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No. 57/17 STATEMENT BY MR. L.B. PEARSON, CHAIRMAN
OF THE DELEGATION OF CANADA, UNITED NATIONS
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MIDDLE EAST

We are now reaching, if indeed we have not already reached, the point of no return in our effort to deal with the problems arising out of military intervention in the Suez area begun last October. So where do we go from here? Not, I hope, in a direction which would tend merely to harden existing antipathies or, in the words of the Secretary-General, to introduce "new elements of conflict."

The Canadian Delegation, like many other delegations here, has tried to take an objective and impartial position in dealing with the problems which came to a head when Israel's military action in the Sinai Peninsula began last October. We are not influenced by a desire to support either of the contestants at the expense of the other in our efforts to find a means of bringing to an end a conflict which has been growing in intensity over a period of some years. We are solely concerned with finding the best policy to pursue in order to resolve a series of difficult problems by means which will bring peace and security to the people of both countries. We have no other interest than this.

The problems with which we are dealing go deeper than the immediate issue of withdrawal of military forces. They have their roots in the past and are terribly difficult for both parties to the dispute. They are also fraught with danger to the peace of the world as well as to the peoples immediately concerned. This Assembly has a duty to avert that danger and to insist that it will not lead to violence.

We realize that the issues before us will never be truly solved if we are content to let our minds become submerged in tales of past tragedies. These, it is true, have given just cause for grief and bitterness on both sides, but we can scarcely hope for success if we allow ourselves to be persuaded that the record of violence in the past justifies a

policy of violence today. We cannot, of course, ignore the past, for it is impossible to deal effectively with this problem unless we have thoroughly studied its origins from every point of view and with respect for the needs of all the people concerned by it. But if we allow our minds to be dominated by the unhappy precedents of violence and reprisal which have made up so much of the recent past of this area, then it is hard to see how we can devise any solution which will in the long run be satisfactory to both sides.

As I see it, the problem is basically one of fear, which breeds distrust and animosity and conflict. There has been fear on the one side of extermination by neighbours whose hostility to the creation and continued existence of the State of Israel has been strong and unremitting. It is difficult for people to act with the moderation and restraint through which wisdom expresses itself if they believe that they themselves live in the shadow of destruction and are uncertain about their very survival as a nation.

The fear from which the people of Israel suffer, the fear which explains the violence of reprisals which they have taken against their neighbours, will be on the way to elimination when the Arab states are willing to recognize Israel as a sovereign state, and its right to national existence within accepted boundaries and under conditions of life tolerable to its people. There were some signs a year ago that we might at least be approaching a time when the Arab states would be willing to grant Israel this recognition. Unfortunately, the events of last autumn have reversed that trend. It must now be one of our major aims to help set again in motion the forces which will lead to the early recognition of Israel in normal terms by its neighbours, and thus to the removal of fear.

On the other side, however, there is also fear, which has led to extreme views, to extreme policies and to violence. Among the Arab states there is a deep and understandable apprehension that the displacement of population and the political tension already associated with a new state, most of whose citizens have come from abroad, a new state established in the midst of the Arab people may be followed by still further dislocations owing to the pressure of immigration into Israel, backed as that state is by strong international pressures and international resources. There is a fear that Israel will yield to expansionist ambitions, which is the counterpart of Israel's own fear of Arab intentions. This has bred in the Arab world animosity and violence toward Israel. When that fear is dissipated we may count on moderation in the attitude of Israel's neighbours toward that state. We cannot but agree that if Israel has a right to live and prosper, freed from the fear of strangulation by its neighbours, the Arab states also have a right to feel confident that Israel will not attempt to expand its territory at their expense; the right to be assured that if Israel, however, should at any time develop such ambitions it will receive

no encouragement, but meet only opposition on both the official and the non-official level from the outside world, an opposition which would result in the isolation of the State itself from any international assistance or support.

It is in this shadow of the past and the present, of fear on both sides, that we have to consider the problem which is immediately before us. As I see it, that problem is one of securing a firm and agreed basis for the withdrawal of Israel from those places which she still occupies beyond the armistice demarcation line; a basis which can be used to increase security and create conditions conducive to peace. If we do not secure such a basis, we may fail completely to bring about this withdrawal - with consequences which will be tragic for us all, and perhaps especially for Israel. As I have said before in this Assembly, it is not a question of rewarding or punishing; of laying down conditions or refusing conditions; it is a question of associating the withdrawal of Israel with arrangements which should remove the necessity, or at least minimize the possibility, of facing this same problem a year or two years from now.

From the very beginning of this crisis, the Canadian Delegation have tried to keep in the forefront of its thinking on this question the importance of finding a solution not merely for the problem posed by military intervention, but of that posed by the conditions that brought about the intervention.

It was in that spirit that we advocated the establishment of UNEF. We felt that by its action in bringing about an end of fighting, the Assembly was accepting responsibility for pursuing two related aims: the immediate aim of supervising and securing the cease-fire, and the longer-range objective of helping to create conditions in which it might be possible eventually to settle fundamental problems. We have insisted, even in the earliest days of this crisis, that a return to stability would not flow merely from words or acts of condemnation; that punishment was not a substitute for progress.

Now, more than three months later, we are confronted with the need to strike a similar balance between the immediate and primary objective of securing the completion of Israel's withdrawal; and that of achieving this in such a way that withdrawal will be accompanied by helpful and fruitful results. I repeat that we refuse to consider these as unrelated objectives, even though priority in time must be given to the first, withdrawal. We still require to believe that they cannot be achieved without adopting proposals for forms of pressure which would be an admission by the Assembly of complete and final failure to solve this problem constructively. Our Delegation does not believe that we should yet admit any such failure. We think that there is still a way of bringing about withdrawal by spelling out the detailed arrangements which would follow, and which would strengthen security and prepare the way for pacification. In its resolution 461 of February 2, the Assembly indicated in general terms the necessity for such arrangements. We should

now, before deciding on other measures, follow up that indication with something more concrete and specific.

We think that both parties should be willing to accept any recommendations to this end which are satisfactory to the majority of the members of the Assembly. If Israel refused to withdraw its forces immediately on the passing of such a resolution, she would be taking on a very heavy responsibility indeed and would forfeit our support and invite other measures by the Assembly.

In our view, the arrangements which we should now agree on to follow withdrawal and which would ensure that such withdrawal would help to bring about conditions which promise greater security and stability might include the following:

First there should be a firm pledge by the Governments of Israel and Egypt to observe scrupulously the provisions of the 1949 Armistice Agreement. But when we talk about scrupulous observance of the Armistice Agreement, we should mean, not some of its provisions, but all of them. What are they?

First, the establishment of an armistice demarcation line, which is not a political or territorial boundary, but which cannot be changed except by agreement between the two parties. Also the agreement prohibits any form of aggressive action, warlike or hostile acts, if you like, belligerent acts, or resort to force by the land, sea or air forces of either side. They establish the rights of each side to security and freedom from fear of attack. They do not prejudge or confirm any political or territorial rights or claim or boundary, but they do establish Egypt's administrative control over the Gaza strip without giving her any rights of territorial sovereignty there. They provide for the deployment in certain areas on both sides of the demarcation line of defensive forces only, and they define what "defensive" means for this purpose. They provide for the total exclusion of Israeli and Egyptian armed forces from the El Auja demilitarized zone.

Second, the Secretary-General and the Commander of UNEF should make arrangements with the Governments concerned for the deployment of UNEF on the armistice demarcation line. This deployment which should be made effective with the minimum of interference with civilian life or activity would be for the sole purpose of putting the force in a position:

- (a) To assume certain duties of the Truce Supervision Organization under the Armistice Agreement between the two states;
- (b) To assist in the prevention of incursions, raids and retaliatory attacks across the armistice line in either direction;

- (c) Generally to maintain peaceful conditions along both sides of the line.

Third, Gulf of Aqaba and Straits of Tiran.

It should be agreed and affirmed that there should be no interference with innocent passage through or any assertion of belligerent rights in the Straits of Tiran. Israeli troops, on their withdrawal from the Sharm el Shaikh area, should, as the Secretary-General puts it in his report of January 24, "be followed by UNEF in the same way as in other parts of Sinai", in order to assist in maintaining quiet in the area and in preventing conflict. This would be in accordance with the purposes already laid down by this Assembly for the force.

Fourth, Gaza strip. This is perhaps the most complicated and difficult of the arrangements to be decided, as it has political, social, economic, and humanitarian aspects. We are dealing here with three hundred thousand people, not merely with territory.

I should like, therefore, to go into this problem in somewhat more detail.

The Gaza strip was a part of the mandate territory of Palestine. It is not Egyptian territory. Its indigenous population of 60,000 to 70,000 is Palestinian Arab, and is now greatly augmented by some 267,000 refugees, also Palestinian Arabs. It was occupied by Egypt immediately after the termination of the British mandate in May, 1948. This occupation pending final settlement was acknowledged in the Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Agreement of 1949. Egypt has not annexed the strip and claims to have no intention of doing so. The territory had never been occupied by Israel prior to the 29 October, 1956 invasion, and since then Israel has also disavowed any intention of annexing the strip, though measures and plans for economic development of the area, taken or projected, may indicate an intention to open the territory to Israeli settlement. Should this happen, however, the result would probably be that most of the indigenous Arab inhabitants of the strip would eventually be forced into dependence or destitution as the territory cannot support even the small normal Arab population. Surely there would be little logic to an arrangement whereby Israel would assume responsibility for the administration of a territory not belonging to it, and where it remained in opposition to a decision of the U N Assembly and against the wishes of the Arab inhabitants, for most of whom, as refugees, Israel in these new circumstances might also have to accept responsibility. In the discharge of its responsibilities for refugees, the U N has not recently enjoyed satisfactory relations with the administration of this territory. That situation would be even more difficult, perhaps impossible, if Israel remained in control in the conditions I have just mentioned. The effect of a controversy of this kind would be disastrous for the Arab refugees in Gaza and serious for the Arab refugee problem

as a whole. Nor could the U.N. take on any new role for security in and against the Gaza strip if Israel insisted on remaining there in spite of the Armistice Agreement and of repeated U.N. Assembly decisions that she should withdraw. Yet the key issue in this area, from the Israeli standpoint, is security against any resumption of incursions or raids into Israel from Gaza territory.

From the U.N. standpoint, this is also the key issue; how to provide security on both sides after Israeli withdrawal, on the basis of the Assembly's resolution of November 2, 1956, and of later resolutions, as well as of the reports of the Secretary-General.

Continued occupation of the Gaza strip by Israeli armed forces or by Israeli police and civilian administration after the withdrawal of her troops, and in the face of bitter Egyptian hostility, cannot in my view, give the security sought, for the following reasons:

(a) The prolongation of Israeli occupation of non-Israeli territory in the face of Assembly decisions to the contrary, and in violation of the Armistice Agreement will only incite new provocations, perhaps of greater magnitude than any hitherto. The emotions aroused would be almost certain to increase the likelihood of a resumption of incursions and raids from outside the strip, even though the protection afforded against them might be increased within the strip.

(b) Israeli occupation of Gaza would only shift a little to the southwest the line between Israel and Egypt across which the raids might come. Since there will always be a line or frontier between Egypt and Israel, the only sure way to stop the raids across the Egyptian Israeli border, wherever it may be, is by political action based on the sincere will of the Governments of Egypt and Israel, with U.N. assistance and supervision, to end such raids and incursions and to abide by the terms of the Armistice Agreement. Assurance of this intention, given by the Government of Egypt, has been repeated by the Secretary-General in his last two reports. It seems obvious that continuing Israeli occupation of non-Israeli territory beyond the armistice line will nullify that assurance. It seems equally obvious that such assurances without any intervention by the U.N. to facilitate and ensure their actual fulfilment are not likely to satisfy the Israeli Government. The problem is, therefore, two-fold, and requires for its solution Egyptian and Israeli and U.N. action.

What, then, should be the nature of this action? First in priority and essential to all other steps, Israel should withdraw from the Gaza strip. This action would be in accordance with the previous decisions of the Assembly, and implicit in a

return to the scrupulous observance of the Armistice Agreement.

At the same time, the Assembly should now provide for effective U.N. action to ensure that the area would not be used as a base for raids and incursions against Israel after its withdrawal.

I have just spoken about the deployment of UNEF along the demarcation line. In the Gaza strip, this deployment would serve not only as an effective interposition of UNEF between the armed forces of Egypt and Israel, but as a screen against incursions, raids and retaliatory attacks across the line from either side. Furthermore, in a transitional period, UNEF and other appropriate agencies of the U.N. would be given functions within the Gaza strip which would contribute towards safeguarding life and property, would guarantee good civilian administration, would assure the maximum assistance to the Palestine refugees there, and would protect and foster the economic development of the Gaza strip and its people.

In this regard we have heard with great interest the expression of confidence by the Secretary-General on the attitude of the Government of Egypt towards the necessary arrangements in the Gaza strip with regard to the withdrawal of Israel. Such a statement by the Secretary-General is not to be taken lightly.

The military aspect of withdrawal is relatively uncomplicated. Immediately the Israeli forces leave, the UNEF should enter. As the Armistice Agreement limits Egyptian forces to "defensive" elements only, and as the UNEF will already be deployed along the armistice line, and as the strip is so narrow, the Government of Egypt should not envisage the return of her armed forces to this area after the Israeli troops have withdrawn.

So far as the civil administration of the territory is concerned, the position is more difficult and more complicated. Legally under the Armistice Agreement, the civil administration is to be Egyptian and not Israeli. But there are important practical considerations which qualify this legal position and which cannot be ignored in the replacement of the present administration. It is perfectly clear that we should not simply command the Israeli civil administration to depart in a night. Any one who believes that this is possible should study carefully the special report of the Director of UNRWA on the agency's operations in the Gaza strip and ponder upon the situation which exists in that area. We have here an extremely explosive situation which could very easily get out of control. In this tiny area are crowded over two hundred thousand refugees and a much smaller native population. They are bitter and frustrated, administered by strangers; rebellious, riven by frictions, and in a mood, I have no doubt, to erupt in violence and bloodshed once firm control is removed.

There has already been more than enough murder in the Gaza strip, and the U N cannot be indirectly responsible for more. We owe protection to the refugees and we certainly owe protection to the servants of U N relief and works agency who have been carrying on so heroically in the face of such obstacles, difficulties and dangers in the Gaza strip. Provision, therefore, must be made for a peaceful transition from the administration of Israel to something no less strong and effective and at the same time more generally acceptable. Such a transition can be effected only by negotiation, and such negotiation, which should be both speedy and thorough, can only be conducted by direct agents of the U N. There is no sense in pretending that, under present circumstances, it could be undertaken between Egyptians and Israelis alone. The good offices of a third party must be interposed, and this can only be the U N.

This is all the more desirable because after Israel's withdrawal, the U N 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. UNRWA is already there, with an experienced and efficient administrative nucleus. The U N could also provide other help through the U N technical assistance machinery, the resources of its Secretariat, and expert consultants recruited for specific purposes. In this way there would be built up in Gaza, in co-operation with Egypt and with Israel, a U.N. civil administration.

To co-ordinate and make effective arrangements to this end the Secretary-General might decide to appoint a U N Commissioner for Gaza. Working with the Commander of UNEF and the Director of UNRWA, and after consultation with Egyptian and Israeli representatives as well as with refugee and other local Arab leaders, he could arrange to bring about with all possible speed the replacement of the present Israeli civil administration of the area. In this way, and perhaps in this way only, we should be able to effect the withdrawal of Israel, with order and speed, and in such a manner as to protect the interests of the inhabitants, and of both Egypt and Israel as well.

After the replacement had been completed, this U N Commissioner should, in my view, remain in Gaza where he would have chief responsibility for all U N activities there, including those of UNEF inside the strip. He would be concerned with the supervision of the Armistice Agreement, including maintenance of the cease-fire observers' functions, checking and reporting on alleged incidents of violation. In discharging these responsibilities he would work through UNEF rather than UNTSO, though this would be without prejudice, of course, to the role of UNTSO in the other three armistice agreements.

In view of the status of the Gaza strip, however, as an area not belonging to the sovereign territory of any neighbouring state, any arrangement for the administration of the territory such as that outlined above must be considered as an interim measure pending final agreement as to the proper disposition of the territory. That final agreement is the responsibility of the U N and it should be met and discharged after these interim arrangements have been completed.

Mr. President, I venture to submit these proposals to the Assembly because I believe they will provide a basis not only for the essential and prior withdrawal of Israeli forces, but for a better and more peaceful state of affairs than that which has existed previously. They may not be perfect proposals, and I realize they will not fully meet the wishes of the two parties to this conflict. This programme is admittedly a compromise, as any resolution based on it would be a compromise. But it is meant to be a constructive compromise, which may lead to further steps that will make for lasting peace. That is the spirit in which it is submitted.

S/C