

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
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ISRAELI INTENTION TO WITHDRAW

Statement by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, in 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 U N 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 U N there for the assistance of Arab refugees, that special and helpful arrangements could be made, involving the U N 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 prejudicing any legal position of Egypt under the Armistice Agreement which we admit that she has there) is first that UNEF should move into the Gaza strip immediately upon the withdrawal of Israel's armed forces; and, secondly, that the U N should take immediate steps to associate itself with the replacement of the civil administration there, although obviously this replacement would have to be done by agreement and would have to be planned to avoid any breakdown in the administrative services which now exist.

Why should there be any suspicion about the U N taking its full share of responsibility for security and stability and development in the Gaza strip. Surely no sincere or unprejudiced person is going to allege that UNEF, with its present composition and authority, is an agent, or could become an agent of colonialism or imperialism. Nor could the United Nations Relief and Works Agency or any other U N agency in the area. U N action of this kind is a reward for nobody, but it means, I hope, greater assurance for everybody that there will be security and stability there.

We think, Mr. President, that these ideas, which have been covered by previous resolutions of the Assembly or have been suggested in reports of the Secretary-General, should immediately on the withdrawal of Israeli forces, be converted into concrete arrangements, and that the Secretary-General should take steps to that end with our full support and, if later he requires it, with our endorsement. It was the view of my Delegation that the Secretary-General should be requested to do these things by a resolution of this Assembly. It is the view of others that he has the necessary authority under existing resolutions and reports. We accept that view and agree that if there is good will and a desire to make firm and constructive arrangements on all sides, no difficulty will arise. We have, however, as we see it, an obligation not so much to Israel but to ourselves as members of the U N, to see that, immediately after withdrawal, some action is taken along the lines indicated by the delegate of the United States last Friday, and by many other delegations today. If other delegations agree, as many have already agreed, that this should be done then this should give us the necessary assurance that not only has the U N succeeded in bringing about a cease-fire and a withdrawal of forces, but that it will also take constructive and effective action to avoid a resumption of hostilities.

Only in this way, I suggest, can we create the kind of atmosphere without which there can be no progress in the direction of that peace which we so much desire.

Mr. President, we have made progress in the last few days to this objective. Perhaps in a day or two we may have even greater reason for hope if the Secretary-General could

report to us on the completion of the withdrawal of Israeli forces and on related matters.

We have then made progress--encouraging progress - in the solution of this problem. But much remains to be done, and goodwill and understanding will have to be shown by all of us before we can be confident that a final result will be achieved and will bring peace and security to this troubled part of the world.

S/C