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Middle East

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- Statement by Amb. H.C. Lodge, USA, in Plenary Session on the Middle East
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UNITED STATES DELEGATION
TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Press Release No.
March 1, 1957

Statement by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, United States Representative, in Plenary Session on the Middle East.

During the long weeks in which the General Assembly has been occupied with the grave situation in the Near East, the United States has sought a solution which would be based on justice and which would take account of the legitimate interests of all the parties. The United States position was manifested from the very beginning in its resolution before the Security Council which called upon Israel to withdraw and which called for the withholding of assistance to Israel if it did not withdraw. The United States views in this respect have been steadfast. They were most recently and most authoritatively set forth by President Eisenhower in his public address of February 20. In this endeavor we have recognized that it is incompatible with the principles of the Charter and with the obligations of membership in the United Nations for any member to seek political gains through the use of force or to use as a bargaining point a gain achieved by means of force.

It now appears that the General Assembly's efforts to restore peaceful conditions in the area following the hostilities of four months ago are about to come to fruition. In its most recent efforts to find a solution, the Assembly, on February 2, adopted two resolutions. The first of these reiterated the earlier calls for Israeli withdrawal behind the Armistice line. The second requested the Secretary General, once that withdrawal is completed, to carry out the measures proposed in his report of January 24. The implementation of these measures would constitute solid progress toward lasting conditions of peace in the area and the United States considers that all these measures as approved by the General Assembly should be put into effect without delay.

Now Israel announces that it is making a full and prompt withdrawal behind the Armistice line in accordance with Resolution I of February 2, 1957. The United States welcomes this announcement. The United States understands this declaration to mean that withdrawal will be immediate.

The United States also takes note of the declarations made in the statement of the representative of Israel. We do not consider that these declarations make Israel's withdrawal "conditional". For the most part the declarations constitute, as we understand, restatements of what has already been said by this Assembly or by the Secretary General in his reports, or hopes and expectations which seem to us not unreasonable in the light of the prior actions of this Assembly.

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Regarding the United Nations measures contemplated for the Gaza Strip, the United States has taken note of the statement by the Secretary General on February 22. He stated then:

"It is the desire of the Government of Egypt that the take-over of Gaza from military and civilian control of Israel -- which, as has been the case, in the first instance would be exclusively by the United Nations Emergency Force -- will be orderly and safe, as it has been elsewhere. It may be added with equal confidence (he stated) that the Government of Egypt, recognizing the present special problems and complexities of the Gaza area and of the long-standing major responsibility of the United Nations there for the assistance of the Arab Refugees, and having in mind also the objectives and obligations of the Armistice Agreement, has the willingness and readiness to make special and helpful arrangements with the United Nations and some of its auxiliary bodies, such as United Nations Relief and Works Agency and United Nations Emergency Force. For example, (the Secretary-General added) the arrangement for the use of the United Nations Emergency Force in the area should ensure its deployment on the Armistice line at the Gaza Strip and the effective interposition of the force between the armed forces of Egypt and Israel. Similarly, the assistance of the United Nations and its appropriate auxiliary bodies would be enrolled toward putting a definite end to all incursions and raids across the border from either side. Furthermore, with reference to the period of transition, such other arrangements with the United Nations may be made as will contribute toward safeguarding life and property in the area by providing efficient and effective police protection; as will guarantee good civilian administration; as will assure maximum assistance to the United Nations Refugee Program; and as will protect and foster the economic development of the territory and its people."

It is the view of the United States that from a juridical standpoint the future of the Gaza Strip must, as the Secretary General said, be worked out within the framework of the Armistice Agreement.

Obviously these matters are not for the United States alone to decide, but the United States can, I think, properly entertain the hope that such a useful role for the United Nations and its appropriate subsidiary bodies as the Secretary General has described could usefully continue until there is a definitive settlement respecting the Gaza Strip or some final general agreement between the parties.

With respect to the situation in the area along the Gulf of Aqaba and the Straits of Tiran, I stated on January 28, and again on February 2, that:

"It is essential that units of the United Nations Emergency Force be stationed at the Straits of Tiran in order to achieve there the separation of Egyptian and Israeli land and sea forces. This separation is essential until it is clear that the non-exercise of any claimed belligerent rights has established in practice the peaceful conditions which must govern navigation in waters having such an international interest. All of this would, of course, be without prejudice to any ultimate determination which may be made of any legal question concerning the Gulf of Aqaba."

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It is appropriate at this time to recall the position of the United States on navigation through the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba. In a memorandum of February 11, 1957, made public February 17, the United States Government stated:

"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. We have in mind not only commercial usage, but the passage of pilgrims on religious missions, which should be fully respected.

"The United States recalls that on January 28, 1950, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the United States that the Egyptian occupation of the two islands of Tiran and Sanafir at the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba was only to protect the islands themselves against possible damage or violation and that 'this occupation being in no way conceived in a spirit of obstructing in any way innocent passage through the stretch of water separating these two islands from the Egyptian coast of Sinai, it follows that this passage, the only practicable one, will remain free as in the past, in conformity with international practices and recognized principles of the law of nations.'

"In the absence of some over-riding decision to the contrary, as by the International Court of Justice, 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."

These views are to be understood in the sense of the relevant portions of the report of the United Nations International Law Commission on the law of the sea, covering the Commission's work at its eighth session, from April 23 to July 4, 1956.

In connection with the duration of the deployment of the United Nations Emergency Force in this area, the question has been raised whether the Secretary-General would give notice to the General Assembly before the Emergency Force would be withdrawn. We have noted the Secretary-General's statement in his memorandum of February 26 that "an indicated procedure would be for the Secretary-General to inform the Advisory Committee of the United Nations Emergency Force, which would determine whether the matter should be brought to the attention of the Assembly."

I should like to emphasize at this time the vital necessity of full and strict compliance by Israel and Egypt with their international obligations, including the Armistice Agreement. Governed by their obligations under the Charter, Israel and Egypt should base their relations on full observance of the Armistice. The General Assembly in its various resolutions dealing with the present problem has recognized this necessity. Indeed, the Assembly in its first resolution dated November 2, 1956 noted that disregard on many occasions of the terms of the Armistice Agreements by the parties thereto was a forerunner of the hostilities which broke out in late October.

Once Israel has completed its withdrawal in accordance with the resolutions of the General Assembly, and in view of the measures taken by the United Nations to deal with the situation, there is no basis for either party to the Armistice Agreement to assert or exercise any belligerent rights.

The United States has from the beginning made clear its belief that after the withdrawal of British, French and Israeli forces, there should be established conditions different from those which had previously prevailed. As Secretary Dulles stated before the Assembly on November 1, 1956: "There needs to be something better than the uneasy Armistices which have existed now for these eight years between Israel and the Arab neighbors."

The United States would like to see as rapidly as is practical a definitive settlement of the Palestine problem -- such a peace as is contemplated by the Armistice Agreements. Realistically we must accept the fact that this cannot be attained at the present. Therefore, one of our principal tasks is to create peaceful conditions and tranquility through the prevention of aggression. We believe that even if formal peace with definitive settlements may not now be obtained, we should vigorously seek to bring about the conditions of security and tranquility which may, as rapidly as possible hereafter, make a peace settlement practicable, and that in the meantime there should be a strict compliance by both Israel and Egypt with their international obligations.

If, following the Israeli withdrawal, there should be any recurrence of hostilities or any violation by either party of its international obligations, including those of the Armistice Agreement, then this would create a situation for United Nations consideration. The United States would consult with other members of the United Nations to consider appropriate action which they or the United Nations might take, with the object of restoring peace and harmonious relations in conformity with the principles of justice and international law.

In these difficult matters, the United Nations has a basic obligation set out in our Charter to suppress acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace. We also recall that Article 2 of the Charter provides that members, in order to get the rights and benefits resulting from membership, shall themselves fulfill in good faith their obligations under the Charter, and that among such obligations is that of settling their international disputes by peaceful means and refraining from the use of force against the territorial integrity of any state.

We have reached a turning point in the long efforts of the United Nations to bring order and stability to this troubled area in the Near East. We have just heard Israel's announcement that it will respond to the call of the General Assembly for withdrawal. It is now incumbent upon all members of the United Nations, and particularly those directly concerned, to give their full cooperation in carrying out the measures proposed by the Secretary General in his report of January 24 and endorsed by the General Assembly on February 2.

Let me also say that Egypt during these trying weeks has acted with commendable forbearance on the issues which we confront today. We are confident that Egypt will continue to act in this spirit.

The United States also expresses its deep appreciation for the untiring efforts of the Secretary General and his immediate associates to achieve the objectives of the General Assembly resolutions.

This Organization is fortunate in having at its helm a statesman and diplomat whose great energies and intellect have been devoted to peace through long days and nights.

There are even more formidable tasks ahead for Mr. Hammarskjold. We are confident that his wisdom and patience will help us in the future.

With good will and a determination to serve the purposes of the Charter, we can make significant progress toward a more settled, prosperous, and happy world.

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Message from Luis

March fourth

US press briefing

In answer to queries, Mr. Rope said that Ambassador Lodge's statement Friday had been carefully considered and thoroughly cleared before delivery and that the Israelis were fully filled in on the substance of the speech and there was no deviation in the substance of the statement and that the statement needed no amplification.

Privately Rope said the plan was to recess the Assembly and that the US was working on submitting a resolution, under co-sponsorship, to that effect.

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March 1, 1957

Secretary of State Dulles met today with the representatives of the following Arab States: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

He reported to them that the Government of Israel had indicated its intention to withdraw wholly and promptly from the Sharm el-Sheikh area and from the Gaza strip, in accordance with the United Nations Resolution of February 2, a Resolution which had been unanimously supported by all the Arab States.

Secretary Dulles stated that this Israeli withdrawal would involve no promises or concessions whatsoever to Israel by the United States, but would be predicated wholly upon the prior decisions of the United Nations General Assembly and the reports of the Secretary General and the public position of the United States, notably the position expounded by President Eisenhower in his address of February 20.

For its part, the United States, in its discussions with the Israeli Government, had been endeavoring to achieve implementation of the United Nations Resolution in the interest of peace and stability in the area. The Secretary welcomed the indicated action by the Israeli Government to withdraw.

Secretary Dulles said that he was aware of the fact that Communist propaganda was spreading the story in the Arab world that there was some secret understanding between the United States and Israel. He deplored this effort to misrepresent what in fact was a great achievement for the principles and efforts of the United Nations, namely, the full and unconditional withdrawal of Israel as had been sought.

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