

ISRAELI INTENTION TO WITHDRAW

The following is the text of a statement made by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, in the United Nations General Assembly March 4, 1957:

Our meeting last Friday, and the statement from the delegate of Israel which we have heard this afternoon, mark, I hope, the turning point in the crisis which has been facing this Assembly for many weeks. The dangers and the risks which were inherent in the continued occupation of non-Israeli territory by the armed forces of Israel should now disappear, provided the Israeli withdrawal is followed by appropriate United Nations action. It was in the full recognition of these dangers that Canada joined others in this Assembly in efforts to bring about complete withdrawal of Israel from those areas, but in circumstances that would avoid, and not provide the seeds for, future conflict. We warmly welcome Israel's decision as a right and wise one, and as showing a sense of international responsibility. We feel that certain assumptions and expectations that Israel has mentioned in connection with the completion of her withdrawal are reasonable ones, as we understand them.

As the Assembly is aware, my Delegation, like many others, has made its own assumptions in speaking about arrangements which we believe should follow immediately upon, not before but immediately upon, withdrawal. We did not, and we do not now, regard these arrangements as conditions governing or prior to the withdrawal. We felt, however, that it was important to come to some prior understanding about them so that immediately after withdrawal they might be put into force and thereby help to create conditions in the area concerned which would prevent a return to the deplorable conditions which existed before the armed intervention of October 29, and which themselves were largely responsible for that action. Every member of the Assembly, including Israel, has a right to assume that the UN will take some positive, fair and constructive action to this end. Our own view on the necessity for such action has been given in the statement I made in the Assembly on February 26 and on earlier occasions, so I can be brief this afternoon.

Concerning the Gulf of Aqaba and the straits of Tiran, I suggested that there should be no interference with innocent passage through those waters, nor the assertion of any claim to belligerent rights there. I was not suggesting, and I am not now, that legal rights in those waters should be determined by this Assembly in any particular way, or that this determination which should be made by a legal body should be prejudiced by us. I do not conceive it to be the function of this Assembly to decide legal questions. What I do suggest, however, is that in order

to maintain a situation of peace and quiet, in order to minimize the chance of a new outbreak of fighting, the Assembly should recommend, and the parties should agree, as a political and not a legal act, that there should be no interference with the innocent passage of ships through the waters concerned. And that would be one way to bring about an improved situation in the area. Does any member of this Assembly believe that interference with such innocent passage will not provoke conflict and, thereby threaten the peace of the area? Is it not, then, our duty to do what we can to avoid such a result? If so, we do not, in my view, discharge that duty merely by coming to certain conclusions regarding the international legal aspects of the question which remain to be determined.

So far as the use of the United Nations Emergency Force in the Gulf of Aqaba area is concerned, I believe it is common ground in this Assembly that UNEF should, immediately after the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces, move into the area to secure and supervise the cease-fire and withdrawal. This does not mean that in our view UNEF would occupy Sharm-el-Shaikh indefinitely, nor even until there had been some formal agreement or decision about navigation in the Gulf and in the Straits. But it does mean as we see it that upon the withdrawal of Israeli forces, there would be such arrangements for the deployment of UNEF at that point and for the time being as may be necessary to maintain the cease-fire situation. We also agree that before any withdrawal of UNEF from this position, the question should be referred to the Advisory Committee on UNEF which after all is an agent of the Assembly. What I am talking about is again the maintenance of peaceful conditions, not the solution of controversial questions, legal or political.

And there are similar considerations which govern our own attitude toward the situation in the Gaza strip. We agree that arrangements for the withdrawal of Israel should be made between the Commander of UNEF and the Chief of Staff of the Israeli armed forces. And for that purpose, we welcome the announcement that a meeting between these officers has already been held. We also agree with the Secretary-General, and with other delegations, that in view of the special problems and complexities of the Gaza area and of the long-standing major responsibilities of the UN there for the assistance of Arab refugees, that special and helpful arrangements could be made, involving the UN and some of its subsidiary bodies, to facilitate an effective replacement of the present administration in the Gaza strip.

What we are suggesting now (and we assume that these things can and will be done on Israel's withdrawal without prejudging or pre-