

U.N. Proposals for Easing of Tension.

The situation on the border between Egypt and Israel, which had been relatively quiet since the Gaza clashes in August, again deteriorated during the last week of October, when further incidents occurred in different parts of the frontier area. The tension culminated on Nov. 3 in sharp fighting in the El Auja demilitarized zone, in which a number of casualties was suffered by both sides. Developments in the border area during the period covered (mid-September to Nov. 12) are described below.

Sept. 20. Despite the Security Council's resolution of Sept. 8 (see 14419 A), in which the erection of a "physical barrier" between the forces of the two sides had been recommended, neither Egypt nor Israel took any immediate measures towards its implementation. Although Israel accepted the U.N. suggestion in principle, Egypt opposed the erection of a barbed-wire barrier along the whole length of the demarcation line—as had been suggested by General Burns, chief of the U.N. Truce Supervisory Organization—on the ground that it would imply some degree of recognition of that line as a permanent frontier between the two countries. On Sept. 20, however, the Egyptian Prime Minister (Colonel Nasser) announced (*a*) that he had ordered Egyptian troops in the Gaza area to withdraw at least 500 metres from the demarcation line, and (*b*) that he had also ordered the erection of barbed-wire obstacles at "certain vital points" in this area. He explained that such barriers would be set up a short distance inside Egyptian territory and not on the demarcation line itself.

Sept. 21–22. A small number of Israeli troops entered the El Auja demilitarized area, where for a short time they occupied the headquarters building of the Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission. The Israeli Foreign Minister, (Mr. Sharett) subsequently sent an apology to General Burns explaining that the Israeli unit had entered the building in error and had withdrawn immediately they became aware of their mistake. At the same time Mr. Sharett informed General Burns that the Israeli unit would be withdrawn from El Auja if the Egyptians withdrew two of their outposts which, he alleged, had been established inside the demilitarized zone for some time.

The village of El Auja, the scene of heavy fighting during the Palestine War, is strategically important because it is astride one or the two roads linking Egypt and Israel. Under the armistice agreement of 1949 the village and a small surrounding area were proclaimed a demilitarized zone, and El Auja became the headquarters of the Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission. Since the area was demilitarized there had been frequent controversies in which each side had accused the other of infringing the 1949 agreement.

Sept. 26. General Burns sent messages to the Egyptian and Israeli Governments calling upon them to withdraw their forces from the El Auja demilitarized area simultaneously and immediately, under U.N. supervision. He declared in these messages that "both Egyptian and Israeli military forces have taken up positions in the demilitarized zone in flagrant violation of the armistice agreement between Egypt and Israel."

Oct. 2. In compliance with General Burns's request, both Egypt and Israel withdrew their forces from the demilitarized zone simultaneously, the withdrawal being carried out under the supervision of U.N. observers.

Oct. 7. The Israeli Foreign Ministry issued a statement claiming that the Government of Israel was in possession of information proving that the Egyptian authorities had decided, after the cease-fire arrangements of Sept. 4 (see 14419 A), to continue raiding operations against Israel by gangs of saboteurs (*fedayeen*) from the "Gaza strip," and also to organize similar guerrilla attacks from the territory of other Arab States. After listing a series of raids carried out in recent weeks from the "Gaza strip" and from Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, which had resulted in the death of three Israelis, the wounding of 11 others, and the destruction of houses and water installation, the statement warned Egypt that if she did not put an "immediate and total end" to these attacks she would be responsible for breaking the cease-fire agreement, and would oblige Israel to take "all necessary steps for the protection of her citizens." The statement pointed out that the *fedayeen* gangs had originally been formed as "suicide squads" to attack British troops in the Suez Canal Zone, and were now incorporated in the Egyptian Army.

Oct. 28. In retaliation for two Egyptian attacks on an Israeli frontier post in the El Auja area, an Israeli battalion attacked and captured the Egyptian frontier post of El Kuntilia, in the Sinal desert 60 miles south of El Auja and four miles inside Egyptian territory. The attacking force withdrew into Israel after taking 27 prisoners, destroying 15 Army vehicles, and capturing a considerable quantity of arms, including machine-

guns, automatic rifles, and ammunition. It was stated on the Israeli side that ten Egyptians were killed and four Israelis wounded—one of whom subsequently died—in the operation.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry said that the attack on El Kuntilla had been carried out “after two successive days of Egyptian aggression against Israeli territory” in the El Auja area. On Oct. 26, it was stated, an Egyptian unit had overrun an Israeli police post and killed an Israeli policeman, wounded three others, and taken two prisoners before withdrawing; on the following day, Oct. 27, other Egyptian units had returned to the area and established themselves one mile inside Israeli territory where they still remained. The statement added: “The purpose of the Israeli counter-action [at El Kuntilla] was to emphasize what should have been clear to Egypt—that attack on Israel will be met by counter-attack. If they leave us alone, we will leave them alone. If they want us to leave them alone, let them leave us alone. The Israeli action was directed against an Egyptian post which carried out attacks against Israeli territory. By contrast with Egypt, whose soldiers are still in Israeli territory, the Israeli forces returned to Israel.”

In Cairo it was denied that Egyptian forces had occupied Israeli territory in the El Auja area. Egyptian casualties at El Kuntilla were stated to be four men of the Egyptian Camel Corps killed and 27 taken prisoners.

Oct. 30. General Burns (who was then on a visit to U.N. Headquarters in New York for discussions with the U.N. Secretary-General, Dr. Hammarskjöld) called upon Egypt and Israel to end clashes on their borders, pointing out that continued aggressive actions might have the gravest consequences. He said that the Egyptian forces bore the responsibility for the latest series of clashes, which had led to retaliation by Israel, and formally appealed to both sides to stop fighting in the demilitarized area.

Nov. 1. Three Egyptians were killed when they crossed the demarcation line in the “Gaza strip” and clashed with an Israeli military patrol. The Israel Army authorities stated that the three men were in the uniform of *fedayeen* irregulars, that they carried identity cards bearing their names and showing that they had come from Gaza, and that the bodies had been handed over to the U.N. Truce Organization.

Nov. 3. The heaviest fighting since the end of the Palestine War occurred on this date, when Israeli forces launched an attack with the objective of dislodging Egyptian troops from the El Auja demilitarized zone. After several hours' fighting the Israeli forces withdrew after taking 49 prisoners and capturing a large quantity of military equipment, including 20 vehicles, four heavy mortars, two 6-pDr. guns, two 30 mm. anti-aircraft guns, a quantity of light mortars, a number of machine-guns of Belgian, Swedish, and Spanish manufacture, and a large quantity of small arms and ammunition. The Egyptians tried to bring up reinforcements including eight *Sherman* tanks (two of which were destroyed), but were unable to reach the defenders in the zone.

Discrepant versions of the fighting were given by the Israeli and Egyptian sides. Whilst the Israeli military authorities stated that Egyptian forces had been ejected from the demilitarized zone with the loss of 50 killed, against Israeli casualties of four killed and 19 wounded, the Egyptian High Command claimed that 200 Israeli soldiers had been killed and a number captured, that Egyptian troops, supported by armour and heavy guns, had recaptured positions at El Sabha (an outpost on the border of the demilitarized zone), and that the Egyptian forces were “in complete control of the battlefield.” Egyptian losses were given in Cairo as 70 men killed and missing.

(*Economist*)

The following comment was made by the Jerusalem Correspondent of *The Times*: “This latest attack by Israel has the excuse that Egyptian troops have been moving steadily into the Auja zone since Oct. 26, in defiance of the terms of the armistice and subsequent agreements. . . . Repeated appeals by the [U.N.] true organization to the Egyptians to withdraw have been consistently ignored. It seems clear that the Egyptian military forces have no right to be in the zone. In fact, no military forces have a right to be there. What is less clear is the political status of the area. Israel claims that it is her sovereign territory; it is, indeed situated on the Israeli side of the old international frontier. . . . On the other hand, it is pointed out by U.N. officials that the demilitarized zone was defined as such, and as nothing more, in the armistice agreement. Its intention was to cover the Auja crossroads and to serve as a means of preventing direct military access along the Beersheba Ismailia road towards either of those two points. . . .”

Nov. 4. The border remained quiet after the fighting of the previous day, apart from a small-scale Egyptian attack against an Israeli outpost near the “Gaza strip,” which was repulsed.

Nov. 8. Egyptian and Israeli forces clashed near the Israeli port of Eilat, at the head of the Gulf of Akaba, contradictory versions of the incident being given by the two sides. The Israeli authorities said that an Egyptian force had crossed into Israeli from the Sinai desert and attacked an Israeli mobile patrol, but had been driven back across the frontier, with no casualties to the Israeli forces. The Egyptian authorities said that an Israeli force had crossed the frontier at el-Naqb (five miles N.W. of Eilat), supported by four armoured cars and aircraft, but had been repulsed after losing four men killed and eight wounded. Incidents also occurred during October on the Israeli-Syrian border, apart from attacks inside Israeli territory by sabotage (*fedayeen*) groups apparently operating from the Lebanon and Jordan.

Sept. 23. Three civilians, including an American tourist, were killed when an armed gang held up a bus near Meron (on the Haifa - Safed road, in northern Israel) and flung hand-grenades at it. Following a complaint by the Israeli authorities, who expressed the belief that the attackers had crossed the frontier from the Lebanon, an investigation was begun by the Israeli-Lebanese Mixed Armistice Commission.

Oct. 22–23. A border clash occurred on the Syrian frontier, apparently in retaliation for an earlier incident on Oct. 18 in which Syrian troops had captured an Israeli soldier on the Israeli side of the frontier and carried him off into Syria. The U.N. Truce Organization; reporting on the incident of Oct. 22–23, quoted a Syrian statement that one officer and two Syrian soldiers had been killed, six soldiers wounded, and five others listed as missing. After placing responsibility for the incident upon Israel, and stating in this connexion that investigations had shown that the attack had been carried out by two Israeli platoons which advanced about a kilometre into Syrian territory, the U.N. communiqué recalled that General Burns had “strongly condemned the policy of retaliation, the consequences of which are here so tragically illustrated.” The Israeli Army authorities announced that five Syrian soldiers had been captured during the night of Oct. 22–23 and would be held as hostages for five Israeli soldiers in Syrian hands. [Five Israeli soldiers had been captured by the Syrians in December last, one of whom subsequently took his life in his prison cell; U.N. efforts to obtain the release of the other four had proved unavailing. The fifth Israeli soldier in Syrian hands was the one captured on Oct. 18.]

Nov. 5. A group of armed Jordanians tried to blow up houses in the Israeli frontier village of Sde-Hemed causing some damage but no casualties. An was instituted by the Israell-Jordanian Mixed Armistice Commission.

Nov. 13. Another group of Jordanians blew up a house at Rosh Haayur, near the northern terminal of the Negev water pipeline (see 11511 A). There were no casualties. A strong Israeli protest was made to the Mixed Armistice Commission.

The Israeli delegation at the U.N. announced on Oct. 23 that it had protested to the Security Council against the “grave situation,” which had arisen on the Israeli-Syrian border. The Israeli memorandum referred particularly to the abduction of the Israeli soldier on Oct. 18 (see above), which, it charged, was “the latest in a series of aggressive acts committed by Syria against Israel during the past few months.” It added: “A particularly dangerous feature of this situation is the evidence which has come to light of Syrian complicity in the campaign which has been waged in northern Israel in the past few weeks by Egyptian-controlled *fedayeen* operating from bases in Syria, the Lebanon, and Jordan. The Government of Israel has for some time been aware of an Egyptian plan to continue the operations of these gangs from bases in other Arab countries, in addition to those at Gaza, and it is known that Egypt has solicited, and received, both support and material in this connexion from Syria.”

Proposals for easing the tension between Egypt and Israel, drawn up by Dr. Hammarskjöld after discussions with the British, U.S., and French representatives at the U.N., were conveyed by General Burns to Mr. Ben-Gurion (the new Prime Minister of Israel— see 14520 A) in Jerusalem on Nov. 9 and to Colonel Nasser in Cairo on Nov. 10. Although they were not officially made public, it was understood that they involved the withdrawal of all troops from the demilitarized zone at El Auja and the demarcation of the Egyptian-Israeli frontier in that area. While in Cairo, General Burns also had discussions with the British and U.S. Ambassadors (Sir Humphrey Trevelyan and Mr. Byroade) and with the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Lester Pearson; who had arrived in the Egyptian capital in the course of a tour of European and Asian countries.

It was stated at U.N. Headquarters on Nov. 4 that Dr. Hammarskjöld had had meetings with the Israeli and Egyptian delegates at the U.N., and had expressed to the Israeli delegate his “grave concern” at the Israeli attack at El Auja. In addition, it was announced that “the Secretary-General, in his protest, drew attention in particular to the restrictions placed by the Israeli authorities on the free movement of U.N. observers in the El Auja area immediately before and during the attack.”

Sir Humphrey Trevelyan had two meetings with the Egyptian Foreign Minister (Dr. Fawzi) on Nov. 6–7, and, it was understood, urged the Egyptian Government to accept the U.N. proposal for the withdrawal of all troops from El Auja.

The Egyptian and Israeli Ambassadors in Washington were called to the State Department on Nov. 5 for separate discussions with Mr. George V. Allen, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. The following communiqué was issued after the meetings:

“During recent weeks, especially during the last few days, the United States has noted with deep-concern the increasing tempo of hostilities between Israel and Egypt. According to our information there have been violations of the General [Armistice] Agreement by both Israel and Egypt which have led to bloodshed and loss of life. The United States deplores resort to force for the settlement of disputes.

The U.N. Secretary-General and General Burns have put forward proposals to Israel and Egypt which are designed to ease the present situation along their common border. The U.S.A. strongly supports the U.N. efforts to achieve a settlement by peaceful means, especially the current proposals of General Burns.

Recent reports have also been received that U.N. observers who are under General Burns's direction have been prevented from carrying out their assigned functions. The U.S.A. continues to believe that these observers should have full liberty to perform their peaceful functions.

Assistant Secretary Allen informed the Ambassadors of Israel and Egypt of the attitude of the United States, and asked for information with respect to their Governments' intentions regarding these matters.”

A prepared statement by President Eisenhower—then recovering from his recent illness—was released in Denver on Nov. 9 by Mr. Herbert Hoover jr., Under-Secretary of State.

“All Americans,” said the President,” have been following with deep concern the latest developments in the Near East. The recent outbreak of hostilities has led to a sharp increase in tensions. These events inevitably retard our search for world peace. Insecurity in one region is bound to affect the world as a whole.

While we continue willing to consider requests for arms needed for legitimate self-defence, we do not intend to contribute to an arms competition in the Near East, because we do not think such a race would be in the true interest of any of the participants. The policy which we believed would best promote the interests and the security of the peoples of the area was expressed in the tripartite declaration of May 25, 1950. This still remains our policy.

I stated last year that our goal in the Near East, as elsewhere, is a just peace. Nothing has taken place since which invalidates our fundamental policies—policies based on friendship for all the peoples of the area.

We believe that true security must be based upon a and reasonable settlement. The Secretary of State outlined on Aug. 26 [see 14392 A] the economic and security contributions which this country was prepared to make towards such a solution. On that occasion I authorized Mr. Dulles to state that, given a solution of the other related problems, I would recommend that the United States join in formal treaty engagements to prevent any effort by either side to alter by force the boundaries between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Recent developments have made it all the more imperative that a settlement be found. The U.S.A. will continue to play its full part and will support firmly the United Nations, which has already contributed so markedly to minimizing violence in the area. I hope that other nations of the world will co-operate in this endeavour, thereby contributing significantly to world peace.”

The following declaration was issued by the State Department on Nov. 10: “The United States has let it be known that we will be strongly opposed to the side which starts a war in the Middle East, and very favourably disposed to the side which convinces the United States that it desires to maintain peace. We are doing everything we can to convince both sides that to start a war would be utter folly on their part.”

Mr. Nutting, Minister of State at the Foreign Office had separate meetings on Nov. 3–4 with the Egyptian and Israeli Ambassadors in London, to he expressed the grave concern of H.M. Government at the deterioration of the situation. He also had a meeting on Nov. 4 with General Burns, who was returning to the Middle East after his visit to U.N. Headquarters.

A Foreign Office said that Mr. Nutting and General Burns “a most about ways of restoring tranquility on the Egypt ; that Mr. Nutting had expressed “H.M. appreciation of General Burns's great efforts to this and assured him of their fullest possible support”; and that Britain would make “strong diplomatic representations in Israel and Egypt in support of the proposals put forward by the U.N. Secretary-General in connexion, with the situation in the El Auja area.”

In the House of Commons, Mr. Arthur Henderson (Labour) suggested on Nov. 15 that, in view of the tension between Egypt and Israel, H.M. Government should propose a conference under U.N. auspices to

secure a peaceful settlement of Middle East problems. This suggestion was rejected by Sir Anthony Eden, who made the following statement:

“A conference such as that suggested can, I think, only have any hope of success if the parties concerned have previously shown willingness to compromise. It is for this that we are working. In my speech at the Lord Mayor's banquet [see 14519 A] I tried to set out as accurately as possible the conflicting points of view which impede a settlement of the long-standing Palestine dispute. I think the House will agree that this dispute lies at the heart of all troubles in the Middle East. It has been our policy, in close co-operation with the U.S. Government, to seek some means of bringing about a settlement. The proposals put forward by Mr. Dulles in August, and fully supported by us, were such a step. My deliberate purpose last week was to give a new impulse towards a settlement.

“I stated what I believed to be the Arab and Israeli positions with regard to the negotiations. I said that the Arabs stand on the 1947 and other U.N. resolutions, whereas the Israelis base themselves on the Armistice Agreements of 1949 and the present *status quo*. . . . The gap between the two positions is certainly wide. But how can there ever be a peaceful settlement unless both sides are willing to compromise? Peace and conciliation are so urgently necessary for the peoples of the Middle East that sacrifices by both sides must be in the ultimate interest of both. It is in that conviction that I have appealed to them to work together with us and our American allies for peace.”

Mr. Robens (Lab.) asked the Prime Minister whether he had in mind “considerable changes” or “small changes” in the boundaries between Israel and her Arab neighbours, in view of his (the Prime Minister's) appeal to both sides to compromise. Sir Anthony replied. “As to how far either party should move, I did not attempt to lay down anything and I would not attempt to do so now. If both parties are willing to consider moving from the fixed positions they have taken, negotiations may have a chance.”

Mr. Shinwell (Lab.) drew attention to the fact that Egyptian and other Arab spokesmen had recently declared that they would never be content until the State of Israel was destroyed, and asked how it was possible to effect a settlement while such an intransigent attitude continued. In reply, the Prime Minister said that that was one of the problems which had to be considered; if there was a discussion about boundaries, there had to be “acceptance on both sides of the existence of States which have boundaries.”

Mr. Grimond (Liberal) asked the Prime Minister to make a statement on his proposal for a guarantee of Israel's frontiers, Sir Anthony made the following written reply: “The position of the Government is that they are prepared to guarantee Israel's frontiers after a settlement which includes an agreement on what those frontiers are to be. That is also the position of the U.S. Government, as will be seen from President Eisenhower's statement on Nov. 9 [see above] . . . If we can get an arrangement between Israel and the Arab States we should be ready to guarantee it.”

Mr. David Ben-Gurion, speaking in the Israeli *Knesset* on Nov. 15, rejected Sir Anthony Eden's offer to mediate between Israel and her Arab neighbours on the ground that it was designed “to truncate the territory of Israel for the benefit of her neighbours” and therefore had “no legal, moral, or logical basis.”

Mr. Ben-Gurion said that Sir Anthony Eden's proposals, instead of fostering better relations and bringing peace nearer, were more likely “to encourage and intensify Arab aggression and lessen the likelihood of peace in the Middle East.” He emphasized that Israel could not conduct negotiations on the basis of those proposals, which, he said, involved the “dismemberment of Israel's territory” and were tantamount to “bestowing a prize upon the aggressors.” He added: “The invasion by the Arab States [i.e. in 1948] has made all U.N. resolutions on Palestine null and void. They cannot be brought back to life, any more than the thousands of Jewish defenders who gave their lives.”

Quoting Sir Anthony Eden's criticism of the Soviet Union, Mr. Ben Gurion said that it was disquieting that he [Sir Anthony] had “deliberately ignored the grave danger which the supply of weapons of war to one side only meant for Israel.” Although Sir Anthony had placed the whole responsibility on the suppliers and not on the recipients—“as if the purchasers of the arms had bought them for decorative purposes only”—he had apparently forgotten that “for a long time his Government, too, had been sending arms to one side only—and there is no indication in his statement that it will not do so again in future.”

The British Prime Minister (Mr. Ben Gurion added) had not seen fit to point out that Israel, which was the victim of aggression in 1948, harbored no hostility towards her neighbours after the end of the fighting, and had stretched out the hand of peace, “That hand is still outstretched,” said Mr. Ben Gurion, “but when Sir Anthony Eden asks for a compromise between the frontiers of 1947 and the frontiers of 1949, his request may be described as fitting his own definition of an innocent commercial transaction as applied by Russia to the Czech arms deal with Egypt.”

A statement on the U.N. resolutions of 1947, to which Sir Anthony Eden referred in his Guildhall speech, was issued on Nov. 10 by the Israeli Embassy in London.

The statement recalled that the Arab leaders had rejected the U.N. resolutions at the time, after the withdrawal of the mandatory Power (Britain); had attacked Israel to prevent them from being enforced; and had only supported the U.N. resolutions after the failure of their invasion of Israel. Israel's title to the territories she had occupied at the end of the defensive war, the statement declared, was at least as valid as that by which Egypt had occupied the "Gaza strip," which had not been given to her under the U.N. plan, or that by which Jordan had annexed part of mandatory Palestine without U.N. authority. It reaffirmed that Israel would accept the existing armistice lines and would be ready, in the course of general negotiations for a peace settlement, "to make necessary minor adjustments of those boundaries. . . . to facilitate the solution of local problems and to make the 'line' more workable." The statement added, however: "Israel does not admit any claim on the part of the Arabs, whether alone or supported by other Powers, to any of the territory Israel now holds." At the same time it offered "to meet Arab representatives, without preconditions on either side, for the amicable discussion of a just and lasting peace."

Following his discussions with Mr. Macmillan and Mr. Dulles in Paris, Mr. Sharett, the Foreign Minister of Israel (then Prime Minister), had meetings in Geneva on Oct. 27 and subsequent days with Mr. Macmillan, Mr. Dulles, and M. Pinay, and on Oct. 31 with M. Molotov. No official statements were issued, but it was understood that assurances had been given to Mr. Sharett by the Western Foreign Ministers that the tripartite declaration of 1950 constituted an adequate guarantee to Israel against any attack by her Arab neighbours. [Under the tripartite declaration, the U.S.A., Britain, and France agreed to take joint action in the eventuality of any aggression in the Middle East, whether from the Arab or the Israeli side.] After his conversation with Mr. Molotov—which was understood to have dealt with Communist arms supplies to the Arab countries—Mr. Sharett said that "nothing unexpected had occurred."

A spokesman of the Israeli Foreign Ministry stated on Nov. 7 that Mr. Sharett was leaving for the U.S.A. with a "completely revised" arms policy, which had "become inevitable the moment Egypt made her deal with Soviet Russia for Czechoslovak arms." The spokesman added: "Previously we had been favourable to a limitation of armaments in the Middle East; now we ask for the right to a balance in arms." Mr. Sharett arrived in New York on Nov. 10 for a fortnight's speaking tour on behalf of Israel development bond issues.

The Israeli Ambassador in Washington (Mr. Eban) said at a press conference on Nov. 8 that Israel would ask the U.S.A. for a "significant quantity" of arms to ensure "Israel's security."

No official statement was made by any of the Arab States in response to Sir Anthony Eden's offer to mediate in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Colonel Nasser, however, issued a statement on Nov. 3 declaring that the Israeli attack at El Auja proved that Mr. Ben-Gurion was "not sincere" in his appeal for peace (see 14520 A), which had been delivered only a few hours before the attack was launched. He described Mr. Ben-Gurion's appeal as "a smoke-screen designed to conceal his aggressive intentions," and said that "it seems that Ben-Gurion want to force peace on us." (Times - Daily Telegraph - Manchester Guardian - New York Times - New York Herald Tribune - Le Monde, Paris) (**Prev. rep. Middle East Situation, 14485 A; Communist Arms Supplies to Egypt, 14449 A; Border Incidents, 14419 A; 14389 A; Egyptian-Syrian Pact, 14518 E; Sir Anthony Eden, Guildhall Speech, 14519 A; Mr. Ben-Gurion, 14520 A.**)