Meeting of June 5

Following the outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East, the Security Council met in emergency session.

The Council had a letter from the representative of the United Arab Republic which stated that Israel had “committed a treacherous premeditated aggression” against his country that morning, launching attacks in the Gaza Strip, Sinai, and several airports in Cairo, the Suez Canal area, and other localities. Preliminary reports, it was stated, indicated that 23 Israeli planes had been shot down and several pilots captured. The letter went on to say that the United Arab Republic, “in repelling this aggression...had decided to defend itself by all means in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations.”

The Secretary-General, U Thant, in his statement, said the United Nations had no means of ascertaining how the hostilities began. Reports coming in from the parties were conflicting, but all agreed that there was serious military action on land and in the air at a number of points which was spreading. The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), which was in the process of withdrawal, was no longer on the Line. Information from the UNEF Commander, General Indar Jit Rikhye, therefore, was necessarily general. He gave the Council the information he had received, including the report that three UNEF soldiers in the Indian contingent were killed and an undetermined number wounded when Israeli aircraft strafed a UNEF convoy. The authorities of the United Arab Republic reported large-scale air raids throughout the country, including Cairo, but Israel denied that Cairo had been raided. The authorities of the United Arab Republic also reported an Israeli attack on El Quiseima in Sinai and stated that its artillery in Gaza had started firing at Israel-controlled territory. General Odd Bull, Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine (UNTSO), reported firing in Jerusalem. At his request, Israel and Jordan had accepted a ceasefire. Overflights by Syrian jet fighters and air battles over the Syrian-Israeli Armistice Line were reported.

The Secretary-General went on to say that the Israeli representative at ISMAC had informed the UNTSO officer at Tiberias that Israel considered itself at war with Syria,
ISMAC reported that the Damascus airport had been attacked. The Secretary-General said that UNTSO headquarters had been occupied by Jordanian soldiers. Israeli troops, following heavy firing, had driven out the Jordanian soldiers and, ordering General Bull and his staff out of Government House, escorted them into Israel. The Secretary-General had requested Israel to restore the compound to exclusive United Nations control.

The Secretary-General also reported that Damascus airport and other locations in Syria were said to be under intermittent air attack, and that Israel claimed that Megiddo, Afula and a locality south of Akko had been attacked from the air. Firing was still going on in Jerusalem, and he supported the idea of declaring it an open city in order to protect its irreplaceable religious places.

Gopalaswami PARTHASARATHI (India) asked the Council to condemn Israel for the “wanton, irresponsible and brutal action” in which Indian soldiers were killed.

Mr. RAFAEL (Israel) told the Council that fighting had broken out on Israel’s frontiers and that the Israeli Defence Forces were repelling the Egyptian Army and Air Force. He said that, in the early morning hours, Egyptian armoured columns had moved in an offensive thrust against Israel’s borders and Egyptian planes had taken off from airfields in Sinai and struck out towards Israel. Egyptian artillery in the Gaza Strip had shelled the villages of Kissufim, Nahal-Oz and Ein Hashelosha in Israel. Israeli forces had engaged the Egyptians in the air and on land, and fighting continued.

Mr. Rafael said he was bringing this development to the attention of the Council in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter. The Israeli Minister of Defence, he added, had stated that Israel had no desire for conquest; it was simply defending itself.

Mohamed Award EL KONY (United Arab Republic) said the attack on his country was so widespread that it had to be premeditated. The United Arab Republic, he said, had no choice but to defend itself in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter, and it would continue to do so. He asked that the Council condemn the aggression.

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[At a subsequent meeting of the Security Council, the spokesman for Israel delivered the following explanation of Israel’s military action. Security Council, Off. Rec. 1358th Meeting, 13 June 1967, S/PV. 1358, at p. 20.]

198. Let us look again at the events which preceded the outbreak of fighting on 5 June. On 18 May, the Government of the United Arab Republic demanded the eviction of the United Nations Emergency Force which was deployed along the Gaza Strip and the Sinai desert and at Sharm el Sheikh at the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba, and on the day UNEF ceased to exist. Was this an act which promoted peace? Was this an act which demonstrated peaceful intent? It was not; it was preparation for aggression. The Emergency Force had to be gotten out of the way so that aggression on Israel could be prepared and mounted.

199. On 23 May, the United Arab Republic declared that the Strait of Tiran would be closed to Israeli shipping and to ships of other nations carrying what were described as strategic goods, that is to say, anything which the United Arab Republic chose to define as strategic goods, to Israel’s southernmost port of Eilat. Was this act of blockade a