

Political and Security Situation

Introduction

The massive, demonstrative concentration of Egyptian forces in the Sinai which began on Israel's Independence Day (in accordance with the Jewish calendar, it coincided, after nineteen years, with the original date, May 14) increased tension overnight and brought near the ominous specter of all-out war, which had been considered an extremely remote possibility only a few hours before. U Thant's abrupt acquiescence to the Egyptian demand for the withdrawal of the U.N. Emergency Force from its positions, in fact going beyond the terms of the original demand, albeit unintentionally, inadvertently added fuel to the flames. In this situation, the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Levi Eshkol, reported to the Knesset on the steadily worsening political and security situation. Although aware of the Soviet role in the chain of events, Eshkol took care not to exacerbate relations with that country, still hoping against hope that it might bring its influence to bear in Cairo and Damascus to prevent the outbreak of hostilities. At the same time, he announced that the Cabinet had authorized a partial mobilization of reserves. Mr. Begin, the first speaker for the Opposition, reminded the Government of his dire warnings against withdrawing from the Sinai ten years earlier. Nonetheless, the debate was characterized by a remarkable degree of unity.

Sitting 176 of the Sixth Knesset

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The Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, L. Eshkol: Mr. Speaker, distinguished Knesset...on the night of 15 May 1967 we received information from various sources about Egyptian troop movements towards the Sinai. Military forces were transferred demonstratively and in broad daylight. Cairo explained this step as being a response to Israel's alleged preparations to attack Syria, with the massing of Israeli forces on the northern border.

Upon learning of Egypt's military movements and hearing the explanation for them, and before Egyptian troops had crossed the Suez Canal, we informed the U.N. that the claims regarding the massing of Israeli forces in the north were unfounded. This statement was published in the world press. Indeed, our statement was transmitted to the

capitals of the Middle East, including Cairo, by the U.N...and the facts contained in it were confirmed by the U.N. Observers....

Nonetheless, the Egyptian troop movements towards the Sinai continued, as did the dissemination of false propaganda from Cairo and Damascus about so-called Israeli troop movements. During the first days of the movement of the Egyptian forces towards the Sinai official political circles in the capitals of the world maintained that this was merely a demonstrative step which lacked any special military significance. The Egyptian troop movements into the Sinai were intensified during the second half of last week and today they are virtually in battle position in the eastern Sinai and elsewhere throughout the peninsula. Prior to May 14 the Egyptians had less than two divisions, primarily infantry and some armored corps, in the Sinai. Today...they have almost four divisions there, as well as a great deal of artillery and increased Palestinian forces in the Gaza Strip.

The number of Egyptian planes in the peninsula has also increased, and the total number of Egyptian soldiers there is now estimated as being in the region of 80,000. This is the first time Egypt has introduced such a large force into the Sinai....All this has aroused international concern as to Egypt's actions and intentions.

While the Egyptian forces were advancing in the Sinai the Head of the Egyptian Armed Forces informed the Commander of the U.N. Force, on May 16, that he had instructed his forces to be ready for action against Israel the moment Israel took any aggressive step against an Arab country...that his forces had been deployed in the Sinai accordingly...and that, for its own protection, the U.N. Force was advised to remove itself immediately....The Commander of the U.N. Emergency Force replied that he would report to the Secretary-General, since he could move the U.N. Emergency Force or change its disposition only on the Secretary-General's instructions.

The U.N. Secretary-General, U Thant, immediately asked the Egyptian representative at the U.N. for clarification, but at the same time, for some reason, announced that he would regard any request for the temporary removal of the U.N. Force from the border as a demand for its complete withdrawal from Gaza and the Sinai. The Egyptians responded by demanding the full withdrawal of the U.N. Force from Egyptian territory and the Gaza Strip. Although the U.N. Secretary-General noted in his reply of that day that the withdrawal of the Force could have serious implications for peace in the region, amazingly enough, he responded immediately to the demand for withdrawal.

On Friday, May 19, the Commander of the U.N. Force informed the Israeli authorities that as of 4 p.m. that day the Force would cease to fulfill its function, would withdraw to its bases and would concern itself solely with self-defense. That was the only official information Israel received from the U.N. I should note here that Israel was a party to the

international arrangement reached in 1957, but for some reason the Secretary-General did not see fit to consult anyone before making his hasty decision.

The U.N. Force, comprising soldiers from various countries, was set up in accordance with the Assembly's decision of 5 November 1956, and was situated at various points in the Sinai....Its task was...to contribute to maintaining peaceful conditions in the region, i.e., to prevent hostile acts and aid in the transition towards peace. Although the U.N. Force could not physically prevent armed hostilities, the fact that it existed in certain areas and the tasks it fulfilled undoubtedly played a positive role. The U.N. Force was situated in the region for more than ten years. The demand for its withdrawal, and the response to it, have undoubtedly weakened the U.N.'s peace-keeping role....The Secretary-General did not bring the demand for the withdrawal of the Force before the Advisory Committee or the Assembly before making his decision....Several countries have expressed their reservations concerning the step taken by the Secretary-General. Israel had reason to believe that any demand for the withdrawal of this Force would be discussed extensively in advance, so that the appropriate conclusions could be drawn.

This recent development is a link in the chain of tension which began in Damascus. From this podium I have stated in the past that Syria is characterized by its demands for an immediate war with Israel and in this connection has begun organizing groups of murderous terrorists to operate within Israel. Between January 1965 and May 1967 there have been 113 terrorist actions or attempts, for which Syria is responsible, either directly or indirectly....This is in addition to the dozens of shooting incidents originating from Syrian territory and directed against farmers and settlements. Since July 1966 we have complained to the U.N. about these Syrian activities in 34 letters to the Security Council and have been in constant contact with the U.N. Secretariat and the Head of the U.N. Observers in the region....

Throughout this period the acts of terrorism have been accompanied by belligerent declarations, threats and statements by the Syrian leaders. This has been done in the sight of the whole world and the members of the U.N. Syria has also made the foolish claim that it is Israel which is about to attack it. Last week was not the first time its sources disseminated false information about large concentrations of Israeli forces on the northern border....

Four times in the last two years the Head of the U.N. Observer Force proposed reviewing the situation on both sides of the border....In March 1965 Israel agreed to such a review but Syria did not....In June 1966 both sides agreed and the review was held....In October 1966 Israel itself proposed that a review be held, in view of the reiteration of the Syrian claims, and this was done. In April this year, when Arab and other sources spread rumors about Israeli troop concentrations, the Head of

the Observers proposed that a review be held. Israel agreed to this but Syria did not. The same situation occurred in May, and the review has not been held to this day, because of the Syrian attitude....On May 15 the Egyptians claimed that they had sent their forces into the Sinai on the basis of the Syrian contention about large concentrations of Israeli troops on its border. In fact, Syria had done everything it could in the preceding weeks to foil any attempt by the U.N. to assess the facts accurately....

In his report to the Security Council of May 19, U Thant said: "A few days ago the Government of Israel informed me that there were no unusual concentrations of Israeli forces or troop movements on the Syrian border," and "the reports of the U.N. Observers have confirmed that there have been no troop concentrations or movements on either side of the border." In other words, the Syrians have evidently been spreading false rumors, which were used by the Egyptians....

In the face of the Syrian aggression we attempted, unsuccessfully, to my regret, to utilize every political course of moderation. When the acts of aggression increased we occasionally found it necessary to use our right to self-defense. I will not repeat here the explanations we gave at the time to the world, the Knesset, the nation and our neighbors....

During the last six weeks there have been 19 incursions into Israel. In his report to the Security Council of May 19, the U.N. Secretary-General said: "The acts of terror by Al-Fatah are a central element in bringing the situation to an intolerable level of tension and danger. These acts arouse powerful reactions in Israel, on the part of both the Government and the public." He added: "Some of the recent incidents appear to indicate a new level of organization and training of those implementing the acts of terror."

The tension between Israel and the Arab countries has always been affected by the state of the relations among the Arabs and between the Powers, against the background of their policies in the region and the world....In view of the recent increase in tension, the Powers should exert all their influence to avert the danger of a conflagration in the Middle East. Special responsibility rests on the U.S.S.R., which has sway in Damascus and Cairo but has not yet dissociated itself from the Syrian Government's policy towards Israel. Quite the contrary...the U.S.S.R.'s declared policy of seeking peaceful solutions to disputes should be manifested in our region, without discrimination....

The concentrations of Egyptian forces in the Sinai have reached proportions which increase tension in the region and arouse concern in the world. The situation must be restored to what it was previously, on both sides of the border....The members of the U.N., and the Powers in particular, should condemn acts of aggression against a member-state of the U.N. and demand their cessation....Every international influence should be exerted to ensure the continuation of the quiet which has

existed on the Israel-Egypt border since 1957, by honoring the essential national and international rights of every country, including Israel.

As you know, the U.N. Secretary-General is about to come to the Middle East with the intention of attempting to pour oil on troubled waters and bolster peace. We will follow his visit and its outcome with interest. From this podium I would like once again to tell the Arab countries, including Egypt and Syria, that our intentions are not aggressive. We have repeated this many times. We have no interest in harming their security, territory or legal rights. Nor will we interfere...in their internal affairs in any way....On the basis of mutuality, we demand that they act similarly....

Some international elements have claimed that the Egyptian troop movements have no military significance....But we maintain...that we must take every step necessary to cope with every contingency....As a result of the Egyptian troop concentrations on the border and the withdrawal of the U.N. Force I have ordered—naturally, with the approval of the Government—the limited mobilization of our reserves, in accordance with our plans. When the limited mobilization was completed I had the opportunity of visiting the IDF units. The fighting fitness of our Army, which has been cultivated over the years, has reached a high standard today. The IDF can withstand any test with the same dedication, talent and ability it has evinced in the past....

In conclusion, I call on the nations of the region to show mutual respect for the sovereignty, integrity and international rights of every country. The State of Israel, which trusts in its ability to defend itself and the firmness of its spirit and strength, expresses its readiness to participate in the attempt to restore tranquillity and to progress towards peace in our region.

D. Ben-Gurion (Rafi): Distinguished Speaker and Knesset, what has to be said about the development of our security and political situation and the steps which should be taken in order to assure peace and security should be said in the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, not the Knesset plenum. I therefore propose that the debate on the Prime Minister's statement be transferred to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee...so that no damage be caused the state....

The Speaker, K. Luz: ...The Government has announced that it agrees to a debate....If any party groups oppose this...I am prepared to accept MK Ben-Gurion's proposal....

(After a recess of one hour.) The result of the consultations is that the Knesset will hold a debate....I give the floor to MK Begin....

M. Begin (Gahal): Mr. Speaker...there are differences of opinion between us. We will express them. When facing the enemy we must have national unity, and we will express that too. In our view, it is of supreme parliamentary and national importance to hold a debate. That is what

we did in the past, both before and after the Sinai Campaign. And that is what we will do today, too.

Where there is no panic there is no need for pacification. There are not, nor have there been, any signs of panic in this nation, which has once again displayed courage at the testing time. But artificial pacification which obscures the facts causes harm, clouds our vision...and allays our alertness when we are most in need of those faculties. Our nation must be fully apprised of the facts. It is regrettable that the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense did not present them to us. Since he did not, I will fulfill my duty and do so.

In the last few days our security situation has become graver, and this will not disappear overnight. The nation, which has withstood many tests, must know this. It knows that it is surrounded by enemies who seek to destroy it, even though this fact is sometimes obscured...Our nation does not want bloodshed. In this generation it has lost an unparalleled proportion of its members. On no account will it accept the shedding of Jewish blood in the land of its forefathers, to which it has adhered; it will not accept violations of our national sovereignty, acts of hostility or mines; it will act within its internationally-recognized rights to defend itself against this aggression.

A week ago Egypt announced that it was sending its forces towards Israel...and that if Israel attacked Syria, Egypt would wage war on Israel...I would like to say that the Prime Minister was not speaking accurately when he said here today that certain international elements had interpreted Egypt's actions as being merely demonstrative. That interpretation originated here, among Government circles...Everyone knows that Egypt is at war with Israel. If that country sends its troops, tanks, planes and cannon towards our border, that is an open and explicit threat of aggression. That is how the entire world understands troop movements of this kind on the border between two countries, one of which has announced that they are at war.

But Israeli explanations focused on the demonstrative nature of this action...Egypt itself announced that it was massing troops in the Sinai...but we denied its aggressive intentions through our mistaken and damaging interpretations...Furthermore, Egypt announced it would attack Israel if we attacked Syria. That is a direct threat of aggression. Everyone knows that Israel has not attacked Syria, while Syria has attacked Israel directly and indirectly and continually declares its undying hostility towards Israel and its intention of destroying it....

We have exonerated Egypt of the crime of openly threatening violence. Meanwhile facts have been created, and the nation must be apprised of them. Fully-equipped armies are facing one another. The Prime Minister told us how many Egyptian soldiers are in position in the eastern Sinai. That number comes to 80,000, with artillery, tanks and planes. Of course, we must put an Israeli force in position facing

them. The Egyptian dictator is engaging in "brinkmanship"...How far will our brinkmanship take us? Even if there is no all-out war, when forces of this kind face one another...anything can happen....

That is why we must speak clearly to the world and the enemy today....In order to prevent a deterioration in the situation and avoid acts of hostility which could develop into an all-out war, it is the duty of the Prime Minister and the Knesset to speak out clearly today. Of course it is a tragedy that in 1967 Egyptian forces are facing Israeli forces in the eastern Sinai. Ten years ago, in February 1957, we had to tell the Knesset that the IDF was abandoning El-Arish, Abu-Ageila and Kuseima....Those places were not geographical spots or mere battle sites for us. They were also advance bases across the enemy's desert, where for years he had been preparing his offensive and training terrorists, whence he had sent those who mined our roads. It was to those bases that the defeated Egyptian army returned with whoops of victory, and everything was as it had been in the past.

Today it is a fact. That is why the Government must conduct an immediate and urgent political campaign, supplemented by the demand that those forces which have been massed against Israel should return to their former bases. This is not a formal issue. At the time of our withdrawal from the Sinai, perhaps too late, the demilitarization of the Sinai was proposed. It was not accepted....Now all the international elements which claim that they are interested in the preservation of peace should exert every possible pressure to ensure that those forces retreat from Israel's southern border and the armistice line in that part of the Land of Israel which has been conquered by Egypt.

The U.N. Force which was stationed in Egypt and the Gaza Strip has been dissolved and no longer exists....A friendly nation, perhaps out of short-sightedness, proffered the strange advice that the U.N. Force should move to Israel instead. I must declare adamantly that...Israel must not agree to the stationing of foreign troops on its sovereign territory. That U.N. Force saved Nasser from a complete downfall and Egypt from an historic defeat. Israel's Army won the battle more than ten years ago and we do not need any foreign force to protect us. It is Israel's soldiers, not the dissolved U.N. Force, which will deter the enemy from using aggression....

Freedom of navigation to and from Eilat is an incontrovertible law, and no more need be said on that point.

The enemy in the south threatens us with aggression if we use our right to defend ourselves against the aggression of the enemy in the north. If that threat were to succeed, if we were to accept acts of hostility orchestrated by Syria and implemented by its emissaries, because Egypt threatens us with aggression...not only would that be an unparalleled victory for the enemy but our state would be open to attack, Jewish blood could be shed freely and our sovereignty would be a mockery. That is

why it must be said loud and clear that the threat of aggression from the south will not induce Israel to accept the aggression from the north. And if that aggression continues Israel will implement its right to self-defense. Today the Syrians say that if something happens in the south they will attack in the north. Once again, if we succumb to these threats of violence and aggression, all is lost....Nor must we be intimidated by threats of renewed and intensified terrorist actions from Egypt and Syria....Nothing will make Israel accept the current and continuing aggression.

We must clarify these points to our enemies, international elements and our nation. Of course, once again our nation is being tested, and is showing its mettle. Its sons went when they were called, knowing that military service is not easy and that there is no telling what the morrow may bring. We are proud of them and send them our blessings. Whatever the differences of opinion between us about the mistakes and errors which have been made, about the self-defeating information campaign, when it comes to the question of the nation's stand against the enemy it will stand united, undivided, behind its sons, believing that they—our sons—will deter or smash the enemy's aggression.

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I. Raphael (Mafdal): Madam Speaker, distinguished Knesset, for over ten years our southern borders have been quiet. Israel wanted that quiet, and embarked on the Sinai Campaign to achieve it; the Egyptian rulers wanted it because they realized that guerrilla warfare by means of murderous terrorists was neither worthwhile nor effective. That is why they agreed to the presence of an international buffer force...though they were also glad of the excuse it gave them vis-à-vis both their own population and the other Arab states for the quiet on their border. Israel had no objection to that Force because it had never sent armed men across the border to terrorize or murder innocent civilians in their beds. The U.N. wanted that Force, believing that it contributed to calming one of the world's potential trouble-spots....

There can be only one explanation for Egypt's one-sided decision to demand the withdrawal of the U.N. Force. Its leaders may envy the Syrian terrorist groups and aspire to return to the Fedayeen attacks of more than a decade ago, seeking once again to turn the Sinai and the Gaza Strip into bases for terrorists trained to attack us. That may be why they have asked for the buffer force, a potential eyewitness, to be removed. What other explanation can U Thant have for Nasser's demand? That being so, how could he agree to remove the Force with such alacrity and without any consultations? What was the point of cultivating and investing in that Force if it was to be set aside so easily the moment it was needed...? U Thant has indirectly condoned a serious insult to the U.N. by Nasser, who has done this in order to enhance his status within the Arab world....

The withdrawal of the U.N. Force is an even graver step than the concentration and reinforcement of Egyptian forces in the Sinai. I have made no secret of the fact that I reject any attempt to explain these troop movements as being purely demonstrative, and am happy to note that this view is now generally accepted....The troop movements are a direct threat to our borders and our independence....Nonetheless, I am convinced that they do not indicate Nasser's intentions as clearly as the withdrawal of the U.N. Force.

We cannot assume that Nasser has already decided to embark on a full-scale war against us. It is doubtful that Nasser, who is astute and calculating, will pay heed to the boastful claims of his military advisors and leaders. He can guess what the outcome of a clash with the IDF would be....He is not yet ready to accept another military defeat while the memory of the first one is still fresh in his mind. That is why I doubt that he will be quick to provoke our ships sailing in the Straits of Tiran and linking our country with those of Africa and Asia. Even after the withdrawal of the U.N. Force from Sharm el-Sheikh, the Egyptian rulers know—and the Prime Minister repeated this in his speech today—that any move against Israeli navigation will be regarded as an act of war. And just as the Egyptians had the good sense not to damage the National Water Carrier, despite their repeated declarations, we may assume that cold logic will prevent them from getting involved in this sensitive front.

The real and immediate danger is, then, that Egypt will be tempted to follow the Syrian example. Syria has not embarked upon war with us, it merely shells peaceful farmers from its trenches, pours artillery fire on peaceful settlements across the border and sends bands of terrorists to wreak murder and destroy roads and installations. For such "good deeds" as these the Syrian leaders win the support of the extremists among their population and the approval of other hot-headed Arab leaders. In fact, Syria has never been condemned by the Security Council, because the representatives of "progress" there have extended their patronage to those criminal offenders.

It is true that from time to time Syria is punished by the IDF, when it goes too far...but it seems to be worthwhile for the leaders of that unstable country to take a few punches and be regarded as the "champions of the popular liberation war."...If Egypt follows Syria's lead the problem will be much graver. Our borders with Egypt are longer and more exposed. Within Egypt, and particularly in the Gaza Strip, there is Shukeiry's organization, whose declared object is to send terrorist gangs against us. That organization receives open moral and material support from several Arab countries....Many of its members—recruited from the refugee camps—are supported in effect by money from UNRWA which was intended to help mothers and babies and the homeless. The rulers of East Germany, who have not yet grasped that they should return some of

what their Nazi compatriots seized from their Jewish victims, have already found their way to Shukeiry, their "progressive" ally, assuring him of military aid in his war against the Jews in their final stronghold....

The State of Israel will never acquiesce in the activities of the terrorists, nor will it fail to guarantee the peace of its settlements, the security of its roads and the tranquillity of its citizens. It will spare no effort, resources or manpower to prevent terrorist actions, reveal infiltrators and strengthen the defense of its borders....It is saddening to see that the newspapers of the Soviet champions of peace, *Izvestia* and *Pravda*, castigate the anti-terrorist units, branding them as the aggressors....If our actions designed to prevent aggression against us prove unavailing, the IDF will have to take whatever steps are considered necessary to guarantee our security...and this will inevitably open the way to the head-on clash we seek to avert. That, I think, is the greatest danger of the recent developments....

Despite all our criticism of U Thant...we should remember that in the last few days he has declared unequivocally and for the first time that the deadlock currently affecting our region is the result of Syria's uncompromising attitude and that Al-Fatah's terrorism has exacerbated the tension....It is a good thing that the U.N. Secretary-General is aware of this, and it is a good thing that all the Powers have announced their concern for peace in the region. We must regard this as a binding commitment. If their intentions are honorable, and the lesson of Vietnam should have taught them something...it can be assumed that they will take some initiative in order to reduce the tension.

Knowing the power of our country and the capacity of its Army to crush those of our enemies who would test us, I would like to say that peace is most dear to our hearts. Let us not be tempted by thoughts of victory. We must take care not to be drawn into the fray or to react hastily. As long as peace can be preserved, we will preserve it. Even an uneasy peace with hope is better than a successful war which leads to a schism. That is why we must respond to any call, from whatever quarter, which seeks a solution....

All of us, without exception, are united in our desire to defend our country. In times of tension and alert, at a time when our population has displayed admirable fortitude, the barriers between opponents have fallen; the differences between the Orthodox and those who do not consider themselves Orthodox have fallen. The hearts of us all beat for the aim which is dear to everyone. Anyone who saw what happened last Saturday in the Orthodox quarters of Jerusalem and heard what occurred in the center of Bnei Brak, when Orthodox Jews drove to their units accompanied by the blessings of their rabbis, recalled scenes from the War of Independence, when we arose as one nation to defend our lives and existence.

How good it would be if we could transfer at least some of that sense of unity to everyday life, so that our unity would not be limited solely to times of danger. Even in our daily tasks, which are also historic ones of creating a nation and building a homeland, we need greater unity, more readiness to understand one another and more brotherly love. But with the sense of our great mission and recognition of our responsibility to the nation and the generations to come, we will withstand the difficult tests ahead.

J. Hazan (Mapam): Distinguished Speaker and Knesset, the Near East has become the focal point of a storm because of three factors: the conflict between the Powers over the fate of the region; the struggle between the Arab countries for their position within the region; and the Jewish-Arab dispute, which is exploited by the first two elements. The campaign is now entering its gravest stage. From the furthest point of the southern sea, where it was situated till now, in the Yemen, Aden and the oil sheikdoms, it is now moving towards us. Nobody—not even those responsible for this upheaval—knows how things will turn out. We must not delude ourselves or belittle the gravity of the situation. We must be ready for the most serious development, and precisely for that reason we must keep our presence of mind as well as our courage, so that we will not be the ones to pay the price of this storm.

Our policy is now at a crossroads in the life of our young country. Today more than ever our position must be both clear and balanced, responsible and firm. That is the stand we must take vis-à-vis our enemies, our friends, world public opinion and the U.N. We are a nation under siege and we should be aware of this truth and behave accordingly. We must not speak lightly nor forego our basic right....Our enemies must be aware of our position...: we do not want war, we want peace; but we will not accept defeat or forego our rights in order to attain peace. The enemy must be made aware that we regard his military dispositions as constituting preparation for war and that we are ready....Although our nation wants peace, we will defend ourselves vigorously and unitedly.

Our friends throughout the world, the peace-loving Powers, must be told that we are on the brink of war, without any illusions which provide balm for their consciences or absolve them of responsibility. We did an injustice not only to ourselves but to the whole world when we failed to sound the alarm from the first day of the Egyptian troop concentrations, for they are aggressive, threatening war and destruction, and all the peace-loving elements in the world must realize that immediate action has to be taken in order to save the peace. We must embark on a vigorous political campaign. Nothing can replace our own ability to defend ourselves, but while maintaining a maximum defense alert, we must strengthen ourselves with a front of friendship, aid and political pressure.

First of all, we must appeal from this podium to our people, not only in Israel but throughout the world, and let them know that the State of Israel is in danger. They must know that the Israeli nation is preparing to defend it and themselves and they should aid us in this....

The U.N. has received a bitter blow. Its Force was stationed on the border between Israel and Egypt as the symbol of peace; it was withdrawn with astonishing alacrity when it was time to preserve the peace. Nonetheless, let us not share in pouring scorn on the U.N., which has disappointed us on more than one occasion. We are interested in its actions on behalf of peace...and we will not overlook any opportunity or spurn any quarter which can help restore peace....

All our strength should be focused on neutralizing the southern front, but we must not neglect to intensify our alertness on all our borders. I do not believe in the hermetic sealing of borders, but the more difficult we make it to cross them...the more we will guarantee peace and will not have to make grave decisions which none of us want or knows where they lead.

I do not wish to amuse myself by guessing what Nasser wants and what the motives for his dangerous maneuvers are. I repeat: we must not delude ourselves and the world. The massing of tens of thousands of soldiers and hundreds of tanks near our borders is a direct threat of war. He must know that we are ready for it. He must know that we want peace, but will fight to victory if he forces war on us. He must know that for this war we will muster every last iota of strength, unity, solidarity and national responsibility.

The nation's emissaries, our sons and brothers—the IDF—are already on the border; we are with them, the whole nation is with them, in the defense of peace and of the great hope of our lives—the State of Israel.

...

S. Mikunis (Maki): Distinguished Speaker and Knesset, the military tension on the Israel-Arab borders has reached heights unknown during the past ten years. There is the danger of war on our southern and northern borders. The supreme imperative, that of life and security for our nation and the neighboring ones, is to prevent any deterioration into the abyss of war and to reduce the military tension.

It is up to the Governments of Israel, Egypt and Syria to prevent the outbreak of war on the Israel-Arab borders....It is up to them to decide whether they are to be guided by considerations of the welfare of nations and national independence or the unfortunate routine of the use of force and the threat to do so....Given the current dangerous situation on the borders, we find it necessary to appeal to all peace-loving elements in the world to exert their influence on both sides and prevail upon them to refrain from taking any step which could lead to the outbreak of war between Israel and the Arab countries. The Soviet Government's message to Washington that it aspires towards the maintenance of peace in

the Middle East, and the note sent to the Egyptian President, Abdul Nasser, by the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, expressing her satisfaction at the fact that Egypt does not intend to heighten the tension in the Middle East, are indications that things are moving in the right direction....The institutions of the U.N. and all those anxious for peace should act to remove the Israeli and Arab armies from the borders, so that the Armistice Agreements may be observed and the basic conditions for reaching a peaceful settlement created....

In his one-sided and evasive statement, the Prime Minister...omitted to mention the chief agent of the dangerous situation on the borders, namely, American imperialism. Both the international situation and common sense tell us that the global and regional policy of the U.S., as well as of Britain, is interested in exacerbating the tension between Israel, on the one hand, and Syria and Egypt, on the other....In addition, the U.S. stands to gain by provoking a regional confrontation which will divert international and internal attention from its dreadful crimes in Vietnam and the genocidal methods it employs against the Vietnamese people which have earned it the opprobrium of the whole world. From Hanoi to Athens, and from Athens to the Israel-Arab borders, the contaminated and dangerous hand of American imperialism is evident.

The Prime Minister said...that "amazingly enough" the U.N. Secretary-General responded to the Egyptian demand for the withdrawal of U.N. troops from the Gaza Strip and the Sinai. Many people are amazed, and justifiably so. The U.N. is not generally known for the alacrity with which it acts, and the objective position of the Secretary-General is such that he cannot make quick and independent decisions on such serious and complex issues....The Prime Minister avoided giving an explanation for U Thant's eagerness to withdraw the U.N. Emergency Force, after almost eleven years, just when a tensely dangerous situation arose. Someone must have "persuaded" U Thant that a clash between Egypt and Israel was preferable to one between Egypt and the U.N. Force, and that someone was interested in removing that buffer and thereby facilitating a military confrontation between the armies of Israel and Egypt....That "someone," whether it was the Pentagon or the infamous C.I.A., was American imperialism, which is behind the current belligerent provocation....

In referring to the U.N. Secretary-General's report...the Prime Minister should have quoted from it more fully. It is true that the Secretary-General mentioned the fact that one of the causes of the deterioration in the situation is the anti-Israel "terrorism" of Al-Fatah, but he also criticized the "war-like pronouncements" of Israel's leaders which, he contended, "were so threatening that one could say that they were deliberately intended to cause trouble."

Thus, the threat of force and the use of force on either side of the Israel-Arab border has served American imperialism and continues to do so. It has solved no problem but has exacerbated all the disputed issues between Israel and the Arab countries. One of Israel's most weighty conclusions must be to avoid taking any step which could involve it in the alien interests of the forces of imperialism. Let us take note of the recent statement by the Commander in Chief of the Egyptian forces in the Sinai...to the effect that his troops will not initiate hostilities in response to a local skirmish unless Israel launches a major attack on one of the Arab countries. That reflects a serious and even responsible approach. Every avenue has not yet been explored, and a great deal depends on the behavior of the Government at this critical time.

...There are no absolutes, there is no hard and fast dichotomy between good and evil, in the Israel-Arab conflict...and any attempt to depict the situation as such will not bring peace nearer. Imperialism can exploit the conflict...but in order to fight imperialism and ensure the independence and security of Israel and the neighboring countries the conflict must be resolved peacefully, on the basis of the mutual recognition of the just national rights of both sides. On this score the rulers of both Israel and the Arab countries have failed to date....

As long as our rulers ignore the legal rights of the Arab refugees and the Arab rulers deny Israel's right to exist...there will be no end to the Israel-Arab conflict. At this moment the most pressing issue is to save the peace....We reject the pressure of militarist circles in Israel, which prefer a large-scale military campaign to continued defensive activities on the borders against penetration by terrorists and murderers, even though they have to admit that Israeli strikes across the border are fruitless. We also reject the propaganda campaign and organization which advocates "the liberation of Palestine" and whose object is to destroy Israel...which merely aids imperialism in the region and causes further damage to the Palestinian Arabs....

Like the Arab peoples, the people of Israel seek to eliminate war from Israel-Arab relations. It is incumbent upon the Government to reject internal and external pressures to make military decisions. It is Israel's right, as it is every country's, to use force only in the last extreme of self-defense, but every step must be considered with maximal caution when the borders are so volatile. The dangerous situation on the southern and northern borders obliges the Government to stop threatening to use force, and actually using force, across Israel's borders, to initiate political action aimed at obliging the Arab countries to act similarly, and to evince readiness to return to the Armistice Commission and observe the Armistice Agreements, which are the only international basis for the relations between Israel and the Arab countries.

The ultimate test for Israel, its neighbors and all the forces of peace in the world and the region will be an all-out effort to prevent the outbreak of war on the borders and save the peace.