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CABLEGRAM DATED 22 MARCH 1949 FROM THE ACTING MEDIATOR TO THE  
SECRETARY-GENERAL TRANSMITTING A SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT  
ON THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTHERN NEGEV

For President of Security Council:

I have the honour to present a detailed report on the situation in the Southern Negev further to my previous preliminary reports dated 10 and 13 March (documents S/1285 and S/1286). This report sets forth all the facts that could be ascertained in regard to the situation in this area as the result of an intensive investigation by United Nations Observers of the Truce Supervision Organization undertaken since 7 March 1949. (All MR are to survey of Palestine 1:250,000, South Sheet.)

Since 1 March, the Head of the Transjordan delegation in Rhodes has submitted to me a number of complaints of incidents in the region of the Gulf of Aqaba as follows: on 25 and 26 February, forces approaching from the Egyptian border, 35 kilometres Northwest of Aqaba town attempted to cross lines occupied by Transjordan forces North of Aqaba. On 25 February, it was alleged that an Egyptian police Sergeant saw 7 Israeli vehicles inside the Egyptian frontier in Sinai coming South from the direction of El Auja (MR 096 032) and crossing into Palestine near Kuntilla (MR 118 934). This force was alleged to have spent the night of 25-26 February at Bir Melhan (MR 143 916). On 26 February, three vehicles of the patrol encountered an Arab Legion patrol but withdrew by Huniek (MR 147 940). On 3 March, it was reported by the Arab Legion from Aqaba that an Israeli Auster aircraft passed over El Ghamr (MR 170 991) in Transjordan territory. On 7 (?) March, Transjordan authorities complained that "Military operations against the Arab Legion in Wadi Araba continue, Israeli forces attacking Arab Legion forces with tanks and armoured cars". In a note dated 28 February and delivered to me at Rhodes on 2 March, the Transjordan Minister of Defence protested "most strongly at this Jewish attempt to achieve a fait accompli, just at the moment when the Transjordan delegation is leaving for Rhodes".

In an additional note submitted to me on 15 March summarizing their point of view, the Transjordan authorities claimed to have been in occupation of Kurnub (MR 156 048) and Ain Hasb (MR 174 024) between

/12 June 1948

12 June 1948 and 5 November 1948, and that Israeli Forces occupied these two places on 8 November 1948. On 1 December 1948 the Israelis, according to Transjordan authorities, advanced Southwards and Arab Legion forces fell back to positions North of Wadi Masalle (MR 170 006). Later the Israelis withdrew to Ain Hasb and Arab Legion forces occupied Ain El Weiba (MR 167 004) and El Ghamr. It was also claimed that on 7 March Transjordan forces were in occupation of posts at Bir Ibn Ode (MR 140 170) and Ideid (MR 125 967) and that on that date Israeli forces advanced in two columns, one passing 1 kilometre West of Bir Ibn Ode and the other down the main track to El Ghamr, from which the Transjordan forces withdrew. On 8 March, a skirmish was alleged to have taken place near Ain El Weniba, one Arab Legion armoured car being knocked out by an Israeli tank. On 9 March an Israeli force was said to be 8 miles inside the Transjordan border. The Transjordan note also alleged that on the same evening, an Israeli column reached Ras En Negeb (MR 137 890) and attacked the Arab Legion there.

As stated in my earlier reports to the Security Council, these complaints were referred by me to the Israeli authorities for their comments. On 10 March, I received a reply from Dr. Eytan on behalf of the Government of Israel stating that Israeli land and air forces were nowhere operating outside the borders of Israel, and that they had not crossed and did not intend to cross the Transjordan frontier at any point. This statement complained that Transjordan forces had crossed the frontier into Palestine in this area and that this constituted an unjustified invasion of Israeli territory, which was a serious embarrassment to the present negotiations. I was requested by this message to submit to the Government of Transjordan the strong protest of the Government of Israel against this action of Transjordan forces.

These complaints and the situation in the Southern Negev were fully investigated between 7 and 18 March by United Nations Military Observers whose numbers in the area were temporarily increased, and by a senior civilian member of the Secretariat who went to the area as my personal representative. On 17 and 18 March, General Riley, Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization also visited the area. The following facts have been established from this investigation:

1. Since 8 March 1949 Israeli military forces at considerable more than normal patrol strength have moved into the area between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba in Palestine, and have taken up positions at several points which they had not previously occupied.

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2. There has never been anything in the nature of a military line in this area. It appears that Arab forces in small strength have recently patrolled in parts of the area, as have small Israeli patrols, in violation of the Truce in both cases.
3. The main movement of Israeli troops has been down the road in the Wadi Araba which road runs for its whole length inside Palestine but close to the Palestine Transjordan frontier.
4. The complaint that Israeli troops crossed the Transjordan border could not be verified. On 18 March, the Senior United Nations Observer at Amman reported that no Israeli post existed at that time on the Transjordan side of Wadi Araba.
5. The report that one body of Israeli troops entered Umm Reshresh (MR 145 885) by a road from the Egyptian side of the frontier could not be verified. No complaint of such movement has been received from Egyptian authorities though it has been established by the Observers that an Israeli force reached Umm Reshresh by way of Res En Negev on the Egyptian frontier. The Egyptian-Israeli General Armistice Agreement defines the western half of this area, i.e. west of a line running midway between the Egyptian and Transjordan frontiers, at the western front, in which only Israeli defensive forces, based on the settlements, may be maintained. The Eastern half of this area, or the Eastern front, pending the conclusion of an Armistice Agreement with Transjordan, remains fully subject to the existing Truce.
6. No fighting has taken place between the Transjordan and Israeli forces in the Southern Negev. Arab Legion forces retired from Al Ghamr to Gharandal (MR 169 944) in Wadi Araba as the Israeli forces advanced southwards. A small Arab Legion force which had entered Umm Reshresh on 3 March had left on 9 March and Israeli forces arrived there the following day.
7. By 15 March Israeli forces had established a series of points on the Palestine side of the border in Wadi Araba from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. About 200 men with several half-track vehicles were encamped at Umm Reshresh on 16 March. Israeli posts of about one platoon strength have been established at the following points as of 17 March: MR 185 049; at Ein El Weiba (MR 167 004); at Road Junction (MR 167 992); at MR 166 972; at MR 163 958; at MR 165 947. A Northern sector command post of about 200 Israelis and 50 vehicles was established at MR 169 028. There was a concentration of two tanks, six half-tracks and ten to fifteen heavy trucks south of the police station at MR 154 921. On 7 March, there was an Israeli outpost of  
/one platoon

one platoon strength with one half track 3 kilometres southeast of Ras En Negeb.

Observers also reported that on 13 March British forces at Aqaba were reinforced by forces put ashore from an LST.

On 18 March, the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization, after visiting the Aqaba area, reported that no tension existed there and that no incidents were likely other than the possibility of patrol clashes along the Transjordan frontier.

It is clear on the evidence available to me as a result of the investigation by United Nations Observers since 7 March that Israeli forces have effectively occupied this area since that date. Previous to 7 March Transjordan forces had lightly patrolled at least parts of the area and it is contended by Transjordan sources that they had maintained fixed positions at Gharandal, Bir Qattar (MR 137 890) Ain El Weinba and Meliha (MR 162 968). It has not been possible to verify on the basis of a check by United Nations Observers when such positions were established by Transjordan forces, but it is established that no Transjordan forces are now on the Palestine side of the frontier in this area. No fighting ever having taken place in that area before and no significant forces of either side having been concentrated there, it had not been necessary to place it under close observation nor to define any truce lines.

I am quite convinced that any positions other than at Aqaba, established in this area either by Transjordan or Israeli forces have all been established since the existing Truce came into effect on 18 July 1948, with the possible exception of Transjordan positions at Ain Habd and Kurnub, and have, therefore, been established contrary to the terms of that Truce. Similarly, patrolling activity and reinforcement of pre-Truce forces on either side of the frontier in this sector are in conflict with Truce conditions which have been accepted by both sides.

(Signed) Ralph Bunche  
Acting Mediator

