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LETTER DATED 14 NOVEMBER 1964 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF ISRAEL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to refer to the incident which took place in the Dan sector of the Israel-Syrian border yesterday, 13 November. As the incident is one of the gravest clashes on this border in recent years, my Government deems it proper that the relevant facts should immediately be made available to you and to the other members of the Security Council.

1. The following is a brief resume of the events on 13 November (in local time):

At 1330 hours, in broad daylight, a small routine Israel police patrol was proceeding along the border track northeast of Kibbutz Dan, within Israel territory. The patrol came under sudden and unprovoked fire from machine-guns and recoilless guns from the nearby Syrian army position of Nukheila, at a range of approximately 500 metres.

At 1345 hours two Syrian tanks, dug in at Nukheila, joined in the attack. Fire was returned in order to extricate the patrol.

At 1410 hours the fortified Syrian army positions on the hilltops of Tel el-Hamra and Tel Azaziat, opened an artillery and heavy mortar bombardment of the Israel villages of Shear Yashuv and Kibbutz Dan, which are respectively 1700 and 500 metres on the Israel side of the border. Other Syrian fortified gun emplacements on the high ground further back from these hilltops, joined in the bombardment. Fire was returned in an unsuccessful effort to silence the Syrian guns.

A cease-fire proposed by United Nations Observers, to take effect at 1430 hours, was disregarded by the Syrians, who continued their bombardment of the two villages and the surrounding area. A further attempt by UNTSO personnel to arrange a cease-fire for 1500 hours also failed.

At 1455 hours Israel planes were obliged to go into operation in order to silence the Syrian gun positions and halt the bombardment of the Israel villages.



After this defensive measure, the Syrians promptly agreed to a cease-fire, which came into operation at 1530 hours.

The Israel casualties in this incident were 3 killed and 11 wounded, 5 of them seriously.

Extensive damage was sustained by the two Israel villages as a result of the bombardment. At Kibbutz Dan there were direct hits on a number of dwelling houses, also on the children's house, the regional dental clinic, the village museum, the electric power plant, and agricultural machinery. At Shear Yashuv a number of dwelling houses were damaged, and there was considerable damage to the fruit orchards and irrigation network. In both villages there would have been much greater loss of life had most of the inhabitants not succeeded in taking refuge in shelters.

The employment of Israel planes in the last resort, as an emergency defence measure, must be understood in relation to the nature of the terrain. The border area is completely dominated by the adjacent high ground on the Syrian side. These heights have been heavily fortified by the Syrian armed forces, which occupy a chain of infantry and artillery positions dug into the rock, and mostly concealed from observation from the valley below. In that valley, only a short distance away from the Syrian guns above them, the local Israel population pursues its daily life and work. In these topographical conditions, an unrestrained attack from the Syrian positions can at any time murder a number of innocent civilians, and destroy their homes, farms and installations.

For instance, the fortified Syrian positions at Nukheila, Tel Azaziat and Tel el-Hamra, which were involved in the 13 November attack, are between 1500 metres and 2600 metres away from the two attacked villages, and several hundred feet higher than they are. It is not feasible to suppress a murderous and destructive attack from these positions on open agricultural villages, simply by direct counter-fire from below.

In the present case, after the initial attempts by the United Nations representatives had not succeeded in halting the attack, the only effective counter-measure open to the Israel forces was by an air strike against the Syrian positions which were in action. The only targets for this strike by the Israel planes were those Syrian positions actually engaged in the bombardment.

2. In trying to explain how the incident was initiated, Syrian official statements suggest that the Israel patrol vehicle had penetrated into Syrian territory before it came under fire. There is no truth to this allegation.

The track in question is needed to enable regular patrolling by border police, in a sensitive sector of the border where the frontiers of Israel, Syria and Lebanon meet. Israel civilian activity extends here practically up to the border. The track was partly laid in October 1961, and completed after the winter rains, in May 1962. In 1962, it was alleged by Syrian representatives that the track encroached across the border. In order to clarify the position, UNFISG brought in a Canadian survey team, which established that the track was on the Israel side.

At the beginning of last month (October), Syrian representatives again complained of encroachment, in connexion with the track, but an UNFISG investigation showed that this claim was unsubstantiated.

On 3 November, a party of workmen carrying out repairs to the road, suddenly came under attack from Syrian positions. This led to a heavy exchange of fire, in which Syrian tanks took part. The work was later completed, and the normal police patrol was resumed without incident, in the days preceding the sudden and unprovoked November 13 attack.

It is repeated that there is no basis for the Syrian claim that the patrol crossed the border and penetrated into Syrian territory.

3. This incident is the most recent example of the Syrian pattern of harassment by shooting across the border. For many years now the indiscriminate firing from Syrian positions at Israel farmers, fishermen, policemen and other civilians going about their lawful occupations in Israel territory, has been a major source of tension and fighting along the border.

On 7 July 1964, the Permanent Representative of Israel submitted a letter to the President of the Security Council (S/5801) for circulation to its members, detailing twenty-nine such acts of aggression in the four-week period from 9 June to 6 July 1964. It was pointed out then that these attacks were producing a deteriorating situation which threatened the peace. Since then the same type of attack has been frequently repeated.

The United Nations authorities have taken up a clear and consistent position, that the opening of fire across the border is totally prohibited under any circumstances. Unfortunately, despite repeated assurances, the Syrian authorities have consistently violated this rule.

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On 11 August 1964, the UNTSO Chief-of-Staff, General Odd Bull, informed the Israel Prime Minister that he had received firm assurances from the Syrian authorities that they would in future refrain from opening fire on Israel activities to which they might take objection, and would instead submit complaints. On a number of occasions during the last few months, the Israel Government was again informed that such assurances had been reaffirmed to United Nations representatives by the Syrian Government. This was stated, for instance, on 8 July, on 15 August, on 26 August, on 8 September, and as recently as 12 October, when General Bull advised that he had once more stressed to the Syrian Chief-of-Staff that the obligation to respect the cease-fire and refrain from shooting was absolute and unconditional.

In each of the above cases, the solemn Syrian assurance was flouted and violated within a matter of weeks.

It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that this pattern of incessant, deliberate and unprovoked armed attack is not only contrary to the Charter, the decisions of the Security Council, and the terms of the armistice agreement, but extremely irresponsible, provocative and dangerous in the conditions prevailing on the Israel-Syrian border. The flare-up on 13 November was the most recent example of the consequences of this conduct. It was a direct result of yet another act of shooting at normal and peaceful Israel civilian activity within Israel. Unless this practice is stopped once and for all, the border situation is liable to deteriorate still further.

4. The aggressive behaviour of Syrian troops in the border area must be seen against the background of the situation within Syria, the relations between Syria and the other Arab States, and the belligerent policies of the Arab States towards Israel. In my letters to the President of the Security Council on 18 September 1964 (S/5980) and 19 October 1964 (S/6020), attention was drawn to the decisions taken at the Arab Summit Conference at Alexandria in September 1964. These letters stated that:

"The clear purpose of this proclamation is that thirteen Member States of the United Nations have set themselves the aim of liquidating another Member State, and declared that to be a central policy objective guiding their collective actions, and have determined to concentrate all their national potential on the attainment of this aim."

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It was added that "these policies ... inflame the tension in the Middle East, and constitute a threat to international peace and security".

It is known that at the Alexandria Conference, and also at the earlier Arab conference in Cairo in January 1964, it was the Syrian leaders who pressed most strongly for immediate military action against Israel. Recently, there have been a series of bellicose and sabre-rattling threats from Damascus. For instance, on 29 October 1964, General J'did, the Syrian Chief-of-Staff, was reported to have declared that his army would not be satisfied until Israel had been liquidated, and a number of other utterances are in similar vein.

The Israel Government must once more place on record its deep concern at the implications for regional peace of the belligerent course the Arab States have set themselves. As far as the Israel-Arab border situation is concerned, the incitement to violence by the Syrian leaders must create the political and psychological climate for actual violence and lawlessness on the border by the armed forces of Syria.

The Government of Israel cannot abrogate its duty to defend the lives and property of its citizens, and the integrity of its territory.

I have the honour to request that this letter be circulated to the members of the Security Council, as a Council document.

(Signed) Michael COMAY
Permanent Representative
