

UNITED NATIONS  
SECURITY  
COUNCIL



Distr.  
GENERAL

S/5102  
26 March 1962

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

---

REPORT BY THE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE UNITED NATIONS TRUCE  
SUPERVISION ORGANIZATION TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON  
RECENT DANGEROUS DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LAKE TIBERIAS AREA

1. I have the honour to report on: (1) the events which led up to the fighting in the Lake Tiberias area during the night of 16-17 March 1962; (2) the fighting itself; (3) the cease-fire which was arranged with both sides on 17 March; and (4) subsequent developments.

I. Events leading up to the fighting on the night of 16-17 March 1962

2. On the morning of 8 March, at approximately 0900 hours (local time), an incident occurred on Lake Tiberias. According to the verbal complaint which the Israeli delegation addressed to the Chairman of the Israeli-Syrian Mixed Armistice Commission, the Syrian military positions at El-Koursi had opened heavy machine-gun, bazooka and recoilles gun fire towards an Israeli police boat. Two of the crew members had been wounded. The boat had been damaged.

3. According to the Syrian verbal complaint, relating to the same incident, an armoured Israeli lighter had come to within about 40 metres of the eastern shore of the lake and opened automatic fire on the Syrian post of El-Koursi.

4. Each delegation asked the Chairman to arrange for an investigation of its complaint. The two investigations were conducted separately.

5. According to the witnesses interrogated in Israel, a boat with two Israelis fishing 50 metres from the shore was machine-gunned from a Syrian position. The police boat coming to their assistance was fired at when about 200 metres from the shore, first from one Syrian position with machine-gun, then from three or four Syrian positions with recoilless guns, bazookas or similar type weapons as well as machine-guns with armour-piercing bullets. The police boat returned fire with light machine-guns.

6. According to the witnesses interrogated in Syria, an Israeli patrol boat opened machine-gun fire on 15 or 20 farmers working in a field near the village of El-Koursi and on the village itself. The farmers returned fire with their rifles.
7. The United Nations Military Observer investigating on the Israeli side was shown a police boat in which he saw numerous indentations and holes, including three large holes such as would be made by armour-piercing projectiles of approximately 80 mm. calibre. The wheel-house had recently been exposed to burning.
8. The United Nations Military Observer on the Observation Post located at MR 2083-2556 was not in a position to see the incident. However, at 0853 hours (local time) he heard a long burst of machine-gun fire and six big explosions very far away in the direction of the south of the lake, then later at 0915 (local time) several short bursts of machine-gun fire continuing far away in the same direction.
9. Whatever may have been the origin of the firing incident, which occurred at approximately 0900 (local time) and was heard by the United Nations Observation Post located some 7 kilometres to the north, the statements of the Syrian witnesses do not explain the damage done to the Israeli police boat. It is not, however, for the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission or for me to substitute for the Mixed Armistice Commission in a discussion of investigation reports relating to complaints addressed to it. Until June 1951, the Mixed Armistice Commission had met regularly. The reasons why it has ceased to meet have been explained in a previous report (S/4270, paragraph 9 et seq.).
10. The importance attached to this incident by the Israeli authorities was made clear at once. Immediately after submitting the verbal complaint referred to in paragraph 2 above, the senior Israeli delegate requested an urgent meeting with the Chairman "in view of the seriousness of the situation caused by the latest Syrian attack on Lake Kinneret". As the Chairman was unable to attend on account of illness, he was replaced by the United Nations Military Observer in charge of the Tiberias Control Centre. The meeting took place in the afternoon of 8 March. The senior Israeli delegate referred to the present dangerous situation which, in his view, might deteriorate to the state that existed in 1955, when the Israeli Army attacked Syrian positions east of the

lake. (The action of the Israeli Army against Syrian positions on the night of 11-12 December 1955 followed a firing incident which occurred on 10 December 1955; see S/3516, paragraph 11.)

11. When it was reported to me that on 8 March the senior Israeli delegate had referred to the situation of December 1955, I considered that, while the 8 March incident was grave, it had not been preceded by a progressively deteriorating situation in the Lake Tiberias area. Between 1 January and 8 March 1962 there had been one verbal Israeli complaint, on 25 February, alleging the opening of machine-gun fire from the Syrian military position of El-Koursi towards Israeli fishing boats. (Fire had been returned.) Israeli complaints had mainly referred to illegal fishing by Syrians and, in some cases, to the theft of nets belonging to Israeli fishermen. There had also been, on 7 March, an Israeli complaint stating that during the night of 6-7 March the Syrians had twice directed a search-light towards the lake and the town of Tiberias. I was told that the senior Israeli delegate had attached importance to that Syrian search-light, preceding by some 36 hours the 8 March incident. However, it was difficult not to conclude that the 8 March firing incident was like sudden thunder on the Sea of Galilee.

12. On 9 March, I was requested by the Israeli Ministry for Foreign Affairs to advise Damascus that "Israel regarded the attack on the police boat as very grave and wished the Syrian Government to realize that by such actions they were playing with fire". I have never considered that United Nations representatives should be requested to relay messages which could be construed as open or implied threats. Such messages are liable to produce an effect contrary to that which had been expected. However, in view of the statement that the Israeli intention was not to threaten, but to make Israel's stand clear, I asked the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission to transmit the message. In case another incident were to occur, United Nations representatives should not be reproached with not having made Israel's position sufficiently clear. The Chairman was also instructed to add that I considered it important to take measures to avoid further incidents. I referred in particular to the issuance of orders to local commanders strictly to observe the cease-fire.

13. There was another matter which the Chairman, with my full approval, took up in Damascus. During the 8 March incident the United Nations Observation Post at MR 2083-2556 on Syrian territory had heard but not seen the firing. The incident was taking place some 7 kilometres to the south, and in an area which the Observation Post was unable to watch. There are, at the present time, from north to south of the Armistice demarcation lines, five Observation Posts on the Syrian side and four on the Israeli side. On the Syrian side, two Observation Posts are in the Lake Tiberias area. The eastern side of the lake is the more fertile in incidents. The best fishing grounds are in the northern part, in the vicinity of the mouth of the Jordan. In these waters, Israeli fishing boats and nets are at a short distance from Syrian territory. Police boats occasionally patrol close to the shore. It is accordingly on the Syrian side that at least one additional United Nations Observation Post would be desirable. By objective reporting of possible incidents, it would contribute to preventing them. The matter was brought to the attention of the higher Syrian military authorities on 10 March, and they promised to study it without delay.

14. On 14 March, I was advised by the Secretary-General that the Permanent representative of Israel on 13 March had expressed his concern about the incident of 8 March.

15. On 15 March, there was a new incident on Lake Tiberias. According to the Israeli verbal complaint, at approximately 1556 hours (local time), the Syrian military positions in Moussadiye (between El-Koursi and the mouth of the Jordan) opened heavy machine-gun and mortar fire on a police patrol boat. According to the Syrian verbal complaint, at approximately 1600 (local time), two Israeli armoured lighters came to within 80 metres of the Syrian post of El-Hassel and opened automatic fire on it supported by fire of a 20 mm. cannon. A third armoured lighter coming to their assistance opened heavy fire. A young Syrian girl was seriously wounded. Fire was returned.

16. The Syrian delegation alone asked for an investigation of its complaint. The United Nations Military Observer, in charge of the investigation, was shown at Kuneitra hospital the dead body of a young girl. It was his definite

opinion that she had been wounded in the back by a small bullet. The United Nations Military Observer was also shown nose-cones of three HE 20 mm. cannon projectiles and spent small-arm tracer and armour-piercing bullets which, it was alleged, had been found at the Syrian post of EL-Hassel and the village of Moussadiye after the incident. Two Syrian witnesses, a soldier in the National Guard, and a farmer who stated he was the father of the dead girl, were interrogated. They had seen three Israeli patrol boats coming at the same time to the area. The Israelis had opened fire (machine-gun fire and also what the farmer described as "shots with a very strong voice", coming more slowly than the other fire).

17. The United Nations Observation Post east of the mouth of the Jordan had a better opportunity to observe this incident than the 8 March incident. At approximately 1540 (local time), the Observer saw three Israeli craft approaching from the west. Two of them were Israeli police patrol boats; the other craft, which was much smaller, was, he assumed, a fishing boat. When one of the patrol craft was about 1400 metres from the shore, the Observer saw a member of the crew pointing in the direction of Moussadiye, then dropping behind the armour plate of the craft. Within a few seconds after shifting his observation from the craft to land, the United Nations Observer heard a single shot closely followed by a fire-fight. The weapons employed by the Syrians appeared to be anti-tank gun and machine-guns, and those employed by the Israelis machine-gun and a larger calibre (20 mm.) gun. The strike of Israeli projectiles on the ground raised more dust than would 30 or 50 calibre weapons. At approximately 1605 (local time) the firing ceased, the Israeli patrol craft having moved westward a considerable distance. The United Nations Observer reports that he was not in a position to state which side fired first.

18. The Secretary-General advised me that he had received an urgent message from the Foreign Minister of Israel reporting that an Israeli boat had again been fired at. Fortunately, no one was wounded. According to the message, this situation could not be allowed to continue, and the Secretary-General was requested to demand at once that the Syrians stop their attacks. The Secretary-General asked me for urgent information about the incident.

/...

19. Before such information could be received and used, a third incident occurred on Lake Tiberias. According to the Israeli complaint, on 16 March, between approximately 1045 and 1055 hours (local time), Syrian military positions at Kafer Aaqeb had opened heavy machine-gun, recoilless and mortar fire on a police boat. Fire was returned. According to the Syrian complaint, at 1040 (local time), two Israeli armoured lighters came to a distance of 100 metres of the eastern shore of the lake opposite the Syrian post of El-Koursi and opened heavy automatic and 81 mm. mortar fire. Fire was returned. Neither party requested an investigation. The United Nations Observation Post at the mouth of the Jordan was not in a position to observe the incident.

20. The Israel Foreign Minister sent a further message to the Secretary-General asking if this new attack on a police boat when it was 300 metres from the shore was the Syrian answer to the representations of the United Nations.

## II. The fighting on the night of 16-17 March

21. In the above summary of events which led up to the fighting on the night of 16-17 March I have referred only to the three incidents of 8, 15 and 16 March on Lake Tiberias. I have deliberately done so. Between 8 and 16 March, neither in conversations with Israel representatives relating to the tension between Israel and Syria nor in the message which I was asked to transmit to Damascus (see paragraph 12 above) was there any reference to incidents in other areas or to other causes of friction.

22. At 0300 (local time) on Saturday, 17 March, the spokesman of the Israeli Defence Forces issued a first communiqué announcing an Israeli military action against a number of Syrian positions. It stated, in part:

"In order to ensure normal activity within Israel's sovereign territory, our forces were compelled to destroy the Syrian positions from which the launches and the fishermen had been attacked. Shortly before midnight, a unit of the Israel Defence Forces assaulted Syrian positions north of Nuqueib, occupied the posts and destroyed the fortifications."

/...

23. The United Nations Military Observers on the western shore of the lake and in the two Observation Posts near the northern and southern ends of the eastern shore were not in a position closely to follow this night operation and its development. They could, however, provide the following outline.

(a) Between 2330 on 16 March and 0050 on 17 March, a number of illuminating flares were fired from the eastern shore, coinciding with explosions.

(b) At 0102 on 17 March there was a large volume of Syrian fire (machine-guns, heavy artillery), followed at 0105 by Israeli fire.

(c) At 0110 a light plane flew over the centre of the lake. There was firing from boats on the lake, and heavy Syrian guns firing from the shore.

(d) As from approximately 0130 the firing appeared to subside, though it was resumed sporadically until 0700 hours.

(e) In particular, there were exchanges of fire between Syrian positions and Israeli boats in the middle of the lake at 0200 hours; heavy artillery fire from Syria, starting at 0219 hours, was still continuing at 0244. Most of this artillery fire was said to be falling south of Nuqueib, in Ein Gev (MR 2101-2434).

(f) In the last hours of the night, firing appeared to concentrate more particularly in the southern portion of the lake. It was watched by the southern United Nations Observation Post in the area. At 0400 there was Syrian machine-gun fire directed at Ein Gev, and also Israeli artillery fire coming from the south-west of the lake. This artillery fire stopped at 0425.

(g) At 0432 two unidentified jets flew north to south over the lake. There were four further reports of such flights in various directions between 0448 and 0530.

24. On 17 March the Syrian delegation submitted to the Chairman of the Israeli-Syrian Mixed Armistice Commission a complaint concerning "a series of aggressive acts committed during the night of 16-17 March 1962 by Israeli Army Forces against Syrian territory and Arab lands in the demilitarized zone". The complaint listed the following acts:

/...

- (a) 16 March, 2300 hours: opening of mortar fire on the Arab village of El-Nuqueib (MR 2104-2449);
- (b) 17 March, 0040 hours: opening of automatic fire by armoured lighters on the Syrian post of El-Douga (MR 2106-2521);
- (c) 17 March, approximately 0130 hours: heavy fire on the Syrian village of Fiq (MR 2161-2423) from Israeli artillery in position at Bouria (MR 235-200);
- (d) between 0410 and 0435: heavy artillery fire from Bouria on the Syrian village of Squofie (MR 2148-2450);
- (e) at approximately 0500 hours: bombing by the Israeli Air Force of the Syrian positions of El-Al (MR 2201-2455), Fiq (MR 2161-2423) and Zaki (MR 2173-2461);
- (f) at 0545 hours: bombing of the region of El-Hamme (MR 2130-2325) by the Israeli Air Force.

25. The Syrian complaint stated that the Israeli fire was returned in each case. It requested an immediate investigation on the spot. A United Nations Military Observer was sent to investigate in the El-Douga and Nuqueib areas, and another in the other areas.

26. A Syrian witness at El-Douga said that on 16 March at 2230 hours two boats moving from north to south had approached to approximately 150 metres from shore and started firing at the village. A girl had been wounded by a machine-gun bullet. Larger calibre rounds had also been used. (One hole angling slightly upwards was shown in the wall of a house, two other holes in another house. The projectiles appeared to have entered from about 260-C degrees magnetic.) The spent shells had been removed. After firing at the village of El-Douga the two boats had continued south.

27. In the Nuqueib area, a Syrian soldier described the Israeli attack as follows: At 2300 hours the witness had been about fourteen Israeli lighters about 200 metres from shore. He also saw Israeli soldiers coming from Ein Gev. They fired at Nuqueib and at Khal Hamma (MR 2107-2463) with artillery and heavy machine-guns. In front of the Israeli forces were tanks and artillery. The Arab villagers ran away to El-Koursi (MR 2107-2488). The Israelis tried to

/...



get around the hill (about one kilometre inland) and were fired at by the Syrians. Some Israelis proceeded north on the lake shore road and planted explosives. Syrian artillery returned fire. The Israeli forces returned to Ein Gev at about 0600 hours.

28. At El-Hamme (MR 2130-2325), a local policeman said he saw an Israeli jet plane coming from the north, dive over the village into the Yarmouk valley and drop one or perhaps two bombs in Jordan territory. The time was 0800 hours. (The United Nations Observation Post north-west of El-Hamme had heard at 0541 hours a big explosion, like a bomb, in the area indicated by the policeman. The Observer had heard but could not see the plane which dropped the bomb.)

29. At Fiq (MR 2161-2423), the United Nations Military Observer was shown 15 to 20 shell craters containing fragments of high explosive shells similar to those coming from a round fired by a 105 mm. howitzer. The same number of identical craters were in a field at Squofie (MR 2148-2450).

30. The incomplete character of the investigation summarized above may be explained by a statement made by the junior Syrian delegate to one of the two investigating United Nations Military Observers, that the object of the investigation was to see physical evidence of the Israeli attack.

### III. The 17 March cease-fire

31. The negotiation of a cease-fire during the night while exchanges of fire extended over a large area proved difficult. The problem was to contact the chiefs of the two delegations to the Mixed Armistice Commission and secure their agreement to a simultaneous cease-fire. Efforts to contact the senior Israeli delegate in Tiberias and the senior Syrian delegate in Damascus began on 17 March shortly after 0100. The Senior Israeli delegate was contacted at 0130. He agreed to a simultaneous cease-fire at 0215. When it proved impossible to meet this deadline, the senior Israeli delegate agreed in principle to a simultaneous cease-fire 45 minutes after the senior Syrian delegate had been contacted. At 0510 the senior Syrian delegate was contacted. After a further exchange of messages, a cease-fire was arranged for 0700 hours.

/...

IV. Developments since the 17 March cease-fire

32. The Israeli military action on the night of 16-17 March has left an aftermath of tension and the present cease-fire is an uneasy one.

33. Between 18 and 23 March there were twenty-one Israeli complaints relating to specific incidents. Of these, thirteen complaints alleged overflights by Syrian jet planes in the area of Lake Tiberias and adjoining areas; one complaint referred to a new firing incident, on 20 March, between Syrian positions and a police boat on Lake Tiberias; six complaints referred to firing incidents on land, and one complaint to Syrian search-lights directed towards Israeli villages.

34. During the same period the Syrian delegation submitted five complaints. One referred to the 20 March incident between Syrian positions and an Israeli police boat; three referred to firing incidents on land, and one to an aerial battle between Israeli and Syrian jet planes in the Syrian air space.

35. In four of the thirteen cases of Syrian overflights alleged by the Israel delegation, United Nations Observation Posts had seen jet planes, which they could not identify, in the Israeli air space. The Israel delegation requested an investigation for one case, viz. the case of jet planes which, on 20 March, had been seen dropping flares over Lake Tiberias and the Hula valley and Kiryat Shimona areas.

36. The aerial "dog-fight" of six aircraft in the Syrian air space was clearly seen by United Nations Observation Posts. They also saw during this flight anti-aircraft gun-fire from Syria. The Syrian complaint relating to this incident stated that at 0935 hours four Israeli jet planes of the Mystère type, having earlier violated the Syrian air space, overflew the town of Kuneitra (WK 2207-2801) and engaged in an aerial battle for 15 minutes with Syrian planes. Four gas tanks were projected from the Israeli planes on Syrian territory. A child was wounded. The United Nations Observer who investigated the complaint was shown four aircraft fuel tanks, one of them bearing an inscription in French. The boy alleged to have been struck by a fuel tank was in the hospital. He was slightly wounded.

37. The new incident between Syrian positions and an Israeli patrol boat on Lake Tiberias took place on the morning of 20 March. The Israeli delegation complained that at approximately 0940 hours the Syrian military positions at El-Koursi and Nuqueib had opened heavy mortar, recoilless and machine-gun fire towards a police patrol boat, approximately one kilometre from the shore. Two policemen were wounded. The Syrian complaint stated that an Israeli armoured lighter came to a distance of 100 metres off shore and fired with its automatic weapons on the Syrian position of El-Koursi. Fire was returned. The United Nations Observation Post east of the mouth of the Jordan could not see the El-Koursi position, but could see the Israeli patrol boat, which was under mortar and artillery fire from 0942 to 0951 hours. At 0942 the boat was 400 metres from the shore. During the investigation requested by the Israeli delegation, the United Nations Military Observer inspected the police boat. There were numerous indentations and holes, including a 20-centimetre hole through the left side above the water line. There was blood inside the turret and outside the wheel-house.

38. The Israeli delegation requested an investigation of two other firing incidents. It complained that on 21 March, from approximately 2050 hours, the Syrian military positions in the lower customs house area had opened heavy machine-gun fire towards Gadot (MR 2085-2695), Mishmar Hayarden (MR 2086-2688), and the "Southern tractor parking lot" (MR 2087-2696). Fire was not returned. The United Nations Military Observer who investigated the complaint saw fresh bullet holes and marks on buildings at the Israeli police post of Mishmar Hayarden, at Kibbutz Gadot and in a dragline on the Jordan River. United Nations Observation Posts had watched the Syrian firing.

39. The Israeli delegation also asked for the investigation of the following complaint: On 22 March, at about 1000 hours, ten bursts of machine-gun fire had been fired in the direction of civilian workers at approximately MR 2123-2903. Fire was not returned. There were no casualties. During the investigation, signs of recent work were seen at the site indicated in the Israeli complaint. Syrian positions at approximately MR 2125-2902 were occupied by Syrian soldiers armed with personal weapons and one machine gun. The United Nations Observation Post in the vicinity had reported the ten bursts of machine-gun fire.

/...

40. The increase in the number of jet planes flying over the area as well as the sporadic firing at military or civilians reflects the present tension. In order to alleviate it I have tried to get the two parties to agree to a few practical measures. On 20 March I was able to announce the Syrian decision to co-operate with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in setting up within a few days an additional United Nations Observation Post in the vicinity of El-Koursi (see paragraph 13 above). Circumstances had compelled me to defer a visit to the Commander and to the Chief of Staff of the Syrian Arab Army. I went to Damascus on 22 March. On 21 March the Israel Foreign Minister told me that, in order to facilitate my efforts, Israel would keep the police boats out of Lake Tiberias for a few days until the United Nations Observation Post at El-Koursi was organized.

41. During that conversation with the Foreign Minister of Israel I mentioned two other proposals which might help in relieving tension. One concerned the proposal made in 1956 by the late Secretary-General concerning a special United Nations boat on Lake Tiberias (S/3506, paragraph 35). In 1956 the Israel Government had not accepted this proposal (ibid., paragraph 87). Mr. Dag Hammarskjold had, however, found it necessary to maintain it (ibid., paragraph 88). Though the Government of Israel later co-operated in the establishment of United Nations Observation Posts on Israeli territory - a proposal it had also rejected in 1956 - the suggestion of a special United Nations boat on Lake Tiberias would still, I was given to understand, meet with strong objections.

42. The second proposal which I made to the Foreign Minister of Israel and, on the following day, to the Chief of Staff of the Syrian Arab Army, concerned a visit by United Nations Military Observers of the demilitarized zone (Article V of the General Armistice Agreement) and of the so-called "defensive areas" (Article 7, paragraph 6 of the General Armistice Agreement). Each party suspects that the other has built up and may still continue to build up its forces. This suspicion is perhaps today the main cause of tension. I think the importance of the proposal I have made has been realized by both sides. After explaining it orally, I have submitted it in writing. I have specified that the object of the visit would be to check whether forces which may have been brought recently into the defensive areas or the demilitarized zone have been withdrawn, rather than

to investigate past complaints by either side. The two parties to the General Armistice Agreement should co-operate with the United Nations Military Observers, who should enjoy the necessary freedom of movement for the fulfilment of this mission.

-----

