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REPORT DATED 5 SEPTEMBER 1955 FROM THE CHIEF OF STAFF  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS TRUCE SUPERVISION ORGANIZATION  
IN PALESTINE CONCERNING RECENT INCIDENTS BETWEEN EGYPT  
AND ISRAEL IN THE AREA OF THE GAZA STRIP

1. The following report is concerned with the outbreak of extreme violence centered on the Gaza area, which began with the incident of 22 August and of which the latest and most serious action is the attack by Israeli forces on the Khan Yunis police station in the night of 31 August - 1 September. This report is intended to touch only on the key incidents and the factors involved in the present situation.
2. The period of violence began with the incident of 22 August, in which an Egyptian post at Hill 79, near the Demarcation Line and five kilometres due east of Gaza, was occupied by Israeli forces. This incident, in which one Egyptian officer and two soldiers were killed and three others wounded, started off the chain of violence. It is one more example of the type of incident arising frequently between 28 February and 1 June from the combination of Israeli motor patrols along one side of the Demarcation Line and Egyptian outposts on the other side and close to it.
3. The episode of 22 August was soon after followed by an organized series of attacks on vehicles, installations and persons, carried out by gangs of marauders in Israel territory which, according to my information, resulted in the deaths of eleven military and civilian personnel and the injury of nine.
4. The number and nature of these acts of sabotage perpetrated well within Israel territory are such as to suggest that they are the work of organized and well trained groups. Investigations so far completed by United Nations military observers tend to support this view. The sudden resumption of this type of incident after they had practically ceased for three months is significant.

5. On 28 August, after several such attacks had been reported and investigated, at my direction the Chairman of the Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission wrote to Colonel S. Gohar, Director of the Department of Palestine Affairs, Egyptian Ministry of War, to the Governor of Gaza, and to the military Commander in the Gaza area, citing three cases which had been investigated and emphasizing the risk that this type of incident might provoke reactions which might lead to the gravest situation.
6. Unfortunately, the incidents continued. According to a statement of the Israel Foreign Ministry, published in the Jerusalem Post of 1 September, they were the determining factor in the Israeli decision to carry out the action on Khan Yunis.
7. There were also numerous incidents of firing across the Demarcation Line with, in some cases, incursions by small parties of troops of either side. Casualties resulting from these exchanges were sometimes heavy. According to my information, four Egyptian soldiers were killed and eleven wounded, and three Israelis were wounded. In many cases, it is unlikely that the Mixed Armistice Commission will be able to establish which side was the first to fire.
8. On 26 August, in view of the deterioration of the situation in the Gaza area, I had reminded the Israeli authorities that in the present situation, there was need to take special precautions to reduce tension and to avoid any further incidents. I also requested that responsible Israeli authorities in the area be firmly instructed to act with restraint and, in particular, to reduce to a minimum the deployment of patrols and other forces in the vicinity of the Demarcation Line in a manner which might provoke incidents. I informed the Egyptians that I considered it advisable that United Nations military observers be again posted on the Egyptian side in accordance with arrangements previously in force, but discontinued at the request of the Egyptians. I also urged that instructions be issued to responsible Egyptian military and civilian authorities to ensure that troops and civilians should commit no attacks in breach of the General Armistice Agreement. On 28 August the Egyptians informed me that they agreed to the reposting of United Nations military observers at specific points.
9. With a view to achieving a period of quiet, which would render possible appropriate action to arrest the continued tension, I addressed an appeal, on 30 August, to both parties proposing that they agree to order their troops along

the Line of Demarcation in the Gaza and El Auja areas to observe strictly a cease-fire from 1600 hours GMT that day, and also that they issue and enforce the most positive orders to prevent any persons crossing the Demarcation Line and attacking persons in the other's territory, laying mines, or committing other acts of sabotage.

10. At 1600 hours GMT, the Egyptian authorities transmitted the following reply to the Chairman of the Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission in Gaza:

"The Egyptian military authorities will issue the orders proposed by you and specifically will observe strictly a cease-fire from 1600 hours GMT today, 30 August 1955. In this connection I beg to inform you that if the other side will start any aggressive action after 1600 hours GMT, he has to bear the consequences of his aggression."

11. At 1625 hours GMT, the Israeli authorities replied inter alia:

"...the Government of Israel finds itself in the first place compelled, in response to your letter, to invite you to obtain the assurance of the Egyptian Government that it accepts responsibility for these acts and that it is ready to give guarantees for immediate, complete and definitive cessation of all further hostile acts in strictest compliance with its obligations under the Armistice Agreement."

12. I pointed out that to obtain acceptance by the Egyptians of responsibility for previous incidents would be an unreasonable and, in any case, unacceptable condition for a cease-fire. Moreover, the Egyptians had accepted my cease-fire appeal which, incidentally, covered all hostile acts. I therefore strongly urged Israel definitely to accept the cease-fire. About an hour later, I was informed by telephone by the Israeli authorities that in view of the alleged killing of two civilians in an incident that night, there were further doubts whether the Egyptians intended to respect the cease-fire. The Israel Government was still considering the situation and a reply would be given as soon as available. I again stressed that the Egyptian authorities had accepted the cease-fire covering all hostile acts, that the time for effective cease-fire was already well past, and that it was necessary that the Israelis give an unequivocal answer to the cease-fire request.

13. Later that evening, I was informed that the Israel Government still had the matter under consideration, but that no decision changing the stand set forth in the letter quoted in paragraph 11 above had yet been reached. In informing the Egyptian authorities that the Israel Government had not yet reached a decision

because of several alleged attacks that night, I nevertheless urged the Egyptian authorities to maintain the cease-fire under conditions they had agreed to in their message to me quoted in paragraph 10 above.

14. On 31 August I learned that six United Nations military observers and three other United Nations personnel were being detained by the Senior Israeli Delegate to the Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission in Beersheba and vicinity. A protest against this interference was immediately made to the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs and after some conflicting statements had been made, about 1500 hours GMT, the observers were permitted to go to Jerusalem or Gaza with escort.

15. The placing of restrictions on the movements of the United Nations military observers for several hours on 31 August, following the prior stipulation by the Israeli authorities of the above-mentioned conditions in their reply to my appeal for a cease-fire, immediately preceded the action at Khan Yunis on the night of 31 August - 1 September, reported in a communique issued on 1 September by the Israeli Army. The United Nations military observers are now investigating this action.

16. Although the investigation of the attack on Khan Yunis by Israel forces is not complete, the following is a summary of what took place: On the night of 31 August - 1 September, an Israeli light armoured unit, in half-tracks, penetrated into Egyptian-controlled territory and advanced to the police station at Khan Yunis, taking it under machine gun fire and subsequently destroying it by heavy explosive charges. The hospital under construction was also partly destroyed by explosives, and neighbouring buildings and others in the village of Bani Suheila, through which the force passed, were machine gunned. An Egyptian defensive position east of Abasan was also attacked and casualties were inflicted. Casualties reported by the Egyptian authorities are: thirty-six killed and thirteen wounded; these comprise policemen, members of the Armed Forces and civilians, but it has not been possible to establish casualties exactly and few among those listed have been actually seen by observers.

17. On 3 September, following consultation with the Secretary-General, I renewed my appeal of 30 August to Egypt and Israel to observe strictly a cease-fire, with the conditions mentioned in paragraph 9 above, and requested both parties to inform me not later than 1500 hours GMT on 4 September 1955, whether or not they

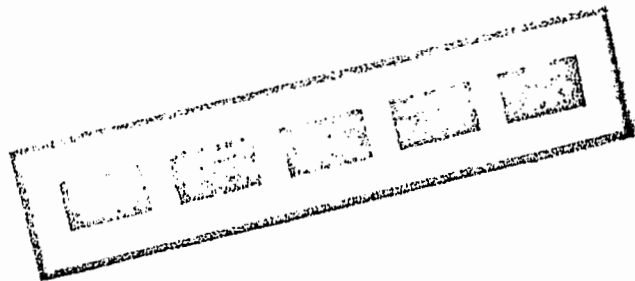
would accept this appeal. At 1045 hours GMT on 4 September, the Government of Israel replied that Israel accepted my request while reserving its full right of self-defence if attacked. At 1445 hours GMT Egypt's reply was received stating that Egypt had issued orders for cease-fire in response to my previous request and assuring me that these orders were still in effect, provided Israel also observed the cease-fire.

18. It is to be regretted that in the negotiations carried on from 28 June until broken off on 24 August, it was impossible to secure the final agreement of both parties to any of the measures suggested in my report of 17 March 1955,<sup>1/</sup> in regard to which the Security Council resolution of 30 March 1955 called upon the parties for cooperation.

19. I am now of opinion that a repetition of the incidents of firing between Egyptian outposts and Israeli motor patrols which have precipitated several crises since February 1955, will only be avoided if the forces of the opposing sides are separated by an effective physical barrier along the Demarcation Line; and if in addition defensive positions and motorized patrols are kept at least 500 metres from the Demarcation Line on either side.

20. If by adopting these measures it is possible to maintain tranquillity along the Demarcation Line for some months, the other proposals under negotiation up to 24 August might again be brought forward for discussion.

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<sup>1/</sup> S/3373.