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REPORT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

1. I have felt it to be an obligation to submit this report in order to convey to members of the Council my deep anxiety about recent developments in the Near East and what I consider to be an increasingly dangerous deterioration along the borders there.
2. The members of the Council will be aware of the Special Report on the United Nations Emergency Force which I made to the General Assembly on 18 May 1967 (A/6669).
3. I am very sorry to feel obliged to say that in my considered opinion the prevailing state of affairs in the Near East as regards relations between the Arab States and Israel, and among the Arab States themselves, is extremely menacing.
4. There has been a steady deterioration along the line between Israel and Syria, particularly with regard to disputes over cultivation rights in the Demilitarized Zone, since the first of the year. In this regard I may point to my reports to the Council of 15 January 1967 (S/7683) and of 8 May 1967 (S/7877). In late January the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine, Lt. General Odd Bull, obtained the agreement of Israel and Syria to attend an emergency and extraordinary meeting of the Israel-Syrian Mixed Armistice Commission on an agreed agenda item on cultivation problems. Three meetings were actually held but the agreed agenda item was not discussed because both parties insisted on first bringing up broader issues. It has not been possible to achieve a resumption of these meetings owing to an impasse over a position taken firmly by Syria. In consequence, General Bull, on my advice (S/7877), is now trying to initiate separate discussions with the two parties in order to work out practical cultivation arrangements affecting disputed lands along the line.
5. It was precisely in the effort to avert serious armed clashes such as that which occurred on 7 April 1967 that so much emphasis has been given by UNTSO's Chief of Staff to the need for discussion and agreement on cultivation arrangements, whether

achieved within or outside ISMAC. In the absence of such an agreement, tension along the line continues high and the possibility of new armed clashes in disputed areas is ever-present.

6. A number of factors serve to aggravate the situation to an unusual degree, increasing tension and danger.

7. El Fatah activities, consisting of terrorism and sabotage, are a major factor in that they provoke strong reactions in Israel by the Government and population alike. Some recent incidents of this type have seemed to indicate a new level of organization and training of those who participate in these actions. It is clear that the functions and resources of UNTSO do not enable it to arrest these activities. Although allegations are often made, to the best of my knowledge there is no verified information about the organization, central direction and originating source of these acts, which have occurred intermittently in the vicinity of Israel's lines with Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. All three of the latter Governments have officially disclaimed responsibility for these acts and those who perpetrate them. I am not in a position to say whether any or all of the Governments concerned have done everything they reasonably can to prevent such activities across their borders. The fact is that they do recur with disturbing regularity.

8. Intemperate and bellicose utterances, by other officials and non-officials, eagerly reported by Press and radio, are unfortunately more or less routine on both sides of the lines in the Near East. In recent weeks, however, reports emanating from Israel have attributed to some high officials in that State statements so threatening as to be particularly inflammatory in the sense that they could only heighten emotions and thereby increase tensions on the other side of the lines.

9. There have been in the past few days persistent reports about troop movements and concentrations, particularly on the Israel side of the Syrian border. These have caused anxiety and at times excitement. The Government of Israel very recently has assured me that there are no unusual Israel troop concentrations or movements along the Syrian line, that there will be none and that no military action will be initiated by the armed forces of Israel unless such action is first taken by the other side. Reports from UNTSO Observers have confirmed the absence of troop concentrations and significant troop movements on both sides of the line.

10. The decision of the Government of the United Arab Republic to terminate its consent for the continued presence of the United Nations Emergency Force on United Arab Republic territory in Sinai and on United Arab Republic controlled territory in Gaza came suddenly and was unexpected. The reasons for this decision have not been officially stated, but they were clearly regarded as overriding by the Government of the United Arab Republic. It is certain that they had nothing to do with the conduct of UNEF itself or the way in which it was carrying out the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly and accepted by the Government of the United Arab Republic when it gave its consent for the deployment of UNEF within its jurisdiction. There can be doubt, in fact, that UNEF has discharged its responsibilities with remarkable effectiveness and great distinction. No United Nations peace-keeping operation can be envisaged as permanent or semi-permanent. Each one must come to an end at some time or another. UNEF has been active for ten and a half years and that is a very long time for any country to have foreign troops, even under an international banner, operating autonomously on its soil. On the other hand, it can be said that the timing of the withdrawal of UNEF leaves much to be desired because of the prevailing tensions and dangers throughout the area. It also adds one more frontier on which there is a direct confrontation between the military forces of Israel and those of her Arab neighbours.

11. It is well to bear in mind that United Nations peace-keeping operations such as UNEF, and this applies in fact to all peace-keeping operations thus far undertaken by the United Nations, depend for their presence and effectiveness not only on the consent of the authorities in the area of their deployment but on the co-operation and goodwill of those authorities. When, for example, the United Arab Republic decided to move its troops up to the line, which it had a perfect right to do, the buffer function which UNEF had been performing was eliminated. Its continued presence was thus rendered useless, its position untenable, and its withdrawal became virtually inevitable. This was the case even before the official request for the withdrawal had been received by me.

12. It is all too clear that there is widespread misunderstanding about the nature of United Nations peace-keeping operations in general and UNEF in particular. As I pointed out in my Special Report of 18 May 1967 to the General Assembly (A/6669, paragraph 12 (c)) "The United Nations Emergency Force is, after all, a peace-keeping

and not an enforcement operation". This means, of course, that the operation is based entirely on its acceptance by the governing authority of the territory on which it operates and that it is not in any sense related to Chapter VII of the Charter. It is a fact beyond dispute that neither UNEF nor any other United Nations peace-keeping operation thus far undertaken would have been permitted to enter the territory involved if there had been any suggestion that it had the right to remain there against the will of the governing authority.

13. The order for the withdrawal of UNEF has been given. The actual process of withdrawal will be orderly, deliberate, and dignified and not precipitate.

14. I do not believe that any of the Governments concerned are so careless of the welfare of their own people or of the risks of a spreading conflict as to deliberately embark on military offensives across their borders, unless they become convinced, rightly or wrongly, that they are threatened. Nevertheless, there is good reason to fear that the withdrawal of UNEF will give rise to increased danger along the Armistice Demarcation Line and the International Frontier between Israel and the United Arab Republic. The presence of UNEF has been a deterrent and restraining influence along both lines. There are some particularly sensitive areas involved, notably Sharm-El-Sheikh and Gaza. The former concerns the Strait of Tiran. In the Gaza Strip there are 307,000 refugees and the substantial Palestine Liberation Army must also be taken into account.

15. It is true to a considerable extent that UNEF has allowed us for ten years to ignore some of the hard realities of the underlying conflict. The Governments concerned, and the United Nations, are now confronted with a brutally realistic and dangerous situation.

16. The Egyptian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission (EIMAC), established by the Egyptian-Israel General Armistice Agreement, remains in existence with its headquarters at Gaza, and could, as it did prior to the establishment of UNEF, provide a limited form of United Nations presence in the area, as in the case of the other Mixed Armistice Commissions which are served by UNWISO. The Government of Israel, however, has denounced the EIMAC and for some years has refused to have anything to do with it. The United Nations has never accepted as valid this unilateral action by the Government of Israel. It would most certainly be helpful in the present situation if the Government of Israel were to reconsider its position and resume its participation in EIMAC.

17. Similarly, I may repeat what I have said in the past, that it would be very helpful to the maintenance of quiet along the Israel-Syria line if the two parties would resume their participation in ISMAC, both in the current emergency session and in the regular sessions.

18. Since the announcement of the decision of the Government of the United Arab Republic with regard to UNEF, tension in the area has mounted. Troop movements on both sides have been observed, but as of the evening of 19 May these do not seem to have attained alarming proportions. Although one brief shooting incident on 19 May has been reported, I believe it can be said that as of this moment there is no indication on either side of the line of any major action of an offensive nature, but the confrontation along the line between the armed forces of the two countries which has been avoided for more than ten years now quickly begins to reappear. Unless there is very great restraint on both sides of the line, one can readily envisage a series of local clashes across the line which could easily escalate into heavy conflict.

19. I do not wish to be alarmist but I cannot avoid the warning to the Council that in my view the current situation in the Near East is more disturbing, indeed, I may say more menacing, than at any time since the fall of 1956.
