

STATE OF ISRAEL

DOCUMENTS ON THE FOREIGN POLICY OF ISRAEL

THE SINAI CAMPAIGN: THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE
OCTOBER 1956 – MARCH 1957

COMPANION VOLUME

STATE OF ISRAEL
ISRAEL STATE ARCHIVES

DOCUMENTS ON THE
FOREIGN POLICY
OF ISRAEL

VOLUME 12
THE SINAI CAMPAIGN:
THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE
OCTOBER 1956 – MARCH 1957

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FOREWORD

The present volume is the twelfth in the series of volumes of documents relating to the foreign policy of Israel. This volume differs from previous volumes in the series in that it is devoted to two central subjects: a description of the political and diplomatic struggle waged by Israel during and after the Sinai Campaign, until the final withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Sinai peninsula and the Gaza Strip, and of the political and military results of the war. The period covered is from the outbreak of war on 29 October 1956 until 31 March 1957.

This volume, the English companion volume, consists of English summaries of the Hebrew documents and a full translation of the list of documents, introduction, editorial notes, footnotes and indexes to the Main Volume. Because of the nature of the diplomatic campaign, much of which was conducted in or with reference to the United States and at the U.N., many of the key documents appear in the Main Volume in English.

The documents appearing in this volume, as in previous ones, are merely a limited selection of the many thousands of documents dealing with Israel's foreign relations and security in connection with the Sinai Campaign. It does not include military documentation on the events of the campaign, or documents dealing with domestic affairs, political and economic issues, unless these matters had a bearing on foreign and security affairs. Strict criteria had to be applied also when making the selection of documents on foreign relations so as to remain within the framework of the volume. Thus only a small amount of documents on Israel's relations with Latin America, Eastern Europe and many other European states have been included. On the other hand, some subjects were documented almost in their entirety, such as the moves and developments in the U.N. Security Council and the General Assembly during and after the campaign, or Israel's relations with the Eisenhower Administration. The editors wish to stress that the whole process of selection and editing took place without the imposition of any restrictions or prohibitions of a personal or political nature, and with unlimited access to archival sources.

Most of the documents in the volume are from the files of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs kept in the Israel State Archives. Some documents come from the files of the Prime Minister's Office in the Israel State Archives, the Israel Military and Defence Establishment Archives and the Ben-Gurion Archives. To prepare the introduction and notes the editors also made use of material in other record groups of the Israel State Archives and of material from the British National Archives. The stenographic records of government meetings were also at the editors' disposal.

Arrangement of the documents. The documents are arranged in chronological order. Telegrams were arranged according to the earliest known date, in most cases the date when the telegram was written. If this date was not known, the date of receipt was used. Reports of meetings and discussions were arranged according to

the date of writing the report, rather than the date when the meeting or discussion took place.

The text. The text printed in the Main Volume is that of the original document, except for the following editorial changes and emendations:

- (a) Addresses of senders and addressees, as well as dates in their original form, have been deleted. In some reports, memoranda and minutes the original headings have also been omitted. These details have been incorporated in part in a standard format in the heading supplied by the editors (see below) or in a note. The lists of addressees to whom copies of the documents were sent have also been omitted, except in cases where the editors felt it was important to indicate the distribution of the document, when the information was included in a footnote.
- (b) In some documents words or passages that are of no direct relevance to foreign policy or are of a personal nature have been omitted. All such omissions are explained in a note.
- (c) Slips of the pen, typographical errors and misspellings have been corrected silently. In general, no further attempt has been made to correct style, syntax or grammar.
- (d) Common abbreviations and abbreviations whose meaning is not in doubt have been expanded to full form. In cases of doubt the abbreviation appears in full form in square brackets. Abbreviations of proper names and place names have always been expanded to full form in square brackets. Abbreviations commonly pronounced as such and acronyms (e.g. U.N., U.S., IDF, NATO, etc.) have not been altered.
- (e) Words missing in the original have been added, either conjecturally (within square brackets) or on the basis of a parallel text of the same document (in square brackets and with an explanatory note).
- (f) Original punctuation and capitalisation, as well as British or American spelling, have been retained except in cases of obvious mistakes or to avoid misunderstandings. In telegrams, where the original punctuation is partial, the editors have exercised greater liberty in determining capitalisation and punctuation.

Editorial headings. The heading includes the names of the sender and the addressee, the file reference of the document, the origin and the destination, except when the addressee is the Foreign Ministry or another agency of the Government of Israel, and the date.

Editorial Notes. These provide information on important events or developments which are not found in the documents. They have been placed before the document mentioning the subject for the first time or the date of the event and numbered in sequence together with the documents.

The footnotes explain and expand subjects which are not clear in the text, give cross-references to other documents mentioned in the text or containing further

information and give references to additional literature. Biographical information has been given only when necessary for a proper understanding of the text. In other cases the biographical index, which gives basic information on most persons mentioned in the documents, should be consulted.

Indexes and list of documents. A list of documents and editorial notes, indicating their main subjects, appears at the beginning of the volume. Two indexes, one for persons, and one for topics and places, appear at the end of the volume. References in the index are to document numbers.

Chronology and map. At the beginning of this volume, after the list of documents, a chronological table of military and political events between 22 October 1956 and 31 March 1957 and a map of the Sinai Campaign have been added. The purpose of these additions is to clarify developments in the Sinai Campaign and the British-French attack on Suez (Operation Musketeer) and the political moves in Washington and the European capitals and at the U.N., which took place during and after the campaign. These events formed the background to the political and diplomatic struggle described in this volume.

We would like to thank all the individuals and institutions who helped in the preparation of this volume: Ambassador (retired) Daniel Mokadi, who read the manuscript and made many important comments; Mrs. Michal Zur, the director of the Israel Defence and Military Establishment Archives, and Mrs. Hannah Pinschau, the director of the Ben-Gurion Archives, for their assistance in locating additional documentation; the veteran staff of the Foreign Ministry, who are too numerous to mention by name, who advised the editors on their field of expertise; Ambassador (retired) Yoel Sher, for his generous assistance with material in French; the Government Printer and Printiv Press and their staff, for their dedicated and accurate work; Dr. Yair Glick and Nina Davis of the Quality Translations company and Rachel Yarden who translated the companion volume, Joan Hooper, who was responsible for proofreading it and all those who contributed to preparing and publishing this volume.

INTRODUCTION

This volume describes the political and diplomatic campaign waged by Israel to preserve as many as possible of the achievements of the Sinai Campaign. This campaign was carried on in several arenas: in the Security Council and in the General Assembly of the United Nations, in Washington, in the European capitals, in South America and among the members of the Afro-Asian bloc.

In addition the volume traces the development of Israel's foreign policy on this critical issue, as it took shape in various institutions and agencies: the government, the Knesset (Parliament), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and Israel's missions around the world. This process, secret for the most part, with only its outcome evident to the public, underwent a number of dramatic upheavals. Serious differences of opinion found expression in the sharp transition from David Ben-Gurion's victory speech to the decision on Israeli withdrawal and its implementation.

The political campaign began with the convening of the Security Council almost immediately after the fighting began. Its aims changed gradually over the following five months. Though the results of the political campaign were not as clear cut and unambiguous as those of the battles, which continued until 5 November and resulted in the destruction of the main strength of the Egyptian army and the IDF taking control of all of the Sinai peninsula except a 15 kilometre wide strip east of the Suez Canal (see Chronology, p. cxvii), they proved, in the long run, to be more enduring and solid. The political arena is thus the central subject of this volume. Alongside it various other subjects are discussed (which will not be presented in this introduction), such as the attempt to improve relations with the Vatican;¹ the repatriation of Polish Jews from the Soviet Union;² Israel's attempts to get a foothold in the conference of NATO ministers in Paris,³ and more.

The secret Sèvres agreement,⁴ signed on 24 October 1956 between France, Great Britain and Israel, sealed the close cooperation between the three countries in the planned attack on the Nasser regime in Egypt, which had nationalised the British-French owned Suez Canal in July 1956. The Sèvres agreement, which included Jordan's ally, Britain, and gave Israel a free hand against Jordan in case of Jordanian attack, neutralised Israel's fear of such an attack following the serious deterioration in security along their common border, as a result of Fedaiyun terror attacks and Israeli reprisal operations. Because of the complicated nature of the agreement — Israel had to provide the pretext for the British and French attack on Egypt by

¹ See report by Maurice Fischer on his mission to the Vatican, no. 438.

² See for example nos. 313, 445.

³ See Editorial Note no. 205.

⁴ See Vol. 11, preface, pp. 22–23; see also no. 500, *ibid.*

attacking it in Sinai — and because of the need for total secrecy, the campaign's true target — Egypt — could not be indicated until its actual onset. The massive call-up of reserves which began in Israel in late October for the purpose of the war against Egypt was perceived as preparation for military action against Jordan, and, in effect, a successful deception was achieved, one which was plausible because it was based on real elements in the relations between Israel and Jordan.⁵

The involvement of the United States (and particularly of President Dwight D. Eisenhower) in these developments began as early as mid-October, in the attempt to prevent the approaching war. The reserve call-up in late October, combined with Israel's policy of vagueness and opacity, aroused great concern in the United States that Israel was indeed about to attack Jordan. This concern impelled President Eisenhower to contact Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in a message transmitted via Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on 15 October,⁶ and later in direct messages on 27 and 28 October, in order to dissuade him from creating a situation that would present Israel before the world as being in the wrong and would put the United States in a difficult position.⁷

In his messages to Ben-Gurion the American president was still addressing the tension between Israel and Jordan, showing that the United States had been convinced by Israel's deception. Right up to the actual outbreak of war the United States had no inkling of the dramatic upheaval which had taken place in the military and strategic situation in the Middle East following the Sèvres agreement.

But the United States was not the only one misled by the Israeli government's moves. Even their own Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was to carry the burden of the worldwide political campaign, was excluded and received no information until the actual fighting began. Except for the foreign minister, Golda Meir, most of the Ministry personnel knew nothing of the Sèvres agreement or of the true purpose of the call-up of reserves. However, Jacob Herzog, who was appointed special advisor to Ben-Gurion before the war, was involved in all decisions and developments. The Israeli ambassadors abroad — including Abba Eban, Eliahu Elath, Jacob Tsur and Yosef Avidar — visited Israel about a week before the campaign began for an ambassadors' conference in Jerusalem, but not a word was said to them about the imminent war.

After being repeatedly questioned by Dulles as to Israel's intentions, especially during the massive call-up, Eban once again asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

⁵ See Editorial Note no. 1.

⁶ See Vol. 11 no. 491; see also A. Eban: *The Political Battle in the U.N. and in the United States following the Sinai Campaign* [Hebrew] (below, *The Political Battle*), p. 5. This paper by Eban, in Hebrew, was never published and is available in the Israel State Archives in file 130.02/2458/18.

⁷ See nos. 2, 4.

for information,⁸ but despite his entreaties received no further details. He only learned that the war had broken out while he was discussing Eisenhower's latest message to Ben-Gurion with William Rountree, the assistant to the Secretary of State, after the news had been received in the State Department.

Eban, as Israel's ambassador to the United States and permanent representative in the United Nations, bore the brunt of the reaction to Israel's decision to attack Egypt in conjunction with the two Western powers, France and Britain. ("Collusion" between these powers and Israel was widely suspected but officially denied.) Eban was to play a central role in the political struggle on two fronts: in the United Nations, opposite Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, and in the State Department opposite Dulles, Under-Secretary Herbert Hoover and his adviser (later to replace Hoover as under-secretary) Christian Herter. Both Hammarskjöld and the Americans were determined to ensure that Israel made no gains, especially territorial ones, as a result of the war. Eban, backed by the rest of the embassy staff and, in conjunction with Golda Meir whenever she was in the United States, was in constant and direct contact with Ben-Gurion; his reports and assessments carried weight with the government and influenced its decisions, and in February 1957 he even rushed back to Israel to take part in its discussions.

The period of five months beginning with the onset of the war on 29 October 1956 and ending with the completion of the withdrawal in late March 1957 may be divided into the seven stages⁹ described below:

1) Establishing military facts and political attitudes (29 October–8 November 1956)

The political campaign to consolidate the military gains of the Sinai Campaign began with full force with the convening of the Security Council on 30–31 October for three consecutive sessions. A draft resolution was tabled by the United States, demanding an immediate Israeli withdrawal and denying Israel any assistance. However, it swiftly became clear that Israel was not alone in the struggle — Britain and France presented Israel and Egypt with an ultimatum, calling on them to stay clear of the Suez Canal, and vetoing the American proposal. Contrary to French and British assumptions that this would nip the proceedings at the United Nations in the bud, a new proposal enabling the bypassing of the Security Council was promptly raised, advocating the use of the "Uniting for Peace" procedure which was first applied during the Korean War. The subject was transferred for discussion to the General Assembly, which pronounced an emergency special session which would

⁸ See no. 7.

⁹ See *The Political Battle*, pp. 1–3.

continue until a solution was found to the crisis in the Middle East. The emergency special session lasted ten days, during which the situation changed drastically, and the issue was then relegated to the Assembly's regular session.

Eban, who had still not been let in on the secret of the joint plan, took part in the discussion in the Security Council, making a short statement based on the instructions sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to all the missions, which were to present Israel's action as a large-scale reprisal aimed at destroying concentrations of Fedaiyun and their bases of operation.¹⁰ He was instructed to accept the Anglo-French ultimatum but mainly to try to play for time.

On 2 November the General Assembly approved by a large majority the U.S. draft proposal calling for a cease-fire and a withdrawal of all the forces involved in the hostilities. An additional resolution called on all U.N. members to refrain from supplying arms and military materiel to the Middle East.

The resolution calling for withdrawal was the first of six such resolutions passed in the General Assembly during the next four months, their wording and tone becoming increasingly harsh to the point of threatening Israel with sanctions. The resolution on the prohibition of supplying arms to the region harmed only Israel, since all its arms deals with Britain and Canada were put on hold, whereas arms continued to flow unhindered to Arab countries (mainly to Syria) from the Soviet Union.

At this stage, yet another of the basic assumptions of the partners to the Sèvres agreement was shattered. Contrary to their belief that Eisenhower, busy with his election campaign for a second term as president, would not get involved, the president threw in his full weight, giving full support to the United Nations and its decisions. Moreover, as an expression of his anger at Israel for starting a war without consulting the United States, the president suspended all communication by normally accepted channels between heads of state, and chose to exert personal pressure on Ben-Gurion through the veteran Zionist leader Abba Hillel Silver.¹¹

The lack of coordination between the three partners to the campaign was already becoming apparent. Following the General Assembly's resolution of 2 November, and since Israel had achieved most of its objectives in Sinai, Israel was ready to obey the United Nations and to agree to a cease-fire even before Britain's and France's ground forces had landed in Egypt. Eban's announcement at the Assembly of Israel's consent to a cease-fire brought furious reaction in Paris and London, and when Ben-Gurion learned of this he decided to accede to France's request and instructed Eban to hold off Israel's agreement while not annulling it officially.¹² Two days later the Ministry of Foreign Affairs notified Eban that there was no longer any

¹⁰ See no. 19.

¹¹ See no. 14.

¹² See nos. 46, 47.

need to be ambiguous about the cease-fire, since the British and French forces had now landed in Egypt; however he was to say that Israel's consent to the cease-fire was contingent upon the replies given by Egypt to five questions submitted to it by Israel, regarding the state of belligerency between the two countries.¹³

Since the fighting in Sinai continued even after the first resolution on withdrawal was passed, the General Assembly passed two more resolutions on 4 November, the more important of which gave instructions for the establishment of a U.N. Emergency Force (UNEF). The very next day a commanding team and a commander were appointed to the force — Major-General Eedson Burns, Chief of Staff of the U.N. Truce Supervision Organisation in Israel — and the United Nations promptly embarked on setting up units and drafting personnel. At that point Israel decided that it would agree to the stationing of a U.N. force along the Suez Canal only, in order to ensure freedom of navigation to all nations, but would object to the entry of such a force into Sinai. It claimed that the danger of war had been eliminated once Israel and Egypt had agreed to a cease-fire and that all their differences must be resolved through direct peace negotiations.¹⁴

On 5 November a new factor entered the scene. Since the beginning of the war, the Soviet Union had done practically nothing to halt the hostilities except for a draft proposal for a cease-fire and withdrawal submitted to the Security Council on 30 October and vetoed by Britain and France. The reason for the Soviet inaction was the revolt in Hungary, which broke out at the same time as the Sinai-Suez crisis.¹⁵ Only after it was forcibly quelled, with the Soviet army's takeover of Budapest on 4 November, could the Soviet Union turn its attention to the other crisis. It then immediately embarked on a series of forceful measures:

- 1) Dispatching messages to Britain, France and Israel containing a threat of the use of force should they fail to comply with the General Assembly resolutions. These warnings to the three states contained implied mention of the use of missiles, which caused panic in Western capitals and unprecedented pressure on Israel to put an end to the crisis;
- 2) A proposal to the United States (in a message to President Eisenhower) that the two powers cooperate, even employing military force if necessary, to put an end to the war in the Middle East; despite his anger with the partners in the Suez-Sinai venture, Eisenhower refused to co-operate with the power which had just crushed Hungary.
- 3) An initiative to convene the Security Council on the night between 5–6 November to discuss "hostilities against Egypt," and a draft resolution calling for withdrawal of forces within 12 hours, otherwise the United

¹³ See no. 49.

¹⁴ See no. 56.

¹⁵ See Editorial Note no. 7.

States and the Soviet Union would be asked to come to Egypt's help. This last initiative was prevented by a majority of members of the Security Council.

Even harsher measures were directed against Israel. A message sent on 5 November by Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin to Ben-Gurion¹⁶ contained the threat that Israel's actions called into question its very existence as a state; in addition, as of the first day of the war, all agreements for the supply of crude fuel oil and mazut (heavy fuel oil) to Israel were cancelled, and the Soviet ambassador to Israel, Alexandre Abramov, was recalled a week later.

Immediately after receiving the message from Bulganin, Ben-Gurion decided to send Meir and the director-general of the Ministry of Defence, Shimon Peres, to France, to probe France's attitude should the Soviet Union act on its threats. The two left for Paris on 6 November and met with Foreign Minister Christian Pineau and Minister of Defence Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury. The atmosphere was grave due to rumours that had reached the French of massive shipments of arms from the Soviet Union to the Middle East and of "volunteers" being sent to Syria. The French expressed their sympathy towards Israel but could not promise any actual aid.

The purpose of the brutal anti-Israeli campaign initiated by the Soviet Union was to bring about an immediate Israeli withdrawal. Before its severity became clear, Ben-Gurion gave a victory speech in the Knesset on 7 November. In his speech, the prime minister criticised the United Nations and its handling of the crisis, outlined Israel's political goals in the region and defined seven principles for Israel's relations with Egypt and with the other Arab countries.¹⁷ The Knesset, by a majority of 88 votes of all parties (except for *Maki*, the communist party), passed a resolution supporting the prime minister's address. However, within 24 hours matters came to a head, bringing about a complete turnaround in Ben-Gurion's stance.

On the day that Ben-Gurion gave his address in the Knesset, he received a message from Eisenhower demanding that he abide by U.N. resolutions unconditionally and without delay.¹⁸ Hoover (the acting secretary of state) and his deputy Rountree, who gave Reuven Shiloah, the minister in Israel's embassy in Washington, the president's message, were even more blunt. Their fear that the Soviet Union would adopt a policy which could bring the world to the brink of global conflagration caused them to accuse Israel of endangering world peace.¹⁹ Hoover went so far as to end the talk with Shiloah with an explicit threat that any refusal by Israel would result in harsh measures against it, starting with cutting off all private and government aid and ending with sanctions imposed by the United Nations.

¹⁶ See no. 61.

¹⁷ See Editorial Note no. 69.

¹⁸ See no. 70.

¹⁹ See no. 71.

In fact, the United States was the only Western country actually to apply economic sanctions against Israel. As soon as the war broke out the United States cut off the grant-in-aid, the implementation of the Food Surplus Law, and the negotiations on a loan from the Export-Import Bank.²⁰ There was concern that even the transfer of funds from the United Jewish Appeal and the Israel Development Bonds would be stopped.

Ben-Gurion's first move was to find out through Eban whether, in the prevailing atmosphere in Washington, there was any possibility of arranging a meeting between him and Eisenhower, where he could present Israel's position. Eban replied that in view of the hostile atmosphere towards Israel in Washington such a meeting was out of the question.²¹

Following the threats by the State Department, the hostility in the United Nations, the Soviet threats and the accusations that Israel was responsible for creating tensions that might lead to a world war, Ben-Gurion changed his position. On 8 November the government convened for two urgent sessions. In the first, the text of a reply to Bulganin was approved²² and in the second a decision on withdrawal was reached. This decision was included in a letter of reply to Eisenhower,²³ in order to involve the United States in any future arrangement in the Middle East. At the same time an identical text of the decision was dispatched to the U.N. secretary-general.

It was past midnight when Ben-Gurion addressed the nation on the radio and announced Israel's consent to the demand for withdrawal, making it dependent on the entry of UNEF into the region of the Suez Canal. By using this wording Ben-Gurion intended to buy Israel some time, to delay the actual withdrawal and allow the world to calm down from the war scare, thus giving Israel the opportunity to prepare for the approaching political campaign.²⁴

2) The struggle in the United Nations (9 November–31 December 1956)

By now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been drafted to the front line of battle, and on 10 November Ben-Gurion himself gave instructions for information and public relations activities to Israel's missions around the world. These

²⁰ See no. 25, note 1.

²¹ See stenographic record of the government meeting of 8 November 1956, in file 77.0/9/32.

²² See no. 83.

²³ See no. 79.

²⁴ See D. Ben-Gurion, *The Sinai Campaign*, Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1959, p. 239 [Hebrew].

instructions emphasised the function of UNEF in the Suez Canal zone; the need for demilitarisation of Sinai, freedom of navigation for Israel through the Straits of Tiran and in the Gulf of Aqaba (generally known in Israel as the Gulf of Eilat) under protection of the IDF; explanation of the true nature of Nasser's regime and warnings of the danger of a Soviet take-over of the Middle East.²⁵

The Foreign Ministry representatives set to work to bring about a change in the attitude to Israel. Eban and the embassy staff held a series of meetings with members of the House of Representatives and of the Senate of both parties, with State Department officials and with journalists. In addition, they urged the heads of the Conference of Presidents — the umbrella body for the important Jewish organisations in the United States — to act to explain Israel's stand and demonstrate solidarity with it. Golda Meir, now in New York, held talks with British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, Canadian Secretary for External Affairs Lester Pearson and other foreign ministers who had come to attend the session of the U.N. General Assembly.²⁶ By now the three countries involved — Israel, Britain and France — had coordinated their positions on withdrawal from the Suez Canal, and made this conditional on the stationing of UNEF along the Canal, ensuring freedom of navigation and that there was no Egyptian control of the area. Britain and France believed that their troops would be part of UNEF and would be stationed along the Canal. They would thus achieve some of their objectives in this war.

Meanwhile Ben-Gurion had received a second message from Bulganin (15 November)²⁷ to which an urgent response was required. Bulganin rejected all Ben-Gurion's explanations about the causes of the war, again placed all responsibility on Israel, accused it of war-mongering and even repeated his threat of the danger of destruction looming over it. Meir and Eban responded firmly: the minister of foreign affairs scheduled a meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Dimitri Shepilov in order to demand clarification as to whether this threat really entailed an intention to attack Israel; notes were dispatched to the State Department, and a meeting there was arranged for Meir. The Israeli mission also considered lodging a complaint with the Security Council or the General Assembly concerning the Soviet Union's threats and its interference in the negotiations between Israel and the United Nations.²⁸ Another campaign against the U.S.S.R. was waged by Israel's embassy in Washington and its mission to the United Nations, and concerned rumours and accusations spread by Syria, egged on by the Soviets, of supposed concentrations of Israeli troops along its borders. These accusations were eventually disproved

²⁵ See no. 89.

²⁶ See nos. 115, 116 and 117.

²⁷ See no. 113.

²⁸ See no. 114.

and dispelled, after vigorous efforts to persuade Hammarskjöld and the dispatch of U.N. observers to the border to report about the situation.²⁹

The United States contented itself with issuing a warning against a Soviet attack on the members of the Baghdad Pact (Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Britain), but did not mention Israel.³⁰ It was only in December that relations with the Soviet Union eased somewhat: on the 8th of that month the Soviet Union cancelled its threat of sending “volunteers” to the Middle East, and on the 21st it announced the return of the ambassador to Israel, six weeks after he had been recalled to Moscow.

The initial meetings of Meir and Eban with Hammarskjöld (on 19 November) were very tense. Difficulties emerged as soon as the subject of a withdrawal was mentioned, along with the link between withdrawal and Israel’s demands from Egypt and the function of UNEF in ensuring free navigation through the Suez Canal.³¹ During the talk Hammarskjöld made reference to a report he had received about the town of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, where, it was said, there had been mass riots with some 50 dead and numerous injured. Hammarskjöld asked whether, in light of the situation, Israel would agree to allow U.N. observers to enter Rafah and Gaza immediately. Meir, however, insisted on first getting answers to the questions she had submitted to Egypt.³²

Since these talks with Hammarskjöld had ended in disappointment, Meir and Eban wished to ascertain the U.S. position. They met with the U.S. representative to the United Nations, Henry Cabot Lodge, and explained Israel’s position on Gaza, the Gulf of Aqaba, the Suez Canal and Sinai. However Lodge had not yet received instructions from the State Department about the U.S. stand on these matters.³³ In a telegram to Ben-Gurion, Meir and Eban expressed their frustration that the United States was not joining the West in its efforts to find a stable solution to the issues being handled by Hammarskjöld. They argued that if Eisenhower did not give his attention to these issues there was no hope of formulating a clear policy and an effort to discuss matters with him should be made. Meir and Eban proposed to inform the State Department that the foreign minister had a personal message to convey to the president together with oral explanations. Ben-Gurion approved and they began putting out feelers, but quickly learned that the president had already refused to meet with the prime ministers of Britain and France, Sir Anthony Eden and Guy Mollet; thus it was unlikely that he would agree to invite Israel’s foreign minister of all people.

²⁹ See no. 139 and note 2 there.

³⁰ See no. 175.

³¹ See no. 122.

³² See no. 123.

³³ See no. 135.

The members of Israel's mission to the United Nations continued their efforts, with intensive talks and contacts with foreign ministers of European countries, with officials in the Administration and with journalists in the attempt to get the United States to adopt a more active and positive policy. But all was to no avail. On the other hand, the indirect contacts which Eisenhower preferred at this stage continued. Jacob Javits, the attorney general of New York State, who was Jewish and a friend of Israel, arrived in Israel in the last week of November, bringing with him a personal message from Eisenhower to Ben-Gurion. He held talks with Ben-Gurion and with Walter Eytan, director-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in which he described the main points of U.S. policy in the Middle East and listened to reports of the danger of Soviet penetration of the region and of Africa if Nasser regained his strength.³⁴

On 12 November the regular session of the 11th General Assembly opened, and within a few days the crisis in the Middle East was on the agenda. The U.N. secretary-general presented reports on UNEF (whose units had meanwhile begun arriving in Egypt) and on its tasks, on the preparations for clearing the Suez Canal, and on the extent to which the previous U.N. resolutions demanding withdrawal of forces had been complied with. These reports were discussed by the Assembly on the 23rd of the month, and an Afro-Asian draft resolution was approved, calling once again for prompt withdrawal. Belgium's minister of foreign affairs, Paul Henri Spaak, tried to introduce some far-reaching amendments into the resolution. Although these amendments reflected the views of most West European countries and their reservations about the one-sided stand of the Afro-Asian bloc and the aloof attitude of the U.S., the initiative failed. In fact the amendments had never stood a chance of being accepted, since the joint votes of the Afro-Asian and Soviet blocs came to more than a third of the votes in the Assembly, the number required to block any proposal.

At that time Israel had taken an unexpected blow from Turkey, which — following a decision taken by members of the Baghdad Pact — had decided to reconsider its relations with Israel and recall its minister in Tel Aviv. However, this did not constitute a total severance of relations, since ties in other areas remained unaffected, and the Turks did not demand that Israel's minister, Maurice Fischer, be returned to Israel (his term of office in Ankara was to end at the end of December in any case).³⁵

Together with the political struggle during the first month after the war, Israel's representatives in the United States and in Europe were required to take swift and decisive action to assist the Jewish community in Egypt. The daily life and status of this community underwent a complete upheaval immediately after the war broke

³⁴ See no. 154.

³⁵ See nos. 150, 151.

out. In early November the Egyptian government issued a series of orders restricting the freedom of movement of the Jews and members of other foreign communities; censorship was imposed; and a legal basis was provided for seizing hostages, conducting mass arrests and revoking citizenship. Many had their assets confiscated and were left without any source of income; others were deported and many were subjected to terrorisation and harassment. These pressures and restrictions on economic activities brought about a growing movement to leave Egypt. The first few thousands fleeing Egypt reached Italy and France, who evacuated their citizens from Egypt and also gave temporary asylum to several thousand Jewish refugees. All told, some 20,000 Jews left Egypt within the space of one year.³⁶

From late November onwards Israel took a number of steps in the United Nations on behalf of Egyptian Jewry: the minister of foreign affairs submitted a note on the subject to the president of the Assembly and Eban made a speech in the Assembly describing all the facts known to Israel and emphasising Egypt's international obligations, which was submitted to the president of the Assembly as a memorandum to be distributed to all members of the United Nations. Israeli mission staff spoke with members of many other missions and asked them to raise the matter at the Assembly and also to approach Egypt, the president of the Assembly and the U.N. secretary-general. The Israeli mission also approached the secretary-general several times.³⁷ Following these requests and similar ones by the British and the French, the secretary-general met twice with Egypt's minister of foreign affairs, Mahmoud Fawzi, and demanded full details from the secretary's personal representative in Cairo. Hammarskjöld promised that if he did not receive satisfactory reports, he would ask Egypt to agree to stationing observers on its territory.

In contrast with the sympathetic response of France and Italy, who agreed to take action on behalf of the Jewish community in Egypt, the talk which Meir had with Hoover on the subject was difficult and tense. He responded in an indifferent and evasive manner to all the suggestions by Meir for the United States to increase its involvement and take a firm public stand on the issue.³⁸

In late November and early December Eban held a series of talks with Hammarskjöld to discuss the issues which Israel considered as a *sine qua non* for its consent to a withdrawal, namely: the duties and extent of the authority of UNEF, its deployment in Sinai, the length of its stay there and the conditions under which it would be withdrawn. But Hammarskjöld remained true to his usual aloof and formalistic attitude. He demanded that Israel withdraw first and only then would its demands be discussed. As for Egypt, the secretary-general emphasised the latter's sovereignty over Sinai and the Gaza Strip, based on the armistice agreements, which

³⁶ See M. Laskier, *Israel and Jewish Immigration from North Africa, 1948-1970*, Sede Boker, Ben-Gurion Institute, 2006, pp. 141-150 [Hebrew].

³⁷ See no. 161.

³⁸ See no. 197.

he insisted must be fully maintained.³⁹ During these four months (November to the beginning of March) Hammarskjöld submitted no less than six reports to the General Assembly on these issues, all of which were hostile to the Israeli stand. Even Israel's announcement on 1 December of a retreat of 50 kilometres along the entire Canal did not produce any softening in his attitude.

After UNEF entered Sinai in early December, Hammarskjöld raised the issue of the destruction which Israel had left behind — destroyed roads, railways, airfields and communication lines — and claimed that these actions were a breach of U.N. Assembly resolutions. Israel believed that the destruction would prevent Egypt from rebuilding its strength and that in any case it was desirable that the Sinai desert serve as a natural barrier between Israeli and Egyptian forces.⁴⁰ Nevertheless Eban warned that this issue could cause a major clash with the United Nations, and therefore conveyed to the secretary-general, on 12 December, Israel's pledge to cause no more damage in the Sinai.⁴¹

In early December Israel decided on a policy of delay in the implementation of the withdrawal from Sinai. The rate fixed for the withdrawal was 25 kilometres per week, and the government insisted on linking it with solutions to the basic issues it had raised: the demilitarisation of Sinai, preventing its again becoming an Egyptian military base, and freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and the Gulf. In order to increase pressure on Hammarskjöld to discuss these demands it was decided that the IDF would stop at the El-Arish line and not continue its withdrawal, even if this resulted in a clash with the secretary-general.⁴² In a meeting between Chief of Staff Dayan and Burns on 16 December, Burns agreed to the rate of withdrawal proposed by Dayan, since in any case he did not yet have enough troops at his disposal for full deployment.

A problem that arose on the first day of the war and was discussed throughout this period was that of fuel. Soon after the cutting off of the supply of fuel oil from the Soviet Union on the first day of the war, Israel began vigorous efforts worldwide to find alternative sources. Of all the countries that Israel approached, it was France which agreed to supply it with fuel. At the same time, in view of the possibility that the Suez Canal, blocked by Egypt during the war, might remain closed for some time, a new proposal was raised: to approach Britain and France and interest them in a plan for laying an oil pipeline from Eilat to the Mediterranean. The idea was to lay the pipe as soon as possible, so as to make it operative and provide for Israel's fuel needs, while transferring the remaining oil to Britain and France.⁴³

³⁹ See nos. 182, 183.

⁴⁰ See no. 179.

⁴¹ See no. 208.

⁴² See nos. 214, 217.

⁴³ See nos. 98, 126.

Negotiations with France began immediately, and Ambassador Tsur held numerous talks with Guy Mollet and staff of the French Foreign Ministry. Concurrently Israel decided on 22 November to lay a temporary pipe, 8 inches in diameter and 200 kilometres long, from Eilat to Beer Sheba, from which the oil would be transported by trucks to Haifa. In January 1957 it was decided to lay a 12-inch pipe from Beer Sheba to Sukrir (Ashdod).⁴⁴ At the same time, the option of laying a larger diameter pipe which would also enable export of oil was not ruled out. Indeed, on 25 December Israel was informed that the French government had decided to finance the difference in cost between an 8-inch and a 16-inch pipe.⁴⁵

This decision met strong opposition in France. Paul Ramadier, the minister of economic affairs, opposed France's participation, claiming that it would jeopardise the oil supply to France from Arab countries, as well as possibly harming the French oil company, in which the government held a 35% share. French Foreign Ministry officials, too, with their traditional pro-Arab orientation, tried to torpedo the plan. However in January Mollet confirmed the plan on conditions of strict secrecy,⁴⁶ though progress was slow. It was agreed to appoint a committee to go to Israel to examine the situation, but by the end of March nothing had happened. When Finance Minister Levi Eshkol came to Paris on 21 March, talks were again held about French participation in the pipeline.

The oil for the Eilat-Haifa pipeline was to be supplied by Iran, which proposed in November 1956 to provide Israel with oil exceeding its overall consumption needs through the Iranian national petroleum company. However, making Iran into Israel's chief supplier involved political and practical problems, such as the lack of suitable tankers. In addition, Israel did not wish to take any steps contrary to the interests of the Consortium (the union of western petrol companies drilling for oil in Iran). In order to avoid revealing the source, the Israel government decided to purchase some of its petrol from Iran through the French company Petrofrance, which also undertook to transport it.⁴⁷ However, Zvi Doriel (head of Israel's mission in Teheran) and Israel Kosloff (the government's fuel adviser) demanded that most of the petrol be purchased directly from the national Iranian petrol company. It was therefore decided to delay signing of the agreement with Petrofrance and await the arrival of the first shipments to Eilat.⁴⁸ The U.S. tanker *Kern Hills* loaded in Iran on 26 March, arriving ten days later when the new oil pipeline to Israel began operating.

⁴⁴ See no. 148.

⁴⁵ See no. 246, note 3.

⁴⁶ See no. 319, note 3.

⁴⁷ See U. Bialer, "Petrol from Iran — Zvi Doriel's Mission in Tehran, 1956–1963," *Iyunim*, 8 (1998), pp. 150-181; *Iyunim*, 9 (1999), pp. 128-168 [Hebrew].

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* See also no. 374.

Talks with Hammarskjöld were renewed on 19 December, and he complained about the slow rate of the withdrawal from Sinai agreed on in the meeting with Burns and said that he considered matters to be at a deadlock. Eban once again listed the guarantees demanded by Israel before it would resume its withdrawal. At the same time, to mitigate somewhat the unfavourable report which Hammarskjöld was expected to submit to the General Assembly, Eban conveyed Israel's pledge to evacuate the entire area as far as El-Arish by 7 January.⁴⁹ At this point both Ben-Gurion and Meir reached the conclusion that there was no longer any point in discussing things exclusively with the secretary-general, and that pressure should be applied to get the United States directly involved. Meir did not believe Hammarskjöld's promises that he would postpone handling the issues of Gaza and the Gulf to a later stage and cast doubt on his fairness and trustworthiness.

Therefore, on 22 December, Ben-Gurion met with the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Edward Lawson, to discuss the U.S. stand on freedom of navigation and the demilitarisation of Sinai. Ben-Gurion said that Israel wished to coordinate its policy with that of the United States, while preserving its vital interests and that Eban should meet with Dulles as soon as possible to discuss these issues before the withdrawal to the El-Arish line. As a result a meeting between Eban, Meir and Dulles was fixed.⁵⁰ Eban agreed with Ben-Gurion that Israel should concentrate on freedom of navigation and on not returning to the previous status quo in Sinai, and undertook to tell Dulles bluntly that Israel would risk everything for the sake of these two principles. On the other hand, Eban had reservations about Ben-Gurion's view of Hammarskjöld and believed it was impossible to exclude or circumvent him, since the United States was determined to operate through him. Eban therefore proposed that the next moves should be a talk with Dulles and submission of questions to Hammarskjöld on the assurances that Israel was demanding.⁵¹ At the same time, Israel began creating *faits accomplis*: on 26 December the first Israeli Navy ship arrived in Eilat, and work began on building a naval base there.

On 28 December the crucial talk took place between Dulles, Eban and Meir. Meir said that Israel wished the United States to become involved and to cooperate to prevent a crisis. To that end she asked Dulles to declare that the United States supported freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba and prevention of the return of Egypt to Gaza and to make it unambiguously clear to Hammarskjöld that the United States would guarantee any arrangement proposed for freedom of navigation in the Gulf and would use its influence in the General Assembly should an argument ensue on these matters.

⁴⁹ See nos. 221, 226.

⁵⁰ See no. 229.

⁵¹ See no. 237.

Dulles replied that the issues of the Gulf and Gaza were subject to negotiations with Hammarskjöld, that the United States supported him and that he himself was not authorised to make any arrangements with Israel behind Hammarskjöld's back. He added that the United States was committed to freedom of navigation for all in the Suez Canal and supported the principle that the Gulf of Aqaba remain an international waterway open to all. As for the Gaza Strip, he said he had no detailed plan. Later in the conversation, Dulles criticised Israel's policy, especially its long-term political perspective, and claimed that it had not tried hard enough to dispel the hatred towards it in neighbouring countries, and that its strong-arm policy and use of retaliation had failed totally. However, he ended by saying that he did not want his candour to be misunderstood, since the basic sympathy of the United States for Israel remained firm.⁵²

Ben-Gurion was furious with this one-sided presentation of matters and Dulles' preaching to Israel. In his meeting with Ambassador Lawson on 31 December the prime minister took the opportunity to present his point of view: he described the chain of events that led to the war and the U.S. role in it, and the deep-seated reasons for the Arabs' hatred of Israel. He demanded assurances from the United States and stressed Israel's desire to coordinate policy with it.⁵³

Following the Meir-Dulles talk, Ben-Gurion decided to anchor Israel's demands in government decisions. A discussion was held by the government on 31 December and resulted in several fundamental decisions (later re-affirmed), as follows: Israel would object to the return of Egyptian forces to the Gaza Strip and to the entry of UNEF to Gaza; the IDF would remain in Sharm el-Sheikh and along the shores of the Gulf of Aqaba until freedom of navigation for all was ensured; it was desirable to demilitarise Sinai or at least its eastern strip; the IDF would continue its withdrawal at a rate of 25 kilometres per week; Israel recognised the need to find a solution to the refugee problem through the United Nations and was willing to assist in this solution.⁵⁴

3) Completing the withdrawal from Sinai and Israel's demand for guarantees (1–23 January 1957)

On 4 January another meeting was held between Dayan and Burns, during which an exchange of prisoners of war was discussed. Burns said that he knew of only four Israeli prisoners, and in exchange for them Dayan was prepared to hand over the thousands of Egyptian prisoners held by Israel. As for the Fedaiyun who had

⁵² See no. 254.

⁵³ See no. 257.

⁵⁴ See no. 261.

been captured and tried, Dayan made it clear that Israel did not consider them prisoners of war and therefore would not release them, but would be willing to consider exchanging them for the Egyptian Jews tried in Cairo and found guilty of espionage for Israel in January 1955.⁵⁵ Burns undertook to bring this proposal to the Egyptians, but commented that, in his opinion, Egypt would not accept it and would agree only to the prisoner of war exchange, without the Fedaiyun, in order to get back the prisoners held by Israel.⁵⁶

On 5 January the United States added another factor to the balance of power in the Middle East — the president's new Middle East policy (the Eisenhower Doctrine), which he presented to a joint session of both houses of Congress. Congress was asked to grant the president powers to use economic aid and even military force in order to support Middle East countries under threat by the Soviet Union. This plan indicated a turning point in the previous policy of the United States, which had been to lay all the region's problems before the United Nations, expecting that organisation to provide solutions. But if Israel hoped that the new doctrine would fulfill its hopes and the United States would agree to the demands it had been making since it had agreed to withdraw, these hopes were quickly dashed. Towards the end of his speech in Congress Eisenhower stated very clearly that the Israeli-Arab conflict, the future of the Arab refugees, and the status of the Suez Canal were all previously existing issues, even if they were now aggravated due to Soviet involvement in the Middle East. Eisenhower thus excluded these topics from the scope of his doctrine, indicating that the United States intended to continue to leave them to the United Nations.⁵⁷

Eban's meeting with Hammarskjöld on 5 January turned into an overt clash over the rate of Israel's withdrawal and also revealed substantial disagreements between them concerning the function of UNEF. After this talk the Israeli mission to the United Nations held a discussion, and its conclusion, with which Meir concurred, was that the tactic of "buying time" was no longer effective. It had become clear that remaining in Sinai actually weakened Israel's position in the battle for freedom of navigation in the Gulf and for Gaza. By the time it agreed to evacuate all of Sinai, neither Hammarskjöld nor the Americans would be willing to discuss arrangements for free navigation. Further delays in the withdrawal would also make it difficult for Israel to gain support for its demands at the General Assembly. Based on these assessments, it was decided to inform Hammarskjöld of Israel's willingness to complete the evacuation of Sinai, excluding Sharm el-Sheikh, after receiving guarantees of freedom of navigation and ensuring a wide separation

⁵⁵ See Vol. 9, Editorial Note no. 536 and no. 269, note 3 in this volume.

⁵⁶ A report of this meeting was written by Mordechai Bar-On, bureau head of the CGS. See no. 269.

⁵⁷ See Editorial Note no. 275.

between Egyptian and Israeli forces. No mention would be made of Gaza in this announcement.⁵⁸

Ben-Gurion's stand was more determined. Though he supported the evacuation of Sinai even if no guarantees were obtained, he insisted that Israel would not pull out of Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh even if the United States supported a General Assembly resolution to impose sanctions on Israel.⁵⁹ Considering the struggle that awaited Israel in the General Assembly, Ben-Gurion recalled Meir and Eban to Israel on 8 January in order to take part in the government deliberations. Meir replied that Eban's presence in New York was vital for the continued political and public relations campaign and she would therefore come alone.

The possibility of sanctions against Israel seemed very real at that point. Mordecai Kidron, the deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, reported from New York that the Arabs were expecting the secretary-general's report any day, and immediately afterwards they would demand that the Assembly convene and ask it to consider sanctions should Israel refuse to withdraw its troops immediately.⁶⁰

On 10 January Ben-Gurion called a consultation to discuss the possibility of sanctions. The meeting ended with the decision that nevertheless, Israel would not withdraw from the Straits of Tiran, the Gulf of Aqaba and Gaza under the existing conditions. Herzog expressed his opinion that there would be no two-thirds majority in the Assembly in favour of sanctions. Ben-Gurion asked how long Israel could withstand such a situation economically, without the assistance of funds from the UJA and the Israel Bonds. Eshkol's estimate was that Israel could sustain itself for about three months and that it would be possible, by rationing, to extend that period for a few more months.⁶¹

In a session of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of the Knesset that same evening, Ben-Gurion proposed not to withdraw and to appoint a committee that would start immediately on preparing an emergency economic plan in case the United Nations or the United States were to impose sanctions. It was also proposed to mobilise world Jewry to stand by Israel.

In order to gain time and delay the submission of the secretary-general's report and the convening of the Assembly, Israel had to continue its dialogue with Hammarskjöld, despite everything. Therefore Ben-Gurion instructed Eban to deliver to Hammarskjöld the text of a general declaration, saying that Israel's withdrawal to the international border would be completed by 22 January, then a few days later to submit to him the demands for guarantees of freedom of navigation in the Gulf and continued Israeli control of the Gaza Strip.

⁵⁸ See no. 278.

⁵⁹ See no. 281.

⁶⁰ See no. 289.

⁶¹ See no. 293.

All these subjects were discussed on 13 January in the government meeting attended by Meir. Ben-Gurion himself drafted the decisions approved at the meeting: to evacuate the Gulf of Aqaba only after freedom of navigation had been ensured and guarantees obtained for this, as well as for freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal; Israel would continue to be responsible for security in the Gaza Strip and autonomous self-rule of the local residents would be established; to demand the demilitarisation of Sinai or at least of the part bordering on Israel; to assert Israel's willingness to contribute to a solution of the refugee problem.⁶² Even though taking these decisions at this time was designed mainly to influence the secretary-general's report and the resolutions of the General Assembly, Ben-Gurion stressed in a telegram to Eban that the IDF would remain stationed on the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba in defiance of any Assembly resolution, since Israel recognised the sovereignty of justice rather than the formal authority of the United Nations. In addition, Israel rejected any resolution on returning to the armistice lines, since the armistice agreement with Egypt had ceased to exist and Israel considered any resolution based on it as null and void.⁶³

On 15 January, in a talk between Eban and Pearson, a proposal was raised which laid the basis for a solution. Pearson proposed to deal first of all with the issue of freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba, and to settle it by stationing UNEF troops there with a special defined and permanent mandate. He proposed to decide on an additional postponement of discussion of the Gaza issue due to its complexity. Pearson suggested that, should Hammarskjöld continue to insist, a resolution would be drafted as agreed by the Western nations, and an effort made to obtain sufficient support for its approval; he even expressed willingness to head the campaign at the Assembly.⁶⁴

On 17 January the U.N. General Assembly convened once again to discuss the situation in the Middle East. There were two documents on the agenda: the secretary-general's interim report and a draft resolution proposed by 25 members of the Afro-Asian bloc. In his report Hammarskjöld contented himself with a factual description of the progress of the withdrawal so far. In the draft resolution by the Afro-Asian bloc, Israel was condemned for not having obeyed the Assembly's previous resolutions and the secretary-general was charged with supervising the carrying out of the withdrawal. The original wording of the proposal was stronger and also contained threats of sanctions against Israel, but it aroused strong opposition among delegations from Western countries. As a result of their efforts and pressures on the Afro-Asian bloc, as well as reservations on the part of some Asian members, the proposed resolution was toned down and the paragraph on sanctions removed.

⁶² See no. 306.

⁶³ See no. 307.

⁶⁴ See no. 315.

After these changes, the resolution was approved by the Assembly on 19 January with an overwhelming majority of 74 votes, with only Israel and France objecting, and Costa Rica and Cuba abstaining.⁶⁵

Britain supported the resolution, and would have supported it even if it had included a paragraph about sanctions — as was made clear to Elath by the British Foreign Office — for fear of the Arab countries cutting off Britain's oil supply.⁶⁶ Britain also continued to adhere strictly to the General Assembly's resolution of 2 November, which called on all U.N. members to refrain from supplying weapons to the Middle East. Since then, Britain had maintained an embargo on the supply of aircraft engines and spare parts and ammunition for the destroyers it was about to provide to Israel, despite urgent requests made by Elath to the Foreign Office and Foreign Secretary Lloyd himself.⁶⁷

Britain's attitude towards Israel did not change despite two highly significant events that took place during those months: the first was Eden's resignation on 9 January and his replacement by Harold Macmillan; the second was the talks between Britain and Jordan, which began in early February, about cancelling their mutual defence agreement and evacuating Britain's bases in Jordan. The agreement was indeed cancelled on 13 March.

On 22 January the Israeli government again ratified the decisions taken on the 13th of the month. In addition, it was decided that Ben-Gurion would make a political statement in the Knesset. The aim was to bring matters to the attention of U.N. members and world public opinion before the secretary-general made his final report to the U.N. Assembly, and to foil the Western countries which had begun formulating a plan of their own. This plan was intended to solve the issues of the Gaza Strip, Sharm el-Sheikh and the Gulf of Aqaba by deploying UNEF on the Egyptian border along the armistice demarcation lines, both on the Egyptian and the Israeli sides.⁶⁸

Relations with Hammarskjöld quickly deteriorated in the next two meetings that took place between him and Eban. In the first, the secretary-general insisted once again on linking the Gulf and Gaza issues with the armistice agreement with Egypt; in the second, in which he received a memorandum with the Israeli government's decisions, he expressed undisguised disappointment and the talks ended in deadlock and crisis.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ See Editorial Note no. 320.

⁶⁶ See no. 325.

⁶⁷ See nos. 282, 325.

⁶⁸ See no. 334.

⁶⁹ See nos. 331, 332.

4) **The height of the crisis in the negotiations with Hammarskjöld (24 January–11 February 1957)**

In his final report to the Assembly on 24 January, the secretary-general totally rejected Israel's proposals and once again insisted on withdrawal as the first step, a return to the armistice agreement with Egypt, and stationing UNEF on both sides of the border. This time the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman openly criticised the report, calling it negative, unconstructive, one-sided, and ignoring the facts with the aim of restoring the *status quo* prior to the war.⁷⁰

At the same time Pearson's plan began taking shape. On 26 January, he presented to Michael Comay (Israel's ambassador to Canada) the main points: all the countries which supported it would pledge to uphold freedom of navigation in the Gulf, and one of UNEF's roles would be to supervise this. This force would also be deployed in the Gaza Strip and along the border. The Israeli administration would leave the Gaza Strip, and the United Nations alone would supervise the new regime there. Pearson, too, demanded that both sides reaffirm the armistice agreement, but its supervision and maintenance would be carried out by UNEF. Pearson did not want to deal with the issue of Israel's freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal in his plan, but he did consider including that principle by means of a reference to the Security Council's resolution of September 1951 as a paragraph in the preamble.⁷¹

However, five days later Pearson dropped his proposal because of the resolution taken by the Assembly on 2 February. In fact, two resolutions were adopted: the first again called on Israel to complete the withdrawal to behind the armistice demarcation lines (the Assembly's sixth resolution on this matter). The second declared that the withdrawal must be followed by action to ensure progress towards creation of peace terms between Israel and Egypt. The U.N. secretary-general was charged with implementing the measures proposed in his report, including the deployment of UNEF along the armistice demarcation lines in the Gaza Strip and in the Gulf of Aqaba. This proposal, of which the United States was a key initiator, was rather general and non-committal in nature and did not clearly define the role of UNEF. The United States thus acceded to the pressure of the Afro-Asian bloc, and as a result Pearson relinquished his own initiative. Despite its flaws, Israel saw the second resolution as important because it showed some progress towards international recognition of the fact that there was no point in resolutions on withdrawal without addressing the hostility that had preceded the war. Therefore Israel only abstained from voting on the resolution.⁷²

⁷⁰ See no. 356.

⁷¹ See no. 352.

⁷² See no. 363; see Editorial Note no. 366.

On the following day Eisenhower sent a firm message to Ben-Gurion, demanding that the latter accept the General Assembly's resolutions which had been initiated and supported by the United States. He even included an implied threat that, should Israel not comply, the United States would join in any measures the United Nations might take against it (i.e., sanctions). This threat was repeated in a press conference held by Dulles on 5 February.⁷³

It should be mentioned that at the time, King Saud of Saudi Arabia was visiting the United States, and the Administration showered him with honours and gestures of friendship in order to obtain his support for the Eisenhower Doctrine. Israel's representatives watched this visit with concern, worried that Israel would pay the price for obtaining King Saud's allegiance and support. Rumours in Washington implied that Eisenhower had pledged to the king that he would strongly insist that Israel evacuate Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh without delay, and that this was the reason for the president's message to Ben-Gurion.⁷⁴

However, the Israeli government held its ground and in a meeting held on 3 February following the resolutions at the General Assembly, its earlier decisions were reaffirmed.⁷⁵ An announcement by the Foreign Ministry the following day stated that Israel remained firm in its position as decided by the Knesset on 23 January concerning the Gulf of Eilat (Aqaba) and the Gaza Strip, and that the solution to these two problems was cessation of hostilities on Egypt's part on land and on sea.⁷⁶

Two further meetings between Eban and Hammarskjöld did not bring about a breakthrough. But at this point some unrest began to be felt in U.S. political circles, in opposition to the tough line taken by Dulles and the president towards Israel. After Dulles' statement at the press conference, Senator William Knowland, the Republican leader in the Senate, came out with a strong statement deploring the discrimination against Israel: Israel was being threatened with sanctions, while no one had even mentioned sanctions against the Soviet Union, which had brutally suppressed the rebellion in Hungary. These statements caused reverberations and reactions, and on the following day (6 February), 41 Republican members of Congress addressed the Administration, asking it not to demand Israel's withdrawal until direct negotiations with Egypt were under way. Even before that, on 23 January, 75 Democratic members of Congress had come out with a similar statement, demanding that the United States insist on freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal, the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba before demanding that Israel evacuate the territory it was holding. This opposition in Congress, and especially

⁷³ See no. 371 and note 5, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ See Editorial Note no. 376.

⁷⁵ See no. 372, note 1.

⁷⁶ See no. 372.

in the Senate, had an effect on the Administration, which needed their support for approving the Eisenhower Doctrine.⁷⁷

On 8 February, while in Israel demonstrations were taking place against the threat of sanctions, Ben-Gurion replied to Eisenhower's message. The prime minister argued that while Israel had already completed its withdrawal from Sinai, Egypt had not relinquished its belligerent status with Israel; he further protested the discrimination against Israel practiced by the United Nations by threatening to impose sanctions on it. Ben-Gurion justified Israel's demand for guarantees of freedom of navigation and for putting a stop to the Fedaiyun actions, and expressed his expectation that the United States and other countries would provide Israel with such assurances.⁷⁸

5) Direct contact with the United States on the proposal for guarantees (11–24 February 1957)

Despite Eisenhower's tough message and Dulles' words about sanctions, it seems that at the same time a change began to take effect in the position of the United States, specifically in the State Department. Several factors were responsible: the strong objection to sanctions, initially expressed in Congress by members of both parties, was now felt in the press, which demanded that the United States give direct guarantees to Israel, and in public opinion. The visit of King Saud had ended, and the Administration could afford to deviate from the pro-Arab line it had demonstrated towards a more balanced attitude. Another factor was the growing disappointment with Hammarskjöld, who had not succeeded in making good use of his status and authority as U.N. secretary-general to achieve a solution to the crisis in the Middle East.

The turning point came on 11 February, in a meeting between Eban and Shiloah and Dulles and his staff. For the first time, Dulles proposed a solution to the issue of guarantees: the United States would declare its commitment to freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba, would even exercise its navigation rights there and would call on other maritime nations to follow suit. As for the Gaza Strip — the United States insisted on an unconditional withdrawal by Israel, according to the Assembly's resolution, and on a U.N. force entering the Strip. The proposals were handed to Eban in the form of a State Department aide mémoire.⁷⁹

Further to this talk there was a discussion with Robert Murphy, Dulles' deputy for political affairs. Murphy made it clear to Eban that the key element of the guarantees

⁷⁷ See no. 382, note 2.

⁷⁸ See no. 390.

⁷⁹ See nos. 403, 404.

was the certainty that the maritime nations would exercise and defend their own navigation rights; to be on the safe side, a U.N. force would also be stationed in the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf. The United States believed that its declaration would make the Gulf in fact an international waterway. Once agreement had been reached with Dulles on the basis of this aide mémoire, the United States would arrange matters in the United Nations and with Hammarskjöld.⁸⁰

Coincidentally, on 11 February the Soviet Union approached the three Western powers and proposed to them (as a counter-measure to the Eisenhower Doctrine) to formulate a joint plan for ensuring peace in the Middle East, based on the following principles: settling disagreements peacefully; non-interference in the internal matters of countries in the region; refraining from dragging them into military alliances; removal of military bases and evacuation of foreign forces; cutting off the supply of arms to countries in the region; assisting the economic development of these countries without political preconditions. In effect this plan merely recycled previous proposals made to the West and rejected.

At this point it seemed as if the subject of sanctions had been removed from the agenda. Even Hammarskjöld, in a report submitted to the Assembly on 11 February, expressed his reservations about the proposal, both from the legal aspect and in terms of its wisdom and usefulness.⁸¹ Eban, after the bitter struggle with Hammarskjöld, finally saw the possibility of a solution favourable to Israel and thought that Ben-Gurion should welcome the American initiative. He urged the latter to accept Dulles' offer promptly, despite Israel's reservations, and warned that rejection would cause Israel to lose sympathy and the chance to obtain guarantees from the United States. Ben-Gurion remarked in his diary that Eban saw this proposal as a fundamental turning-point and almost as salvation, and tried to cool his enthusiasm, responding that Dulles' proposal did indeed contain a basis for a favourable solution, but Israel could not accept it in its present form.⁸²

Eban did not give up, and in a series of daily telegrams he continued to stress the significance of the proposals, which he saw as a serious guarantee on the part of the United States. In order not to miss this opportunity, he pressured Ben-Gurion at least to accept the proposal in principle, and only then to begin discussions about alterations and amendments. Shiloah too thought that the Dulles proposal was a basic turning point in the Administration's policy and should be taken up at once, before Eisenhower changed his mind.⁸³

Ben-Gurion summoned the government for an extraordinary meeting on 14 February to discuss the American proposals. The government welcomed the positive

⁸⁰ See no. 403.

⁸¹ See no. 407, note 2.

⁸² See no. 407, note 6; no. 408.

⁸³ See nos. 409, 414 and 415.

attitude of the United States to the issue of the Gulf of Aqaba, but proposed that in order to prevent a renewed blockade there, U.N. forces be stationed along the coast to ensure freedom of navigation, or else that Israel be given effective guarantees, as suggested by Dulles. As for the future of the Gaza Strip and a solution to the refugee issue, it was proposed to hold clandestine talks with U.S. representatives in order to seek an appropriate arrangement that could be submitted to the United Nations. As for the armistice agreement, in the opinion of the government, there was no going back to the *status quo ante* or relying on an agreement which Egypt had already made null and void. At the same time, the Israeli government stated that Israel did not demand belligerency rights for itself in respect of Egypt, and that it pledged to abstain from any acts of belligerency against it, on a reciprocal basis.

Ben-Gurion sent Meir the main points of these decisions, which were to serve as a basis for the reply to Dulles. In fact, behind all the praise to the United States for its involvement and behind Israel's acceptance in principle of Dulles' proposals lurked the demand for further clarifications.⁸⁴ Ben-Gurion presented the government's decision to Lawson in the same way. Lawson drew his attention to the positive points in the State Department's aide mémoire and to the heavy moral responsibility that the United States was undertaking.⁸⁵

The government's aide mémoire was sent the next day to the State Department, and was promptly discussed in detail (the first of three continuous discussions) by Dulles and his aides, together with Eban and Shiloah. Dulles immediately noted Israel's objections to his proposals and expressed his disappointment. He claimed that Israel was in no position to conduct bilateral negotiations with the United States instead of acting in cooperation with the United Nations. Dulles demanded that his proposals be accepted, and commented that the pressure in the General Assembly was mounting, and that if an understanding was not reached forthwith, the argument would erupt again in full force. Eban said he would consult with the foreign minister and report to the government.⁸⁶ He summarised his impression of the state of affairs (which he defined as "most delicate") in a telegram to Ben-Gurion: Dulles had reached the end of his tether and could make no further or different proposals; Israel did not have much leeway; if it failed to accept Dulles' proposals, the United States would abandon its initiative and leave matters in the hands of the United Nations.⁸⁷

But unlike Eban, Ben-Gurion stood firm. In reply to Eban's persistent telegrams, Ben-Gurion enumerated the positive and negative points in the American proposal. He added that Israel would announce that its existence and security required that it

⁸⁴ See no. 418.

⁸⁵ See no. 419.

⁸⁶ See no. 422.

⁸⁷ See no. 425.

evacuate the Gulf only after receipt of effective guarantees of freedom of navigation and the establishment of a joint administration of Gaza by Israel, local residents and the United Nations; Israel would not alter its position even if threatened and punished with sanctions.⁸⁸

In the second talk with Dulles, on 17 February, he reiterated that the United States considered Israel's response a rejection. The United States could not give Israel explicit guarantees of freedom of navigation, because this would entail obtaining the approval of Congress. Dulles suggested that Israel reconsider and accept his offer, and stressed that should Egypt again impose a blockade on Israeli shipping, the responsibility would lie with the United States. Eban responded that Israel had had its share of disappointments and had learned to beware of promises not backed up by guarantees.⁸⁹

The third talk took place that same day amid an atmosphere of crisis. Eban conveyed the prime minister's reply to the American proposal and his conclusion that the plan did not guarantee freedom of navigation and would not prevent renewed Egyptian aggression. He added that making freedom of navigation contingent on the evacuation of the Gaza Strip cancelled the American pledge, since Israel would not allow Egypt to return to the Strip. Dulles asked whether Israel would accept the plan if the two issues were separated, and Eban replied that he was not authorised to exceed the limits of his instructions. Dulles expressed regret and disappointment over Israel's response, claimed that a serious opportunity for cooperation had been missed, and warned that an era full of obstacles was beginning, one which would harm relations between the two countries.⁹⁰

As the day wore on, a tense exchange of telegrams ensued between the United States and Israel. Meir warned Ben-Gurion that the United States saw solving the crisis in the Middle East as a priority vital to its policy and that it might be ready to take drastic steps against Israel. The president asked that a delegation of Jewish dignitaries (some of whom were not Zionists) meet with Dulles, apparently in an attempt to undermine the united Jewish front in the United States and to bring pressure to bear on Israel.⁹¹ Despite the tension, Meir argued that Israel should not withdraw on the basis of Dulles' proposals, especially not under the pressure of the debate in the General Assembly. She suggested that Eban leave for Israel immediately and expressed willingness to go herself. Meir thought that the

⁸⁸ See no. 426.

⁸⁹ See no. 427.

⁹⁰ See no. 428.

⁹¹ The meeting did in fact take place on 21 February in the State Department, but the foreign minister briefed the participants beforehand and at the same time the Conference of Presidents launched a vigorous protest campaign. Thus the result — increased solidarity of the American Jews with Israel — was the opposite of that expected by the president.

government should defer a final decision until Ben-Gurion had heard Eban, even though she did not subscribe to his views.⁹² Eban on his part continued his unceasing efforts to convince the prime minister to accept Dulles' proposals and avoid a crisis with the United States and the United Nations.⁹³

France proved once again that it stood by Israel. In a talk which Meir and Eban held with Pineau in New York, the latter supported Israel's reply to Dulles. It was agreed that Pineau would instruct the French ambassador in Washington to tell the State Department that the European states would not agree to sanctions against Israel, even if such a resolution were passed in the Assembly. Pineau would also meet with Spaak in Paris in order to organise a broad front of Western countries for that end. In addition, France offered Israel a large loan to help it in the case of sanctions.⁹⁴

On 17 February, alongside the publication of the proposals in the State Department's aide mémoire, Eisenhower issued a presidential statement saying that the United States recognised that Israel had legitimate claims against Egypt and that a solution should be found; that the proposals made by the State Department reflected the intentions of the United States both as a member of the United Nations and as a maritime power with rights; and that the United States believed that the step taken by the United Nations in its resolution of 2 February, the declarations to be made by the maritime powers and the aide mémoire of the State Department provided Israel with the best guarantees it could expect in this regard.⁹⁵

Israel's reaction to the statement arrived on the following day. After an urgent government meeting, where Ben-Gurion's suggestions for a solution to the points in dispute between Israel and the United States were approved once again,⁹⁶ Lawson was summoned to Jerusalem to see the prime minister. Ben-Gurion wished to clarify Israel's response and to try and bridge the widening gap between the two countries on issues vital to Israel. For this purpose he relayed an urgent message to Dulles, asking him to prevent the rift between the United States and Israel. He also proposed that a committee of representatives of neutral countries be sent out to review the situation in the Gaza Strip and propose solutions.⁹⁷

In reaction to the publication of the State Department's aide mémoire, Israel published its response to Dulles' proposals, and the Foreign Ministry spokesman stated that the U.S. proposals failed to solve the basic problems: ensuring freedom

⁹² See no. 429.

⁹³ See no. 430.

⁹⁴ See no. 431.

⁹⁵ See Editorial Note no. 434.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ See no. 436.

of navigation once the Israeli forces pulled out of the Gulf of Aqaba and preventing the Gaza Strip from again becoming a base for Fedaiyun attacks on Israel.⁹⁸

In New York, Eban tried yet another way of influencing the secretary of state. On 19 February he met with Arthur Dean, a Washington attorney close to Dulles, to try and persuade Dulles to make his proposals more flexible. Dean conveyed the message to Dulles, and the latter replied that the president was willing to accept amendments or interpretations of the aide mémoire if they were not contrary to its spirit, but only on the assumption that if he did so, Israel and the United States would reach a final arrangement.⁹⁹

On that day, before Eban left for Israel, the Israeli mission in New York held a final discussion of Dulles' proposals at his request. The conclusions were as follows:

- 1) that Israel must announce its consent to evacuate Sharm el-Sheikh and the Gulf of Aqaba, based on the statement made by the United States and the other maritime powers that the Gulf was an international waterway. Israel, too, would have the right to declare that it would retaliate against any assault on its freedom of navigation according to article 51 of the U.N. Charter (the right to self defence);
- 2) that the solution proposed for Gaza in the State Department's aide mémoire was not acceptable, but the matter should be discussed further with the United States, because the positive aspects of Dulles' proposals outweighed the negative.

The foreign minister approved these conclusions, and Eban took this summary with him to Israel to present at the government meeting.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, pressure from the United States continued to mount: the chancellor of West Germany, Konrad Adenauer, was asked to exert his influence on the Israeli government and to persuade it not to insist on its position but rather to agree to the arrangement proposed by Dulles. Adenauer said that the matter did not concern Germany and refused to get involved. He even told the State Department that if the United Nations decided to impose sanctions, Germany would not join them, because the reparations agreement was not part of ordinary trade relations, but was rather a moral and political contract which Germany was committed to fulfill and would do so under all circumstances.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ See the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Israel missions abroad, Circ. Tel. 832, 18 February 1957, 130.02/2377/5.

⁹⁹ See no. 440.

¹⁰⁰ The document has no title, but Gideon Rafael wrote on it "Summary agreed with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to be taken by Eban for consultation in Israel," 19 February 1957, 130.02/2448/6.

¹⁰¹ See no. 443. But despite Germany's firm stand on Israel's side, there was no progress on the issue of establishing relations between the two countries. See no. 291; no. 523.

Direct presidential pressure on Israel also reached its climax at that time. Eisenhower's statement of 17 February was the first in a series of moves which seemed to be leading to direct confrontation. On 20 February, as opposition in Congress to his attitude towards Israel increased, Eisenhower summoned 26 leaders of the two parties in Congress to discuss whether the United States should support a proposal to impose sanctions on Israel, should the latter stand fast in its refusal to withdraw. In this meeting, the leaders of both parties — Senators William Knowland and Lyndon Johnson — expressed forceful objection to any threat of sanctions. Most of the other senators who attended also disagreed with the president and refused to give public support to his stand.¹⁰²

Disappointed with the failure of his efforts to enlist Congress on his side, Eisenhower decided to ignore the views of the leaders of the Senate and to address the nation directly in a radio and television broadcast. Before speaking he dispatched an urgent message to Ben-Gurion by telephone, and asked for an immediate answer, in the hope that this answer would enable him to tone down his intended speech. This message was extremely harsh in nature and contained an explicit threat of sanctions. Ben-Gurion sent back a laconic reply that he must delay any decision until he had received Eban's reports and until the Israeli government had reached a decision.¹⁰³

Eisenhower's address to the nation, broadcast that evening (20 February), was even harsher than his message to Ben-Gurion. He presented the problem in the Middle East as a problem of U.S. national security, and in order to solve it he threw his own prestige and that of the United States into the balance. With reference to freedom of navigation, he said that it was not likely that once Israel retreated Egypt would revert to its earlier aggressive acts. If Egypt violated the armistice agreement or other international obligations, this should be dealt with firmly by the society of nations. As for Israel's obligation to comply with U.N. resolutions, he was even more explicit and scolded Israel for its demand for guarantees. The president concluded his address with a forceful expression of support for the United Nations and its role in peacekeeping.¹⁰⁴

On 21 February the government convened for a session attended by Eban, who had meanwhile arrived in Israel. Before the meeting, Meir dispatched an urgent telegram to Ben-Gurion, suggesting that as well as stressing the points vital to Israel, the government decision should include an expression of appreciation to the United States and emphasise that its proposals contained a basis for a solution.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² See Editorial Note no. 446.

¹⁰³ See nos. 447, 448.

¹⁰⁴ See Editorial Note no. 446.

¹⁰⁵ See no. 451.

At the same time, Shiloah sent Ben-Gurion a message relayed by Walter Bedell Smith (a former undersecretary of state who was close to the president), at the request of Eisenhower and Dulles. The message said that Dulles' proposals contained a U.S. commitment to Israel, and therefore Bedell Smith implored the prime minister to show flexibility and accept them.¹⁰⁶

Eban expressed a similar opinion in the government meeting, saying that failure to reach an understanding with the United States would bring grave dangers on Israel. He recommended making every possible effort to reach an arrangement in the spirit of the recommendations from the mission in New York, which he presented to the meeting.

The marathon discussion by the government lasted for three sessions throughout the day (21 February) and into the small hours. Despite Eban's recommendations the government did not change its stand as expressed in its earlier decisions (of 22 January), but it did make a change on the Gaza issue: Israel's demand for continued responsibility for security in Gaza was deleted, to be replaced by an emphasis on its willingness to work on a solution in cooperation with a U.N. investigative committee which should come to the region.¹⁰⁷ In a break between the second and the third sessions, Ben-Gurion went to the Knesset to deliver the government's decisions, which were included in the political speech he made in the plenum. At the end of his speech Ben-Gurion spoke of the American pressure on Israel, but said that he believed that the government's resolutions — which Eban would bring back to Washington — provided hope for a solution to the disagreement between the two countries.¹⁰⁸

The purpose of this speech, as before, was to present Israel's position to the United Nations and to world public opinion before the General Assembly convened. Israel's ambassadors in Europe took similar preparatory steps, holding talks with heads of state and foreign ministers to discover their position in view of the expected proposal of sanctions at the Assembly. In a talk with Macmillan, Elath once again raised Israel's requests concerning guarantees and sanctions, but Macmillan refused to commit himself as to whether Britain would join the United States and other maritime nations in guaranteeing Israel's freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba.¹⁰⁹

Mollet and Pineau, on the other hand, told Tsur that France supported Israel's stand both on the issue of Gaza and on the Gulf, and it would be prepared to join a statement the maritime nations and to test the existence of free navigation

¹⁰⁶ See no. 453.

¹⁰⁷ See Herzog to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tel. 493, 22 February 1957, 130.02/2459/15.

¹⁰⁸ See Editorial Note no. 452.

¹⁰⁹ See no. 454.

forthwith. Neither rescinded their promise to grant Israel a loan or credit in the case of sanctions, despite France's difficult financial situation.¹¹⁰

From Rome, Ambassador Eliahu Sasson reported that Italy supported Israel's proposal to set up a neutral investigation committee, and that it would join the statement by the maritime nations and also support the stationing of a U.N. force along the Gulf.¹¹¹

Daniel Lewin, the director of the Asian and African division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reported from New York on rifts in the Afro-Asian bloc and commented that Israel's friends in the bloc opposed the proposal to condemn Israel and threaten it with sanctions.¹¹²

After repeated postponements, the U.N. General Assembly convened on 22 February. The topics on the agenda were a report on UNEF activities in Sinai and the secretary-general's report on compliance with the General Assembly's resolutions of 2 February. The threat of sanctions, which had been hanging over Israel's head since the Assembly's January session, once again became a real possibility with the Arab-Muslim proposal on the subject. This proposal was tabled by six countries (Afghanistan, Indonesia, Lebanon, Sudan, Iraq and Pakistan). Most members of the Afro-Asian bloc did not join this initiative. The proposal called upon U.N. members to condemn Israel for not complying with the Assembly's resolutions, to withhold from it any assistance or economic, financial and military services and to report to the secretary-general on the execution of this resolution. A group of western countries, headed by Canada, attempted to draft a counter proposal less hard on Israel. In the end the Arab-Muslim proposal was not put to a vote that day, the White House spokesman announcing that the United States would not decide on this issue before another meeting between Dulles and Eban, on the latter's return from Israel. Continuation of the debate was therefore postponed till 26 February.¹¹³

In anticipation of this talk with Dulles, Ben-Gurion instructed Eban first to present the government's position, then to specify the arrangements required to ensure free navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba. Ben-Gurion stressed that any agreement including these arrangements would be acceptable to the Israeli government, even without the stationing of a U.N. force along the coast of the Gulf until the achievement of peace with Egypt.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ See no. 458.

¹¹¹ See no. 455.

¹¹² See no. 461.

¹¹³ See Editorial Note no. 462.

¹¹⁴ See no. 466.

6) Completing the negotiations with the United States, with the aid of France (24–28 February 1957)

Immediately upon his return to the United States, Eban held a series of meetings. On 25 February he met Hammarskjöld twice to discuss the role of UNEF in the Gulf and Egypt's status in the Gaza Strip. The secretary-general insisted on Egypt's legal rights in the Strip according to the armistice agreement, and could not accept a practical arrangement that would prevent Egypt from returning.¹¹⁵

On the same day Eban met with Dulles and presented Israel's amended demands on the issues of freedom of navigation and Gaza. As for the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba, he informed Dulles that Israel accepted his proposal but demanded that UNEF, which was to be stationed there instead of the IDF, should be withdrawn from there only with the consent of the General Assembly.

Dulles defined the plan as constructive and, after consulting with his staff, presented his comments on the points enumerated by Eban, and accepted Israel's proposal to dispatch a neutral investigation committee to Gaza on behalf of the United Nations. In conclusion, it was decided that Israel would prepare an aide mémoire containing all the points agreed upon, that the United States would try to defer the continuation of the debate in the Assembly and that both parties would endeavour to conclude the discussions as speedily as possible.¹¹⁶

However, it seems that Eban, in his eagerness for a successful conclusion of the negotiations with Dulles, exceeded the mandate given him on the issue of Gaza, and agreed to the entry of UNEF to the Gaza Strip as well. When Ben-Gurion received the report on this talk, he reprimanded Eban severely for his "catastrophic mistake," pointing out to him that the government's decisions which he received spoke only of the non-return of Egypt to Gaza, and of sending a U.N. investigation committee there. Ben-Gurion instructed Eban to inform Dulles that there had been "an unfortunate misunderstanding" and that the government's instructions had in fact been to propose separating the Gaza issue and that of freedom of navigation in the Gulf.¹¹⁷

Eban replied that if he had excluded the possibility of UNEF entry into the Strip in his conversation with Dulles, the talks would have reached a complete impasse. In his view, this issue was included in the conclusions formulated by the Israeli mission prior to his departure for Israel and approved by the foreign minister. Meir, on her part, confirmed that there was no chance of reaching a settlement on the Gaza issue without consenting to the presence of UNEF there.¹¹⁸ On the following

¹¹⁵ See nos. 468, 469.

¹¹⁶ See no. 470.

¹¹⁷ See no. 471.

¹¹⁸ See nos. 472, 473.

day Eban wrote a personal letter to Ben-Gurion, saying that the reprimand had hurt him deeply. Eban resented the criticism levelled at him after four long months during which he had fought a vital war for Israel's freedom of navigation and safe borders and tried to mend fences with the United States and influence world public opinion. If he had made a "catastrophic" mistake, the government should be given the chance to draw its own conclusions about him.¹¹⁹ After the full minutes of the talk with Dulles arrived, it turned out that Eban's words had been misconstrued. The minutes provided a more positive impression than the initial report, and Ben-Gurion apologised for his harsh remark to Eban.¹²⁰

But in a further talk with Dulles that day, it emerged that the secretary objected to separating the issues of the Gulf and the Strip and still maintained that efforts must be made to solve all outstanding issues concurrently. In this talk, he mentioned for the first time a plan which Pineau had proposed in a meeting with the president, Dulles and Mollet, and which the four of them thought might lead to a solution. He suggested that the Israelis meet with Pineau and hear his ideas, though he refused to disclose their nature.¹²¹

Eban met with Pineau on 27 February and heard the main points of his plan: initially UNEF would assume full authority in Gaza. Until a peace agreement with Egypt was reached there would be a civil administration in the Strip run by the United Nations exclusively, by means of its agencies. If in the period between the IDF's withdrawal and UNEF's taking control Egypt caused riots in the Strip, Israel would be permitted to act to ensure its rights, after having proclaimed that it was withdrawing its forces only on the basis of this plan. The United States, France, Britain and other countries would confirm in the General Assembly Israel's right to cancel its withdrawal if these stages were not carried out. A final settlement on Gaza would be reached as part of a peace treaty or a special agreement between the parties.¹²²

In fact, and as it later became clear, the Pineau plan was essentially the Dulles plan. Dulles composed the aide mémoire on Gaza and presented it to Pineau, assuring him that this was the only way to solve the issue of the Strip. But Dulles refrained from fully disclosing the U.S. intent to recognise Egypt's sovereignty in the Strip, and thus persuaded Pineau to present the plan as his own. Pineau only demanded that mention of the armistice agreement be removed from the document, and this was done.¹²³

¹¹⁹ See no. 475.

¹²⁰ See no. 476.

¹²¹ See no. 478.

¹²² See no. 481.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, note 2.

After the meeting with Pineau, Eban promptly recommended accepting his plan, which was approved by Dulles. Meir, who had returned to New York, supported Eban, saying that if Israel rejected the French plan it would be totally isolated in the United Nations. The major advantage of the plan was that it did not require a U.N. resolution and that it relied on statements made by friendly countries (similar to the solution proposed on the issue of freedom of navigation).¹²⁴

The government met for an extraordinary session on 27 February and agreed in principle to the Pineau plan, but requested additional clarifications about the prevention of Egypt's return to the Strip. Their agreement was also conditional on assurances of freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba and removal of any reference to the armistice agreement.¹²⁵

Time was running out, and Dulles told Eban and Meir that he could no longer delay the convening of the General Assembly. On 28 February the decisive discussions took place in Washington and in Jerusalem. In the State Department, two consecutive discussions took place, with Dulles attending the second, in order to arrive at an agreed draft of the statement to be made by Meir at the U.N. Assembly on Israel's final withdrawal. In the final text, which the Americans went over and approved word by word, the statement on freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba was based on the assumptions and wording that had been discussed with the United States since 11 February. The section on Gaza was taken in its entirety from the amended Pineau proposal. At the end of the discussion Dulles said that Lodge would declare in the Assembly that the United States supported the assumptions and hopes expressed by Meir. Eban asked to see the draft of Lodge's speech but Dulles claimed there was no written draft yet and gave him the main points orally.¹²⁶

The extraordinary government session that took place that day approved the agreement with the United States and the order of speeches at the General Assembly as determined in the meeting at the State Department: the statement by the foreign minister, Lodge's statement, and statements from the supporting countries, without a vote. To be on the safe side, and in order to receive one last assurance that Egypt would not return to Gaza, Eban had one more talk with Dulles that day. Dulles asked him to convey to the Israeli government that U.S. policy was that the United Nations would govern Gaza until a final settlement was reached.¹²⁷ However, matters in the General Assembly were to take an entirely different course.

¹²⁴ See no. 482.

¹²⁵ See no. 484.

¹²⁶ See Editorial Note no. 490.

¹²⁷ See no. 491.

7) Israel's announcement on withdrawal; the dispute with the United States on its commitment to its pledges (1–20 March 1957)

The Israeli minister of foreign affairs opened the session of the General Assembly on 1 March with an announcement on Israel's withdrawal from the Gulf of Aqaba and from Gaza. She described Israel's assumptions and expectations regarding guarantees for freedom of navigation in the Gulf, UNEF remaining there and the establishment of exclusive U.N. rule in Gaza until the achievement of a final settlement. The next speaker to address the Assembly was Lodge, who was expected merely to support and confirm Meir's statements. He made a statement on the Gulf and freedom of navigation as agreed with the State Department, but on the issue of Gaza he made an unexpected change and spoke of Egypt's rights in the Strip as based on the armistice agreement, even quoting the last report submitted by Hammarskjöld to the Assembly on 24 January.

After Lodge the representatives of several other nations spoke, expressing their support for Israel's statement as agreed. Eban and Meir, who were stunned, could do nothing further at the Assembly, but as soon as it was over Eban telephoned Dulles, protested vehemently about Lodge's deviation from the points agreed and said that a thorough inquiry was needed.¹²⁸ However, Dulles expressed satisfaction with the proceedings at the Assembly and said that Lodge had asked his permission to insert a few "small" changes in his speech to ensure that Hammarskjöld would not interfere with the plan. He stressed yet again that U.S. policy was to support total freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba and international rule of Gaza, and expressed his willingness to meet Eban to discuss the situation.¹²⁹

On the following day an extraordinary government meeting was held — the first in the history of Israel to take place on a Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. This session, and the following two, were conducted under the shadow of a two-fold crisis: on the one hand, the high tension with the United States following Lodge's speech at the Assembly, which Israel considered a breach of trust; and on the other hand a crisis within the coalition due to the opposition of ministers from the Achdut Ha'Avoda and Mapam parties to withdrawal under the new circumstances. At the end of the deliberations, it was decided to demand from the United States an unequivocal statement that Egypt would not be allowed to return to the Gaza Strip and recognition of Israel's right to self defence both in the Gulf and in Gaza.

¹²⁸ On the same day, before the statements at the Assembly, Dulles informed the representatives of nine Arab countries that there was no secret agreement between Israel and the United States, nor concessions or secret promises. See *The Political Battle*, p. 288.

¹²⁹ See no. 495.

Israel should demand that all details of the agreement with the United States be confirmed in writing, either in a letter from the president to the prime minister or in a written agreement signed by both parties.¹³⁰

That same day Eban and Shiloah met with Dulles, who once again claimed that the deviation from the agreement in Lodge's speech was not significant and promised that the United States supported the principles expressed in Meir's speech. In order to set things right the president would give his word, in writing, to Ben-Gurion.¹³¹ Eisenhower promptly sent a message to the prime minister, praising Israel on its decision to withdraw and promising that it would have no cause to regret it.¹³² Bedell Smith, who — at Shiloah's request — also approached Eisenhower on the subject of Lodge's speech, received a similar answer, that there had been no last-minute change in U.S. policy.¹³³

In light of these promises, Eban sent a telegram to Ben-Gurion, calling Israel's situation "an achievement," particularly after the president's message. He pointed out the improvement in the country's status in all important respects, including in Congress and public opinion. Therefore he urged Ben-Gurion to announce as soon as possible that the withdrawal was being put into action according to Meir's statement, and to place responsibility for the future on Eisenhower, in view of the pledge made in his message. Eban believed that the determining factor in Israel's decision should be not only finding solutions for practical security problems but also preserving relations with the United States and France, on which the country's security was dependent.¹³⁴

In the government session of 3 March several proposals were considered, and Ben-Gurion's was finally accepted, namely, to consent to the withdrawal and comply with the president's message. Though the threat to the coalition remained, the government decided to instruct the IDF Chief of Staff to meet General Burns and prepare an agreed timetable for the withdrawal.¹³⁵

Eban continued to try to obtain a written commitment from Dulles regarding Israel's right to self defence in the Gulf and in Gaza. Dulles refused, claiming that a commitment for an exchange of letters regarding the Gulf already existed, and as for Gaza — the president's message amended Lodge's statement at the General Assembly.¹³⁶

On 4 March Dayan and Burns met to determine withdrawal procedures, and at the same time the Foreign Ministry spokesman announced that Israel would return

¹³⁰ See no. 496.

¹³¹ See no. 497.

¹³² See no. 498.

¹³³ See no. 499.

¹³⁴ See no. 500.

¹³⁵ See Editorial Note no. 502.

¹³⁶ See no. 504.

to Gaza if Egypt tried to send troops into the Strip. On the same day Meir informed the General Assembly of the arrangements, thus confirming her statement of 1 March. Following her announcement, 12 more countries announced their support for Israel's declaration.

However, on the next day Israel suffered two disappointments. In a press conference, Dulles denied that the United States had made any secret commitment to Israel and claimed that Lodge's statement reflected U.S. policy on the Gaza Strip. He again confirmed the principle of freedom of navigation in the Gulf, but denied that the United States had any plan to send a ship to Eilat in the foreseeable future. In a telegram to Ben-Gurion, Meir expressed disappointment with Dulles' statements and doubts about his credibility.¹³⁷

On the same day, Eytan asked Pineau to confirm that the French initiative concerning Gaza had been his own, but Pineau refused to do so and stated that even if France had played a part in achieving the compromise, the final form which the United States had given it was very far from what he had been led to believe by Dulles. Pineau was prepared only to confirm his own (pro-Israeli) interpretation of the Gaza section in Meir's announcement of the withdrawal.¹³⁸

On 5 March Ben-Gurion again appeared before the Knesset and explained Israel's motives for going through with the withdrawal as planned. No resolution proposed by the government was put to the vote for fear that the coalition would fall apart. However, three no-confidence motions were defeated by a large majority, thus providing an indirect confirmation of the government's statement.¹³⁹

In his reply to Eisenhower's message (on 7 March), Ben-Gurion stressed that Israel was withdrawing from the Gulf of Aqaba and Gaza, despite its misgivings, because it relied on the U.S. commitment as expressed in the president's pledges.¹⁴⁰

Gaza was evacuated on 7 March and handed over to the United Nations. On the following day Sharm el-Sheikh was handed over to UNEF which completed its deployment along the Gulf of Aqaba by 12 March. Thus Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai was completed. Hammarskjöld reported to the U.N. Assembly on Israel's complete withdrawal, the Assembly closed its session and charged the secretary-general with acting for peace in the Middle East.¹⁴¹

However, within a few days the U.S. commitment to Israel was already put to the test: following violent mass demonstrations in the Gaza Strip on 10 March, including calls to bring back Egyptian rule, UNEF troops opened fire on the crowds, and a curfew was imposed. Egypt immediately accused UNEF of exceeding its

¹³⁷ See no. 514.

¹³⁸ See no. 512.

¹³⁹ See *Divrei HaKnesset* (Knesset Reports), Vol. XXII, 1957, pp. 1233–1281.

¹⁴⁰ See no. 520.

¹⁴¹ See Editorial Note no. 526.

authority and announced that it was renewing its control of the Gaza Strip and appointing Major General Hassan 'Abd al-Latif as its administrative governor. On 14 March the governor and his men arrived in Gaza.

Israel, seeing its worst fears fulfilled sooner than it expected, embarked on a series of urgent measures to test the reliability of the promises it had been given. On 13 March Ben-Gurion dispatched a message to Eisenhower, claiming that, in its actions in the Strip, Egypt was violating the understanding between Israel and the United States. He asked the president to intervene so that Israel would not have to exercise its right to self defence. Eisenhower replied that the United States remained steadfast in its hopes and assumptions concerning the Middle East, and called on Israel to refrain from hasty action.¹⁴²

Eban, Shiloah and Kidron met the heads of the State Department (Herter, Rountree and Murphy) and demanded that the United States act to fulfil its pledge to Israel.¹⁴³ Eban also spoke with Hammarskjöld, who was about to depart for Cairo, about the role of UNEF in the new situation in the Gaza Strip; but Ben-Gurion told Meir that there was no point in further appeals to the secretary-general before the latter received commitments from Egypt.¹⁴⁴

Meir met in Paris with Mollet, who was furious with Dulles for having misled him, as well as with Louis Joxe, the secretary-general of the French Foreign Ministry, and with Bourgès-Maunoury, who promised that France would support Israel if it was forced to act against Egypt.¹⁴⁵ Continuing on to Washington, Meir met on 18 March with Dulles for a decisive meeting to find out whether the United States was willing to carry out its promises and what steps it would take to do so. The other aim of Meir's visit was to arouse public opinion against Nasser's provocation and prepare it for the possibility that Israel might have to exercise its right to self defence. At the end of the meeting a joint statement was issued, confirming Israel's and the U.S. common policy on three issues: Gaza, the Gulf of Aqaba and the Suez Canal. This statement was more explicit in its wording than previous American statements concerning the U.N.'s responsibilities in Gaza.¹⁴⁶

In the end Israel made do with the warning campaign it had conducted and the more explicit promises received from the United States and did not take military action against Egypt in the Gaza Strip, mainly because Egypt made no further moves after appointing the governor. In fact, this had been Ben-Gurion's original decision, and already in a meeting with Dayan on 15 March he had said that he had no intention of responding with force if Egypt entered Gaza; however he would

¹⁴² See nos. 538, 549.

¹⁴³ See no. 534, 539.

¹⁴⁴ See nos. 548, 554.

¹⁴⁵ See no. 552.

¹⁴⁶ See no. 562.

respond with full severity to any attempt by Egypt to interfere with navigation through the Straits of Tiran and in the Gulf.¹⁴⁷

The events of the next ten years seemed to show that Ben-Gurion's decision not to use force was justified. These were years of peace which Israel used for bringing in new immigrants, developing its economy after the opening of the trade route to Asia via the Red Sea and military development, supported by France. When Nasser once again blocked the Straits of Tiran and expelled the U.N. forces from Sinai and Gaza in 1967, President Johnson recognised the commitment given by his predecessors, and recognised the Egyptian blockade and the infringement on Israel's freedom of navigation as a *casus belli*, giving Israel the right to self defence.¹⁴⁸

Nana Sagi

¹⁴⁷ See no. 538, note 1.

¹⁴⁸ See M. Oren, "The Second War of Independence," *Azure*, 27 (2007), pp. 41-48.