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Middle East

Meeting of Advisory Committee on UNEF

15 Aug. 57

CONFIDENTIAL

MEETING OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON UNEF

(Held in the Secretary-General's Conference Room on
Thursday, 15 August 1957, at 10.30 a.m.)

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: There is nothing very urgent which has caused us to invite you to this meeting, but we felt that it was about the right time to bring you up-to-date on developments as we wish you to be fully aware of the problems as they grow, as they are resolved or as they remain frozen. There are some new points in the picture about which we especially felt you should know even if they do not for the moment call for any action.

I think that the first item on the routine agenda should be to give a usual short summary of what the situation is along the Armistice Demarcation Lines in respect of incidents of various characters.

Mr. BUNCHE: I have a good report to make -- that is, I have nothing to report because there is virtually complete quiet all along the Demarcation Line, the Gaza line and the International Frontier. There have been no incidents of a frontier nature since the last meeting. I think we can say that there has been "deadly quiet" along the line since mid-July. The only shooting of any kind was internal. We do not have the details yet, but last week an Indonesian was killed through some accidental shooting in the quarters. That is the only report of any shooting that there has been.

While I am at it, I might say a word about the question raised by Mr. Lall at the last meeting on the incident of 17 June, which was the last serious shooting incident, in which two Arabs had been killed by a UNEF patrol. We have a full report on this now from General Burns. He carried out a full investigation. It revealed that there were approximately six local civilians who were encountered by a Danor patrol. They were challenged. They were in the zone where they were not supposed to be. The report says that on being challenged the group began converging on the patrol and threw a knife, whereupon the patrol fired. Two were killed. One civilian was apprehended. Knives and sheaths were found at the spot of the incident.

The investigation revealed that there was a clear intention of the civilians to cross into what is technically called out there ICT or Israeli-controlled territory with intent to damage or to steal. Their mode of dress was such as to confirm this suspicion. They had their trousers tied or wrapped close to the legs. Two of them

carried ropes around their waists. Their kaffeas were tied to the waists. They wore military type uniforms. The apprehended civilians were handed over to the Egyptian police authorities and the incident was considered closed. From then on, we do not know a thing. We have not yet broken through that particular barrier. We have not been able to learn what happens to infiltrators when they are turned over.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: No, but this first report on the absolute quiet is of course worth noting in two respects. It shows that the tendency to slip indicated by the mining incidents of early June was stopped effectively. I think it can only be interpreted as an indication of considerably greater strictness by Egypt in relation to the local population.

The other thing is that in this recent period we have also been free from those incidents which took place with Israeli soldiers crossing the line. You will remember that they said they were "over-keen". In fact, back of it is that they placed along the line for the first time, and in line with what we had asked for for a long time, professional soldiers instead of having sort of civilian guards of the kibbutz type. That gives on the one side, of course, much more discipline. But they were new to this kind of task, and that is really the explanation of this so-called "over keenness". They were well disciplined -- there were no incidents for that reason -- but, so to say, were not clear on the limits of their rights or authority or functions.

The next point to which I think we should give a moment is the one raised at our last meeting concerning the liaison officers. General Martola will comment on that.

General MARTOLA: As I have already told the Committee at its last meeting, I have been assigned the mission to discuss the question of liaison officers with the military representatives of the participating nations. Since the meeting, I have met with these military representatives and I have explained all the angles of the question, stressing the necessity for a complete review of the status of liaison officers and mentioning the possibility of withdrawing the liaison officers entirely. The liaison between the Government and the UNEF contingents perhaps could be made better by the commander of the contingent, which seems to be General Burns' strong opinion. If liaison officers should be at all necessary, they should be of junior rank and form only a routine link between General Burns' staff and the contingent.

The military representatives have not yet been able to give me a definite answer. I assume that the reason for the delay in the official answer is because the general staffs naturally are compelled to consult their contingents in Egypt on this question. I hope that in the near future the question will be cleared definitely.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Thank you. Are there any questions on this point? Or should we just wait for the result of the continued studies? I guess that is indicated.

There is a new aspect in the picture in the region, to which I think we should draw your attention. It is a new development. It is more time-honoured than most, but it is certainly a new aspect. We were not aware of it until recently. It is related to the situation and the way of operating of the Bedouin tribes.

Mr. BUNCHE: There have been no fedayeen activities, no raids, no pillaging. But this is an area where for centuries smuggling has been rather institutionalized. It is sort of part of the way of life of some of the people.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I guess it is to be considered a normal form of "foreign trade" of Bedouins.

Mr. BUNCHE: So it was inevitable, I suppose, that sooner or later UNEF would encounter this particular part of the mores and customs of the area in one way or another; and recently that has come to pass. One aspect of it is strictly internal. You may recall that in the first days of UNEF's activity out there some of our people had been approached by smugglers, whom they reported to the police. We gave very great assistance to the Egyptian police in breaking up an important narcotics smuggling ring. It was almost like a "cops and robbers" story.

Just recently, there have been some suspicions that a few UNEF personnel from more than one contingent might be involved in running narcotics. That was only a suspicion. But last week it became something more than a suspicion when Egyptian customs officers stopped a UNEF truck crossing the Ismailia bridge into Egypt proper, crossing the canal, and found -- it was driven by two corporals -- under the seat of the driver's cab of the truck quite a large quantity of opium and hashish. The corporals said that they did not know just how it got there. The Status of Forces Agreement worked exceedingly well in this case with Egypt, as it has in all of those

cases. The Egyptian officers turned these men over to UNEF immediately into our custody in accordance with the Agreement and they are subject to be tried according to their national law. Our legal people out there -- both the military legal officers and the legal officer from the Legal Councillor's Office -- feel that if the investigation, when completed, proves that these men were guilty or seem to be guilty, if the evidence so indicates, they would be subject to court martial. It was also reported that the Egyptian concern is not particularly with these two men. It is with what they were carrying and through them trying to track down the suppliers, who are behind the whole thing.

The second aspect concerns some of the Bedouin tribes which, according to information, may be continuing their age-old activity of smuggling. The information we have is not authenticated, but it indicates that along this international frontier, -- south of Gaza it runs for 200 kilometres as against the sixty kilometres of the entire perimeter of the Gaza Strip and over very rugged terrain -- UNEF is deployed but very thinly and there is patrolling activity primarily by the Yugoslav and Canadian armoured reconnaissance car contingents. The information indicates that the Bedouins have enjoyed grazing practices on both sides of the international frontier. The Bedouins notoriously do not recognize international frontiers anyhow in that area and they regularly cross frontiers seasonally. But they have had grazing practices on both sides of the line, and this is accepted by Egyptians and Israelis alike, according to the information. Now, there may be some abuse of that grazing privilege in the form of smuggling activities. The information we have is that UNEF itself has actually seen no smuggling caravans. There have been some indications of tracks which may be suspicious.

It is understandable that General Burns does not wish to get involved in anti-smuggling activities which would involve him very deeply with the Bedouins in that area. At present, the situation is that if he has any suspicions, whenever he gets reports that may be suspicious, these are conveyed to the Egyptians. In connexion with this -- the Egyptians are aware of the situation according to the information, and the Israelis also -- General Burns approached the Egyptians about some strengthening of the police forces, particularly at Quseima, Kuntilla and Ras el Naqb along the frontier. There is a prospect that the Egyptians will mildly strengthen the police forces to back up these frontier detachments at the town of Nakhl, which is in central Sinai about 100 kilometres from the international frontier.

These are frontier police forces which are exclusively for police purposes, for checking on smuggling, and are considered essential by Burns. As a matter of fact, the tendency of the Egyptians with regard to the smuggling activity apparently has been not to try to stop it at the frontier, but to stop it when it tries to cross Suez into Egypt proper. It is not established as a problem for UNEF yet in the sense that there has been any direct contact, but it is something to be alert to on our side and it is also important to alert both the Egyptians and the Israelis to the situation.

Mr. LALL (India): That is an interesting story. I disagree with Dr. Bunche's conclusions. I do not think it is our duty at all to alert the Israelis and Egyptians to this matter unless, under the guise of smuggling, systematic or unsystematic infiltration is being attempted. This matter of smuggling seems to me to lie entirely within the administrative purview of the Israeli and Egyptian Governments. It has nothing to do with our forces. In my personal opinion, the further we keep away from it, the better, unless, as I say, there is evidence that caravans which pretend to be smuggling in fact consist of armed intruders or infiltrators who are trying to create trouble in the two countries. Seriously, I think this is a matter entirely for the Administrations. It is quite another thing to point out to the Egyptians and Israelis that there does seem to be this smuggling. But to suggest to them that they should strengthen their police force against this smuggling is, in my view, beyond our purview.

Mr. BUNCHE: This part of it, i.e. the strengthening of the police force, was only on the Egyptian side, relating to the Egyptian police forces at the three border points mentioned.

Mr. LALL (India): Yes, but I am saying that I really do not think it is within our rights to suggest to the Egyptians that they should strengthen their administrative machinery to decrease smuggling or gambling or anti-social practices to which we may object.

Mr. BUNCHE: May I just say on behalf of General Burns that the information he had was that these bands consist of well-armed men in the number of twenty to over 100, which cross the frontier. He did not undertake to establish any authority on his part to stop them. But there was the point that if such groups crossed the frontier, UNEF patrols might be involved in some way or other. Therefore he felt it was certainly important to call the attention of the Egyptians to this fact. That is all he has done.

Mr. LALL (India): Yes.

Mr. BUNCHE: On the other hand, from our point of view here, that is why I made the reference to alerting the Israelis to what we understand they are already full aware of; namely, if one such band, in carrying on smuggling activities, should have an encounter with Israelis in the Negev through an ambush or an attempt on the part of Israelis to stop them, then of course UNEF would be very definitely involved in the sense of its responsibility for stopping incursions across the line. This is all our concern is about. We do not want to be caught in the position where a charge would be made that there was crossing of this line by armed men of any kind for any purpose which UNEF permits.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: There are very many aspects here. First of all, the very fact that this type of practice has been going on, is going on, introduces obviously a factor of quite considerable risk because both the Egyptian police groups and the Israeli military groups and our people may run into them and nobody knows exactly what happens. In fact, I cannot exclude that some of the most publicized incidents in the Negev in the past -- ambush and things like that -- were really things going back to this kind of group in some kind of vendetta and in some kind of revenge and what not. That is to say, it was perhaps the fourth party, definitely neither Egypt nor Jordan, but the Bedouin tribe.

The other factor, of course, as Mr. Lall points out, is that it is in no sense the function of the UNEF to police things of this type. If we were to be very formal about it, these are, of course, moves which have been going on for nine years in contravention of the Armistice Agreement, but that is another matter. We need not be much more regal than the king in this respect.

But the matter has another aspect. This is a major United Nations organ. We know in good faith about activities which are not only outlawed in the countries concerned but outlawed in very close co-operation with centralized activities from the United Nations itself. We cannot then escape responsibility, if we ourselves feel that we should not do anything about it, to act as any good citizens act in relation to the police. We know this traffic is going on. We do not consider it to be our duty to straighten it out, but there you are. That is exactly what is, so to say, being done here. That is to say, we inform in very general terms the two Governments that we are aware of it. That we are aware of it does present us with a very thorny moral problem. It does not present us with a problem of new activities of the United Nations or UNEF in any sense, but you must be aware of our being aware of your being aware, so to say. That is to say, we must have a clear mind as to what the situation is in order not to run us all into major trouble at another stage.

It seems to us to be a general moral duty of the United Nations, but for my part I would not like to go beyond that. We have no reason to instruct the Governments how to handle it, nor would, of course, General Burns get any instructions to go beyond his strict terms of reference. Were the situation to develop in such a way that we had to regard it not only in a formal sense but in

a real sense as incursions, the situation would be a different one, but we do not know anything to that effect yet. I think this is the philosophy as it stands at present.

Mr. LALL (India): With that philosophy I find myself in agreement and I do not want to take the time of the Committee by stating my own personal caveats. I can see and feel and share the moral indignation, may I say, of the UNEF in standing by while opium is smuggled and so on but I myself do not agree that we need to express that moral indignation in any way beyond bringing to the notice of the two Governments that we are aware of this position and that this is happening and possibly even suggesting that one has to be very careful about these matters because they may become a cover for armed intruders. But, as the Chairman entirely rightly says, it is purely up to the Governments to decide what they do about those activities and not for us to tell them that they must stretch their police forces and so on.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I hope that, as we have passed ten months without this flaring up in any way, it can continue in the same way, but at all events, as I said, I think that between the two Governments and the United Nations the facts must be on the map. After that piece of information, we may perhaps leave the subject.

You will remember that at our last meeting I presented to you the draft of a letter to General Burns trying to establish the present status in clearer terms between us. We have now had General Burns' reply. First of all, that reply confirms entirely the picture of the situation as to law and negotiations which was given in the letter. That is to say, there is full agreement between Burns and myself as to where we are in these two important respects. He also reviews, and in detail, what has happened under all the various points in the informal agreement reached in Cairo concerning co-operation between the Egyptian authorities and the United Nations. I have no reason to go into the details here, because we shall give you the paper summing up the situation.

It is on the whole quite satisfactory. The most important point undoubtedly is that, as already pointed out in this meeting, the absence of incidents does, in his view, reflect a more effective local police and CID action.

There is nothing in the developments under the twelve-point memorandum from Cairo which gives rise to any concern or calls for any new initiatives on our side. In that respect too this report is satisfactory.

The third point comes, of course, when we raise the question of the competence. His view on that point is that, despite the present quiet and the generally satisfactory situation, there is still need for deploying part of the UNEF also on the Israel side of the line. There is need for the erection of a fence with mines along the line, and there is need for authority for UNEF to fire during darkness at infiltrators coming from either direction. He points out as the background for his statement that the quiet could be quickly broken and that we then would need these various safeguards.

However, he recognizes that at this time it would be futile and inadvisable to try to press these matters to a decision. That is the direct reply to my question whether he for his part would recommend a new diplomatic initiative, political initiative. It coincides with my own view. The political difficulties which would arise if we started pressing are obvious. The present situation is a quiet one. That we might in effect be creating those political difficulties introduces a rather dangerous element in the situation, and on balance, for that reason, he comes down on the same side we came down; that is to say, he arrives at the conclusion that the wisest thing for the time being, although he would like to have these three things settled in a more clear-cut and complete way, is to let them rest until later.

The "operation stocktaking" seems to have been most satisfactory because it has established the conformity of views on the two sides which I think is essential if we are to follow through this operation in a good way. The views of the people in the field must not diverge from the views we hold here. They must not feel let down by a lack of initiative on our side, and we of course would listen very carefully to what they might suggest. As they now happen to have come to our conclusions, there is nothing that presents us with a problem.

The paper that you have here is a memorandum because Burns' letter is so edited that it is very difficult reading without having access to various documents back of it, and for that reason it was better to make, so to say, a transcript of it, building into the text the questions to which he refers only by simple indications of various documents. Thus this review of the main

issues and arrangements affecting the UNEF pretends to be a fairly complete -- or, I would say, complete -- survey of the situation as understood both by Burns and by ourselves in the Secretariat. We wish, of course, to handle it and treat it as a confidential paper, but as a matter of course it is not only for your consideration or whatever initiative you might yourselves wish to take on the basis of this paper but it also has background information from the standpoint that you have to face questions regarding, for example, the status of the right to shoot. Are there any special observations General Martola, Mr. Bunche or Mr. Cordier would like to make on this paper? There being none, I should think for my part that the best thing would be that you just get the time to read it and, if there are any questions, bring them up directly. If there are any major questions, we can, of course, meet again and discuss them.

That is really all that we had on our side, the last point definitely being the most important one because it is the follow-through on previous discussions.

Mr. BUNCHE: Before we adjourn, I might just revert to a question that was briefly discussed, I believe, in the Committee at an earlier meeting at the time of the announcement that the Indonesian contingent could not be replaced. The question was whether it would not be replaced in whole or in part. We have put that question to General Burns, and he has, with his senior officers, studied it very carefully and has arrived at the conclusion that, as he puts it, the strength of one or more existing contingents should be increased -- that is, not to bring in a new contingent. He is already burdened, as I think I pointed out earlier, by the number of contingents, each of which has to be visited regularly by him and so on. So he would recommend that the strength of one or more existing contingents be increased by a total of six platoons, that is, approximately six officers and 267 men, which is just about half the present strength of the withdrawing Indonesian contingent. I say "withdrawing" because the Indonesians are still there; we are in the process of finding shipping to return them.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: That gives a reply also to the budget question.

Mr. AHMAD (Pakistan): May I ask whether you would in due course be submitting the report on the UNEF in general to the next Assembly and, if so, whether you have worked out in your mind the general structure and scope of the report?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: We are preparing such a report, and I consider it a "must" to bring such a report out to the General Assembly. I guess we would appreciate having the advice of this Committee on the final drafting. Part of it is of no specific interest to you, apart from the information aspect -- I mean the logistical side, the numbers, the deployment and so on and so forth -- but part of it, of course, covers political ground. The way in which the political ground is covered not only may give guidance to the debate which may take place in the General Assembly but, if unwisely drafted, of course, it may be provocative in the wrong direction at the wrong time. I think that the political part of the report will follow fairly closely the substance of the memorandum you have before you but, of course, will not go into the details of the negotiations or anything like that; it will just state what the situation is. At all events I can say definitely that there will be a report which is reasonably complete, sufficiently complete to serve as a basis for debate, and that I for one would be very happy to have an opportunity to check with you as to how you look at the report when we have our final draft.

Mr. CORDIER: There is a part of the report which would also include the financial aspect of it, which is rather heavy.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: There would really be three parts. The first part would be the political part. The second part would be, so to say, the military part, how things are arranged, so that you could get a clear picture of that. The third part would be the budget story.

Mr. AHMAD (Pakistan): The budget story was left rather in the air, I thought. Has that been worked out completely now?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Not completely, but I would refer that to Mr. Cordier. I would not say that it is in the air but I do not like where it is anyway.

Mr. CORDIER: It is in a state of evolution, I think. We circulated at a recent meeting the budget estimates, which amounted to between \$23 and \$24 million. Then there is another question which is also pending, as to the distribution of costs as between the participating countries and the United Nations. Those two questions will obviously be joined in the Assembly with whatever result flows from the Assembly's decision on the total amount, after which, of course, the Assembly would need to take action on the budget as arrived at from the basis that we have now, \$23 to \$24 million, plus the action taken by the Assembly on the other question.

Of course, in addition to the discussions on this matter, there has also been considerable discussion on the question of the procedure in the Assembly on the handling of this matter: as, for example, whether it should be done in the Fifth Committee or the plenary. It appears that the question is of such importance that there is quite strong sentiment to have it done in the plenary, where the representation would be of such a character as to cope with the problem in an effective way.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: The main problem, of course, not being a financial one but a political one -- it is the question of the continuance and the size of the Force -- I think that the Fifth Committee will find it a little difficult to express a firm view on that. At least, it should not be expressed by Ministers of Finance, who are not likely to agree with the views probably held around this table. As I am an old Minister of Finance man, that, as a matter of course, does not imply any criticism, but it so happens that it represents a somewhat limited interest in this kind of affair.

(Discussion off the record)

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.