

United Nations report on the cessation of conflict in the Suez Canal area (November 20, 1956)

Caption: On 20 November 1956, Dag Hammarskjöld, UN Secretary-General, presents his report on the establishment of an international military force to oversee the cessation of conflict in the Suez Canal area.

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Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (Hammarskjöld) on the Basic Points for the Presence and Functioning in Egypt of the United Nations Emergency Force (November 20, 1956)

After the adoption, 7 November 1956, by the General Assembly of the resolution concerning the establishment of the United Nations Emergency Force, the Government of Egypt was immediately approached by the Secretary-General through the Commander of the Force, Major General E. L. M. Burns, in order to prepare the ground for a prompt implementation of the resolution.

The Government of Egypt had, prior to the final decision of the General Assembly, accepted the Force in principle by formally accepting the preceding resolution on the establishment of a United Nations Command. Before consenting to the arrival of the Force, the Government of Egypt wished to have certain points in the resolutions of the General Assembly clarified. An exchange of views took place between the Secretary-General and the Government of Egypt in which the Secretary-General, in reply to questions addressed to him by the Government of Egypt, gave his interpretations of the relevant General Assembly resolutions, in respect of the character and functions of the Force. At the end of the exchange, he gave to the Advisory Committee a full account of the interpretations given. Approving these interpretations, the Advisory Committee recommended that the Secretary-General should proceed to start the transfer of the United Nations Emergency Force.

On the basis of the resolutions, as interpreted by the Secretary-General, the Government of Egypt consented to the arrival of the United Nations Force in Egypt. The first transport of troops took place on 15 November 1956.

While the Secretary-General found that the exchange of views which had taken place was sufficient as a basis for the sending of the first units, he felt, on the other hand, that a firmer foundation had to be laid for the presence and functioning of the Force in Egypt and for the continued co-operation with the Egyptian authorities. For that reason, and also because he considered it essential personally to discuss with the Egyptian Authorities certain questions which flowed from the decision to send the Force, after visiting the staging area of the Force in Naples, he went to Cairo, where he stayed from 16 until 18 November. On his way to Cairo he stopped briefly at the first staging area in Egypt, at Abu Soueir.

In Cairo he discussed with the President and the Foreign Minister of Egypt basic points for the presence and functioning of the UNEF in Egypt. Time obviously did not permit a detailed study of the various legal, technical and administrative arrangements which would have to be made and the exchange of views was therefore related only to questions of principle.

The Secretary-General wishes to inform the General Assembly of the main results of these discussions. They are summarized in an "Aide-mémoire on the basis for presence and functioning of UNEF in Egypt," submitted as an annex to this report.

The text of this Aide-mémoire, if noted with approval by the General Assembly, with the concurrence of Egypt, would establish an understanding between the United Nations and Egypt, on which the co-operation could be developed and necessary agreements on various details be elaborated. The text, as it stands, is presented on the responsibility of the Secretary-General. It has the approval of the Government of Egypt.

The Secretary-General, in this context, submits below a few indications as to the numerical development of the Force.

As of 20 November 1956 a total number of 696 were at the staging area in Egypt at Abu Soueir. At the same time a total number of 282 were at the staging area in Italy at Naples. According to the present planning a total number of 2,241 will be transferred to Egypt in the immediate future. A further number of 1,260 are to be transferred to Naples or directly to Egypt at times still to be determined.

The extensive practical arrangements, necessary for a successful development of the Force and its activities, are making progress. A report on the situation in this and other technically relevant respects will be presented to the General Assembly as soon as the initial stage is passed.

The initial activities of the Force are determined by the fact that, as yet, no withdrawals have taken place in compliance with the Resolutions of the General Assembly 2 and 7 November 1956. In pursuance of these two Resolutions I shall report to the General Assembly on this matter as soon as I receive clarifications from the Governments concerned. I am sure that the General Assembly, in view of the great urgency, will wish to give their immediate attention to the matter raised in this report so as, by consolidating the basis for the presence and functioning of the Force in Egypt, to contribute to speedy progress towards the ends it has set for the United Nations activities in the area.

ANNEX

Aide-Mémoire on the Basis for Presence and Functioning of UNEF in Egypt

Noting that by cablegram of 5 November 1956 addressed to the Secretary-General, the Government of Egypt, in exercise of its sovereign rights, accepted General Assembly Resolution 394 of the same date establishing "a United Nations Command for an emergency international force to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities in accordance with all the terms of the Resolution of the General Assembly of 2 November 1956";

Noting that the General Assembly in its Resolution 395 of 7 November 1956 approved the principle that it could not request the Force "to be stationed or operate on the territory of a given country without the consent of the Government of that country" (paragraph 9 of the Secretary-General's report of 6 November 1956, A/3302);

Having agreed on the arrival in Egypt of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF);

Noting that advance groups of UNEF have already been received in Egypt,

The Government of Egypt and the Secretary-General of the United Nations have stated their understanding on the basic points for the presence and functioning of UNEF as follows:

1. The Government of Egypt declares that, when exercising its sovereign rights on any matter concerning the presence and functioning of UNEF, it will be guided, in good faith, by its acceptance of the General Assembly Resolution 394 of 5 November 1956.
2. The United Nations takes note of this declaration of the Government of Egypt and declares that the activities of UNEF will be guided, in good faith, by the task established for the Force in the aforementioned Resolutions; in particular, the United Nations, understanding this to correspond to the wishes of the Government of Egypt, reaffirms its willingness to maintain the UNEF until its task is completed.