

# MERIA

## FROM PEACE (KEEPING) TO WAR: THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF UNEF

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*UN Secretary-General U Thant's decision to abruptly remove UN forces, in response to Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser's demand, is seen as one of the factors that led to the 1967 War, as well as to a failure in peacekeeping. This article discusses the rights and wrongs of that choice and also the role of the UN and other countries in the crisis.*

Should the success of a peacekeeping mission be determined by the length of time the peace is kept or by the lasting initiatives of peace that are created?

Judged by the former, the UN's first major attempt at a peacekeeping force was a substantial achievement. The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) eased tensions and kept peace in the Middle East for over a decade. This initial success in defusing the Suez Crisis, and the Nobel Prize it gleaned, became the justification for future UN peacekeeping initiatives and the basis for the myth of peacekeeping that fogs the reality even today. However, when judged by the latter criteria--the ability to create a lasting peace rather than merely observe a ceasefire--the entirety of the mission must be taken into account, rather than just the initial cessation of hostilities. Here the UN's report card is less stellar. UNEF's hasty withdrawal in particular, and the UN's inability to even imagine, let alone actively manage, peacekeeping's retreat, paved the way for the decade- delayed conclusion of hostilities

between Israel and Egypt in the form of the Six-Day War.

When UNEF was deployed in response to the Suez Crisis in November 1956, it was never envisioned that it would still be acting as a buffer force between Arabs and Israelis more than a decade later. Originally intended to be a short-term "emergency" force, UNEF quickly fell into a comfortable routine patrolling along the international frontier and Gaza Strip. Despite complaints in New York about the expense of peacekeeping, it was clear that UNEF's presence was a deterrent to further hostilities, and for most politicians and diplomats, this uneasy peace was clearly preferable to an open war in the Middle East. After ten and a half years, UNEF had become a well-recognized fixture in the Egyptian desert.

Tensions in the Middle East had been high since the state of Israel was proclaimed in 1948. The rhetoric on both sides was thick, but it was intensified in January 1964 when the Arab League officially declared its desire to achieve "the final liquidation of Israel."<sup>1</sup> While the Arabs were not entirely unified in

their enthusiasm for Israel's destruction, prudence dictated that policy makers in Israel take the threat seriously. As the Arab League drafted plans to divert the waters of the Jordan River and other tributaries, Israel was brought into conflict with the chief proponent of the plan--Syria. Raids and bombardments were exchanged until Syria was finally forced to abandon the water diversion plan for fear of starting a full-blown war. By this time, however, a pattern of state-sanctioned terrorism had been established.

Skirmishes along the Israeli-Syrian border were commonplace during the mid-1960s, and to a lesser extent along the borders of Jordan and Lebanon. Jordan had traditionally been opposed to guerrilla acts carried out by organizations such as al-Fatah, but the Hashimite kingdom failed to effectively curb these activities.<sup>2</sup> Israel's reprisals against Jordan were generally symbolic, but on November 13, 1966 the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) rolled into the Jordanian village of Samu with its tanks, in broad daylight, killing "dozens" of Jordanian soldiers and destroying scores of buildings.<sup>3</sup>

The attack was undertaken as a response to a mine explosion in Israel, near the Jordanian border, that took the lives of three IDF members. Both the audacity and severity of the attack shocked the region. Instead of acting as a warning to the Jordanian people not to condone terrorism, the raid hardened opinion against Israel, while at the same time highlighting the fundamental weakness of the Jordanian army, the Arab Legion. By undermining the leadership of Jordan's monarch, King Hussein, Israel managed to alienate its most moderate neighbor. It was recognized at the Arab Defense Council meeting held in December 1966, that a unified

Arab military was the best way to deal with the Israeli threat, yet there was no cohesive approach to achieve this end. Egyptian officials castigated the Jordanian officer corps as incompetent, while the Jordanian representative accused Egypt of "hiding behind UNEF" and shirking its military responsibilities throughout the Arab world.<sup>4</sup> To improve the capability of the Arab Legion it was subsequently decided that the Jordanian high command should be replaced by Egyptian officers, and a vote was taken calling for the withdrawal of UNEF. Neither proposal was acted upon--at least not immediately.

Realizing the extent of their mistake at Samu, the Israelis decided to focus their attention, and wrath, on Syria. Terrorist acts and skirmishes between the two nations continued to escalate, culminating in a full-blown aerial battle on April 7, 1967. The trouble started when the Syrian army opened fire on an Israeli tractor working in the demilitarized zone. Sniping from the Syrian side turned into full-scale shelling, to which the IDF responded with tanks. When the tanks were unable to stop the shelling, the Israeli Air Force was called in to deal with the situation. When the artillery had quieted, six Syrian MiGs had been downed, two of them quite close to Damascus.

This humiliation at the hands of the Israeli Air Force was one of the key events that would culminate in the Six-Day War.<sup>5</sup>

Calls for UNEF's withdrawal were reintroduced at the Arab League Conference in April 1967. The president of the United Arab Republic (UAR), Gamal Abd al-Nasser, did not immediately move to dislodge the UN force, yet it was obvious that if the UAR was to retain its self-assumed

position of leadership among the Arab world, more was needed than just words alone. To this end, the Syrian-UAR Mutual Defense Pact was reaffirmed and an offer was made to provide the Syrian Air Force with Egyptian MiG 21s.<sup>6</sup>

Buoyed by the promise of Egyptian support, terrorist incursions across the Israeli-Syrian border continued to increase. Tempers simmered until May 12, 1967, when Yitzhak Rabin, chief of staff of the IDF, publicly mused that Israel should overthrow the Syrian government. While Rabin was chastised for his comments by the prime minister and members of the Israeli Cabinet, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol announced the following day, that the possibility existed that Israel "may have to teach Syria a sharper lesson than that of April 7."<sup>7</sup> In retrospect, Abba Eban, the Israeli foreign minister, believed that some verbal self-restraint would have helped to contain the situation in the Middle East. Yet at the time, the Israelis hoped that stern warnings would be sufficient to dissuade Syria from encouraging terrorist activities.<sup>8</sup> The domestic political situation in Israel was also a factor, forcing the government to take a harder line regarding the fedayeen raids.

The tough talk emanating from Israel caught the Syrians' attention, but they were emboldened by Egypt's military backing and moral support from the Soviet Union. Nasser found himself in a difficult position in early May 1967, when reports came in from Moscow and Damascus that Israel had mobilized at least 11 brigades along the Syrian border and was poised to strike.<sup>9</sup> Whether Nasser knew these reports to be false is the subject of some debate, though he later drew on these reports to great effect.<sup>10</sup>

The IDF was a formidable force about which Nasser had previously warned his Arab brethren, but with 40,000 troops committed to the conflict in Yemen, the UAR Army was not at its full capability.

Nevertheless, Nasser risked losing credibility throughout the Arab world if he did not live up to the terms of the Syrian-UAR Mutual Defense Pact. The decision on May 13, 1967, to remove UNEF and deploy UAR troops along the Israeli border was subsequently made to strengthen his position throughout the Arab world. It is doubtful that Nasser intended his actions to provoke a war with Israel, yet the alternative--losing prestige and influence throughout the Arab world--was deemed even less palatable.

The message to withdraw UNEF was first conveyed to the commander of UNEF, Major General Indarjit Rikhye, on May 16, 1967. The UAR Liaison Officer, Brigadier General Ibrahim Sharkawy, called Rikhye in the afternoon to inform him that a special envoy would be arriving with an important message for the UNEF commander. The letter--delivered by a courier holding the rank of brigadier general--was from the UAR Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Muhammad Fawzy, and simply stated:

I gave my instructions to all UAR armed forces to be ready for action against Israel, the moment it might carry out any aggressive action against any Arab country. Due to these instructions our troops are already concentrated in Sinai on our eastern border. For the sake of complete security of all UN troops which install outposts along our borders, I request that you issue your

orders to withdraw all these troops immediately.<sup>11</sup>

The courier, expecting immediate compliance on the part of UNEF, was sorely disappointed when General Rikhye merely noted the contents of the letter, and informed his visitors that he would pass the message on to Secretary-General U Thant. Rikhye would have to await orders from New York.

Clearly troubled by the lack of immediate action, the envoy explained that UAR troops were already on their way to the international frontier and wished to prevent any clashes with UNEF. From the UAR military point of view, it was imperative that UAR forces occupy Sharm al-Shaykh and al-Sabha before the Israelis had a chance to react. Rikhye was adamant in his inability to act before receiving instructions from New York, but ventured to ask his interlocutors if the consequences of removing UNEF from the international frontier had been fully contemplated. To this Sharkawy responded, "I will see you for lunch at the best restaurant in Tel Aviv in a few days."<sup>12</sup>

Rikhye immediately dispatched a priority cable to the secretary-general reporting the substance of the meeting, and he was commended for the difficult, yet correct, stand he had taken with the UAR. U Thant instructed Rikhye to await further orders, and in the meantime, to "be firm in maintaining UNEF positions, while being as understanding and diplomatic as possible in your relations with local UAR officials."<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, New York became host to the initiation of hurried negotiations.

Less than two hours after Secretary-General U Thant learned of Egypt's intention to seek UNEF's withdrawal, he met with

Muhammad al-Kony, the permanent representative of the UAR to the UN. Unaware what was happening back home, al-Kony was told by U Thant that there had, in effect, been a breach in protocol and that any request for the removal of UNEF must be directed to the secretary-general. U Thant also sought clarification of Nasser's intent. The original note only made mention of withdrawing from the outposts along the UAR border, yet in the course of the discussion with General Rikhye, specific mention had been made of withdrawing from the UN positions at Sharm al-Shaykh and al-Sabha. It was also unclear whether the withdrawal was of a permanent or temporary nature.

In the view of the secretary-general, however, a temporary withdrawal "would be unacceptable because the purpose of the UN Force in Gaza and Sinai is to prevent a recurrence of fighting, and it cannot be asked to stand aside in order to enable the two sides to resume fighting."<sup>14</sup> While seeking this clarification, U Thant sought to reassure Ambassador al-Kony that were the UAR government to withdraw its consent for UNEF's presence on their territory, the secretary-general would be obliged to respect their wishes. U Thant did not think that this position required consultation and made it clear from the start that any request for a temporary withdrawal or redeployment of UNEF's forces would be considered as a call for the entire UN force to leave.

Most news traveled surprisingly quickly through the corridors of the UN but the Secretariat was, for the most part, able to keep a lid on the news of Egypt's request until the secretary-general met with the troop-contributing nations the following day.<sup>15</sup> As

he had already decided on a course of action to follow, the meeting on May 17, 1967, was purely informative. In the course of the meeting, U Thant reiterated three times his intention to withdraw UNEF if and when a proper request was made by the UAR government. He was subsequently backed up by Ralph Bunche, U Thant's most trusted aide and the Secretariat's resident expert on peacekeeping and the Middle East, and by the UN legal advisor, Costas Stavropoulos.<sup>16</sup>

Opinions in the meeting were varied. The representatives from Brazil, Canada, and to a lesser extent Denmark, believed that the secretary-general should be proactive in addressing the situation developing in Egypt, while the other representatives preferred to wait and see what Nasser's formal response would be. It was also suggested that the matter be referred to the General Assembly, which was sitting in an emergency session, though this idea was rebuffed by the UN Secretariat. While the General Assembly had been responsible for UNEF's creation, Ralph Bunche argued that UNEF's entry into Egypt was the result of direct negotiations between Nasser and then Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld.<sup>17</sup> Thus, strictly speaking, UNEF's deployment was the prerogative of the secretary-general, not the General Assembly.

The "good faith agreement"<sup>18</sup> that Hammarskjöld negotiated with Nasser to govern UNEF's deployment did imply a "limitation of [Egyptian] sovereignty," though as the UN legal advisor explained, "It has a certain value --not the value of stopping the secretary-general from withdrawing, because he cannot do anything else--but the value of being and understanding of how a process will function.[sic]"<sup>19</sup> Legal

arguments aside, the UN could do little but accede to Egyptian demands. When push came to shove, as a lightly armed peacekeeping force, UNEF was no match for the UAR military.

On May 17, U Thant met with al-Kony and handed the UAR Permanent Representative an aide mémoire to be transmitted to Cairo. Formalizing what had been said to al-Kony the previous day, the aide mémoire was intended to clarify a few ambiguous points and outline the secretary-general's understanding of the situation. First and foremost, however, U Thant sought to assuage any fears Nasser might have that the UN was attempting to impinge on the UAR's sovereignty.

Reports from Gaza on May 17 and 18 detailed significant UAR troop movements in the Sinai desert, and in some cases UAR forces interposed themselves between UNEF and the border. The Yugoslav contingent deployed in the Sinai bore the brunt of the pressure, in some cases being forcibly removed from their observation posts and having artillery shells targeted to land just outside their camp perimeters. As tensions in the desert rose, the UAR forces denied permission for UN flights to resupply the Yugoslav troops in the Sinai. General Rikhye himself was required to fly out to the Yugoslav camp to resolve the situation peaceably. On the return trip to Gaza, however, two Israeli fighter jets violated UAR airspace and fired warning shots in an attempt to force Rikhye's plane to land in Israel. It was only due to the "great coolness and skill" of the UN aircrew "winging their way through sand dunes" that an unfortunate international incident was avoided. After strongly worded protests were lodged with

the Israeli authorities, Rikhye concluded that it was not a premeditated act but most likely was the work of "over- exuberant young air force pilots."<sup>20</sup> Regardless, tensions were riding high everywhere.

On the morning of May 18, General Rikhye also reported that in Cairo, UAR Minister for Foreign Affairs Mahmoud Riad, had contacted representatives of all the UNEF troop-contributing nations to inform them of UNEF's termination, and asked them to facilitate the immediate removal of peacekeeping troops. At this time, however, no formal mention of UNEF's withdrawal had been conveyed to the secretary-general.

It was not until 12 noon, on May 18, 1967, that the permanent representative of the UAR formally conveyed a note to U Thant indicating the desire of his government to have UNEF removed from UAR territory.<sup>21</sup> U Thant expressed his misgivings regarding the UAR request, yet gave no indication that the decision would be opposed. Somewhat surprisingly, however, Stavropoulos changed his tune from the previous day and warned the secretary-general against the unilateral withdrawal of UNEF:

I therefore have serious doubts whether the secretary-general should take the radical action of withdrawing UNEF without first affording the General Assembly (or possibly the Security Council, in view of the prevailing situation in the Middle East) the opportunity of considering the matter.<sup>22</sup>

Instead of withdrawing, Stavropoulos suggested that it might be more prudent to order UNEF forces into base camps for a

period of ten days, providing time for the General Assembly or Security Council to deal with the issue.<sup>23</sup> Stavropoulos's advice, however, was not readily accepted.

Having already met with the troop-contributing nations the previous day in an unofficial capacity, the secretary-general called a meeting of the UNEF Advisory Committee on May 18, 1967 to apprise them formally of the situation in the Middle East.<sup>24</sup> The fact that the committee had not met since December 1959 was a testament, according to U Thant, of UNEF's efficacy in maintaining peace in the Middle East.<sup>25</sup> The events of the preceding forty-eight hours hinted more at naïve complacency.

The secretary-general left no room for debate at the Advisory Committee meeting stating unequivocally in his opening remarks that UNEF would be withdrawn from the Middle East. Without the consent of the UAR government, U Thant believed UNEF lacked legitimacy, and it was undesirable for the force to maintain its presence in a situation that could become hostile. Not all of the representatives, however, agreed with the secretary-general's assessment. Canadian Ambassador George Ignatieff was the most vocal in his opposition to the unilateral withdrawal of UNEF. While not directly contesting the UAR's sovereign right to request UNEF's withdrawal, Ignatieff contended that the secretary-general should be negotiating the question with the UAR while also consulting the General Assembly. Canada's view was supported by Brazil and Denmark; India, Pakistan, and Yugoslavia were opposed to further consultations on the issue by the General Assembly or Security Council. Had the Advisory Committee been unanimous against the withdrawal of UNEF,

it could have compelled the secretary-general to bring the issue before the General Assembly. However, with opinion in the Advisory Committee divided, there was no impetus for U Thant to act, nor second-guess his own decision to withdraw UNEF.

Immediately after meeting with the Advisory Committee, U Thant informed al-Kony of his intention to "issue instructions for the necessary arrangements to be put in train without delay for the orderly withdrawal of the Force." U Thant did, however, ask al-Kony to convey to his government the secretary-general's concern that UNEF's departure "may have gave implications for peace."<sup>26</sup> Yet despite having "serious misgivings" about UNEF's removal, the secretary-general cabled General Rikhye that UNEF should cease its activities and commence its withdrawal on May 19, 1967.<sup>27</sup> As of 5 p.m. local time, all UN troops were withdrawn from their observation posts and according to General Rikhye, "That night the peace of the previous ten and a half years was shattered by exchanges of fire between Egyptian and Israeli troops."<sup>28</sup>

Once the decision to remove UNEF had been made, the secretary-general submitted a report to the General Assembly, informing them of the chain of events in the Middle East.<sup>29</sup> International response to the decision was mixed. While it was heralded throughout the Arab world, some Western nations were less enamored with the idea. Britain and Canada, while privately disagreeing with U Thant's decision to remove UNEF, realized that it would be counterproductive to criticize publicly the secretary-general.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, statements on the situation in the Middle East were not entirely encouraging. According to George Brown,

the British foreign secretary, "It really makes a mockery of the peace-keeping work of the UN if, as soon as tension rises, the UN is told to leave."<sup>31</sup>

U.S. President Lyndon Johnson also expressed his concern over the turn of events in the Middle East, while Israel condemned the withdrawal of UNEF, stating that Egypt did not have the right to unilaterally decide the UN force's fate. Israel viewed UNEF as a permanent feature--until such a time that peace was achieved in the Middle East--and publicly linked the force to the "package settlement" that had made possible the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai in 1957. Realistically though, there was very little they could immediately do. Despite growing tensions, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials resigned themselves for the time being to "sit back and wait for events to unfold."<sup>32</sup>

Israel was caught off guard by the "speed and relative efficiency" with which Nasser's troops were deployed across the Sinai. In response, 35,000 Israeli reservists were called up as a precautionary measure, though Abba Eban assured the United States that Israel had "no intention of taking initiatives."<sup>33</sup> The buildup of troops along the Israeli-UAR border, while troubling, did not preclude a peaceful outcome. In a series of moves designed to de-escalate tensions, the Israelis sought to work through the UN and the Americans to persuade Nasser of the futility of waging war against Israel. The recourse to arms was still retained as an option by the Israelis, but with the secretary-general's impending visit to Cairo, Israeli officials preferred, for the moment, to accord diplomacy its due.

On May 19, 1967, Canada and Denmark requested that the Security Council meet to

discuss the alarming situation concerning UNEF's departure from the Middle East, though the appeal was denied by the Soviet Union and Bulgaria. The United States, while not vehemently opposed to a meeting of the Security Council, had not been overly anxious for one, as it would let Syria air the claim that the situation in the Middle East was the work of an Anglo-American plot.<sup>34</sup> Canada had pushed ahead regardless, yet came up against a similar sentiment when Secretary of State for External Affairs Paul Martin met with al-Kony on May 20, 1967. Al-Kony, while stressing that the UAR's, "respect for Canada remains high and favorable," expressed the feeling that there was concern in Cairo, and "elsewhere in [the] Arab World," that there was "a sort of conspiracy" to challenge the UAR's sovereign right to ask for the withdrawal of UNEF.<sup>35</sup>

Canada, hitherto, had been extremely critical of the decision to disband the UN peacekeeping force. Martin's meeting with al-Kony, however, when combined with reports from Egypt, led officials in the Canadian Department of External Affairs to question whether it was wise to oppose UNEF's withdrawal while Canadian troops were still on the ground.<sup>36</sup> Canadian officials in Ottawa and New York began to temper their remarks accordingly, yet the damage had already been done. Despite Nasser's seemingly impetuous decision to order troops into the Sinai and to call for the withdrawal of UNEF, with UN troops still in Egypt—though inactive—hope remained in the Western camp that reason would prevail and a settlement could be negotiated. With U Thant's visit to Cairo scheduled for May 23, 1967, even Israel was optimistic of the outcome. Yet when his plane landed in Paris for refueling on his way

to the Middle East, U Thant was met with the news that Nasser had closed the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping. In a speech to the UAR Air Force the previous evening, Nasser pronounced the move as "an affirmation of our rights and our sovereignty over the Gulf of Aqaba. This is in our territorial waters and we shall never permit a ship flying Israeli colours to pass through this Gulf."<sup>37</sup>

From the Israeli perspective, however, the closure of the waterways was cause for war. While Israel was capable of weathering the economic impact and oil shortage that the closure would have on the port of Eilat and the Israeli economy in the short-term, the psychological strangulation was another matter. The possibility of war with Israel did not seem to faze Nasser. He merely taunted, "Our answer to them is that we welcome war. We are ready."<sup>38</sup>

By denying Israel access to the Straits of Tiran, Nasser had embarked on a dangerous game of brinkmanship—one that he ultimately lost. It was decided to announce the closure of the straits before U Thant's visit, in order to forestall criticism by the international media of the secretary-general on an issue over which he had no influence.<sup>39</sup> The issue of territorial sovereignty was also one upon which Nasser was unwilling, and because of the opinions of his Arab compatriots seemingly unable, to compromise.

Despite the escalating conflict, U Thant did not consider his visit to Cairo to be a complete waste of time. Nasser did not dismiss out of hand the idea of submitting the territorial waters' dispute to the International Court, and he agreed to a two-week moratorium on inspecting ships through the Straits of Tiran. He also supported the idea of



a UN-appointed representative to supervise efforts, though he stipulated that the UN presence was to be in Cairo, not in the Gaza Strip or along the international frontier. However, this was entirely dependent on Israeli cooperation. Despite U Thant's appeals that such a moratorium would provide a breathing spell, it did little to assuage Israeli fears and did not change the situation facing Israel in the Middle East.

Unwilling to await the results of U Thant's discussions in Cairo, the Israeli Cabinet dispatched Abba Eban on a whirlwind tour of Paris, London, and Washington to gauge international support for Israel. Thoroughly disappointed with the reception from President Charles DeGaulle, Eban fared better in London where he at least felt he had, "crossed...into the twentieth century."<sup>40</sup> Eban inferred a much higher degree of sympathy for Israel in Britain and was impressed by Prime Minister Harold Wilson's resolve to work collectively on the international stage to oppose Nasser's closure of the Straits of Tiran. In terms of a diplomatic solution, Israel was pinning its hopes on Britain and the United States to bring about a peaceful resolution.

President Johnson took a strong stand against Nasser's closure of the Straits of Tiran. The limiting factor, however, was that any action to be undertaken in the Middle East needed the full support of Congress which, after having written a blank check for Vietnam, was understandably reticent. Upon learning of Nasser's pronouncement of May 22, the president declared:

The purported closing of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping has brought a new and very grave dimension to

the crisis. The United States considers the gulf to be an international waterway and feels that a blockade of Israeli shipping is illegal and potentially disastrous to the cause of peace. The right of free, innocent passage of the international waterway is a vital interest of the entire international community.<sup>41</sup>

Considering himself honor-bound to follow through on the promises of previous presidents, Johnson intended to fulfill obligations promised by the Eisenhower administration in the wake of the Suez Crisis. The American preference was for the UN to arrive at a solution to the problems growing in the Middle East. Failing that, there was the option for an international maritime force to ensure the freedom of international shipping through the Straits of Tiran. President Johnson sought to ensure that either way the situation was resolved peaceably.

In the meeting between Johnson and Eban on May 26, the president aimed to extract a promise that Israel would not attack its Arab neighbors. Eban hedged, but never outright stated, that Israel would eschew the right to strike first. Seeking assurances of American support, Eban was handed an aide-mémoire and told, among other things, that "Israel will not be alone unless it decided to do it alone."<sup>42</sup> Sadly, Johnson knew that Israel would go it alone. Reflecting on the meeting, the President told Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Eugene Rostow, "Yes, they're going to hit. There's nothing we can do about it."<sup>43</sup>

While Johnson sought to avoid war in the Middle East, there was a certain sentiment in the State Department that advocated that "we

ought to think long and hard before we reject this [an Israeli attack] out of hand."<sup>44</sup> According to a senior State Department official:

The cost of holding them [Israel] back may be a tremendous and lasting commitment to meet their long-term security needs which they feel could be met by a strike now--before the Egyptians fully consolidate their position. That cost could be far greater to us than an air-clearing now.<sup>45</sup>

However, from the President's point of view, the possibility of a war in the Middle East escalating to involve the superpowers was not worth the risk.

As Eban flew back to Tel Aviv, Nasser was speaking to a group of Arab trade unionists, predicting that "the battle against Israel will be a general one...and our basic objective will be to destroy Israel."<sup>46</sup> Confident of the Arabs numerical and qualitative superiority over the IDF, Nasser felt he had little to fear from a war with Israel; but he stopped short of declaring war himself.<sup>47</sup> Instead, he worded his statements very carefully, referring only to the possibility of hostilities initiated by Israel. These provocative statements were nonetheless received with great concern in Israel, though Nasser counted on the United States to restrain Israel's actions in the Middle East. Reaping the benefits of his rhetoric, Nasser was heralded as the hero of the Arab world.

It was true that only great power intervention temporarily saved Israel and Egypt from the scourge of war. Sensing the

urgency of the situation, Arthur Goldberg, the American permanent representative to the UN, informed the president of his fears that Israel would likely decide to strike on the weekend of May 27-28.<sup>48</sup> Abba Eban, however, credited his meeting with President Johnson on May 26 as the only reason Israel did not launch a preemptive strike the following day.<sup>49</sup> Reports of a planned Arab attack to be launched against Israel on May 27 were taken seriously enough by the Kremlin to have their ambassador in Cairo wake Nasser at 3 a.m. to convey the Soviet Union's, "stern objection to any initiation of war by Egypt."<sup>50</sup> Many observers understood, however, that a confrontation was only a matter of time.<sup>51</sup>

As the war of words between Egypt and Israel threatened to escalate into military operations, UNEF quietly made preparations to withdraw its troops from UAR soil. Despite the initial urgency for UNEF to vacate outposts along the international frontier and Sharm al-Shaykh, the UN was put under no pressure to evacuate immediately its troops from UAR territory. U Thant often repeated that the withdrawal was to be, "orderly, dignified, deliberate and not precipitate."<sup>52</sup> It was reasoned that the longer UNEF remained on location, the better the chances were for a new mandate to redeploy the UN force and relieve tensions in the Middle East. Moreover, as Nasser was in no rush to kick UNEF out of the UAR, U Thant saw no need to effect a hasty retreat.

Planning for UNEF's withdrawal had never been given a particularly high priority in New York. In fact, according to one later analysis, "It is not too unkind to draw a comparison with the ostrich who buries his head in the sand until danger is imminent,

and only then takes to his heels.<sup>53</sup> Discussing the dismemberment of the UN force was politically sensitive, but more importantly, it was a tacit acknowledgement that UNEF might fail. The UN's generals had at least done something. General E.L.M. Burns, UNEF's first commander, had overseen the development of plans for UNEF's withdrawal in the late 1950s. These plans were updated in the space of a few hours by Rikhye when he was the military advisor to the secretary-general in 1964.<sup>54</sup> Only two copies of the withdrawal plans had ever been circulated: one was kept by the force commander in Gaza, while the other had been sent to UN Headquarters for safekeeping. When the time came for the plans to be dusted off in 1967, nobody in New York was able to locate the copy.

The plans for evacuation--once they were found and revised--estimated that it would take about six weeks for UNEF troops to be withdrawn, and four months for the equipment, though it was hoped that arrangements could be expedited.<sup>55</sup> Nasser, for his part, seemed quite content to have the UN troops take their time winding up their operations and "promised his fullest cooperation."<sup>56</sup> Various contingencies were taken into consideration, and arrangements were made for the Swedish and Brazilian contingents to depart on June 5, 1967, with the Indians, Yugoslavs, and Norwegians to follow on June 19 and 20.<sup>57</sup> The bulk of the force's logistical support and air transport services were provided by the Canadian contingent, and as such, it was understood that they would be the last to leave.

On May 27, 1967, al-Kony delivered yet another fateful letter to U Thant, this time calling upon the secretary-general to order

the withdrawal of the Canadian contingent within forty-eight hours. Citing unfriendly and provocative statements and actions of the Canadian government as the cause, the UAR was, "desirous to prevent any probable reaction from the people of the UAR against the Canadian forces in UNEF, which may have undesirable reflection on the UN."<sup>58</sup> While it is doubtful that Nasser truly had the interest of the Canadian forces at heart, it was made perfectly clear that they were soon to be considered *persona non grata*.

The reasons behind Nasser's unexpected decision to expel the Canadians were varied and complex. The Canadian government did little to endear itself to Nasser with its efforts to forestall the withdrawal of UNEF. John Starnes, the Canadian ambassador in Cairo, had taken great pains to explain to the UAR government that Canada's actions were purely motivated by concern for peace in the Middle East, but the comments of Prime Minister Lester Pearson and other government officials were widely interpreted as being pro-Israeli.<sup>59</sup> The dispatch of two Royal Canadian Navy destroyers and a supply ship to the Mediterranean was also cited by UAR Foreign Minister Riad in his letter to the secretary-general, as having "inflamed public opinion in my country." This, according to Starnes, was a "blatant lie," since news of the Canadian naval movements had not been made public.<sup>60</sup> Starnes had been instructed to inform Egyptian officials on a confidential basis of the Canadian naval preparations, which were only to be used to withdraw UN troops should hostilities break out in the Middle East. According to Starnes, UAR officials expressed, "little surprise and asked only if

other countries with UNEF contingents were doing likewise."<sup>61</sup>

It is more likely, however, that the arrival of Canadian destroyers, along with the presence of the British Navy and the American Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, gave rise to concerns of a maritime force designed to open the Straits of Tiran--perhaps forcibly if necessary--to all international shipping. The idea of a "Red Sea Regatta" had been floated around as a possible international solution to the tensions in the Middle East, and with the state visits of Lyndon Johnson and British Prime Minister Harold Wilson to Canada at the height of the crisis, it would have taken little to convince Nasser of collusion. The warm reception the Israeli President received when he arrived in Canada to visit Expo 67 on May 21, 1967 was merely icing on the cake.<sup>62</sup>

The immediate withdrawal of the Canadian contingent raised a whole host of problems for the force commander. Day-to-day necessities, such as communications, vehicle repair, supply distribution, and ground transportation, not to mention the airlifting of supplies and personnel out of the Middle East, hitherto provided by the Canadians, all had to suddenly be reorganized. Realizing the logistical difficulties that lay ahead, and sensing that the end was near, General Rikhye recommended to UN Headquarters the "speedy withdrawal of entire UNEF....If one of my contingents is asked to go quickly it is time for the rest of us to leave as well."<sup>63</sup> While the withdrawal of all 3,378 UNEF personnel could have been accomplished in less than five days, officials in New York deemed that "political considerations"

required UNEF to maintain an emasculated presence in the Middle East.<sup>64</sup>

Resigning himself to make the best of a bad situation, General Rikhye assigned the Indian battalion, which at least had some logistics experience, to take over from the departing Canadians. The Brazilian infantry companies were then given the important responsibility of guarding UNEF's stores. UNEF did its best to centralize its depots, which contained over \$15 million of supplies, and attempted to oversee the distribution of goods to the remaining contingents. However, as the Canadians finally withdrew on May 31, 1967, some tasks fell by the wayside. Supply distribution ground to a halt as the Canadian operation, formerly employing over one hundred personnel, was turned over to one lonely UN official.<sup>65</sup> The lack of regular air transport shipments caused mail service to become irregular at best, and without an experienced staff to coordinate ground movements, transportation became a free-for-all.

Communal UNEF responsibilities were also neglected by some individuals as they became preoccupied with the pressing details facing their national contingents.<sup>66</sup> This lack of focus led to increased looting of UNEF supplies, but was nothing compared to that perpetrated once war broke out--first by local residents, and then by the Israeli forces.<sup>67</sup>

At the same time as Nasser dictated the terms of UNEF's withdrawal, domestic pressure on the Israeli government continued to grow. The psychological and economic impact of sustained mobilization, as well as the effects of the closure of the Straits of Tiran, necessitated a resolution, diplomatic or otherwise. The Eshkol government hesitated. To help ease the domestic tensions,

Eshkol bowed to political pressure and opened his cabinet for the formation of a national unity government. Most significant--and perhaps telling--was the fact that Eshkol abdicated the coveted position of minister of defense in favor of General Moshe Dayan, hero of the 1956 Suez War. While Dayan's appointment ensured the confidence of the military, war was by no means inevitable. It was, however, likely.

In a last-ditch effort to ascertain the level of support for Israel in the United States, Meir Amit, the director of the Mossad, was sent to Washington to meet with senior political and intelligence officers. Returning to Israel on June 3, Amit reported that among U.S. officials, including Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, there was an "absence of any strong American objection to unilateral Israeli military action."<sup>68</sup> Buoyed by America's tacit consent, the Israeli cabinet did not hesitate to act.

For all intents and purposes, the outcome of the Six-Day War was decided on the fateful morning of June 5, 1967. In the space of a few short hours, Israel managed to obliterate the UAR Air Force before most of the planes had a chance to leave the ground. The Jordanian and Syrian air forces were similarly disposed of that afternoon, leaving Israeli cities free from attack and allowing the IDF to concentrate on advancing against the enemy. When the dust from the war settled, Israel had accomplished the unthinkable. The combined military forces of Jordan, Syria, and the UAR had been routed, and Israel was left in possession of the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. The costs for UNEF, however, had been dear: fifteen peacekeepers were dead and another seventeen lay injured.<sup>69</sup>

As much as Nasser's order to remove Canadian troops from UAR soil was abhorred in Ottawa, it undoubtedly saved the lives of Canadian service personnel. By the time war broke out, part of the Yugoslav contingent had been repatriated, but some 2,519 UNEF personnel were still deployed in various locations throughout the UAR. The bulk of the troops had been recalled to camps around Gaza, and when the fighting intensified they were relocated to temporary encampments on the beach, which was considered to be relatively safe compared to the town of Gaza itself. With the UN compounds clearly marked, General Rikhye questioned the tactics of the Israeli and UAR forces, commenting that, "surely, black and brown Brazilians, bearded Sikhs, and blonde Scandinavians do not look much like Palestinians."<sup>70</sup> Yet in the heat of battle, it seems that little differentiation was made.

Preparations for UNEF's withdrawal had gone on until the last possible moment on the assumption that there was still time. Part of the Swedish contingent found itself on a train half-way between Gaza and Port Said when the war broke out. The train was seized for military purposes when it reached the Suez Canal, and the Swedes were left to find their own way. One of the first targets of the war had been the airport at Port Said, leaving the planned evacuation of UNEF troops by air in limbo. The absence of leadership from New York to resolve the situation forced officials in Stockholm to step in and make arrangements for the immediate evacuation of their troops.<sup>71</sup> The Swedes were subsequently evacuated by ship on June 8, 1967, along with some additional UNEF personnel and twenty-three US citizens. The Swedish government also made arrangements for the

remainder of its troops to be evacuated from the Israeli port of Ashdod. With continued silence from New York, General Rikhye took the initiative and received permission for all remaining UNEF troops to be extracted through Israel.<sup>72</sup> The majority of troops were withdrawn within a week, and the force commander and his remaining staff officers departed the Middle East on June 17, 1967. Only a handful of UN civilian staff remained to pick up the pieces and arrange for the evacuation or disposal of any remaining UN equipment and supplies.

Criticism of U Thant's handling of the 1967 crisis and the decision to withdraw UNEF came quickly, and from all directions. Paul Martin was among the first to publicly disagree with the secretary-general's decision to withdraw UNEF. President Johnson was "dismayed" by the move, and the British even went so far as to suggest that the situation in the Middle East was exacerbated by U Thant's precipitous action.<sup>73</sup> The credibility of the UN was called into question and the *New York Times* said that the secretary-general had "used his international prestige with the objectivity of a spurned lover and the dynamism of a noodle."<sup>74</sup> It is difficult, however, to escape the conclusion that on both legal and practical grounds there were few alternatives.

From its inception, UNEF was designed as a consensual activity, involving both the host nation and troop contributors. Hence, Nasser's request for the withdrawal of UN troops was "certainly a natural corollary stemming directly from its sovereignty as a state, acknowledged by the General Assembly in its resolutions regarding the establishment of UNEF."<sup>75</sup> Another important detail to note is that while the

General Assembly authorized the creation of UNEF, entry into Egypt was only granted as a result of the independent "good faith agreements" negotiated by the secretary-general. After attempting to clarify Egypt's request for the withdrawal of UNEF without success, U Thant informed the UNEF Advisory Committee of the situation, and the decision to withdraw UNEF was finalized. At no time was the secretary-general's position officially challenged by any member state, and no attempt to convene the General Assembly was made.

Had UNEF been deployed on both sides of the Egyptian-Israeli border, consent by both nations would have been required for withdrawal. However, such was not the case. Furthermore, as they were a lightly armed force, UNEF's authority was more moral than physical. It was entirely unfeasible for UNEF troops to defend themselves against the advance of a determined military. U Thant's hand was also forced by the fact that Yugoslavia and India were prepared to accede to the UAR demand to withdraw their contingents from UNEF regardless of the secretary-general's decision.<sup>76</sup> Taking a very formal and rigid approach, U Thant could not get beyond the issue of host-nation consent. Legalistic arguments aside, however, there was a feeling that the UN had somehow failed in its duty to maintain the peace.

Adding to the controversy was the release in mid-June 1967 of an aide memoire written by Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in 1957, giving his interpretation of the good faith agreements. Released by Ernest Gross, former American deputy permanent representative at the UN, the document asserted Hammarskjöld's belief that the UAR could not unilaterally evict UNEF, but rather

the issue would first have to be put before the General Assembly.<sup>77</sup> Opinions over the document were divided. Some people believed the report to be of great importance in understanding the international situation.<sup>78</sup> U Thant, on the other hand, discounted its value stating that the aide m emoire was not an official document and thus had no binding authority over Nasser or the UAR government. In a somewhat uncharacteristic show of irritation, U Thant went on to say that "the release of such a paper at this time would seem to raise some question of ethics and good faith."<sup>79</sup>

Sir Brian Urquhart, at the time a junior official in the UN Secretariat, recalled that when Hammarskj old negotiated the "good faith agreements," Egyptian sovereignty was not compromised in any way. Thus Nasser's decision to remove UNEF was within his rights. According to Urquhart, "he had a perfect sovereign right to do what he did. It was an extremely stupid thing to do, as we told him at the time, but in fact he had a perfect right to do it, under the agreement that got UNEF in."<sup>80</sup> With varied opinions on both sides of the argument, the aide m emoire only served to highlight the differences between the secretaries-general. Many people believed that had he been alive, Hammarskj old would have immediately traveled to Cairo to resolve the issue of UNEF's withdrawal.

The fact that U Thant waited eight days before meeting with President Nasser on such an obviously important issue was a great source of concern for some observers.<sup>81</sup> Citing his concern for the peacekeepers on the ground, the secretary-general did not want to endanger the troops by challenging the UAR on the issue of host nation consent.

But as a devout Buddhist and having grown up in Burma under colonial rule, neither was U Thant predisposed to confront Nasser over the question of national sovereignty. Instead U Thant sought to deal with the situation by means of quiet diplomacy, which with a dynamic leader such as Nasser had no effect. Only after all other backdoor channels had been exhausted did the secretary-general undertake personal negotiations in the Middle East, but by then it was too late. U Thant's all or nothing approach to the deployment of UNEF also came under the microscope and has been cited a major factor that propelled the Middle East to war. While it is true that a redeployment of UNEF might have helped to preserve peace in the Middle East in the short term, it would have done nothing to solve the underlying problems in the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Ultimately, the Six-Day War was a failure of peacemaking, not peacekeeping. The absence of war is not necessarily peace, it merely creates the conditions in which peace can be fostered. UNEF's presence in the Middle East provided such an environment for peace to be established, yet the absence of hostilities removed the impetus for the parties involved to reach a meaningful settlement. If the UN and its members were not willing to stand on guard for peace indefinitely, they should have been actively planning for the eventual peaceful withdrawal of UNEF from the Middle East. Peacemaking activities should have been part and parcel of UNEF's original mandate. As it was, this first peacekeeping effort taught a lesson that continues today to be a challenge: The parties in conflict need to ceaselessly strive for peace, and the UN needs to have structures in place to aid with these efforts. Otherwise, the

job of peacekeepers is little more than a temporary, albeit worthy, distraction.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 230.

<sup>2</sup>According to Abba Eban, the Israeli Foreign Minister at the time, King Hussein "understood well that the terrorist bands of *al Fatah* were a much sharper threat to his kingdom than was Israel." Abba Eban, *An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 312.

<sup>3</sup>Reports as to the actual toll of death and damage vary widely. Anthony Nutting reports that 18 soldiers were killed and 125 buildings were destroyed, while Avi Shlaim asserts that only 41 buildings were demolished, yet "dozens" of soldiers were killed. The official UN report lists the Jordanian deaths at 18–

15 soldiers and 3 civilian –with 17 civilians and 37 military personnel wounded; 125

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houses, a medical clinic, and a school were destroyed, and a further 28 houses and a mosque were damaged. See, Anthony Nutting, *Nasser* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1972), p. 392; Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, p. 233; UN doc. S/7539, November 13, 1966 and UN doc. S/7539/Corr. 1, November 21, 1966.

<sup>4</sup>National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG 24, Vol. 21595, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 10], December 19, 1966, Cairo to External; Department of National Defence Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), 112.3H1.001 (D19), March 21, 1968, Interview with General I.J. Rikhye, late Commander of UNEF.

<sup>5</sup>Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, p. 235.

<sup>6</sup>Abba Eban, in his autobiography, contends that the Egyptian overtures to Syria were made only after some prodding from Moscow. See Eban, *An Autobiography*, pp. 317-318. The MiGs, however, were never transferred to Syria because of a dispute with Egypt as to where they would be based. DHH, 112.3H1.001 (D19), March 21, 1968, Interview with General I.J. Rikhye, late Commander of UNEF.

<sup>7</sup>Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, pp. 236-237.

<sup>8</sup>Eban contended, "If there had been a little more silence, the sum of human wisdom would probably have remained intact." Eban, *An Autobiography*, p. 319.

<sup>9</sup>For an interesting account of the Russian involvement in the lead-up to the Six-Day War, see, Isabelle Ginor, "The Cold War's Longest Cover-Up: How and Why the USSR Instigated the 1967 War," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* Vol. 7, No. 3



(September 2003). Available online at: <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2003/issue3/jv7n3a3.html>. Accessed November 23, 2003.

<sup>10</sup>General Fawzi, the UAR Chief of Staff, was sent to co-ordinate efforts with the Syrians in mid-May 1967 and reportedly found no indication of an Israeli troop build-up, and he believed that "the Russians must have been having hallucinations." Quoted in Nadav Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation, 1948-1967* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), pp. 274-275, note 8.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in UN doc. A/6730/Add. 3, June 26, 1967. Also see, Maj. Gen. Indarjit Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force Leading to the Six Day War June, 1967* (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1978), p. 16; Rosalyn Higgins, *United Nations Peacekeeping 1946-1967: Documents and Commentary. Volume 1, The Middle East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 340; Nils Sköld, *United Nations Peacekeeping after the Suez War*. Trans Stig Nihlen (London: Hurst & Company, 1996), pp. 159-160.

<sup>12</sup>Maj. Gen. Indarjit Rikhye, *Trumpets and Tumults: The Memoirs of a Peacekeeper* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), p. 196.

<sup>13</sup>U Thant, *View From the UN* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1978), p. 220.

<sup>14</sup>UN doc. A/6669, May 18, 1967; also see UN doc. A/6730, June 26, 1967.

<sup>15</sup>In May 1967, UNEF was comprised of troops from Brazil, Canada, Denmark, India, Norway, Sweden, and Yugoslavia.

<sup>16</sup>Trinity College Archives (TRIN), University of Toronto, George Ignatieff Papers, file 985-0039/005 (21), May 17, 1967, Verbatim Record of Informal Meeting of Representatives of Governments Providing

Contingents for UNEF; also see United Nations Archives (UNA), S-464-373, file 3017.

<sup>17</sup>It quickly became evident that this was a contentious and widely misunderstood interpretation, which Bunche sought to set straight in a press briefing on May 20, 1967. See UNA, S-512-0127, May 20, 1967, Press Briefing by Dr. Ralph Bunche.

<sup>18</sup>See UN Resolution 1121(IX), November 24, 1956.

<sup>19</sup>TRIN, George Ignatieff Papers, file 985-0039/005 (21), May 17, 1967, Verbatim Record of Informal Meeting of Representatives of Governments Providing Contingents for UNEF; UNA, S-464-373, file 3017.

<sup>20</sup>Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, pp. 30-35; Rikhye, *Trumpets and Tumults*, p. 198.

<sup>21</sup>For a copy of the note from the UAR Foreign Minister, Mahmoud Riad, see UNA, S-464-373, file 3017, May 18, 1967, Mohamed El Kony to U Thant.

<sup>22</sup>UNA, UNEF withdrawal – Legal Matters – May-July 1967, May 18, 1967, CA Stavropoulos to U Thant.

<sup>23</sup>UNA, UNEF withdrawal – Legal Matters – May-July 1967, May 18, 1967, CA Stavropoulos to U Thant.

<sup>24</sup>In attendance at the meeting were representatives from Brazil, Canada, Ceylon, Colombia, Denmark, India, Norway, Pakistan, Sweden, and Yugoslavia.

<sup>25</sup>TRIN, George Ignatieff Papers, file 985-0039/005 (21), May 18, 1967, Verbatim Record of Meeting of UNEF Advisory Committee; UNA, S-464-373, file 3017.

<sup>26</sup>UNA, S-464-373, file 3017, May 18, 1967, U Thant to Mohamed El Kony; see also UN doc. A/6730/Add. 3, June 26, 1967.

<sup>27</sup>UN doc. A/6730/Add. 3, June 26, 1967, Annex, Cable containing instructions for the withdrawal of UNEF sent by the Secretary-General to the Commander of UNEF on May 18, 1967, at 2230 hours New York time; see also Higgins, *United Nations Peacekeeping 1946-1967*, pp. 361-362.

<sup>28</sup>Rikhye, *Trumpets and Tumults*, p. 199.

<sup>29</sup>UN doc. A/6669, May 18, 1967. A supplementary report was also submitted to the Security Council the following day. See UN doc. S/7896, May 19, 1967.

<sup>30</sup>PRO, PREM 13/1617, May 20, 1967, UKMIS NY to FO; NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 21, 1967, Permis NY to External; also in DHH, 82/988.

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in Nand Lal, "India and the Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force, 1967," *International Studies* Vol. 13, No. 2 (April-June 1974), p. 313. Regarding the withdrawal of UNEF, the UK foreign secretary in 1967, George Brown, wrote in his memoirs that, "I shall never understand how he [U Thant] was advised to come so quickly to this very ill-considered and, I feel absolutely sure, totally unnecessary and unexpected decision." George Brown, *In My Way* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971), p. 136. A scathing rebuttal to Brown's memoirs, by Ralph Bunche, was published in *The Sunday Times*, on November 1, 1971. See also, UNA, S-512-0130, Note No. 3643, November 2, 1971, Note to Correspondents.

<sup>32</sup>NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 19, 1967, Tel Aviv to External.

<sup>33</sup>LBJ, NSF, NSC Histories, Container 17, "Middle East Crisis, 12 May – 19 June 1967, Vol. 1, Tabs 11-20," May 21, 1967, Tel Aviv to State. See also Michael Oren, "Did Israel

Want the Six Day War?" *Azure 7* (Spring 1999), available online at:

<<http://www.azure.org.il/7-Oren.html>>.

Accessed November 17, 2003.

<sup>34</sup>PRO, PREM 13/1617, May 18, 1967, UK Mission New York to Foreign Office.

<sup>35</sup>NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 20, 1967, Permis NY to External; also see DHH, 82/988.

<sup>36</sup>John Starnes, the Canadian Ambassador in Cairo, reported on May 19: "Since [the] Egyptians seem determined upon having UNEF removed to seek to argue them out of it now would be counter-productive and could make it more difficult for Western countries to influence Nasser in [the] future should [the] general situation make this desirable. There seems no doubt that they have the right to make this request and I suspect that appeals to Nasser to reverse his decision and other such devices will have no effect other than to irritate him. Now that [the] die is cast to think otherwise is to misunderstand the man's mentality and Arab pride." NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 19, 1967, Cairo to External.

<sup>37</sup>NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 23, 1967, Cairo to External.

<sup>38</sup>NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 23, 1967, Cairo to External. A similar translation is also found in Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation, 1948-1967*, p. 209.

<sup>39</sup>See U Thant, "General Rikhye's Minutes of the Meeting of May 24, 1967, Between President Nasser and the Secretary-General," 484; UNA, United Nations Oral History, (02)/U79, Brian Urquhart, interview conducted by Leon Gordenker, October 15,

1984; UN doc. A/6730/Add. 3, June 26, 1967; NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 25, 1967, Cairo to External.

<sup>40</sup>Eban, *An Autobiography*, p. 346.

<sup>41</sup>LBJ, NSF, NSC History, "Middle East Crisis, 12 May – 19 June 1967, Vol. 1, Tabs 11-20," May 23, 1967, May 23, 1967, Remarks of the President on the Near East Situation.

<sup>42</sup>Eban, *An Autobiography*, p. 359; *FRUS, 1964-68*, Vol. XIX, doc. 77, Memorandum of Conversation, May 26, 1967; see also PRO, PREM 13/1906, Record of Conversations Between the Prime Minister and President Johnson at the White House on Friday, June 2, 1967.

<sup>43</sup>LBJ, LBJOHP, AC74-72, Eugene V. Rostow, interview conducted by Paige Mulhollan, December 2, 1968; LBJ, LBJOHP, AC 79-61, John P. Roche, interview conducted by Paige Mulhollan, July 16, 1970.

<sup>44</sup>LBJ, NSF, National Security Council Histories, Box 17, "Middle East Crisis 12 May – 19 June 1967, Vol. 2, Tabs 31-42," May 25, 1967, Memorandum for WWR.

<sup>45</sup>LBJ, NSF, National Security Council Histories, Box 17, "Middle East Crisis 12 May – 19 June 1967, Vol. 2, Tabs 31-42," May 25, 1967, Memorandum for WWR from Hal Saunders.

<sup>46</sup>Statement by President Nasser to Arab Trade Unionists, May 26, 1967. Available online at: <<http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0dye0>>. Accessed November 12, 2003.

<sup>47</sup>On paper, the Arab armed forces enjoyed a 2-to-1 advantage over Israel. The Arabs boasted a combined force of 643,000

personnel with 2,700 tanks and 1,090 aircraft. Israel, on the other hand, only had 300,000 troops—mostly reservists—800 tanks, and approximately 400 aircraft. See, *The Washington Post*, June 6, 1967. Despite the Arabs numerical superiority, US Intelligence estimates forecast that "[t]he Israeli ground forces can maintain internal security, defend successfully against simultaneous Arab attacks on all fronts, launch limited attacks simultaneously on all fronts, or hold on any three fronts while mounting successfully a major offensive on the fourth." LBJ, NSF, Country File, "Middle East Crisis, Vol. 1, Memos & Misc, 5/67", Box 105, 5/67, Report on Arab and Israeli Capabilities; also see United States National Archives (USNA), RG 59, Office of the Executive Secretariat, Middle East Crisis Files, 1067, Lot File 68D135, Entry 5190, Box 7, May 24, 1967, CINCSTRIKE to State.

<sup>48</sup>LBJ, NSF, Memos to the President, Walt Rostow, Box 16 [2 of 2], "Walt Rostow, Vol. 29, 25-31 May 1967, [2 of 2]," May 27, 1967, Walt Rostow to the President.

<sup>49</sup>LBJ, Meeting Note File, Box 2, October 24, 1967, Meeting with Abba Eban and Others.

<sup>50</sup>Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.16.

<sup>51</sup>To add to the complexity of the situation in the Middle East, it is worth noting the relationship between Nasser and his second in command, Field Marshall Abd al-Hakim Amer. For an examination of just who was in control, see, among others, Oren, *Six Days of War*, pp. 92-97; Richard B. Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 83-89.

<sup>52</sup>See UN doc S/7896, May 19, 1967; UN Press Release EMF/449, June 3, 1967; a similar statement was also made by U Thant at the meeting of the UNEF Advisory Committee on May 18, 1967.

<sup>53</sup>DHH, 95/6, Series 3, WAB Douglas, "The Last Days of UNEF: A Study of Military and Diplomatic Imperatives."

<sup>54</sup>DHH, 112.3H1.001 (D19), March 21, 1968, Interview with General I.J. Rikhye, late Commander of UNEF.

<sup>55</sup>NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 19, 1967, Permis NY to External; and Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, p. 40.

<sup>56</sup>"General Rikhye's Minutes of the Meeting of May 24, 1967, Between President Nasser and the Secretary-General," in U Thant, *View From the UN*, p. 486; also see, NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 25, 1967, Cairo to External; also found in DHH, 82/988.

<sup>57</sup>NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 20, 1967, Permis NY to External.

<sup>58</sup>UNA, S-316, Box 9, File 1, Evacuation of Canadian Contingent, May-June 1967, Mahomoud Riad to U Thant. In a message to General Rikhye, the unfriendly actions perpetrated by the Canadian government included the evacuation of embassy families and the burning of documents, as well as "vicious propaganda being conducted by them, [which] constituted hostile activity against [the] UAR Government." See UNA, S-316, Box 9, File 1, May 27, 1967, Rikhye – Gaza to the Secretary-General.

<sup>59</sup>At a press conference on 28 May, Nasser categorized Pearson's opposition to UNEF's withdrawal as "a hostile act, and neo-colonialism," and described the Canadian Prime Minister as a "defender, and an advocate for Israel." UNA, S-464-0086, File 802, May 28, 1967, Press Conference by President Gamal Abdul-Nasser with the Representatives of the International and Arab Press, Radio & T.V. Stations.

<sup>60</sup>NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 12], May 28, 1967, 626, Cairo to External.

<sup>61</sup>NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 23, 1967, 626, External to Cairo; NAC, RG 24, Vol. 21596, file 2-5081.2 [Vol. 11], May 26, 1967, Cairo to External.

<sup>62</sup>John Starnes also speculates that the Russians may have been partially responsible for the hasty withdrawal of Canadian troops from UNEF by passing on doctored military and political communications to UAR officials. Interview with John Starnes, August 9, 2002, Ottawa, ON; John Starnes, *Closely Guarded: A Life in Canadian Security and Intelligence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 120-124; DHH, 87/312, October 23, 1987, Operation Lazarus.

<sup>63</sup>UNA, S-330, Box 4, File 2, May 27, 1967, Telex from Gaza to Secretary-General; also see UNA, S-316, Box 9, file 1, "Evacuation of Canadian Contingent, May-June 1967," May 27, 1967, Rikhye – Gaza to Secretary-General.

<sup>64</sup>Depending on the availability of air transport locations and the level of cooperation offered by the UAR government, it was determined that the entire force could have been pulled out in as little as 84 hours.

Other contingencies would have required five days. DHH, 112.302.009 (D2), "Copies of D Ops Messages on withdrawal of Cdn Contingent of UNEF Egypt, May 1967," CANLIFTCOM to CANFORCEHED. See also, Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>65</sup>Canadian War Museum (CWM), Canadian War Museum Oral History Project (CWMOHP), 31D2 Brown RJ, Ronald J. Brown, interview conducted by F. Quiller Graham, February 12, 2002.

<sup>66</sup>CWM, CWMOHP, 31D2 Brown RJ, Ronald J. Brown, interview conducted by F. Quiller Graham, February 12, 2002.

<sup>67</sup>The final tally of UNEF equipment and supplies taken by the IDF was estimated at close to \$5 million. To help resolve the issue quietly, the US government offered to compensate the United Nations for the cost of the lost materials. For a detailed report, see UNA, S-316, Box 8, File 7, "UNEF Withdrawal – Sullivan & Seward Reports, June – Oct 67".

<sup>68</sup>Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 21; also see William B. Quandt, "Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: What Color Was the Light?" *The Middle East Journal* Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 198-228.

<sup>69</sup>UN doc. A/6730/Add. 2, June 26, 1967. Casualties were primarily sustained by the Indian contingent, with one Brazilian soldier killed, and another wounded. For coverage of the Indian reaction, see Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, and J. Sundaram, *Operation Shanti: Indian Army on Peace Mission in Egypt 1956-1967* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1990).

<sup>70</sup>Rikhye, *Trumpets and Tumults*, p. 203.

<sup>71</sup>Sköld, *United Nations Peacekeeping after the Suez War*, p. 172.

<sup>72</sup>Rikhye writes: "I realised that New York was under a great deal of pressure and was overworked. I could not, however, sympathise with their total ignorance of the military situation, and sadly I became more aware of the inadequacies of their small though conscientious and hard-working staff." Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, p. 136.

<sup>73</sup>LBJ, NSF, NSC History, Box 17, Middle East Crisis May 12-June 19, 1967, Vol. 1, Tabs 11-20, May 23, 1967, Remarks of the President on the Near East Situation, The Fish Room; Clyde Sanger, "Ambassadors urge Thant to call Security Council meeting on Middle East," *The Globe and Mail*, May 20, 1967, pp. 10-11. During the crisis the Canadians tried not to be too harsh in their criticism of the manner in which the situation was handled. At a NATO Conference two weeks after the fact, however, Paul Martin was less guarded and admitted that UNEF's withdrawal made a "mockery" of peacekeeping. See, "Mr. Martin Should Now Set the Record Straight," *The Globe and Mail*, June 21, 1967.

<sup>74</sup>Andrew Boyd, *Fifteen Men on a Powder Keg: A History of the UN Security Council* (London: Methuen & Co., 1971), p. 196.

<sup>75</sup>Nabil Elaraby, "United Nations Peacekeeping By Consent: A Case Study of the Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force," *Journal of International Law and Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1968): p. 149.

<sup>76</sup>Part of India's rationale for complying with Nasser's request stemmed from the perceived lack of support from Western nations on the dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir. USNA, RG 59, Office of the Executive Secretary, Middle East Crisis Files – 1967, Lot File

68DDD135, Entry 5190, Box 6, Arab Israeli Crisis – Chron, USUN to Wellington [6 of 8], May 26, 1967, USUN to State.

<sup>77</sup>*New York Times*, June 19, 1967. Also available online at: <<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/history/unef2.html>>. Accessed November 15, 2003.

<sup>78</sup>Regarding Dag Hammarskjöld's aide mémoire, Paul Martin commented that "[w]hen history comes to be written, I am sure this document will be of the greatest importance." Quoted in "Mr. Martin Should Now Set the Record Straight," *The Globe and Mail*, June 21, 1967.

<sup>79</sup>See, UN Press Release SG/SM/752, June 19, 1967; UNA, S-512-0130, n.d.[June 1967], Statement by the Secretary-General.

<sup>80</sup>UNA, United Nations Oral History, (02)/U79, Interview with Brian Urquhart conducted by Leon Gordenker, October 15, 1984.

<sup>81</sup>According to General Rikhye, one reason for U Thant's delay in visiting Cairo was an inauspicious horoscope. See Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 75.