

conclusions from the manner of our escape and act on them, perhaps we will not in the future have to get so perilously close again....

"We must now press on with the greater and perhaps even more difficult task of a political settlement.... This is implicit in the resolution before us and that of November 3, which establish the conditions within which the UN force must operate. Until we have succeeded in this task of a political settlement, our work today and the cease-fire of yesterday—though they give us reason for hope and encouragement—remain uncompleted."

Immediately thereafter, Pearson became involved in the tiresome business of persuading President Nasser to accept a battalion of Canadian troops as part of UNEF. (The problem was that the two units that the Department of National Defence had in mind were the Queen's Own Rifles of Calgary and the Black Watch, both of which sounded far too British for the Egyptian leader. Pearson commented wryly, "What we needed was the First East Kootenay Anti-Imperialistic Rifles!") In the end, Canadian infantry units were not needed, but an air transport squadron and some 300 administrative personnel were sent. General Burns wrote to Pearson on Christmas Eve: "Canadians in the base units have made all the difference in the world in the efficient operation of the administrative side of the military effort. We just could not have done without them."

But meanwhile, the opportunity for talks on a political settlement was fading. In his memoirs, Pearson sums up:

"There was much discussion in the Assembly about getting all the British and the French out. The British and French did not want to withdraw until there was an assurance that the UN could do the job, and this took some weeks.... They did, however, retire completely before the end of the year. But the Israelis did not, and were not proposing to leave without conditions. While one could sympathize with them, their conditions were not likely to be acceptable to the UN Assembly, and there was no point in discussing a political settlement until the Israelis withdrew to the original armistice lines.

"There was no longer much hope of progress toward a political settlement in any event. Things can be done under the incentive of terror and fear that cannot be done when the fear disappears. There was a time for about a week or ten days, I think, when the Assembly could have passed a resolution providing the basis for a political settlement which could have been imposed by the United Nations. That moment soon passed, once the danger of world war passed. The Israelis knew this, and so fought very hard against withdrawal without conditions. I recall one or two sessions with Mrs. Golda Meir about this in the Plaza Hotel. Eventually they did go back, but they stayed in the Gaza strip as long as they could.

"I tried to get the Israelis out of the Gaza strip and succeeded by a UN administration. I had hoped that the strip could become a UN enclave for the refugees, but that was not possible. Egyptian civilian officials moved in immediately after the Israelis got out, although no Egyptian troops came with them. Gaza could have been the first territory to be directly administered by the UN. I do wish it had been possible."