

Middle East - Suez story No 25-26: Middle East - Suez story No 25-26 - 14

HS L 179:113



Dag Hammarskjöld's samml.

Middle East / Suez story - 26

21 Dec. 56

Statement by D.H. in the General
Assembly.

Statement made by the Secretary-General on 21 December 1956 - General Assembly

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: This morning the representative of Jordan directed to me certain questions. To the extent that I am in a position to reply to those questions I would like to use this opportunity to do so.

The first question put to me was concerned with the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces behind the armistice lines. The four resolutions of the General Assembly relating to withdrawal of forces from Egypt, as the Members of the General Assembly will remember, call for the withdrawal of Israeli forces behind the armistice lines. The last of these resolutions, adopted on 24 November, called for compliance "forthwith" with the previous requests. As of today, the extent of Israeli withdrawal, and the further withdrawal in prospect, are as follows:

On 1 December the representative of Israel informed the Secretary-General by letter that by the morning of 3 December, Israeli forces would be removed from "a wide belt of territory (about 50 kilometres) in proximity to the Suez Canal along its entire length...". This withdrawal has been confirmed by General Burns, and elements of the United Nations Emergency Force immediately entered this area, although progress in it has been impeded because of minefields and destroyed roads.

On 11 December, the representative of Israel informed the Secretary-General "that Israel was now ready to effect further withdrawals of Israeli troops in the Sinai Peninsula, in order to enable the United Nations Emergency Force to extend its occupation eastwards", and invited a meeting between the Commander of the United Nations Emergency Force and the Israeli General Staff to discuss arrangements to this effect.

General Burns met with General Dayan, the Israeli Commander, on the morning of 16 December. General Dayan informed General Burns that according to his instructions the Israeli forces were to be withdrawn from the Sinai Peninsula at the approximate rate of 25 kilometres per week during the "next few weeks". General Burns recalled to General Dayan that the Israelis were expected to withdraw behind the armistice lines as rapidly as possible. He felt sure that the rate mentioned would not be acceptable to the Secretary-General.

Specific arrangements presented at the same time provided for the withdrawal of Israeli forces on 18 December to Misfaq on the El Qantara - El Arish road, and to Bir Gafgafa on the Ismailia-El Auja road. The Israelis stated that on the road from Suez to Elath they had already withdrawn to Sudr el Heitan.

In each such withdrawal, the United Nations Emergency Force contingents would advance to within five kilometres of the Israeli positions. In the Suez Gulf coast region, the Israeli forces were to withdraw from Sudr on the morning of 19 December, with a UNEF detachment moving promptly forward to take over the oil well installations at that place. The specific withdrawal arrangements for the 18th and 19th of December were accepted by General Burns.

Subject to further discussion and in addition to the above withdrawals, it was assumed as a tentative arrangement that within a week the United Nations Emergency Force would move forward approximately another 25 kilometres on roads eastward from the Canal, and also to Wadi Firham on the Suez Gulf coast. It was agreed that a "reconnaissance party" of UNEF would proceed immediately to El-Arish to obtain information regarding the billeting and other requirements of UNEF preparatory to its entry there.

It was estimated by my military adviser, General Martola, and his military aides, that the pace and schedule for the Israeli withdrawal reported to General Burns by General Dayan on 16 December would mean that from four to six weeks might elapse before the withdrawal would bring Israeli forces "behind the armistice lines", as required by the resolutions of the General Assembly.

The assumption by General Burns that the pace of withdrawal proposed by General Dayan would be unacceptable to me was confirmed to a member of the Israeli delegation on 17 December.

Specific Israeli proposals for withdrawals of their force beyond what was agreed upon on 19 December were presented the same day to General Burns. In substance, they provided for a further withdrawal of only some 20 kilometers along the main roads. General Burns informed General Dayan that these proposals were inadequate. On 20 December I informed the representative of Israel that this schedule of withdrawal, which had no completion date, was inconsistent with the intention of the resolutions of the General Assembly and unsatisfactory. The representative of Israel informed his Government to this effect.

Today the representative of Israel has presented a new withdrawal proposal which had been received from his Government and which superseded the proposal of 19 December. This envisages that the remaining Israeli withdrawal will take place in two phases. In the first phase, no Israeli forces would be "west of El Arish" after the first week in January, although Israeli occupation of Sharm

al Shaikh and Tirana would continue. The details of this phase of the withdrawal are to be worked out in another meeting between General Burns and General Dayan. The second phase would involve full Israeli withdrawal, understood to mean behind the Armistice Lines, at an unstated date.

Despite the difficulties encountered by the United Nations Emergency Force in its advance into the Sinai Peninsula, resulting from mine fields and destroyed roads some limitations in communications and transport and the nature of the terrain, the force is prepared to move forward at whatever pace may be required by a rapid Israeli withdrawal behind the armistice lines as envisaged by the General Assembly.

The second question put to me this morning was concerned with the withdrawal of French and British troops from Egyptian territory. The Anglo-French withdrawal from Port Said is in a very late phase, and I do not feel that it calls for any specific comments from my side.

The third question was regarding the destruction which took place in Port Said. So far, I have no specific information on that point.

Another question was to what extent there had been demolition in Sinai. On that point I wish only to refer to a letter from the Permanent Representative of Israel to me, which was circulated last week to delegations of the General Assembly, according to which the Israeli Government gave assurances that no demolition ~~may have taken place, or is about to take place~~ would take place in Sinai. As to the extent to which such demolition may have taken place, I am not in possession of any exact information.

Finally, the representative of Jordan referred to "atrocities which had ~~not~~ been practiced on the Arab population in the Sinai Peninsula". Again, I am not in a position to make any comments. He referred also to the Gaza Strip and the policy of Israel in that area. Shortly, the ^{reports} ~~course~~ will be circulated on the present state of affairs of Gaza as well as the developments under UNRA in Gaza.

As regards the policy of Israel in this area, I have no specific information to give to the General Assembly.