thomasville, warning Israel to withdraw her forces behind the Armistice Demarcation Line or face the displeasure of "the overwhelming judgment of the world community."² President Eisenhower declared that the General Assembly's second Resolution of February 2nd, 1957 gave, "in all fairness," a prospect for remedying Israel's "legitimate grievances." He added that that prospect was further assured by the State Department's memorandum of February 11th, in which the State Department

¹ Ibid, p. 279.

² "New York Times," issue of February 18th, 1957.

"made clear" what the United States would do " after Israel's withdrawal," to help "solve the problems of Gaza and the Gulf of Aqaba."¹ The president stressed the fact that the United states Government had made this declaration both in its capacity of a "member of the United Nations" and "a maritime power"² having rights of its own . On the same day, the State Department made public, for the first time , the Memorandum of February 11th . Furthermore, the "New York Times" relates that Secretary Dulles informed Ambassador Eban that day, that the United States had offered her "maximum assurance"³ of support for the Israeli quest for "security" in both Gaza and the Gulf of Aqaba .

Meanwhile, in the United Nations, the demand for sanctions gathered momentum. Once more, the Israeli Government was engaged in a race against time at the United Nations, and on February 18th, Ben-Gurion sent an "urgent last minute appeal"⁴ to Secretary Dulles requesting the adjournment of the Assembly's deliberations for a short time. To escape the punitive mood of the General Assembly , Ben-Gurion attempted to take the issue out of the Assembly by proposing

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ " Israeli Government Year Book," Op.cit., p. 48

the dispatch of an "impartial committee" to Israel, and Egypt if need be, for the purpose of "seeking an agreed settlement on the questions associated with Sharm el-Sheikh and the Gaza Strip."¹ He rebuked the sanctions proposals and warned that the United Nations, by insisting on sanctions, would be "committing a historic wrong."² Ben-Gurion received two replies to his message. An indirect reply was given by Dulles in the course of his news conference held on February 19th. Secretary Dulles expressed his hope that Israel may come to the conclusion that "the wisest course of action is to withdraw its forces"³ and to rely upon the "assurances" contained in the United Nations resolutions and the United States statements. Mr. Dulles reasserted the United States willingness to send ships of American registry into the Gulf of Aqaba and told reporters that his Government had no reason to assume that "anybody would contest "its view that the Gulf was "an international waterway through which we can have free and innocent passage."⁴ Another written reply to Ben-Gurion's message came from President Eisenhower in

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ "New York Times," issue of February 20th, 1957.

⁴ Ibid.

person, in a letter dated February 20th and to which Ben-Gurion refers in the Israeli Year Book of 1959/60. The President indicated his intention to broadcast to the American people on the subject of Gaza and Aqaba, the same evening. However, the full text of Eisenhower's letter was not published by the White House or Tel-Aviv.

Eisenhower's broadcast met rough criticism from Congressional leaders. An interesting "backstage" description of the developments that preceded Eisenhower's address was related by Sherman Adams. From this description, it appears that the President's determination to take the case "to the people" was necessitated by the strong bi-partisan opposition to the policy of the administration. The Senate Democratic leader, Mr. Lyndon Johnson, had publicly admonished President Eisenhower to avoid "coercion" in US relations with Israel. Republican leader Knowland adopted a similar attitude and went to the extent of threatening to resign from his position as a United States' delegate to the General Assembly if sanctions were imposed on Israel. It was under such circumstances that President Eisenhower called for a bi-partisan meeting on February 20th, in the Cabinet Room of the White House. Adams - who attended the meeting - reports that President Eisenhower expounded his arguments in favour of putting

pressure on Israel to comply with the United Nations demands for withdrawal. He maintained that such compliance would be to Israel's own benefit, for the following reasons: a) from an economic point of view, the Israeli Government would soon be in a critical financial situation unless it obtained help from the Import-Export Bank. This would be possible "only if peace were restored. "Furthermore, a full scale resumption of traffic in the Suez Canal would not be possible, in Eisenhower's opinion, unless the grievances that would keep alive the threat of an Arab retaliation were completely removed. Besides, such retaliation would mean further interruptions in the supply of Middle Eastern oil to Western Europe; b) from a political point of view, Eisenhower warned the legislators that Soviet influence among the Arabs would certainly increase if Israel were permitted to resist the compliance with the UN resolutions. Eisenhower concluded by expressing his fear that "the whole thing might end up in a general war."¹ Describing the reactions to Eisenhower address, Adams asserts that "it was plain that the legislators were by no means convinced."² The President told the legislators that he was aware of their opposition to sanctions against Israel but he reminded them that

¹ Adams, Sherman, Op.cit., p. 281.

² Ibid.

the United States had applied sanctions against the United Kingdom and France for the same purpose when, three months earlier, oil from the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean was withheld pending the agreement of both powers to withdraw from Egypt. Then, he asserted that the best means to protect American interests in the Middle East would be through the United States' support of the United Nations.

The President was followed by Secretary Dulles who told the Congressmen that if Israel were allowed to defy the withdrawal requests, it would be a blow to the basic principles of the United Nations. He pointed out that Israel, along with Britain and France, had agreed to evacuate her troops from Egypt upon the arrival of the UNEF contingents "to the Suez area." Dulles argued that while Britain and France had lived up to the agreement, Israel had refused to withdraw "even though he and Hammarskjold had assured Ambassador Eban that Egypt would probably accept a neutral administration in the Gaza Strip and that the United States would exercise the right we consider ours to free passage to the international waters of Aqaba and were prepared to join with others in their exercise of the same right."¹ Dulles' statement was the first official reference to a "behind the scene" agreement with

¹

Ibid, pp. 282 - 283.

Egypt. However, there has been no confirmation, on the Egyptian side, of the existence of such a deal. The only reference to Egypt's attitude towards the future administration of Gaza, at this juncture, came in Mr. Hammarskjold's report of February 22nd when he asserted that Egypt had accepted that the take over in Gaza be, "in the first instance," by the United Nations only. Finally, Secretary Dulles reminded the Congressmen that "the rest of the world believed that on any crucial question such as this one, Israel could control US policy because of the strong favor it enjoyed in America."¹ He concluded: "The Arabs were watching us intently and, if we confirmed this belief, they would feel compelled to turn to Russia."² After a lengthy debate of the sanctions issue, it became obvious that there was no hope for a unanimous agreement. According to Adams, "Congressional leaders were too conscious of the unpopularity of the stand that the President was being forced to take against Israel to be willing to share with him the responsibility."³ Thus, it was left to President Eisenhower "to shoulder the burden alone" and make a statement to the American people along the lines of his statement

1 Ibid, p. 283.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

to the legislators. However, Congressional leaders made public their disagreement with the President's attitude, and Adams asserts that, as they filed out of the Cabinet Room, Lyndon Johnson "hastened" to announce to the waiting reporters: "our views have not been changed."¹

At nine o'clock of the same night, Eisenhower went on the air. He opened his speech by reviewing the efforts which had been made by the United Nations and the United States in order to find a solution to the crisis. He stressed the importance of the "far reaching United Nations resolution of February 2nd" calling for 1) the placing of the UNEF on the Egyptian-Israel armistice line; and 2) the implementation of "other measures" as proposed in the Secretary-General's report. President Eisenhower made it clear that "these other measures embraced the use of the UNEF at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba, so as to assure non belligerency in this area."² Then, he emphasized the importance of the "declaration of United States' policy" of February 11th, made by Secretary Dulles at his "direction" in a further effort to meet the views of Israel in respect to the Gulf of Aqaba. He also revealed that Secretary of State Dulles had "orally" informed Mr. Eban that "the United

¹ Ibid.

² Department of State Bulletin, March 11, 1957, pp. 387-391.

States would be glad to urge and support... some participation by the United Nations, with the approval of Egypt, in the administration of the Gaza Strip."¹ He reiterated the United States readiness to support the right of innocent passage through the Gulf of Aqaba and its preparedness to exercise this right itself and to join with others to secure "general recognition" of this right. He avoided the word "sanctions" in affirming his support of United Nations action against Israel, and used the less connotative term of "pressure," but made clear his support of the United Nations if it has "no choice but to exert pressure upon Israel to comply with the withdrawal resolutions."² Finally, President Eisenhower expressed his hope that the Israeli Government "will see that its best immediate and long-term interests lie in compliance with the United Nations and in placing its trust in the resolutions of the United Nations and in the declaration of the United States with reference to the future."³ Eisenhower's address brought the crisis created by Israel's non-compliance to a climax.

In Cairo, President Nasser called an urgent meeting

1 Ibid,
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.

of the Egyptian Cabinet to discuss the growing crisis over Israel's refusal to withdraw. Rumours were widespread among diplomatic circles in Cairo that the Egyptian Government might, either openly or in a subtle way, put a halt to the United Nations clearing operations in the Suez Canal, still blocked by sunken ships. Already Egyptian authorities had refused to permit the United Nations salvage crews to start work on the most important obstructions blocking the Canal: the tug Edgar Bonnet, sunk near Ismailia, and the frigate Abukir, sunk near the port of Suez, on the grounds that the Egyptian Navy had not been able to remove explosives found aboard the tug Edgar Bonnet. On the other hand, the Egyptian Government refused to discuss any proposals concerning the future running of the Suez Canal until Israel withdrew completely from Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh. On the international level, the Soviet Union was pressing the Western Powers to agree - at this stage of the development of the crisis - to a plan for the demilitarization and neutralization of the Middle East.

Ben-Gurion's reply to President Eisenhower's speech was given on February 21st, in an address to the Knesset. Ben-Gurion told the Knesset that he disapproved the "injurious proposals" of the American Government, but asserted that this can not weaken Israel's feelings of gratitude for

United States' moral and material aid to Israel. He reiterated Israel's quests for "efficient guaranties" of "freedom of navigation" in the Straits prior to withdrawal of Israel troops from Sharm el-Sheikh. He proposed these "guaranties" be given "either by the stationing of a United Nations force on the shores of the Straits, by the conclusion of peace between Israel and Egypt, or by any other way."¹ Ben-Gurion's proposals, compared with those set forth in the Israeli Aide-Memoire of January 24th, 1957, showed a subtle but basic change in emphasis. The Aide-Memoire had insisted on the necessity of maintaining UNEF contingents along the Gulf of Aqaba "until" another effective means was agreed upon for ensuring permanent freedom of navigation. Such "effective means" were linked with the conclusion of a peace settlement with Egypt or the guarantee of secure freedom of navigation by other international instruments "to which Israel was a party." In Ben-Gurion's speech of February 21st, the same proposals were completely disconnected and presented as three separate and alternative solutions to the deadlock. This was considered, by American officials, to mean that Ben-Gurion was preparing the way for a bargaining move. Another significant development in his speech of February

¹ "New York Times, issue of February 22nd, 1957.

21st - was his declaration that Israel "is entitled to insure effective guarantees from the United States" - i.e. instead of the United Nations, as had been the case previously. But Ben-Gurion expressed his fears that the opening of the Gulf of Aqaba to American ships might not necessarily insure freedom of navigation to Israeli-owned ships. Referring to Gaza, Ben-Gurion outlined three main problems involved in the Strip or connected with it: 1) Security for Israel's settlements in the southern Negev; 2) the economic rehabilitation of the "residents" of the area; 3) a solution for the "refugees" living in the Strip. With regard to the first problem, he asserted that "no matter what may happen, Israel will not submit to the restoration of the status quo in the Strip."² As for the second and third problems, he declared that Israel would arrive at a settlement with the United Nations which will provide for the rehabilitation of "the permanent residents" and pave the way for "the solution of the problem of refugees by the United Nations."³ Ben-Gurion here seemed to extend Israel's hospitality only to the estimated 80,000 original residents of the Strip leaving the fate of the remaining 220,000 very much in the air. Finally, he

1

Ibid. 1952 Current, Issue of February 1952, p. 112.

2

Ibid.

3

Ibid.

asserted that his Government was decided to reach an understanding with the United States Government, and revealed that Ambassador Eban was instructed to convey to the American Government the position of the Israeli Government.

Ben-Gurion seemed to be content with the US pledge to exercise the right of passage through the Gulf. However, he was still requesting "firmer guaranties" for securing the passage of Israeli-owned ships through the Straits. With this purpose in mind, he considered that it was "essential that UNEF should be stationed on the coast of the Straits-until peace is concluded with Egypt" or "until" some other "reliable and effective arrangement is made."¹ to this end. As for the Gaza Strip, Ben-Gurion maintained that the "Strip has never been Egyptian territory."² Ben-Gurion seemed still intent on incorporating the Strip into the Israeli homeland but he would, in return, propose a "compensation" to the Arabs by allowing the rehabilitation of the 80,000 original residents in the Strip and by giving a faint promise for an Israeli "contribution" in the "solution of the refugees problem." Also, still at stake was the timing of the requested "guaranties." The Israeli Government did not budge from its initial attitude of requesting concessions prior

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

to any eventual withdrawal. Once more, Ben-Gurion asserted that if the "wrong" existing in Gaza and the Straits would be "put right and without delay by the United Nations Assembly," then "the question of compliance and non compliance on Israel's part will not arise at all."¹ For these reasons, Ben-Gurion rejected Eisenhower's bid for prompt withdrawal.

In its turn, the United States Government intensified its pressure on the Israeli Government. On February 21st, the State Department summoned a group of eight American Jewish personalities - described by the "New York Times" as being "non-Zionists" - to a meeting with Secretary Dulles. However, the group included a number of leaders² in fund-raising for Israel. No statement was issued on this occasion, but it was understood, according to the "New York Times," that they were asked "to help influence"³ Israel withdraw her troops from the Gulf area and the Gaza Strip.

¹ Ibid.

² The group was composed of: Barney Balaban, Louis Novins, Samuel D. Leidesdorf (treasurer of the United Jewish Appeal of Greater New York), Jacob Blansstein (former President of the American Jewish Committee), William Rosenwald (general Chairman of the United Jewish Appeal), Philip N. Klutznick (President of B'nai B'rith), Mendel Silverberg and Irving Engel (President of the American Jewish Committee).

³ "New York Times," issue of February 22nd, 1957. It is worth noting that on February 22nd, Barney Balaban - a leading figure in fund-raising for Israel - declared that the Jewish group came to the State Department "at the request of the Secretary of State and the Government." He added that he had "no comment" on the subject of the meeting.

If we remember that Israeli officials admit - in Mr. Eytan's terms - that "the two-way relationship between Israel and the Jews of the world has a profound significance, politically, materially and morally,"¹ then we could realize the far-reaching implications of this step. Furthermore, State Department officials made it clear that the United States would not seek another delay in the General Assembly's debate unless the Israelis accepted to discuss withdrawal from Aqaba and Gaza.

An official reply to Ben-Gurion's statement of February 21st was issued by the White House on the following day. The White House revealed that President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles had discussed the speech of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and expressed their "regret" that the Government of Israel had not yet found it possible to withdraw. The White House went on to assert that Ambassador Lodge was instructed to withhold the presentation of the United States' position to the United Nations "until after Ambassador Eban has had an opportunity to meet with the Secretary of State, as Prime Minister Ben-Gurion requested."² The gist of Mr. Eban's mission, as revealed by Ben-Gurion, was "to make an effort in Washing-

¹ Eytan, Walter, "The First Ten Years," Op.cit., p. 185.

² "New York Times," issue of February 23rd, 1957.

ton and at the General Assembly to separate the settlement on free passage in the Gulf of Aqaba from that on the Gaza Strip."¹ He was to endeavour to obtain a satisfactory settlement on Israel's right of passage in the Gulf before any withdrawal from Gaza. Ben-Gurion explains the reason behind such a demarche as being dictated by the fact that the United States Government was "in agreement" with Israel on the question of navigation in the Gulf, but unfavourable to the Israeli scheme for the future "administration" of Gaza. Had the US Government agreed to the separation of both issues - priority being given to the settlement of the issue of navigation through Aqaba - then Ben-Gurion would have carried on his plan for the incorporation of Gaza into Israel, even at the cost of being subjected to UN and / or US imposed sanctions. Thus, he asserts that "if the dispute on Gaza was not settled later, (they) could then impose sanctions on us."² Ben-Gurion still hoped to gain concessions with regard to Gaza from both the United States and/or the United Nations. But neither were willing to concede, and insisted on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Strip.

At the General Assembly, the representative of Lebanon

¹ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit., p. 50.

² Ibid.

introduced, on February 22nd, a draft resolution sponsored by six Arab-Asian countries, by which the General Assembly would 1) condemn Israel for her non-compliance with the Assembly's previous resolutions; 2) call upon all states to deny all military, economic or financial assistance and facilities to Israel; 3) request all states to provide the Secretary-General with information on their implementation of this (proposed) resolution; and 4) request the Secretary-General to report again on the present and previous resolutions. In turn, the United States called for full withdrawal within three to five days, with measures to be taken against Israel if she failed to comply with the withdrawal demand. In Washington, Dulles resumed his negotiations with the Israel Ambassador. A first result of these negotiations was the postponement of the General Assembly's meeting for a "few days," on the United States' demand. It was also understood that the United States rejected the Israeli approach for the separation of the Aqaba settlement from that of Gaza. Israel was still insisting on obtaining "firm guaranties" for the Israeli right of passage in Aqaba, prior to any withdrawal, and showed her determination to resist the US demands by undertaking "vigorous and extensive efforts" in a number of world capitals" to persuade the powers to oppose the imposition of sanctions or to abstain from voting if such

a proposal was made,"¹ according to Ben-Gurion's account. These efforts, Ben-Gurion adds, were "not entirely without success."

The adjournment of the meetings of the General Assembly opened the door to further discussions conducted by Mr. Hammarskjold and Mr. Dulles with Israel's Ambassador Eban, in pursuance of the goals defined in the resolutions of the General Assembly. Rumours leaking out of these conferences indicated that Israel was willing to comply with the second resolution of February 2nd 1957 in which the General Assembly considered that "the scrupulous maintenance" of the Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Agreement required placing UNEF "on" the Armistice demarcation line and the implementation of "other measures"³ proposed by the Secretary-General's report of January 24th, 1957 - namely the suggestion of placing UNEF in the Sharm el-Sheikh area . But the issue still remained, according to the "New York Times," whether this "vaguely worded resolution" gives the UNEF specific and continuing responsibility for preventing resumption of belligerent acts in Gaza and Aqaba. The political outcome of these conferences was recorded in three principal documents:

¹ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit.,

² Ibid.

³ UN Document A/3518, Op.cit.

1) Secretary-General Statement of February 22nd, 1957

On February 22nd, the Secretary-General issued a statement in the nature of a supplement to his report of February 11th. In this statement the Secretary-General declared "with confidence" that it was the desire of the Government of Egypt that the take-over of Gaza from the military and civilian control of Israel "in the first instance" would be "exclusively by UNEF."¹ He added with "equal confidence," that the Egyptian Government, "recognizing the present special problems and complexities of the Gaza area and the long-standing major responsibility of the United Nations there for the assistance of the Arab refugees, and having in mind also the objectives and obligations of the Armistice Agreement, has the willingness and readiness to make special and helpful arrangements with the United Nations and some of its auxiliary bodies, such as UNRWA and UNEF."² The Secretary-General defined these arrangements as being: a) the deployment of the UNEF "on" the Armistice demarcation line and the Gaza Strip; b) the effective interposition of the Force between the armed forces of Egypt and Israel; c) the assistance of the United Nations and its auxiliary bodies in putting an end to all incursions and raids across the border from either

¹ UN press release SG/563, February 22, 1957.

² Ibid.

side. Then, the Secretary-General outlined the arrangements to be taken in "the period of transition." These were: a) the safeguarding of life and property by providing efficient and effective police-protection, b) the guarantee of good "civilian administration," c) assistance to the refugee program, d) the fostering of the economic development of the territory and its people.

The statement of the Secretary-General was presumed to reflect assurances given by Dr. Fawzi. However, the Secretary-General did not mention who had authorized him to make the statement on behalf of Egypt, neither did he set a time-limit for the "transition period" during which Egypt had accepted a United Nations take-over of the Gaza "civilian administration." The following day, the Egyptian information Director, Dr. Hatem, denied in Cairo, the existence of any "compromise" on the future of Gaza, and asserted that Egypt had made no new agreement for additional tasks of UNEF since the agreement made on November 20, 1956. At the United Nations, an Egyptian delegation spokesman, commenting Hammarskjold's statement said that the Gaza Strip was "not a trust territory." He added that after the UNEF had left, "the affairs of Gaza will be run in no different manner than before."¹

¹ "New York Times," issue of February 24th, 1957.

2) Dulles-Eban joint communique of February 24th, 1957

On February 24th, Secretary Dulles received the Israel Ambassador during a 3h. 10m. conference at the State Department. A joint communique was issued at the conclusion of this meeting. The communique made the following points:

- 1) Eban had returned from Israel with "new instructions;"
- 2) Dulles had "clarified" certain points in the assurances the United States had offered Israel concerning security against "Egyptian blockade and raids;"
- 3) Eban undertook to "inform" his Government, "urgently", about his talks with Dulles;
- 4) Eban would confer "promptly" with Mr. Hammarskjold;
- 5) Finally, Dulles and Eban hoped that out of these discussions a solution would be found "consistent with the principles of the United Nations."¹

Commenting on the Dulles-Eban conference, the "New York Times" wrote that "Israelis were seeking US assurance that, if after withdrawal of UNEF, Egyptian guns again closed the Gulf to Israeli-bound shipping, the United States would not expect Israel to remain passive."² The "New York Times" added that "the problem appeared to be to phrase such assurance without condoning a possible renewed Israeli invasion of Egypt."³

¹ "New York Times," issue of February 25th, 1957.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

3) Note by the UN Secretary-General, February 26th, 1957

The third document conveying the results of the multi-lateral discussions was issued by the Secretary-General, in the form of a Note published on February 26th, 1957. A Special Memorandum was attached to this note conveying the Secretary-General's reply to the inquiry sought by the representative of Israel about the future administration of Gaza. The Israeli inquiry requested the Secretary-General to clarify whether he meant in his Statement of February 22nd that the United Nations would have "exclusive administration" of the Gaza Strip. In his reply, the Secretary-General pointed out that the "practical arrangements" advanced in his statement were "envisaged within the framework of Egyptian control of the territory as established by the (Armistice) Agreement, and could, therefore, not be understood as limiting Egyptian rights within the area under the terms of the Agreement."¹ Furthermore, the Secretary-General communicated an exposé of the important points broached in the discussions he conducted with the Israeli representative on February 25th. The answers of the Secretary-General to the questions raised by the representative of Israel were:

A) Questions Related to the Gulf of Aqaba.

1. With regard to the function of UNEF, The Secretary-General affirmed that its function encompassed the prevention

¹ UN Document A/3563.

of belligerency - this, "subject to the qualification that UNEF is never to be used in such a way as to force a solution of any controversial political or legal problem."¹

2. Concerning the Termination of the Assignment of the Force, the Secretary-General reserved to the Advisory Committee the right of determining whether the matter should be brought to the attention of the General Assembly.²

B. Questions Related to Gaza.

1. With Respect to the Administration of Gaza, the Secretary-General renewed his recognition of Egypt's right to control the Gaza Strip by virtue of the Armistice Agreement. Mr. Hammarskjold affirmed that this Agreement is "binding on the Secretariat."³

2. On the Possibility of Separating the Gaza Problem from that of the Gulf of Aqaba, as intended by the Israeli approach during the discussion, Mr. Hammarskjold stated that "it may be seriously doubted that the question of Aqaba can be solved separately."⁴

The published reports of the negotiations conducted outside the United Nations carried promises of an eventual

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid. This aspect of the Force has been discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

solution of the pending crisis. An important development in the situation could be noticed in Israel's acceptance of discussing the "assurances" that had been advanced by the American State Department Memorandum of February 11th and by the reports and statements issued by the Secretary-General. However, basic divergences still existed between the views of the Secretary-General and the Israeli Government. These divergences derived from Mr. Hammarskjold's declared position with regard to the nature of "assurances" that the United Nations could give to Israel. In the light of this position, he declined to give Israel formal "assurances" implying a change in the Armistice status juris and limited the scope of his "assurances" to the extent he considered to be compatible with the Armistice regime. In this respect, Mr. Hammarskjold viewed Israel's demands for "guaranties" involving a legal and permanent character as implying, at this juncture, a forceful change of the existing status juris.

In Israel, a further twin-shift in emphasis could be noticed in Ben-Gurion's declaration to the Knesset, on February 25th, 1957, with regard to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gaza Strip. Concerning the Gulf of Aqaba, Ben-Gurion declared that recognition of Israel's right to use force to keep the Gulf of Aqaba open to her shipping would be the

best guarantee she could "actually expect."¹ This indicated that Israel would renounce her demand for the deployment of the Emergency Force at Sharm el-Sheikh "until" peaceful conditions were re-established, in return for the recognition by the United States and/or the United Nations of Israel's right to use force to prevent Egypt from closing the Gulf of Aqaba in the future. To secure this recognition, Israeli diplomacy undertook a double-headed approach. In Washington, Israelis suggested that: 1) the United States Government make a formal announcement that it intended to send a merchant man, under US flag, to Eilat, in order to emphasize the US view that the Gulf comprehends international waters; 2) the United States would join with major maritime powers in a statement along the lines of the State Department's February 11th Memorandum, recognizing the international character of the Gulf; 3) in relation to Gaza, Israel would give up her demand for the Administration of Gaza provided Egyptian Administration would not be restored. These demands were believed to have been communicated to the State Department during Eban's meeting with Dulles on February 25th. In New York, Israelis sought to obtain: 1) that the Secretary-General spell out in greater detail the remark contained in his January 24th report that UNEF

¹ "New York Times," issue of February 26th, 1957.

had a role to play "in support of mutual restraint" on the shores of Aqaba; 2) that the General Assembly adopt a resolution upholding freedom of navigation in Aqaba, and providing that UNEF be stationed in the area.

Upon resumption of the General Assembly meetings, on February 26th, the Canadian representative made an attempt to test the Assembly's willingness to adopt a resolution that would meet Israeli requests by introducing a measure of internationalisation in the Gaza Strip and ensuring the right of passage in Aqaba. The Canadian representative declared his Government's support of freedom of navigation through the Gulf of Aqaba. Then, citing the Secretary-General's February 22nd statement indicating that Egypt would agree to a United Nations take-over of civilian and administrative responsibilities in Gaza, he proposed a further extension of United Nations' functions and responsibilities within the Strip. He suggested that "the United Nations should... accept responsibility to the maximum possible extent for establishing and maintaining civil administration in the territory."¹ To make effective arrangements to this end, the Canadian representative proposed that "the Secretary-General might decide to appoint

¹ UN Document A/PV 660.

a United Nations commissioner for Gaza."¹ The reaction of the majority of the General Assembly's member states was hostile to the Canadian propositions. At the same time, the failure of the Canadian interference seemed to bring about a radical change in the attitude of the Israeli Government. According to Ben-Gurion's account, this change was a result of the efforts of both Canada and France who, "in the last days of February (1957)... took a hand in the negotiations, thus opening the third and final stage of the struggle."²

IV. Third Stage, February 27th - March 6th, 1957

The third stage in the Israeli instrumental withdrawal from Gaza and Sinai marked Israel's acceptance of "political guaranties" as a practicable substitute for her irredentist claims in Gaza and the renunciation of her initial demands for "assurances" of a legal and permanent character concerning the Gulf of Aqaba.

With regard to Gaza, Israel eventually agreed to give up the actual incorporation of the Strip provided Egyptian Administration would not be restored and that the UN would assume administrative responsibilities in the Strip. In

¹ Ibid.

² "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit., p. 51.

relation to the Gulf of Aqaba, Israel definitely settled for the US-granted "guaranties" based on the de facto implementation of the right of passage of ships of all flags through the Straits. The details of the events that led to this development have not been, yet, completely elucidated. However, Ben-Gurion's version of this sudden change in the Israeli Government attitude was recorded in the Israeli Year Book of 1959/60. According to him, the change was brought about by France and Canada - who had supported Israel "ever since the Emergency Assembly opened".¹ According to Joseph Lash, the French Foreign Minister, Mr. Pineau, had sought to persuade Hammarskjold to give an "explicit formulation on freedom of navigation in Aqaba."² But Hammarskjold insisted that "the formulation should not be open to the interpretation that Israel was getting a reward."³ Ben-Gurion relates that both France and Canada advised the Israeli Government, at this stage, that "there was no hope or possibility of the Assembly adopting by a two thirds majority a resolution instructing the United Nations forces to remain in Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh until

¹ Ibid.

² Lash, Joseph P., Op.cit., p. 106

³ Ibid.

peace was reached between Israel and Egypt."¹ They pointed out that even if the United States so desired, such a resolution would not be possible because the Soviet and Afro-Asian blocs supported Egypt's stand. Therefore, Canada and France proposed that Israel's "rights" should be safeguarded "not by the UN" - for that was impossible - but "within the UN."² Elaborating on this theme, Ben-Gurion wrote that this meant that a number of states "with considerable influence," and especially maritime states, would make two declarations "at the United Nations". The first declaration would be "on freedom of passage in the Straits of Tiran, on Israel's right to freedom of shipping and also on shipping itself, namely that they themselves would send their ships to Eilat"³ and, further, "on Israel's right to self-defence under the terms of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter in case anyone should interfere by force with Israel shipping in the Straits."⁴ A similar declaration would be made by the same states on the regime in Gaza, namely that "the United Nations forces would remain in the Strip until a peace settlement."⁵ Ben-Gurion asserted that

¹ "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit., p. 51.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

France and Canada brought no pressure on Israel and that their suggestion was only "a friendly proposal." He further remarked, with a clear tendency to rationalize the outcome of the Israeli campaign, that "it was clear, however, that this was the last and most practical opportunity for the settlement of these two problems in our favour in the United Nations"¹ - i.e. short of being settled "by" the United Nations. The Israel Government adopted the Franco-Canadian proposals by the end of February.

The Secretary-General's reluctance to adopt an explicit attitude in favour of Israeli demands on Gaza and Aqaba, led to a break off of discussions at the General Assembly. Negotiations for Israeli withdrawal were conducted in Washington. At the conclusion of these negotiations, the Israeli Embassy in Washington issued a statement announcing that the "hope of an early solution is now much stronger."² This declaration aroused a number of speculations within the diplomatic circles of Washington. It was rumoured that Israel had reached a 'behind-the-scenes' agreement with the United States whereby the US would support Israel's claim to the right of passage through the Suez Canal, facilitate, by a special arrangement, the opening of the Gulf of Aqaba

¹ Ibid.

² "New York Times", issue of February 28th, 1957.

to Israeli shipping, and endorse a long-range UN take-over of Gaza. Echoing the rumours concerning the arrangements for the opening of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping, George Lenczowski relates that, profiting by the fact that the Straits of Tiran would be momentarily out of Egyptian control - UNEF would replace Egyptian artillery - an American merchant man would sail "unmolested" into the Gulf, with Port Eilat as its destination, "thereby establishing a legal precedent of free navigation without effective challenge from Egypt."¹ Lenczowski remarks: "by upholding the right of its own ships to navigate freely to and from the Gulf, the US would be committed to uphold a similar right of ships under different flags."²

On March 1st, the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mrs. Golda Meir, declared in the General Assembly that Israel was prepared to withdraw her forces from Egypt, but on certain definite "assumptions" and in the confidence that continued "freedom of navigation" would be maintained for Israel and "international shipping." Recalling the United States' memorandum of February 11th, about the United States' readiness to exercise the right of "innocent passage" in the Gulf

¹ Lenczowski, George, "The Middle East in World Affairs," New York, 1962, (3rd edition), p. 518.

² Ibid.

of Aqaba, Mrs. Meir declared that her Government had subsequently learnt that "leading maritime powers are prepared to subscribe to the doctrine set out in the United States' memorandum of 11 February and have a similar intention to exercise their rights of free and innocent passage in the Gulf and the Straits."¹ Then, recalling statements by the United States representative about maintaining UNEF troops in the Straits area "until" peaceful conditions were assured, she declared that it was generally recognized that the function of the Emergency Force in the Straits of Tiran area included "the prevention of belligerent acts."² Concerned about an eventual premature withdrawal of UNEF troops from the Straits area, her Government had noted the assurance embodied in the Secretary-General's report of February 26th that any proposal for its withdrawal "would first come to the Advisory Committee." This procedure would give the General Assembly the opportunity to ensure that "no precipitate changes" were made which would increase the possibility of a renewal of belligerent acts. Mrs. Meir expressed her Government's intention to exercise her "full rights of free passage in the Gulf of Aqaba and the Straits of Tiran."³

¹ UN Document A/PV 666.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Israel had received with "gratification" the assurances that other leading maritime powers had the intention to exercise their rights of "free and innocent passage" in the Gulf of Aqaba. Interference with ships of Israel flag exercising "free and innocent passage," would be regarded by Israel as an attack entitling her to exercise her right of self-defense. Then, Mrs. Meir declared that Israel's withdrawal was made on the following "assumptions": 1) UNEF would be deployed in Gaza and the take-over from the military and civilian control of Israel would be "exclusively" by UNEF - i.e. Egyptian administration would be excluded from Gaza;- 2) UNEF would carry out the functions enumerated in the Secretary-General's report of February 22nd, namely: safeguarding life and property, guaranteeing good civilian administration, assuring maximum assistance to the UN refugee program and fostering economic development; and 3) the United Nations' responsibility in the administration of Gaza would be maintained until the conclusion of a peace settlement or a definite agreement on the future of the Gaza Strip. If conditions were created in the Gaza Strip indicating a return to the conditions of deterioration which existed previously, Israel would reserve her freedom to act to defend her rights. Mrs. Meir statement

was followed by declarations made by the leading Western maritime powers¹ in which, "as was agreed in advance"² - according to Ben-Gurion - they expressed their readiness to exercise the right of passage in the Gulf of Aqaba. Ben-Gurion considered that these declarations "added weight" to Mrs. Meir statement.

Mrs. Meir announcement of what could be called Israel's "eclectic compliance" with certain resolutions and specific statements made either within or outside the United Nations, created an equivocal understanding of Israel's actual willingness to fulfill the United Nations resolutions in letter and spirit. This situation prompted the Egyptian representative to point out that it was his Government's understanding that the General Assembly was unanimous in expecting "full and honest" implementation of its resolutions calling for "immediate and unconditional withdrawal by Israel."³ He declared that nothing that had been said in the Assembly or elsewhere "could shake this fact or detract from its reality and its validity; nor could it affect the fulness and the lawfulness

¹ The following member states expressed their readiness to exercise the right of navigation in the Gulf: US, France, Britain, Argentina, Costa-Rica, Panama, Holland, Norway, Belgium, Australia, New-Zealand, Sweden, Canada, Portugal, Italy and Denmark.

² "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit., p. 52.

³ UN Document A/PV 666.

of Egypt's rights and those of the Arab population of the Gaza Strip."¹

The US representative, Ambassador Lodge, made an important clarification of his Government's attitude vis-a-vis Israel's decision to withdraw. He declared that his Government did not consider that the declarations made in the statement of Mrs. Meir make Israel's withdrawal "conditional," because most of the declarations constitute "restatement of what has already been said"² by the General Assembly or by the Secretary-General in his reports, or "hopes and expectations which seem... not unreasonable in the light of the prior actions of this Assembly."³ Then, citing the Secretary-General's statement of February 22nd, Mr. Lodge declared that it was the view of his Government that, from a juridical standpoint, the future of the Gaza Strip must be worked out within the framework of the Armistice Agreement. This seemed to imply an eventual acceptance of an alteration of the status quo ante in the administration of the Strip, but within the context of Egypt's de jure "titular sovereignty" over the Strip, as derived from the Armistice Agreement. Almost simultaneously, Secretary of State

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Dulles met the representatives of the Arab states in Washington, on March 1st, and informed them that Israeli withdrawal "would involve no promise or concession whatsoever to Israel by the United States."¹ He added that this withdrawal would be predicated upon "the prior decisions" of the United Nations General Assembly and "the reports" of the Secretary-General and the "public position" of the United States, notably "the position expounded by President Eisenhower in his address of February 20th."² But this was, per se, an endorsement of Israel's demands on the Gulf of Aqaba. Secretary Dulles "deplored" the Communist propaganda spreading the story in the Arab world that "there was some secret understanding between the United States and Israel."³ He treated these efforts as a "misrepresentation" of a great achievement, namely "the full and unconditional withdrawal of Israel as had been sought."⁴

Mr. Lodge's declaration of March 1st to the General Assembly, notably his assertion that the future of Gaza must be worked out "within the framework of the Armistice Agreement," aroused Israel's concern. On March 2nd, the

1 Press Release 103, March 1st, 1957 (from "New York Times," March 2nd, 1957.)

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

Israeli Cabinet held a four-hour emergency meeting. At the end of this meeting, it was declared that Ambassador Eban was instructed to obtain further "clarification" of the United States' position on the future of the Gaza Strip. Israel seemed satisfied with the US position on Aqaba but not on Gaza. On the same day, March 2nd, a spokesman of the Israel Foreign Ministry explained that concern was felt at the declaration made by Mr. Lodge at the United Nations "not so much at the things he said but at the things he left unsaid."¹ It was later reported by Ben-Gurion that several points in the statement of Lodge were considered as constituting "a retreat from the arrangement previously concluded."² However, Ben-Gurion did not reveal the details of the "arrangement" to which he referred, but it was reported by the "New York Times" that there was no serious disagreement over withdrawal from the Gulf of Aqaba, but Israeli officials "had expected the US delegate to say that the United States considers Gaza to be international territory and that Egypt should not be allowed to return in anyway."³ Joseph Lash, also, confirms this report. He asserts that the Israeli representative, Mr.

¹ "New York Times," issue of March 2nd, 1957.

² "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit., p. 52.

³ "New York Times," issue of March 3rd, 1957.

Eban , " thought the US was ready for complete internationalization of the Gaza Strip , "1 and he flew up to New York to find out about this question . But , according to Lash , "Hammarskjold poured cold water on the concept of internationalization."2 Ben-Gurion relates that the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh was held up until he received , on March 2nd, a letter from President Eisenhower stating that it had always been the view of the US Government that , " after the withdrawal , " there should be a united effort by all the nations " to bring about conditions in the area more stable , more tranquil and more conducive to the general welfare than those which existed thereof."3 Referring to the " hopes and expectations" voiced by the Israel Foreign Minister on March 1st, President Eisenhower assured Ben-Gurion that " it is reasonable for Israel to entertain such hopes and expectations , and ... the United States... will seek that such hopes prove not to be in vain."4

On March 3rd, it was announced that the Israeli Cabinet considered a letter sent by the American Ambassador to Mr. Ben-Gurion. This letter was mentioned in the "New York Times" without any reference to its contents. In the course of the

1 Lash, Joseph, Op.cit., p. 107 .

2 Ibid.

3 Quoted in full in the "Israeli Government Year Book," 1959/60, Op.cit., p. 52

4 Ibid.

following days, the Israeli Government undertook the necessary arrangements conducive to the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Egyptian territory. Thus, on March 4th, the Secretary-General informed the General Assembly that the Commander of UNEF had reached an agreement with the Israel Commander-in-Chief on technical arrangements for the evacuation of the remaining Israeli troops. The Secretary-General also stated that General Burns had been instructed to make the necessary arrangements for "complete" and "unconditional" withdrawal, with initial take-over "exclusively" by UNEF. On March 5th, Ben-Gurion told the Knesset that the United States and other nations had "approved" Israel's assumption that United Nations will administer Gaza "till peace settlement was reached."¹ He added "in spite of all this, I must state that there is no certainty that the Egyptians will not return as a civilian administration, or through military occupation."²

On this conviction, Israeli troops began to pull out of Gaza on March 6th, and of Sharm el-Sheikh on March 8th. On the same day, the Secretary-General reported to the General Assembly Israel's "full compliance" with resolution 1124 (XI) of February 2nd, 1957.

¹ "New York Times," issue of March 6th, 1957.

² Ibid.

V. The Return of the Egyptian Administration to Gaza

The UNEF Commander-in-Chief, General Burns, relates that, on March 2nd, he received instructions from the Secretary-General to meet General Dayan "to concert arrangements for the withdrawal and UNEF take-over."¹ General Dayan set a meeting for the same day but cancelled it before it could take place on the grounds that "he had not been given final instructions by his Government."²

General Burns contacted the Secretary-General asking for instructions as to the course of action to be followed by UNEF after the take-over of the control of Gaza. Should he allow the return of an Egyptian Governor, administrative officials and police to the Strip, as had been the case at El Tor and El Arish? What information was he allowed to give to General Dayan if he asked him whether the UNEF would admit any Egyptians to the Strip? Finally, with respect to the UNEF take-over of Gaza "in the first instance"- as indicated in the Secretary-General's statement of February 22nd - how long was this "first instance" to last? General Burns received Hammarskjold's instructions the following day.

In relation to the take-over of Gaza, the Secretary-General referred General Burns to the statement made by Mr. Lodge on March 1st to the effect that Israel's

¹ Burns, E.L.M., Op.cit., p. 256.

² Ibid.

withdrawal must be considered as " unconditional." Moreover the Commander-in-Chief was instructed to avoid discussing with General Dayan the developments that might occur after the initial take-over . As to the future of the Strip , it would be determined " within " the framework of the General Armistice Agreement , and the UNEF would assume the responsibility of administration " for the couple of weeks necessary to negotiate more definite arrangements with Egypt."¹ The UNEF authority in Gaza must be derived from Egypt as the power " in control," according to the General Armistice Agreement .

In the afternoon of March 4th , General Dayan informed General Burns of the Israeli Government's acceptance to withdraw Israeli troops from Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh . Burns and Dayan arranged that the UNEF take-over in Gaza would take place during the night of March 6-7 . In Sharm el-Sheikh , the withdrawal of Israeli forces was completed on March 8th .

Following its entry into the Gaza Strip and the Sharm el-Sheikh area , and in the absence of any civil authority , the UNEF undertook a number of security functions in the Strip . The UNRWA assistance was made available to the population of Gaza . But there was a clear reluctance among the

¹ Ibid, p. 257

population and the local officials to co-operate with UNEF in the conduct of civil administration. The Gaza courts, schools and public utilities remained closed during the UNEF take-over. The citrus crop was just being harvested and the UNEF was faced with the problems of marketing the crop. Among the population, there was a growing insistence upon the return of the former Egyptian administration. Demonstrations broke out in Gaza demanding the restoration of the Egyptian administration. They developed at a frequency that compelled the UNEF to issue a ban on demonstrations and meetings. In spite of the violent development of the situation in Gaza, the United Nations was proceeding with its plans for the administration of Gaza. The Secretary-General's reference - in his March 3rd instructions to General Burns - to "definite arrangements" with Egypt concerning the Administration of Gaza, began to materialize. General Burns reveals that " the Secretary-General had arranged to send Dr. Ralph Bunch to Egypt to have preliminary talks with the Egyptians on the arrangements for the control of the Strip... The Secretary-General also planned to come himself."¹ The Egyptian Government, in view of the disorders in Gaza, announced on March 11th, that General Abdel-Latif was appointed Administrative Governor of Gaza. The statement declared

¹ Ibid, p. 261

that Egypt had agreed to the presence of UN troops in the Gaza Strip to enforce the cease-fire and follow up the withdrawal of the aggressor forces behind the Armistice lines.

On March 13th, Dr. Bunche arrived in Egypt presumably to attempt to persuade President Nasser to delay sending the Administrative Governor into the Gaza Strip, and, according to General Burns, to delay any other action "which would make more difficult the setting up of a regime of shared responsibility between the Egyptians and the United Nations in the Gaza Strip."¹ He was also to press strongly for assurances that there would be no "countenancing" of fedayeen activities by the Egyptian authorities, and to obtain a gentleman's agreement that no Egyptian troops would be sent to the Strip. Burns relates that President Nasser agreed to the last two points, but insisted on sending the Egyptian Governor to Gaza on March 14th, as scheduled. The United States' Ambassador in Cairo also intervened with President Nasser in favour of delaying the Egyptian administrative take-over of Gaza.

On March 14th, Major General Abdel-Latif made his entry into Gaza with a limited staff, and took up his administrative duties. On the same day, an official statement was issued by the Egyptian Director of Information announcing

¹ Ibid, p. 267.

that relationships between UNEF and Egyptian authorities were based on mutual co-operation, and that Egypt was doing her best to help UNEF carry out the responsibilities conferred by the United Nations resolutions. There was actually no return of Egyptian military forces to the Gaza Strip, and the security functions initially undertaken by UNEF, were gradually transferred to the Egyptian administration.

With respect to the Gulf of Aqaba, events subsequent to Israel's withdrawal showed a Western determination to establish the right of passage for Israeli ships through the Gulf. On April 1st, 1957, Prime Minister MacMillan of Great Britain declared, upon his return from the Bermuda Conference with President Eisenhower, that both governments considered that there was a "right of innocent passage" for ships of all flags through the Gulf of Aqaba.¹

On April 6th, 1957 the tanker "Kern Hills" hoisting the American flag, arrived at Eilat under the protective presence of UN troops, thus establishing a precedent in favour of Israel's claim for the right of passage through the Gulf of Aqaba.

¹ Reported by Reuters and U.P.

CONCLUSION

Let us draw the political and military balance sheet of Israel's campaign and sum up Israel's principal gains from the invasion of Sinai.

Israeli objectives in Sinai, as discussed in Chapter II, ranged from a territorial maximum to a territorial minimum and, finally, to a non-territorial political minimum that would secure the advantages accruing from the actual occupation of, at least, Gaza and Eastern Sinai.

Israel's opportunity of achieving her maximal objectives depended, to a great extent, on the military outcome of the Tripartite invasion, and, particularly, the fate of the Franco-British occupation of the Suez Canal and, by implication, the repercussions of the Tripartite intervention on President Nasser's regime.

Drawing on Kecskemeti's analysis of "strategic surrender,"¹ victory in the Tripartite invasion could be achieved only by a lightning defeat of the Egyptian military power. However, despite Egyptian losses of war materiel, the Tripartite intervention did not in fact achieve a monopoly of armed strength that would allow it to dictate the terms of peace. In this respect, no military engagement,

¹ Kecskemeti, Paul, "Strategic Surrender," Stanford, California, 1958.

either in Sinai or along the Canal, could be classified as a "battle of annihilation," in Kecskemeti's terms. Thus, when cease-fire was imposed, Egypt had conserved residual military strength and still retained two-thirds of the Canal - which was a major objective of the Tripartite invasion. On the other hand, the loss of Sinai, from a demographic and economic point of view, was not vital to Egypt's survival. As a consequence, the prestige of President Nasser's regime was not seriously affected and Egypt was able to reject Ben-Gurion's bids for bilateral peace-negotiations which, presumably, would have afforded Ben-Gurion an opportunity to exact Israel's maximal objectives, backed by the power position acquired through the complete occupation of Sinai.

Franco-British withdrawal from the Suez Canal area definitely reduced Israel's chances to remain on the East bank of the Canal. It was perhaps no coincidence that on the day Britain and France officially announced their willingness to withdraw from the Canal area, December 3rd, 1956, Israel declared the initial withdrawal of her troops to a distance of 50 kilometres to the East of the Canal. This initial withdrawal marked: 1) the recession of Israel's irredentist claims in the direction of the alternative territorial minimum, 2) the accentuation of Israel's claims for "political guaranties." This latter was specifically reflected in

Israel's exclusion of the Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh areas from the scope of her "willful" compliance with the General Assembly resolutions on withdrawal, and her insistence on the formalization of her claims in the Aqaba territorial waters.

However, the peculiar configuration in the attitudes of the Eastern and Western blocs at the UN - prompted by the Afro-Asian bloc - in opposing Israel's military occupation of Gaza and Eastern Sinai, and United States' pressure in particular, forced Israel to change her position still further. This Israeli retreat with regard to Gaza and Eastern Sinai went through the following phases:

a) Optimum aim: Israel claimed the direct "civil administration" of Gaza and the guaranteeing of Israeli shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba by way of an agreement signed by the four coastal states, namely Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

b) Second-best aim: As a second best alternative, Israel proposed the "indirect" annexation of the Strip through the elimination of Egyptian control by way of a joint UN-Israel administration, and the guaranteeing of Israeli shipping in the Gulf by way of a UN resolution to this effect, backed by UNEF presence along the Gulf.

c) Third-best aim: Finally, Israel proposed exclusive UN administration of the Strip and the establishment of a

"peace situation" through the "permanent" presence of UNEF along the shores of Aqaba. With this in view, Israel requested the broadening of the UNEF functions in such a way as to make it a peace enforcing corps whose presence in Gaza and along the Gulf of Aqaba would continue "until" the establishment of peaceful conditions.

The opposition of the majority of UN member states to the modification of the UNEF functions, and the necessity of securing Egypt's consent to such a modification, thwarted this last objective. However, the Secretary-General's "flexible" attitude towards the stationing of UNEF along the shores of Aqaba, and the US support of Israel's right of passage through the Straits - later backed by a number of maritime powers - made possible the implementation, on a de facto basis, of Israel's right of passage through the Straits of Tiran.

Considering the US-backed "guaranties" of her shipping in the Gulf as satisfactory, and in an effort to further her claims for a UN administration of Gaza, Israel attempted, at this stage, to separate the settlement of Gaza from the settlement of the Gulf of Aqaba. But, both the United States and the UN Secretary-General opposed the new Israeli approach and considered Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh as a "package deal." However, it is worth noting that the Secretary-General's attitude towards Israeli claims

in Gaza seemed less clear from the Arab point of view than his attitude towards Israeli claims in the Gulf. His reports to the General Assembly, and the Assembly's resolutions, upheld the restoration of the Egyptian administration to the Strip by acknowledging the validity of the Armistice Agreement. But, according to the account of General Burns, the Secretary-General intended, in early March 1957, to introduce a measure of UN administration of the Strip under Egypt's "titular sovereignty." It was the prompt return of the Egyptian administration to the Strip that thwarted this development.

The restoration of the status quo ante in Gaza left to Israel one major gain: the opening of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping. Nevertheless, this concession was secured on the basis of the fait accompli in the area, and although this concession was supported in the UN by a number of maritime powers, it has never been formally acknowledged either by the UN or any of the adjacent coastal states.

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