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THE CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

January-March, 1957

In an earlier paper⁽¹⁾ an indication was given of the background of the crisis in the Middle East, followed by an account of United Nations' actions and the texts of the principal documents. The present paper continues the account from the beginning of 1957 to March 8 when the General Assembly temporarily adjourned.

When the Assembly took recess for Christmas on December 21 it could look back on some degree of progress toward the objectives on which it had agreed. A cease-fire had been achieved. The withdrawal of French and United Kingdom forces had been completed, and elements of the Israeli forces had been withdrawn behind the armistice line. A United Nations Emergency Force had been set up, and had, by the end of the year, some 4,000 personnel in Egypt. Preliminary arrangements for the financing of the Force had been agreed. A start was shortly to be made on the clearance of the Suez Canal by the United Nations salvage fleet, although no plan for financing the operation had as yet been accepted.

While the results thus far constituted no mean achievement, much remained to be done; and soon after the Assembly re-convened on January 2 it turned again to item 6 of its agenda, the situation in the Middle East. While the cease-fire had long since been in effect, other aspects of the general question were still to be resolved: the withdrawal of the remaining Israeli forces, the details of the financing and functions of UNEF, and the clearance of and the regime for the Suez Canal. Each of those problems was complicated in itself, and the solution of each was affected by the remaining two. As the Assembly proceeded, the inter-relationship became evident, as had been the case before the turn of the year. It may, however, be useful at this point to recall the main features of those problems individually.

The Secretary-General's Note of January 15, placed before the General Assembly, showed that it was the declared intention of the Government of Israel to withdraw its forces from the "Sinai Desert", with the exception of "the Sharm al-Shaikh area", by January 22. On the remaining area, and on the Gaza strip, Israel was prepared to have conversations with the Secretary-General.⁽²⁾

Sharm al-Shaikh is the strip of coast on the west side of the Straits of Tiran, the waterway through which a narrow navigable channel leads into the Gulf of Aqaba. The Gulf itself extends for about a hundred miles, past Saudi Arabian and Egyptian territory, to the ports of Aqaba in Jordan and Elath in Israel. Egyptian military installations capable of controlling the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba were established late in 1949 and early in 1950 at Ras

⁽¹⁾ *The Crisis in the Middle East, October-December 1956.*
⁽²⁾ For an analysis of this Note see *External Affairs Monthly Bulletin*, February 1957, pp. 42ff.

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