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Situation in the Gaza - El Auja Area  
(O.H.'s memorandum)

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CONFIDENTIAL

Situation in the Gaza - El Auja Area

General Burns's telegram Nos. 161 and 162, commenting on an Israeli letter that has not yet been received, appear to indicate that the Israelis have turned down the three-point proposal of 3 November 1955. If this should be the case, and after the necessary confirmation has been obtained and Egypt informed of this situation, the following approach towards stabilizing and controlling the situation along the Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Demarcation Line might be given consideration.

Starting from paragraph 4 of the Security Council resolution of 8 September 1955 regarding freedom of movement of United Nations observers, it might be possible to intensify the observation of the cease-fire within the total area of the two defensive areas of the western front on the Egyptian and Israeli sides of the Demarcation Line. Observers might be stationed at Beersheba as one of the key points of the operation, and at several points along the roads radiating from Beersheba, i.e., the Beersheba - Bir Asluj - El Auja road, the Beersheba - El Auja road, the Beersheba - Khan Yunis road and the Beersheba - Gaza road, the Al Majdal - Gaza road, the Julis - Bureir road and the Al Majdal - Faluja road.

Another focal point of operation would be El Auja where observers are already present and at points along the El Auja - Abou Aoueigila and the El Auja - El Qouseima roads. On the Egyptian side observers

could be stationed within the Gaza Strip along the Gaza - Khan Yunis - Rafah road and along the Abou Acueigila - Rafah and the El Auja - El Arish roads.

The observers should have the right of freedom of movement along all of these roads, and if they were equipped with "walkie-talkies", they could communicate with one another and with the sub-headquarters at Beersheba, El Auja and Gaza. Some thirty stations of observers distributed throughout the area along the principal roads, each manned by two or three observers (a total of, say, seventy-five) could maintain an effective twenty-four hour watch on military movements along these roads and quickly alert the Headquarters of UNTSO via sub-stations at Gaza or Beersheba about any unusual activity which would appear to indicate preparation for an attack. The frequent patrolling by observers of a small segment of these strategically important roads from their local points of observation would in itself be a strong deterrent to the kind of carefully planned operation which resulted in the occupation of the El Auja Demilitarized Zone. It would also act as a deterrent to infiltration from Egypt into Israel, and it would make it possible for observers from several nearby points to converge rapidly on the scene of an incident when one occurred and thus be in a position to give eye-witness accounts of events either to the Mixed Armistice Commission or to the Chief of Staff for submission to the Security Council when necessary.

The presence of a large number of observers dispersed along strategic roads and in radio communication with one another and UNTSO Headquarters would also make it extremely difficult for either party to obstruct the movements of all, effectively enough to prevent the detection and the reporting of dangerous operations.

Another possible device that might be considered in connection with this operation is a central radio switchboard at the Jerusalem Headquarters of UNTSO such as has been used in various types of military operations, for instance in Korea, by which it would be possible for the switchboard to plug in a comparatively low powered transmitter in the field. The availability of a helicopter at Beersheba and Gaza could usefully complement this type of "saturated observation."

An operation of this type should not require any modification of the existing terms of reference of the Truce Supervision Organization under the resolution of 11 August 1949 of the Security Council. An objection is likely to be made from the Israeli side on the grounds that such deployment of observers should be based on a decision of the Mixed Armistice Commission. In turn, such a decision might, in the Israeli view, involve a question of principle as to the operation of the UNTSO under the Armistice Agreement, leading to an appeal to the Special Committee where the question could be immobilized. It has been a consistent Israeli line that UNTSO should confine its operations strictly within the framework of the General Armistice Agreement, under which the UNTSO is

subordinated to the MAC machinery and is limited to assisting the parties in their implementation of the Armistice Agreements. The Egyptians have tended, in past discussions in the MAC, to take the broader interpretation which is in accord with the interpretation given by the Secretariat to the functions of the UNTSO.

The resolution of the Security Council of 11 August 1949 distinguishes clearly between assistance to the parties in implementing the terms of the General Armistice Agreements and the observance and maintenance of the cease-fire. It is under the latter heading that the Chief of Staff could deploy the observers as suggested and provide them with such equipment as he considers necessary. To avoid the Israeli objection, these observers need not operate under the authority of the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission, but under the direct authority of the Chief of Staff, reporting to him only on the observance of the cease-fire. They could, on the instructions of the Chief of Staff or at the request of the MAC, be made available to the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission for the purpose of conducting an investigation into a complaint or for the purpose of testifying before the Commission in connection with its consideration of a complaint.

Thus the dual function assigned by the Security Council to the Truce Supervision Organization would be reflected to some extent in the dual character of its organization. There would be on the one hand the Chairman of the MAC and a certain number of observers under his authority for the handling of MAC business and

for the investigation of complaints submitted to the Commission. Parallel to this, there would be a group of some seventy-five observers directly responsible to the Chief of Staff and observing limited and easily covered segments of the strategic roads in the Gaza and El Auja areas which have been used in the past for attacks and from which it would be comparatively easy to observe the movements of infiltrators.

The establishment of such a system would depend on the implementation of only one paragraph of the Security Council resolution, that relating to the freedom of movement of observers, and no special agreement or amendment of the Armistice Agreement would be necessary.

If in addition to the above it is possible to effect a pulling back from the Armistice Demarcation Line up to five hundred metres and the establishment of a double-apron fence at the most critical points, as suggested by General Burns and endorsed by the Security Council in paragraph 3 of the resolution of 8 September 1955, this would strengthen the operation. A further possible strengthening would be the conclusion of a Local Commanders' Agreement under which the local Commanders could call upon the nearest available United Nations observer to follow up any information of an alarming character which might come to their attention.

The introduction of such a plan would in no way prejudge the continuing negotiation for the implementation of Article VIII of

the Armistice Agreement regarding the Demilitarized Zone, but it would be a practical way of dealing with the allegations on both sides regarding the massing of troops or the violations of the provisions of the Agreement relating to the defensive areas on both sides of the Demarcation Line.