

*External Affairs*

armistice terms, also included provisions that the United Nations emergency force was to be deployed on the Egyptian-Israeli demarcation line, and for the implementation of other measures included in the secretary general's report of a few weeks before, January 24, I think.

This report of January 24 by the secretary general, which was endorsed unanimously by the general assembly and is binding on the secretary general because of that unanimous endorsement including the votes of the United Kingdom and the United States, emphasizes that there can be no change in the legal situation under the armistice agreement until the parties to that agreement accept such a change. This report states also that the general assembly can only recommend; it cannot establish any United Nations administration of Gaza, and that that recommendation, to be effective, would require negotiations with Egypt. Now, there have been no further resolutions laying down the function to be performed by the secretary general in carrying out the earlier resolutions. Therefore, this one of February 2 is decisive in this connection.

Our own position in regard to this matter was made clear on February 26. At that time we took the position that an arrangement to follow the withdrawal of the Israeli forces should be spelled out in a resolution and not merely deduced from the secretary-general's reports. We put out in considerable detail what we thought should be included in any such plan or resolution. It should include, first, observance of the armistice; second, deployment of United Nations emergency force in Gaza on both sides of the armistice line; third, there should be no interference with innocent passage through the straits of Tiran pending determination of the legal position of those waters; fourth, we made certain proposals for Gaza. This is such an important point on the map at present that I should like to go into that matter, Mr. Speaker, in somewhat more detail in elaborating the proposals we made at the assembly. It will, I think, if I can go into it in detail, remove some of the misconceptions about this particular problem.

Legally, as I have stated, responsibility for the civil administration of Gaza, under the Egyptian-Israeli armistice agreement of 1949, lies with Egypt. However, in planning for the restoration of civil administration following the withdrawal of Israel forces from the area, we stated our views to the general assembly at that time—this view was shared by a great many other delegations and indeed I think by the secretary general himself—that there were important practical considerations which qualified or should qualify this

legal position. We have an extremely explosive situation in a small and crowded area where there are about 300,000 people, and perhaps 260,000 of them are refugees. It should be recognized, we thought, that this situation might very easily get out of control, and accordingly we considered—this was also the feeling of other members of the assembly—that the United Nations should accept, and Egypt should agree to the acceptance of, responsibility to the maximum possible extent for establishing and maintaining effective civil administration of the Gaza strip. This arrangement, of course, would have to be without prejudice to the legal rights of Egypt in the territory under the armistice agreement, and would be provisional, pending final agreement on the proper disposition of Gaza which has never, since the creation of the state of Israel, belonged to the sovereign territory of any state.

The words we used in the assembly in putting forward this program are on the record, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I could quote one paragraph from our statement. On February 26 I said at the assembly:

After Israel's withdrawal, the United Nations should, in our view and by agreement with Egypt, accept responsibility to the maximum possible extent for establishing and maintaining effective civil administration in the territory; in fostering economic development and social welfare, in maintaining law and order. The United Nations relief and works administration is already there, with an experienced and efficient administrative nucleus. The United Nations could also provide other help through United Nations technical assistance machinery, the resources of its secretariat, and expert consultants recruited for special purposes. In this way there would be built up in Gaza, in co-operation with Egypt and with Israel, a United Nations civil administration.

We had a resolution drafted which would have put that program before the assembly but we did not attempt to bring it forward because, as I have indicated, there was a feeling on the part of certain delegations that it would not get the necessary two-thirds majority.

It is my view, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that this view will prove to be well founded, that we have now entered a phase in which progress may be made towards the objective of finding a suitable balance between the practical position of the United Nations and the legal position of Egypt in the administration of Gaza, an objective which was sought but never found at the recent session of the general assembly. As I have said, the secretary general himself is going to the area tomorrow in search of such an understanding. It is a mission of great responsibility and delicacy, fraught with consequences for the peace of that area. So far as the