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Military and diplomatic developments, 1980-82 - Israeli withdrawal from Sinai - Arab-Israeli military clashes, 1981-82 - Increasing unrest in occupied territories - Negotiations on Palestinian autonomy Israeli annexation of Golan Heights - Israeli invasion of Lebanon - Palestinian and Syrian withdrawal from Beirut

Completion of Israeli withdrawal from Sinai (April 25, 1982). Israeli-Syrian missiles crisis (May 1981). Israeli destruction of Iraqi nuclear reactor (June 7, 1981). Lack of progress in Egyptian-Israeli-US negotiations on Palestinian autonomy (1980-82). Publication of major new Saudi Arabian peace plan (Aug. 8, 1981). Israeli annexation of Golan Heights (Dec. 14, 1981). Israeli invasion of Lebanon (June 6, 1982). Withdrawal of PLO and Syrian forces from Beirut (August-September 1982).

In accordance with the timetable laid down in the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of March 1979 [see 29941 A], Israel on April 25, 1982, completed its withdrawal from the Sinai peninsula to the pre-1967 international border between the two countries. Six weeks later Israeli forces launched a fullscale invasion of Lebanon with the objective of eliminating the military presence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from that country. After a two-month Israeli siege of Palestinian positions in west Beirut, an agreement was eventually finalized on Aug. 19 under which PLO units withdrew from the Lebanese capital by early September, together with Syrian troops of the Arab Deterrent Force stationed in Lebanon since the end of the 1975-76 civil war.

During the two-year period prior to the June 1982 invasion, Israeli forces carried out frequent attacks by land, sea and air on PLO positions in southern and central Lebanon, usually in retaliation for Palestinian guerrilla raids on Israeli targets. In mid-1981 such incursions led directly to a serious confrontation between Israel and Syria when the latter responded to Israeli air attacks by deploying new anti-aircraft missile batteries in eastern Lebanon. Moreover, in June 1981 Israel provoked widespread Arab and international condemnation by attacking and destroying an Iraqi nuclear reactor near Baghdad, an action justified by the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Menahem Begin, on the grounds that Iraq was about to acquire a nuclear-weapons potential.

Throughout this period Israel continued its policy of expanding Jewish settlement of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, in accordance with the Government's view

that these areas formed part of the historic “Land of Israel” over which Israeli sovereignty was non-negotiable. Partly in consequence, the Israeli authorities had to contend with increasing unrest among the Arab population of the occupied territories and particularly the West Bank, where action by the Israeli security forces to quell rioting and disturbances frequently led to Arabs being killed or injured.

Following the signing of the 1979 peace treaty, intermittent negotiations were conducted by Egypt, Israel and the United States on the granting of “autonomy” to the Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as envisaged in the Camp David framework agreements of September 1978 [see 29646 A]. However, widely differing Egyptian and Israeli conceptions of the form of such autonomy prevented any substantive progress being made in these negotiations, which were boycotted by the Palestinians themselves and condemned by most other Arab states. In the latter part of 1981 further strains were placed on the negotiating process by the assassination of President Sadat on Oct. 6 [see 31253 A] and by Israel's decision in late December 1981 to annex the Golan Heights, which had been under Israeli military occupation since their capture from Syria in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Details of these and related developments are given below. (For internal security and political developments within Lebanon itself over this period, [see 31920 A; 30917 A], Arab-Israeli developments in the latter part of 1982 and early 1983 will be dealt with in a subsequent report.)

Completion of Israeli withdrawal from Sinai peninsula - Normalization of Egyptian-Israeli relations - Deployment of multinational peace-keeping force

The first major phase of the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai was completed on Jan. 25, 1980 (i. e. nine months after the exchange of instruments of ratification of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty on April 25, 1979-), at which point some two-thirds of the peninsula, comprising the territory to the west of the El Arish-Ras Mohammed line, had been returned to Egyptian administration. Two days later the then border between Egyptian and Israeli areas of control was declared open, while on Feb. 26, 1980, the two countries exchanged ambassadors in accordance with the mutual recognition provisions of the peace treaty.

The Israeli withdrawal to the El Arish-Ras Mohammed line was accomplished in five sub-phases, the first three of which had taken place in May, July and September 1979. The fourth sub-phase withdrawal, carried out on Nov. 25, 1979, included the restoration to Egypt of the Alma oilfield in southern Sinai, as a prelude to which Mr Begin had reached an agreement with President Sadat of Egypt in Haifa on Sept. 4-6 that Egypt would sell oil from the field to Israel on a non-discriminatory basis [see

page 29955]. The fifth sub-phase, completing the Israeli withdrawal from two-thirds of Sinai, was accomplished on schedule on Jan. 25, 1980, following a partial withdrawal from the Mt Sinai-St Catherine's Monastery area of the fifth sub-sector on Nov. 15 to enable President Sadat to organize celebrations in that location marking the second anniversary of his historic visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 to launch the Egyptian-Israeli rapprochement [see 29149 A].

After the Egyptian People's Assembly had on Feb. 5 voted overwhelmingly in favour (with only four opposition deputies against) of the abrogation of a 1955 law under which Egypt had participated in the Arab economic boycott of Israel, the countries exchanged ambassadors on Feb. 26, 1980. Those appointed to these posts were, for Egypt, Mr Saad Mortada, a career diplomat, who took up residence in Tel Aviv; and for Israel, Mr Eliahu Ben-Elissar, hitherto director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, who took up residence in Cairo. Presenting his credentials to President Navon in Jerusalem, Mr Mortada stated that this did not imply Egyptian recognition of the city as Israel's capital but simply reflected the fact that the Israeli President lived there. Following his election to the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) in the June 1981 general election, Mr Ben-Elissar was succeeded as ambassador to Egypt by Mr Moshe Sasson.

In early March 1980 direct commercial flights were inaugurated between Egypt and Israel (air travel between which had previously been via Athens). On March 3 an Israeli El Al passenger airliner flew from Tel Aviv to Cairo, while on March 5 a new Egyptian company, Nefertiti Aviation, launched a direct service from Cairo to Tel Aviv. Nefertiti Aviation was formed to operate the Tel Aviv service because of the likelihood that the state airline, Egypt Air, would be boycotted by other Arab countries if it undertook direct flights to Israel.

President Navon on Oct. 26–30, 1980, paid the first-ever official visit to Egypt by an Israeli head of state and reached agreement with President Sadat on an acceleration of the normalization of relations between the two countries. Measures agreed by the two leaders included the opening of a land route for civilian traffic between Israel and Egypt and an expansion of “people-to-people” contacts in many fields.

Earlier in October 1980, the then US Vice-President, Mr Walter Mondale, announced on Oct. 15 that the United States and Israel had reached an agreement elaborating the 15-year US commitment, dating from September 1975 and reiterated in conjunction with the 1979 peace treaty, to guarantee oil supplies to Israel following the final restoration of the Sinai oilfields to Egypt [see pages 29949; 27431]. The agreement, which was officially signed on Oct. 17 but not published, reportedly established a complex formula for the pricing of any such supplies in a situation of rising world oil

prices (an aspect not covered in detail in the original US commitment). As indicated above, however, Israel had in fact secured Egyptian undertakings that Sinai oil would continue to go to the Israel market at non-discriminatory prices, so that there was no immediate prospect of the US commitment being invoked.

Three years after ratification of the peace treaty Israel on April 25, 1982, completed its withdrawal to the pre-1967 international border, but with the Gaza Strip (which had been under Egyptian administration prior to remaining under Israeli control. The final Israeli withdrawal was carried out on schedule despite strong resistance to the hand-over from some Jewish settlers and their supporters in northern Sinai and notwithstanding the failure of Egyptian and Israeli negotiators to resolve last-minute differences over the precise position of the international border in certain sectors.

Over the decade following Israel's conquest of the Gaza Strip and Sinai in 1967, considerable numbers of Israelis had settled in these occupied territories, notably in the northern Sinai area between El Arish and Rafah on the Gaza Strip border, where a network of Jewish settlements had been established [see map on page 29171].

The Israeli Government's concurrence with Egypt's insistence that the Israeli military withdrawal to the international border should be accompanied by the removal of Jewish settlements from Egyptian territory provoked varying degrees of opposition among the 5,000 settlers themselves, notably an extreme view that the area was now Israeli territory by right of conquest and settlement. As an inducement to persuade the settlers to move voluntarily, the Israeli Government eventually agreed on Jan. 7, 1982, to allocate over 4,000 million shekels (about \$ 270,000,000) as resettlement compensation, meaning that such payments would average around \$ 200,000 per family (but with farmers being eligible for considerably higher compensation than urban dwellers). On Jan. 26 the Begin Government narrowly defeated (by 55 votes to a no-confidence motion tabled in the Knesset by the opposition Labour Alignment in protest against what it described as the "scandalous" extent of the projected compensation.

The majority of the Sinai settlers accepted the compensation offer and left peacefully by the Government's deadline of March 31, most of them for resettlement in the Negev desert. However, a hard core of several hundred extremists centred on the new Jewish town of Yamit refused to leave and had to be forcibly removed by the Israeli security forces. Opponents of the withdrawal were grouped within a "Stop the Sinai Withdrawal Movement" organized by right-wing Israeli political figures associated with the Gush Emunin extremist settler movement principally active on the occupied West Bank [see pages 29153-54]. In the latter stages of the Israeli withdrawal, several hundred Gush Emunin squatters moved into vacated properties in the Yamit area to bolster the resistance of remaining original settlers, who were also supported by adherents of the Jewish Defence League led by Rabbi

Meir Kahane. Nevertheless, the Israeli authorities completed the clearance operation shortly before the transfer of the area to Egypt on April 25, the town of Yamit being razed to the ground after the last protesters had been removed (and being subsequently renamed Sadat by the Egyptian Government).

The final Israeli relinquishment of Egyptian territory occupied since 1967 was marked by separate low-key ceremonies in which no national leaders participated, although the event was received with widespread public rejoicing within Egypt itself. At dawn on April 25 the Israeli flag was lowered at Sharm el Sheikh on the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula and the Egyptian flag was raised shortly afterwards both at Sharm el Sheikh and in Rafah in the north (the latter town becoming divided by the re-established international border). The ceremony in Rafah was presided over by the newly-appointed Egyptian Governor of North Sinai, Mr Youssef Abu Taleb, who offered thanks to God for “the return of this precious part of our land to mother Egypt”.

Although Egyptian and Israeli negotiators succeeded in late March 1982 in reaching agreement on the location of the international frontier in the Rafah area, differences remained over a number of other border sectors. The most serious of these concerned a stretch of several hundred metres at Taba on the Gulf of Aqaba (south-west of the Israeli port of Eilat), where the Israelis insisted that a recently-developed tourist beach was situated in their territory, whereas the Egyptians placed it within their pre-1967 border. In the absence of a settlement of the Taba dispute before the final withdrawal, Egypt and Israel agreed on April 26 that the contested area should be placed under the temporary control of the incoming multinational peace-keeping force [see below] pending further negotiations on this and other residual border issues.

Concurrently with the final hand-over in Sinai, troops of a multinational peace-keeping force were deployed in certain sectors of the reinstated international border; its central task was to monitor observance of the demilitarization and limited-force provisions respectively applicable to the Egyptian and Israeli border zones [see map 1 on page 29945]. In accordance with agreed minutes to the 1979 peace treaty [see page 29948], this force had been assembled at the instigation of the US Government outside the UN framework, it having become clear that the Soviet Union would veto any move in the security Council to designate a UN force for the purpose. An agreement providing for the deployment of the force had been signed by the Egyptian and Israeli Governments on Aug. 3, 1981.

Officially known as the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), the peace-keeping force totalled 2,669 men, with 1,200 US troops forming the largest contingent. Other contingents were provided by Australia (105), Colombia (500), Fiji (500), France (40), Italy (80),

the Netherlands (100), New Zealand (35), Norway, Uruguay(70) and the United Kingdom (35). The first MFO contingent, of 670 US troops, had arrived at Ophira (Sharm el Sheikh) in southern Sinai on March 17, 1982.

During protracted negotiations to determine the composition of the MFO, the US Government had sought to secure the participation of a wide spectrum of countries but had encountered particular difficulty over the reluctance of Israel to agree to the proposed involvement of four of the 10 European Community member states, namely France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In the latter respect, the Israeli Government maintained that the Ten's general approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict and in particular to the Palestinian question was incompatible with participation in the proposed force by any of their number. After intensive diplomatic efforts by the United States, however, formulations acceptable to both sides were eventually agreed in January 1982.

At the centre of this particular dispute was the Venice summit declaration on the Middle East adopted by the then nine European Community member states in June 1980, in which they had inter alia called for recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and for the PLO to be associated with the peace negotiation process [see page 30635]. Although Israel had repeatedly condemned the Venice declaration and similar subsequent policy initiatives, the four West European states desired to link their participation in the MFO to a reaffirmation of the principles of established Community policy on the Middle East, whereas the Israelis rejected any such linkage. US diplomatic efforts resulted in the signature of a joint US-Israeli memorandum of understanding on Dec. 3, 1981, in which Israel accepted the participation of the four West European states on the basis of the primacy for the Middle East peace negotiation process of the 1978 Camp David agreements (in which no mention had been made of the PLO). Formulations based on the December memorandum were agreed on Jan. 13 by the four West European states, whose participation in the MFO was finally approved by the Israeli Cabinet on Jan. 24.

During the phased Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai peninsula, the focus of the broad Arab-Israeli conflict became centred on Lebanon, where the continuing absence of central government authority in the wake of the 1975–76 civil war was seen by Israel as posing a direct threat to its security interests. Factors of particular concern to the Israelis included the substantial military presence of the PLO in Lebanon and the capacity of Palestinian guerrilla units to strike at targets within Israel itself, and (ii) the activities of the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) which had been deployed in certain parts of Lebanon (although not in the south) since the civil war and which since 1979 had been composed exclusively of Syrian troops [see page 30005]. Against this background the Israelis not only continued to give protection to Maj. Saad Haddad's Christian-controlled enclave immediately to the north of the border but also

supported the (right-wing Christian) Phalangist movement as the strongest Lebanese faction seeking to restore full control of the country to the Lebanese, it being officially confirmed by the Israeli Government in April 1981 that such support included direct military aid [see page 31921].

The perceived threat to its security had impelled Israel to launch a major incursion into southern Lebanon in March 1978 [see pages 29648-52], following which the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) had been created and deployed in the south in a peace-keeping role. Over the following three years, however, the UNIFIL troops had been largely ineffective in bringing stability to the border area, where repeated clashes between the contending factions were punctuated by periodic Israeli strikes against PLO targets in Lebanon, often in retaliation for Palestinian incursions into Israel. Such operations had resulted in several aerial clashes between Syrian and Israeli warplanes and in December 1980 Israeli forces had clashed with the Syrian ADF on the ground. A further escalation of the tensions occurred in April 1981 when Israeli planes for the first time intervened directly in support of Phalangist forces then under attack by the ADF, which responded by deploying surface-to-air missiles in the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon. Although the ensuing crisis between Israel and Syria was eventually defused and a new ceasefire accepted by all sides in the south in July 1981, renewed fighting broke out in the border area in early 1982.