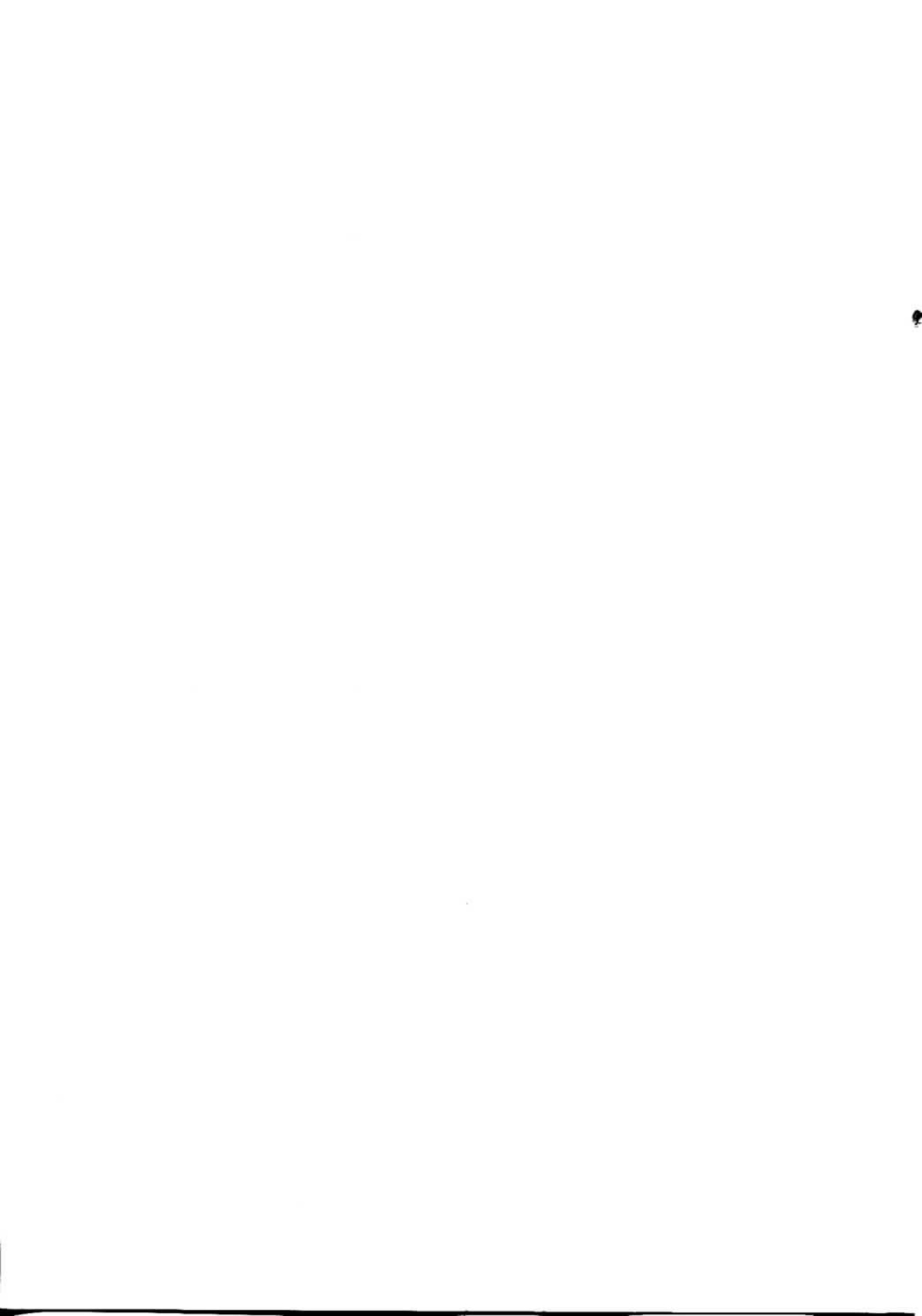


**ISRAEL
AND THE
DEMILITARIZED
ZONES**

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Israel and the «Demilitarized Zones»

The creation of Demilitarized Zones between the Arabs and the Israelis as buffer zones to prevent the resumption of hostilities is not a new phenomenon.

Very few people are aware of the fact that such zones already exist between the two opponents and that they were created as part of the Armistice Agreements signed by the Arabs and Israel after the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. The word « demilitarized » is however, a misnomer. These zones are neither demilitarized nor are they free from hostilities. In fact it was the conflict over the demilitarized zone between the Syrians and the Israelis that brought on the war in June 1967.

In the Armistice Agreements, the demilitarized zones were subject to the following conditions, namely :

- (1) No activities of military or para-military forces would take place inside these zones.
- (2) Any advance into these zones by an armed force of either side would be considered a violation of the Armistice Agreements.
- (3) Civilians who had left these zones during the fighting should be permitted to return to their homes.
- (4) The Mixed Armistice Commission (composed of one Arab, one Israeli and one U.N. Observer) as well as the U.N. Observer Corps would be responsible for the implementation of these conditions.
- (5) Locally recruited Israeli police would patrol the areas where the population was mainly Israeli and locally recruited Arab police would patrol the areas where the population was mainly Arab.



This was the situation at the time hostilities ceased in 1948.

Israel, however, made it clear from the beginning that it had never considered these zones to belong to anyone but the Israeli Government. As early as the 24th of March 1951, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces declared to the UN Chairman of the Israel-Syrian Mixed Armistice Commission that the Demilitarized Zone on the Israel - Syrian border was « part of Israel ».

On the 12th of April 1951, Walter Eytan, then acting Foreign Minister and now Israeli Ambassador to Paris, insisted that Syria had no right to interfere in the internal affairs of Israel and added « that the Government of Israel considers the demilitarized zones to be in Israeli territory ».

On the 21st of September 1953, the Israeli Delegate to the Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission declared that the «el-Auja Demilitarized Zone,» being an integral part of Israel, the term « Palestinian Beduins » had no meaning (there had been a dispute concerning the return of these Beduins expelled by Israel). The same Israeli Delegate also declared that « any Israel activity in the demilitarized zone is an internal Israeli affair and of no concern to nobody (sic), including Egypt ».

It should be stressed here that these zones were of the utmost strategic importance for any troop movements into neighbouring Arab countries and that it was therefore essential for Israel to control them, preferably without their Arab inhabitants.

1. **The el Auja Demilitarized Zone on the Egyptian Border.**

A. PROGRESSIVE MILITARY OCCUPATION

1. The establishment of Kibbutzim (Israeli settlements).

As early as 1950, Israeli forces occupied Bir Qatar in the el-Auja Demilitarized Zone. In 1953, Israel established Kibbutz Ketziat where no Kibbutz had previously existed. This Kibbutz was equipped with a non-local police force. Repeated protests from UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization) had the effect of making Israel turn it into a military camp. In 1953 a company of 85 soldiers from the Israeli regular army equipped with rifles and sub-machine guns took over the camp permanently.

In 1956, General Burns, then Chief Staff of UNTSO, reported that «Kibbutz Ketziat» was being enlarged.

2. The policing of the area by non-local police.

Although this was contrary to the terms of the Armistice Agreements, Israeli government police were from the beginning in control of this zone.

B. THE EXPULSION OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE ZONE.

As early as 1950, only two years after the end of the Arab-Israeli war, Israel tried to get rid of the Arab inhabitants of this zone. On the 18th of September 1950, General Riley, then Chief of Staff of the el-Azazme tribe who had been living in and around the el-Auja zone, had been expelled by Israeli troops in armoured cars supported by aircraft. Thirteen people were killed as a result of this operation and many wounded. Their crops and possessions were burnt. Later that summer, about one thousand more people were expelled from the zone. They had to sign statement before leaving to the effect that they did not intend to return and would never reclaim their property.

This action brought upon Israel a motion of censure by the Security Council. The Mixed Armistice Commission passed a resolution in conformity with the Security Council's decision asking Israel to repatriate the Arabs who had been expelled. Needless to say, Israel ignored these resolutions.

Three years later on the 9th of November 1953, General Bennike, then Chief of Staff of UNTSO, reported that 6-7,000 Arabs had been expelled from the zone before May 1951, and that in 1953, 250 more were expelled. During that same year, 785 Arabs were also permanently removed from their homes inside this zone.

C. THE FINAL OCCUPATION OF THE ZONE BY ISRAEL.

The fact that UNTSO Headquarters were in the Demilitarized Zone did not seem to deter Israeli regular units from occupying el-Auja zone intermittently between 1950-55. The final occupation took place on September 21st 1955, and the Israelis have not moved out since. In spite of a request to the contrary by the Chief of UNTSO, the Israelis built fortifications in the zone. When asked to remove these fortifications the Israelis went ahead and extended them.

II. The Two Demilitarized Zones on the Israeli-Syrian Border.

These zones have been the scenes of continuous friction between the Arabs and the Israelis for the last twenty years. Israel insists that the land inside the zones is Israeli territory and every year Israeli farmers defy U.N. Observers by irrigating, tilling, and harvesting the zones and bringing in armed tractors for protection, thereby exposing themselves to Syrian artillery fire. Israeli police and armed forces intermittently occupy positions in these zones and erect fortifications inside them. These zones have also their strategic importance as they control the areas where any diversion of the two main tributaries of the River Jordan could take place.

A — OCCUPATION AND POLICING OF THE ZONES

Early in 1951, Israeli armed police entered and occupied the zone to the north of Lake Tiberias. On the 18th of May 1951, the Security Council passed a resolution requesting Israel to withdraw its police force from this zone. Repeated requests to that effect brought no response from the Israeli side. On the 6th of November, 1951, General Riley reported that : « This police, wearing the uniform of the State of Israel and subject to Israeli orders from without the zone, has controlled the movement of Arabs and interfered with the freedom of movement of the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission and U.N. Observers ». Defying the U.N. further, Israel erected a police check-point inside the zone at Mishmar Hayarden in 1952. At the end of 1956, General Burns, then chief-of-staff of UNTSO, reported no modification in the situation and in 1960, General Von Horn reported that : « Israeli border police have occupied three points of vantage ».

These zones were also exposed to attacks by the regular forces of the Israeli Army. On the 5th of April, 1951, the village of el-Hamma was bombed by the Israeli air force. On the 6th of May 1961, positions near Tel-el-Muttullah were occupied by the Israeli army. On the 1st of February, 1969, the village of el-Tawafiq was attacked and partly destroyed. And in March 1962, the Israelis used the demilitarized zone to invade Syrian territory.

B — GRADUAL REMILITARIZATION

(1) Fortification of the zones. Soon after 1948, UNTSO reported that Israel was building fortifications inside the zone. But when in 1956, it became known that the Israelis were building permanent fortifications at Kibbutz Haganim, the Chief of Staff of UNTSO requested that these fortifications be removed. The Israelis alleged that their motives were to protect themselves against Syrian attacks. UNTSO Chief of Staff then pointed out that these fortifications were not of a defensive nature. Cornered, Mr. Ben Gurion, then Israeli Prime Minister, simply replied that : « Israel could not comply with the chief of staff's request ».

In his report to the Security Council on February 23d, 1960, General Von Horn, then chief of staff of UNTSO reported that Israel had developed Beit Katzir settlement inside the demilitarized zone, into a «fortified position» depriving Arab farmers of all access to Lake Tiberias.

C — THE EXPULSION OF THE ARAB INHABITANTS OF THE ZONE

In March 1951, the Israeli Government removed 650 Arab civilians from the zone to different parts of Israel. On the 18th of May 1951, the Security Council passed a resolution asking Israel to return these Arabs «forthwith» to their homes. It took Israel five months to comply with this resolution and even then only 95 Arabs out of the 650 were allowed back. In August 1951, 115 Arabs were expelled to Syria by the Israeli armed forces. Israel allowed no more than 11 back. At the same time the Israeli Government refused to allow into the area any relief provided by U.N.R.W.A. for those refugees whose homes had been razed to the ground.

As late as 1955, the Chief-of-Staff of the U.N. Observers reported to the Security Council that «these people are still living in very bad conditions . . . more like beasts than men . . . they have no schools, no medical facilities ».

D — THE USE OF THE ZONE FOR IRRIGATION SCHEMES

In 1951, Israel's Land Development Company started work near Lake Huleh, inside the demilitarized zone. On the 18th of May 1951, the Security Council passed a resolution asking Israel « to cease all operations in the demilitarized zone ». On the 16th of August of the same year, General Riley, Chief-of-Staff of the U.N. Observers, reported that Israel was, on the contrary, «extending the scope of its activities inside the zone ». Defying the world body still further Israel started digging a canal between the Jordan River and Lake Huleh, inside the zone. The Security Council, in another attempt to maintain law and order, passed a resolution on the 27th of October 1953 asking that the « works started in the demilitarized zone should be suspended during the urgent examination of the question by the Security Council ».

As usual, Israel did not comply, but when threatened by Mr. Dulles that Mutual Security Funds would be withheld, the Israeli delegate, Abba Eban, promptly announced at the Security Council that «work would be temporarily suspended» in the demilitarized zone.

III. The Demilitarized Zones on the Jordanian Israeli Border.

There are two such zones on the Jordanian-Israeli border, in Jerusalem, the most important being the zone on Mount Scopus.

This zone strategically controls the city of Jerusalem. The encroachment on it did not follow the same pattern as that of the Syrian and Egyptian demilitarized zones : it was not as easily accessible to Israeli military operations.

In this area there were attempts by Israel to smuggle arms to their police guard, actions aimed at terrorizing the Arab inhabitants and ill-treatment of U.N. personnel.

Extracts from books by two prominent U.N. Observers, Commander Hutchison and General Von Horn illustrate best the situation prevailing on Mount Scopus between 1948 and 1967.

Commander Hutchison, military observer assigned to UNTSO from '51 - 54', relates in his book «Violent Truce» the strange incident of the barrel, an attempt by Israel to smuggle ammunition to the demilitarized zone on Mount Scopus.

Fortnightly, an Israeli convoy was allowed to cross Jordan territory with supplies and change of guard for the demilitarized zone on Mount Scopus. On June 4th, 1952, the convoy was being checked as usual by the UN Observers at the Mandelbaum Gate between the Jordanian and the Israeli sectors of Jerusalem. Testing a barrel declared in the manifest to contain oil, the UN check guard's test rod struck metal inside the barrel. Where-upon the Israeli truck driver fled to Israel with the remaining barrels. Shortly afterwards, Israeli troops occupied MAC (Mixed Armistice Commission) Headquarters in No Man's Land to which the barrel had been removed. This drove Commander Hutchison to the conclusion that (p. 29, Violent Truce) « It mattered little what was in the barrel.

Israel was guilty of falsifying records submitted to the UN; Israel was guilty of attempted smuggling and had revealed to the world it was contravening the Mount Scopus Agreement; Israel had broken the General Armistice Agreement by ordering troops into no-man's-land ».

A second incident is mentioned by Commander Hutchison on p. 39-41 of his book *Violent Truce*. He relates that on December 13, 1952, a group of Israelis attempted to smuggle a large quantity of arms and ammunitions into the Mount Scopus Demilitarized Zone. They were stopped by Jordanian National Guardsmen and fled leaving their ammunition behind them, as well as 3 caps bearing their names and numbers. The Israelis, later, alleged that the ammunition had been stolen by Arabs.

General de Ridder, who was then Chief of UNTSO, had no choice but to condemn the Israelis for this act. The evidence was overwhelming : could the Arabs have really stolen ammunition in order to take it to the Jewish sector of Mount Scopus ? « General de Ridder hardly had a moment's peace after this ». Hutchison says. The pressure for his removal was not confined to Israel but was felt in Washington, London, Paris and even his own country, Belgium. Finally, the U.N. gave in to this pressure and he was transferred to Pakistan.

General Von Horn, Chief of Staff of UNTSO from '58 - '60 and 61 - '63 relates other incidents that took place in the Mount Scopus demilitarized zone. « The Israelis always prevented us from doing our duty. The Arab village of Isawiyeh in the demilitarized zone, was constantly harassed by them, sealing villagers off behind road blocks after darkness ». (*Soldiering for Peace*, p. 83).

Sent to investigate this matter, Dr. Urutia, Hammerskjold's special representative, was turned back in this area by Israeli troops. When he protested to Mrs. Meier, although the area was directly under his control and although he was the person who had been pushed around, her answer was : « We Jews do not like to be pushed around ». (Von Horn p. 85).

The Israelis were warned by Von Horn against increasing patrols in this demilitarized zone but ignored the warning. A few days later, two Israelis and one U.N. Observer were killed. Of this incident, Von Horn says : « The highly skilled Israeli Information Service and the entire press combined to manufacture a warped, distorted version which was disseminated with professional expertise through every available channel to their own people and their sympathizers and supporters in America and the rest of the world. Never in all my life had I believed the truth could be so cynically and expertly bent ». (p. 86).

About this same subject, Commander Hutchison says : « The only weapon held by the U.N. that would have brought about cooperation was publicity. The Arabs were no match for their Israeli adversaries in this battle of the pen ».

Israel's attempts at or successful annexation of the demilitarized zones is no more than a manoeuvre for acquiring jumping off bases to neighbouring Arab countries.

Should the demilitarization of the recently occupied Arab territories or parts of them arise, the following new factors should be taken into consideration : That the Israelis have already annexed Jerusalem, that they have established Jewish colonies on the Western Bank — such as Kfar Etzion — and that they have decided to set up military bases on the West Bank (see Moshe Dayan's interview with the Sunday Times correspondent, 10th of September, 1967).

The same applies to the Gaza strip and Sinai : a Jewish colony has recently been planted near the Arab town of el-Arish and Gaza was proclaimed an « integral part of Israel » (Levi Eshkel to Der Spiegel, 7th of July 1967).

In the Golan Heights in Syrian territory, two military camps were established by Jewish colonizers, at Banias and Qunetra.

The « gradual encroachment » has begun, even before demilitarization was mentioned. How could the Arabs be expected to discuss more demilitarization of more Arab territory? Commander Hutchison, in his book «Violent Truce,» says that the U.N. was constantly faced with « Israel's attempt to exercise total control over the demilitarized zone ». (Violent Truce, p. 107).

Is it conceivable that the U.N. has suddenly acquired the ability to restrain Israel's growing appetite ?

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