

Supply—External Affairs

include a United States commitment to see that the gulf was kept open. I have documents here which confirm that. I am sure some of my hon. friends have read these documents. There is an aide-mémoire handed to the ambassador of Israel by the secretary of state of the United States on February 11, 1957. I venture to suggest that if that document had not been in the hands of the government of Israel it might have been most difficult if not impossible at that moment to get the Israeli forces back behind their original frontiers.

This particular document reads as follows:

With respect to the Gulf of Aqaba and access thereto, the United States believes that the gulf comprehends international waters and that no nation has the right to prevent free and innocent passage in the gulf and through the straits giving access thereto.

Then it continues and the last paragraph reads as follows:

In the absence of some overriding decision to the contrary, as by the International Court of Justice—

That decision might be taken in the future; we do not know.

—the United States, on behalf of vessels of United States registry, is prepared to exercise the right of free and innocent passage and to join with others to secure general recognition of this right.

● (3:40 p.m.)

In speaking to that in the House of Commons at that time, on March 15, I associated myself with that principle and that point of view and emphasized that the withdrawal of Israel's civil and military forces from Sharm el Sheik was made not on an assurance contained in any general assembly resolution except that of February 2, which had been passed a few weeks before and was rather ambiguous in its terms, but on certain assumptions and expectations which the government of Israel had at that time and which they announced to the general assembly.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the right hon. gentleman whether any other members of the assembly expressed agreement with those assumptions stated by the government of Israel?

Mr. Pearson: Yes, Mr. Chairman, there were members of the assembly who questioned these assumptions and the stand taken by other delegates that there was or should be any package deal. The position taken by them was that Israel had been the aggressor at

[Mr. Pearson.]

that time and that her forces should withdraw behind the line from which they commenced the aggression without any commitments, conditions or qualifications of any kind.

The government of Israel had a different point of view. Their forces did withdraw, but they withdrew on certain understandings which the government had received primarily from the United States. Mrs. Meir was their foreign secretary then and she made it perfectly clear for her government that this was the reason they were withdrawing at that time. That, of course, was not accepted by the assembly as such because the assembly insisted technically that the withdrawal should be unconditional.

Mr. Douglas: Was there some guarantee or any agreement signed by the United States, the Soviet union and France with reference to access to the gulf of Aqaba?

Mr. Pearson: Yes, there was a tripartite guarantee, which I think went back to 1950, guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Israel. The Soviet union did not take part in it, but since that time, in the latter 1950's, some doubt was thrown on the validity of that guarantee by certain statements of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. So far as I know, I do not think the government of Israel is relying very heavily at the present time or in recent months on that particular tripartite guarantee. There was a very real and genuine understanding on the part of the government of Israel that they should be guaranteed the right of access to the gulf, and it was on that understanding, they claim, that they withdrew their forces behind the lines from which they had begun to fight.

I mention all this because we are facing or may be facing very shortly a similar situation. This time I hope that during the very difficult diplomatic negotiations which will take place it is made quite clear just what is going to be the situation in these waters and on the U.A.R.-Israel boundaries before the necessary steps which should be taken are taken. I repeat that this can be done and I hope it will be done in agreement with the riparian states on the gulf of Aqaba and with the United Arab Republic. Every effort certainly should be made to bring about that agreement. This can be done if the will is there and without prejudice to the legal position, in order to maintain inviolate the Israeli point of view, the practical point of view, concerning the right of Israeli ships or ships