

ISRAEL - EGYPT RELATIONSA. Introduction

In the past months tension has risen to a new height between Israel and Egypt. The lives and property of Israel citizens have been attacked with increasing frequency. Egypt has persisted in her refusal to abide by the wishes of the UN Security Council to release the Israel freighter Bat Galim and allow it to proceed through the Suez Canal. Threats by Egyptian leaders against Israel have continued. The execution of two Jewish defendants in the Cairo trial, in spite of pleas for clemency from all over the world, has exacerbated the situation.

Within the last 10 days the ever rising curve of Egyptian aggressions against Israel reached its high watermark with the incursions of two Egyptian units deep into Israel territory. On 23.II.55 one of these units broke into a government building near Rishon Le Zion removing various official documents. On 25.II.55 the same unit murdered a cyclist near Rechovot, about 15 kms from Tel Aviv. The other unit was intercepted by Israel security forces and in the ensuing exchange of fire one of the agents of the Egyptian Intelligence was killed. On his body there was found a report on the movements of military traffic for the last 2 days.

When the regime of King Farouk was deposed in the summer of 1952 by the Revolutionary Council led by General Maguib, the Israel Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, welcomed the change. He made clear Israel's willingness to assist the new regime in its task of internal improvement, and the lack of any animosity for a former enemy. Mr. Ben Gurion stated on August 18, 1952:

- " Israel wishes to see Egypt free, independent, progressing. There were no grounds, nor are there now, for any quarrel between Egypt and Israel. There is no cause for territorial disputes, nor any reason for political or economic problems.
- " We have no enmity against Egypt for what was done to our ancestors in the time of Pharaoh, or for what was done to us four years ago. We have never sought to exploit Egypt's political difficulties with a great power attacking her or taking revenge upon her, as she did upon the establishment of our State."

However, these friendly overtures brought no response. Indeed the record of the past six months would indicate a steady drift away from conciliation as the result of increased Egyptian hostility.

B. Border Unrest Grows

Egypt has been condemned by the Israel-Egypt Mixed Armistice Commission for 26 violations of the Armistice Agreement between September and mid-January. These violations range from illegal border crossings to cases of sabotage and murder. Warnings to Egyptian authorities to put a halt to such acts of aggression have had no effect.

In the past six months seven Israel citizens were killed and 24 wounded by Egyptian attacks across the Gaza Strip. During the same period Israel forces clashed 40 times with Egyptian forces which crossed the border into Israel territory. Twenty seven armed Egyptian incursions have taken place during the same period. Nine serious cases of sabotage and mining have been carried out by elements of the Egyptian armed forces under the command of the Egyptian headquarters in the Gaza Strip which directed acts of sabotage, murder and espionage in Israel territory.

On the night of January 24-25 an armed band of infiltrators penetrated six kilometers into Israel territory from the Gaza strip and set up an ambush near the agricultural settlement of Ein Hashloshe. From the ambush they opened fire on two ploughmen of the settlement, killing one and wounding the other.

For this attack, Egypt was condemned by the Israel-Egypt Mixed Armistice Commission on January 27. The Commission resolved as follows:

- " NOTES with grave concern the serious situation prevailing along the Gaza strip resulting from these repeated attacks;
- " NOTES once again with extremely grave concern that despite obligations imposed upon Egypt by the General Armistice Agreement and a number of Mixed Armistice Commission resolutions, these penetrations and killings of Israeli citizens have not been terminated;
- " CALLS upon the Egyptian authorities to put an immediate end to such aggressive acts. "

Just a few days earlier, an Israel military post on the border had been the object of an armed assault by a 12-man Egyptian army unit on January 21. The Egyptian unit drove up to the armistice line and took up firing positions on its side of the border. Five of the unit charged across the line, attacked the Israel post, which was manned by three soldiers, killed one and wounded the two others. The Egyptians retreated on the approach of an Israel patrol.

Condemning Egypt for this attack, the Israel-Egypt Armistice Commission on January 24 noted that the armistice line in the vicinity of the attack was clearly marked. The Commission's resolution was worded thus:

- " DECIDES that this aggressive action carried out by a unit of the Egyptian Army is in flagrant violation of Article II, paragraph 2 of the General Armistice Agreement by Egypt;
- " NOTES with extremely grave concern this aggressive action and calls upon the Egyptian authorities to terminate these aggressive acts against Israel. "

Egypt was condemned by the Mixed Armistice Commission on October 2, and her authorities called upon to put an end "immediately and finally" to acts of aggression after the murder of two farmers on September 20 near Migdal Ashkelon. The men, who were brothers, were riding home on a cart from the local dairy when they were accosted by eight armed infiltrators. They were killed in cold blood; their two companions (one was a son of one of the murdered men) were wounded.

C. Spying and Sabotage by Infiltrators

Egyptian intelligence officers have trained and sent marauders from the Gaza strip into Israel territory to spy and commit sabotage. At the end of September 1954 a group sent to commit sabotage was caught after it had sniped on farmers and blown up houses in a border settlement. (Attached a United Nation report on the investigation of one of the Egyptian saboteurs caught by Israel Security forces). Early in December 1954 four youths were caught trying to gather military information in Israel: they admitted they had been trained and sent by Egyptian officers in Gaza.

Despite condemnations by the Mixed Armistice Commission repeated well-organised military operations against the vital water pipeline to the Negev, Israel's arid southern area, have taken place. For the second time within a month, the main pipeline near Nir Am was blown up with TNT on September 7 by a group of trained saboteurs. An emergency meeting of the Israel-Egyptian MAC adopted a resolution condemning Egypt for this act, after finding that the mining of the water line had been carried out by a group of four well-trained and organised men who had crossed the demarcation line from Egyptian territory and advanced about 1.5 km inside Israel. The gang approached the pipe line and blew it up with a charge of TNT, after which they returned to Egyptian territory. The Commission found furthermore that as a result of the explosion and until repairs could be made, about 40 p.c. of the whole region's water supply ran to waste.

On October 25 a similar attack on the pipeline near Hefalsim took place.

Noting the serious damage incurred, the Mixed Armistice Commission on the latter occasion emphasized its

" great concern (over) the repeated acts of planned demolition on main water pipelines in Israel by well-trained, organised and armed groups coming from Egyptian-controlled territory. "

Attacks on the Negev pipeline have not ceased. In December 1954 the pipeline near Usa was blown up. Evidently the Egyptian authorities have taken no steps to prevent the continuation of these planned attacks.

D. Case of Bat Galim

On September 28, the Israel freighter Bat Galim, carrying a cargo of tinned beef, condensed milk and plywood en route from Eritrea to Haifa, was detained by the Egyptian authorities at Port Tewfik at the entrance to the Suez Canal. After two days of intensive searches, during which nothing more incriminating than the captain's pistol was discovered, the crew was charged with opening fire on Egyptian fishing vessels and killing two fishermen.

The ten-man crew was removed from the ship to military prison where they were held for two days. There the treatment given them was described by the captain of the Bat Galim as follows:

- " We all had our hands shackled behind our backs, and were placed in separate cells. Once every hour four or five men came to give each crew member a thorough beating. I had the distinction of being visited every quarter of an hour. We were also taken out into the corridors and 'taken care of' .
- " If a man had to go to the toilet at the end of a long corridor, he was beaten with wooden sticks by the wardens stationed there. During the first night, not a drop of water was given to the prisoners. "

After 48 hours of such treatment, the crew members were transferred to a civilian prison where they were held, sometimes together and sometimes in solidarity , until shortly before their release on January 1, 1955. The personal belongings of the crew and the ship's fund of \$1400 were confiscated and no receipt given.

E. False Charges Withdrawn

Although Egypt charged in her complaint to the Mixed Armistice Commission on October 6 that two Egyptian fishermen had been killed by the Bat Galim, UN investigators sent to check the charges found no weapons aboard other than the captain's pistol. The bodies of the slain fishermen were never produced, nor was their boat. Other fishermen queried did not know of them, and the Egyptian authorities were hard put to find "relatives" of the missing men.

Israel, which immediately denied the Egyptian allegation as a "reckless fabrication", raised the question of the right to free passage through the Suez Canal in the UN Security Council on October 14. Egyptian unwillingness to have the Bat Galim case discussed was responsible for the Mixed Armistice Commission's not completing its considerations until November.

Meanwhile the Security Council had charged the MAC with reporting to it in full by the end of November,

The French, Brazilian, Belgian, Peruvian and New Zealand representatives all expressed their adherence to this point of view. Leslie Knox Munro of New Zealand, President of the Council during January, summed up the wish of the body on January 13 to see the Bat Galim released in the light of the 1951 resolution.

G. Cairo Sentences Shock World Opinion

While assaults increased against Israel citizens and Egypt persisted in her defiance of UN wishes concerning the Bat Galim, twelve Jews were charged with espionage for Israel before a military court in Cairo. During the trial, which began on December 11, the defendants testified that torture had been used to force them to give information. One defendant, Elias Cremona, died under torture before coming to trial; another, Max Bennet, committed suicide according to the Egyptian authorities; a third, the only woman defendant, threw herself from a window during pre-trial interrogation, but survived.

On January 27, 1955, two of the defendants, Moshe Marzouk, a physician, and Shmuel Azzar, a school teacher, were sentenced to hang. Two other defendants were given life terms and four others long sentences, all at hard labour. The death sentences, which were confirmed by Colonel Nasser as the highest military authority, were carried out on January 31 despite pleas for clemency from all over the world.

Demonstrations were held all over Israel before and after the executions in Cairo. World Jewish organisations also protested the unjustified severity of the sentences.

H. Executions a Political Move

The political motivation behind the death sentences was pointed out by the Israel Prime Minister, Moshe Sharet, speaking in a special session of the Knesset (parliament) on January 31, the day of the executions in Cairo. He said :