

**Middle East - Suez story No
1-6: Middle East - Suez story
No 1-6 - 20**

HS L 179:109



National Library
of Sweden

Dag Hammarskjöld's saml.

L 179:109

Middle East / Suez story - Nr 5.

(as put together by Dag Hammarskjöld and
kept in his safe in his office, U.N. HQ)

28 Feb. - 5 March 56

5

Præli minoris V

(Hæc S.C., supra Cairo)

Dag Hammarskjöld's saml.

Middle East/Suez story - 5

28 Feb. - 20 March 56

Sharett, Moshe (Israeli Foreign Minister)

- 2 letters from O.H.
- 1 letter to O.H.

28 February 1956

My dear Mr. Sharett,

On my return to Headquarters from my journey to the Middle East and Asia I learned to my disappointment and great concern that for several weeks you delayed and now raise difficulties in implementing the agreements on El Auja.

Through reports from General Burns I have learned about your objections. I fail to see that anything has happened which invalidates your unconditional acceptance of the proposals of 3 November, again confirmed when I was in Jerusalem. It is certainly needless for me to recapitulate the various stages in your contacts on this issue with General Burns and the way in which from your side, at a stage when you had accepted the proposals "in principle", severe criticism was directed by you against Egypt for its delay in agreeing to the suggested arrangements. I feel that the further difficulties raised from your side at this stage would have, in the light of the previous history of this problem, an importance beyond the question of El Auja as such and would influence the possibility of making other mutually acceptable arrangements between you and the neighbouring States.

In the course of my conversation with Mr. Ben Gurion and yourself, you stressed the importance of further efforts from the

His Excellency
Mr. Moshe Sharett
Minister for Foreign Affairs

United Nations to get the incidents between patrols and outposts on the two sides under control. Efforts are being made in that direction and, provided that loyal cooperation is forthcoming from both sides, I feel sure that an improvement of conditions could be achieved. However, with what authority could I or Burns discuss these matters with the Egyptians if you in the El Auja case may be said to have backed down from commitments to us which were part of the very background for the Egyptian acceptance of the proposals? Thus, your present attitude on El Auja undermines our ability to go ahead.

When I say that I believe in the possibility of getting the borderline situation under better control, I have in mind particularly a tightening up of the instructions on the Egyptian side in line with your own thinking. I am, however, convinced that such a tightening up has to be combined with measures more effectively separating the two sides. That is so because the new instructions should not be put to too severe a test at an early stage and because steps aiming at avoiding undue strain on the instructions seem to me to be a prerequisite for a successful negotiation on tightened instructions. A willingness on your side for these reasons to adjust de facto your patrolling policy would be a proof of your honest desire to pacify the situation along the Armistice Demarcation Lines.

I wish to stress the seriousness with which I present these observations. They have not been checked with representatives of the United States, the United Kingdom or France, but I know that my attitude would have the fullest support of all three Governments.

Yours sincerely,

COPY

MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

FA/929/56

20 March 1956

Dear Mr. Hammarskjold,

I have received your letter of 28 February in which you express disappointment and concern at our dealying the implementation of the agreements on Nitzana (El Auja).

I fully understand your position, but I would ask you carefully to consider our point of view, we being the party whose vital security interests are liable to be most grievously affected by shifts to our detriment in the balance of military strength on our southern and south-western borders.

You will recall that when you originally formulated your proposals with a view to resolving the Nitzana deadlock on 3 November 1955, you stated that they were meant for immediate implementation. Because of Egyptian prevarications the matter was allowed to drag on for months. In the meantime the physical background of the problem had undergone a far-reaching and, from our viewpoint, most ominous change.

Even before this change had occurred or come to our notice, we were gravely concerned by the presence, in violation of the General Armistice Agreement, of Egyptian military positions in the zone between Nitzana and the Quseima - Abou--Aougeila line. You will be aware that we constantly referred to this disturbing feature of the situation and pressed for its removal. Even though we eventually made our acceptance of your proposals unconditional, we never desisted from urging the withdrawal of Egyptian forces from the area delimited as above, to come as a counter-move to our evacuation of the units of the Defence Army of Israel from the Nitzana zone. In our letter to General Burns of 11 January 1956, which was subsequent to our unconditional acceptance of your proposals, we expressly reserved our position as to their implementation.

But the main difficulty with which we found ourselves confronted arose from the overall change in the disposition of Egyptian forces, the full menacing import of which bore in upon us only after you left the Middle East.

His Excellency
Dag Hammarskjold,
Secretary-General,
United Nations,
New York, N.Y.

You have to bear in mind that at the root of all our thoughts on what the near future holds for the security of Israel lies the conviction that Egypt is bent upon renewed aggression against Israel; or that at least it is actively engaged in determined efforts to attain as quickly as possible a level of military preponderance which would enable it to launch an offensive against us at any moment it might judge convenient.

The nature and quantities of the weapons acquired by Egypt; the large-scale and intensive programme of training pursued by Egypt both locally and in countries of Eastern Europe; the virulent campaign of hatred and revenge against Israel relentlessly carried on by the Egyptian press and radio; the political machinations of Colonel Nasser aiming at the encirclement of Israel by a hostile and militant coalition dominated by him; the insidious devices to which Colonel Nasser has recently resorted in order to assuage the anxieties of the Western world whilst gaining time for perfecting his war-preparedness -- all point cumulatively and unmistakably to the conclusion that war for the elimination of Israel is his **supreme** objective.

It is against this threatening background that we have had to assess successive reports and observations concerning the state of affairs on the Egyptian side of the border and beyond, which have reached us in the last few weeks. The total picture which has emerged from their study is sombre indeed.

The bulk of the Egyptian standing army -- well over the strength of two divisions and, in addition, several armoured formations -- has been concentrated within Sinai. Efforts are proceeding apace to **make** this force logistically independent of the bases west of Suez. The accumulation of supplies and equipment clearly indicates preparations for a long-range offensive campaign. Exercises and manoeuvres are conducted on the pattern of an attack against defined objectives in Israel territory.

This heavy massing of troops and equipment (including tanks of various descriptions, heavy artillery, etc.) has been carried out in cynical violation of the General Armistice Agreement. Apart from the contravention by Egypt of Article VIII (3), the Egyptian infantry forces now stationed within the Defensive Zone -- both along the Sinai border and in the Gaza strip -- exceed at least threefold what Egypt is permitted to maintain there under the terms of Article VII of the Agreement. An additional violation has been committed by the introduction into that Zone of heavy armour and other weapons proscribed by the above Article.

We have lodged an official complaint against this illicit concentration of forces and expect General Burns to undertake an urgent examination of the facts. But I would point out that these violations of Articles

VII and VIII of the Armistice Agreement do not exhaust the menace which Israel is facing. Beyond the infringement of these provisions of the Armistice Agreement, the accumulation of forces even where it does not clash with the above Articles is a feature of the situation which might well engage the attention of United Nations organs as an imminent threat to Israel and to peace generally.

In the face of all these facts and considerations I would ask you to place yourself in the position of the Government of Israel and ponder whether and to what extent it would be acting in accordance with its responsibility for the defence of its territory and the safety of its population if all it did in this critical situation was to lay bare Israel's front by the withdrawal of its units now at Nitzana. Permit me to say that judging by all standards of common sense and practical expediency it would thereby be committing an act of folly.

It is in view of this crushing responsibility and the gravest risks involved in our failure to discharge it that we have been driven to the conclusion that we must insist not only on the removal of the unauthorized Egyptian positions from the area facing Nitzana in accordance with Article VIII (3), but also on the reduction of Egyptian forces in all parts of the Defensive Zone to the maximum laid down in Article VII, both these measures to be carried out simultaneously with the withdrawal of our military forces from Nitzana.

We have informed General Burns, and I take the opportunity of confirming to you, that the acceptance by us of your proposals regarding Nitzana stands; that we continue to regard your success in securing the consent of both parties to these proposals as a significant achievement; that in our view, however, the implementation of these proposals must in the given circumstances be deferred pending examination of the issues bearing on the size and nature of forces located in the Defensive Zone; and that once that examination was complete, its findings should be implemented concurrently with the Nitzana settlement.

In accordance with this position, I now propose to answer the series of questions addressed to me on your behalf by General Burns in our interview of 12 March and recorded in his Aide-Memoire of the same date. In so doing I shall merely be repeating in writing what I have already told General Burns orally.

Your first question is whether the Government of Israel, while maintaining that it still unconditionally accepts the 3 November proposals, makes their implementation conditional upon the implementation by Egypt of Article VIII (3).

My answer is that the Government of Israel differentiates between acceptance and implementation. While its acceptance stands, it believes

that the implementation of the 3 November proposals should be in conjunction with that of both Article VIII (3) and Article VII.

Your second question is whether the Government of Israel realizes that, with equal right, Egypt could make the full application of Articles VII and VIII a condition for the implementation of the (3 November) proposals.

My answer is in the affirmative. We concede Egypt's right to make the same stipulation.

Your third question is whether the Government of Israel realizes that its condition as to simultaneous implementation robs its previous acceptance of the proposals of all substance, since a direct approach to the second step, which is the full application of Articles VII and VIII, nullifies the acceptance of the proposals concerning the first step, which is the Nitzana issue alone.

My answer is that here the Government of Israel must differ from you. It does not accept the negative conclusion set forth in your question as to the status and fate of your own proposals concerning Nitzana. Our assumption is that the Nitzana issue was definitely and conclusively resolved when both parties accepted the Secretary-General's proposals as formulated on 3 November. Hence in the examination of complaints concerning Articles VII and VIII, the Nitzana issue need not and, in our view, should not be reopened. The examination need not and should not extend over the ground already covered by the Nitzana settlement, but should concern itself with issues relating to other points or aspects of the border situation. In other words, the fact that action upon the 3 November proposals, which have been accepted by both parties, is to be deferred pending an agreement on other outstanding issues, by no means entails the nullification of those proposals. In international and other negotiations it is customary not to conduct the discussion of all the items on the agenda en bloc but to tackle them seriatim, i.e. having reached an agreement on the first, pass to the second and so on, on the understanding that when all items have thus been disposed of, action on all of them will follow simultaneously. While discussion and decision can be successive, implementation can be simultaneous, and there is absolutely no contradiction between the two procedures.

I hope that I have succeeded by this letter, for the length of which I must apologize, in dispelling any possible misunderstanding and in explaining our point of view both on the concrete merits of the issue and on its procedural aspect. I shall be happy to learn that our approach has commended itself to you and that we can, along the lines I have attempted to trace, envisage progress towards our common goal of the reduction of tension and the strengthening of peace through a faithful observance of the Armistice Agreement.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed ...)
M. Sharett