

Subject Files of the Sec.-gen. : Dag Hammarskjöld

20/05/1960 - 26/07/1960

Incidents and Commissions - UNEF - "Buzzing" of UNEF Aircraft by Israeli Air Force Planes

PLEASE RETAIN
ORIGINAL ORDER

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UN ARCHIVES

SERIES S-0846

BOX 1

FILE 2

ACC. DAG 1/5.1.3



Nehru

No. D/12/PR

PERMANENT MISSION OF INDIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
3 EAST 64TH STREET
NEW YORK 21, N. Y.

July 26, 1960.

Dear Mr. Hammarskjold,

The Prime Minister has asked me to acknowledge and thank you for your letter dated June 24, 1960, addressed to him, which was duly transmitted by me.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(C.S. Jha)

His Excellency
Mr. Dag Hammarskjold,
Secretary-General,
United Nations,
New York.



No.D/12/PR

PERMANENT MISSION OF INDIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
3 EAST 64TH STREET
NEW YORK 21, N. Y.

July 7, 1960.

Dear Mr. Hammarskjöld,

The Prime Minister has asked me to acknowledge and thank you for your letter dated the 18th June, 1960, addressed to him, which was duly transmitted by me.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,


(C.S. Jha)

His Excellency
Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld,
Secretary-General,
United Nations,
NEW YORK.



מדינת ישראל
ISRAEL

נציגות ישראל
באומות המאוחדות
DELEGATION OF ISRAEL
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

11 EAST 70TH STREET
NEW YORK 21, NEW YORK
TRAFALGAR 9-7600

27 June 1960.

Dear Mr. Hammarskjold,

I am forwarding to the Prime Minister, Mr. Ben-Gurion, your letter to him of 24 June 1960, concerning the plane incident involving Mr. Nehru. In doing so, I would draw your attention to the express denial in Mr. Ben-Gurion's letter that our Air Force had or could have had knowledge as to the identity of the occupants of the Dakota plane. I cannot but repeat my regret that General Gyani did not confine himself to reporting on the facts, and attributed deliberate motives to the Israel Air Force. But for that, his own attitude would not have evoked Mr. Ben-Gurion's comment.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Comay
Permanent Representative

Mr. Dag Hammarskjold,
The Secretary General,
The United Nations,
New York.



מדינת ישראל
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נציגות ישראל
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DELEGATION OF ISRAEL
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

11 EAST 70TH STREET
NEW YORK 21, NEW YORK
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TRAFALGAR 9-7600

27 June 1960.

Dear Mr. Hammarskjold,

Thank you for your letter of 27 June 1960, concerning the interpretation of the phrase "Israel air space" in the General Staff Report quoted in Mr. Ben-Gurion's letter to you of 12 June 1960. I am forwarding your letter to the Foreign Ministry, and requesting a clarification of this phrase.

Sincerely,

Michael Comay
Permanent Representative

Mr. Dag Hammarskjold,
The Secretary-General,
The United Nations,
New York.

27 June 1960

Dear Mr. Conay,

In the report from the general staff quoted in Mr. Ben Gurion's letter to me of 12 June 1960, I note the following phrase in the first paragraph:

"When the track crossed the Gaza strip border into Israel air space, two jets were ordered to take off and intercept".

The words "crossed the Gaza strip border into Israel air space" as they stand, would indicate that Israel authorities regard the air space above the Gaza strip as Israel air space, or at least as being Israel controlled. This way of reading seems to be confirmed by the fact that, likewise, they obviously refer to the entry of the UNEF plane into the Gaza strip and that the only entrance of the plane into air space over Israel territory was — to a depth of 100 metres — in the later landing manoeuvre when the UN plane was easily visible from the ground, under close surveillance by Israel planes and certainly not any longer tracked by radar; in fact, this crossing into air space over Israel territory and the manoeuvring of the Israel planes at the landing have obviously not even been considered worth mentioning by the Israel military authorities.

However, I fail to believe that the interpretation thus indicated can be the intended one, as it would run counter to the legal situation which in the most unambiguous terms has been recognised by the United Nations General Assembly. As I do not believe that it is helpful to the development to leave points like this in doubt, I would appreciate your assistance in a clarification of the intentions of the General Staff.

Dag Hammarskjöld.

Hon. Mr. M. Conay,
Permanent Representative to the United Nations,
Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations,
11 East 70th Street,
New York, N.Y.

24 June 1960

Dear Mr. Nehru,

.....
.....
At the request of Mr. Ben Gurion I have to transmit to you the annexed copy of a letter I have just received regarding the Gaza incident. Mr. Ben Gurion's letter refers to a memorandum from General Gyani which I, therefore, enclose. This memorandum, in turn, was caused by an Israel protest against our criticism of their action as "apparently deliberate".

Needless to say, I have rejected Mr. Ben Gurion's wholly unwarranted criticism of General Gyani.

I take this opportunity for thanking you for your lines regarding the same matter of 31 May 1960. I highly appreciate the spirit in which you reacted and would have liked your comments to be the last word.

Dag Hammarskjöld.

His Excellency
Shri Jawaharlal Nehru,
Prime Minister and Minister for
External Relations,
New Delhi, India.

24 June 1960

Dear Mr. Ben Gurion,

I thank you for your letter of 12 June 1960.

In accordance with your request I have transmitted to Mr. Nehru a copy of this letter, together, of course, with the memorandum to which it refers.

In order not to prolong this discussion, I shall abstain from detailed comments on the points you make or on the Staff report, beyond drawing once again your attention to the fact that the buzzing and low overflight we criticised took place during the landing approach and, for the last time, so late after the landing that Mr. Nehru was already receiving the honour guard (while, as the data you now give yourself seem to confirm, no MIG's had been North of El Arish). In the circumstances, it is certainly not to be considered as evidence of a "hostile attitude", if a witness of its final and decisive stages finds the action "apparently" deliberate.

Also if I have to read what you say about General Gyani as a judgment intended to be of a more general application to him, I have to reject it emphatically and I regret that it has ever been made.

As regards practices necessitated by landing conditions and so far followed, I do not understand you to suggest any change of procedures. Nor do I, in the occurrence discussed, see any indication that there is a need for such a change.

Dag Hammarskjöld.

H.E. Mr. David Ben Gurion,
Prime Minister and Minister of Defence,
Jerusalem,
Israel.

ראש הממשלה
THE PRIME MINISTER

12th June, 1960

Dear Mr. Hammarakjold,

Mr. Comay has transmitted to me the summary of General Gyani's cable, which he received from Mr. Bunche.

In paragraph 1 General Gyani asserts that the plane in which Mr. Nehru travelled from Cairo to Gaza was unescorted by other planes. In paragraph 2 he states that he was informed by the Egyptian authorities of the despatch to El-Arish of four MIG fighter planes at approximately the same time that the U.N. plane was en route to Gaza. It is strange that the discrepancy between paragraph 1 and 2 escaped General Gyani's notice.

In paragraph 3 General Gyani states that he himself did not observe any MIG plane between Ismailia and the Gaza strip.

On receipt of the cable in question, I ordered the General Staff to carry out a detailed inquiry into the actions of our Air Force in this case. The following is the report in full as I received it:

"On 19 May 1960 at 0735 hours an unidentified track appeared on our radar screen moving over the sea from the area of the Suez Canal in the direction of the Gaza strip. When the track crossed the Gaza strip border into Israel air space, two jets were ordered to take off and intercept.

ראש הממשלה
THE PRIME MINISTER

- 2 -

Between El-Arish and Gaza, opposite Khan Yunis, the tracks divided into two separate tracks. One track turned southwards while the second one continued eastwards to the Gaza strip. The track which continued to the Gaza strip was identified as a slower one (an aircraft appears on a radar screen as a greenish moving dot).

As our planes approached Nachal Oz at 500 feet, a U.N. plane of the Dakota type was identified landing in Gaza. Our planes were ordered to leave the area".

The Commander of our Air Force adds that the information on the radar screens leaves no doubt whatsoever that MIG planes escorted the U.N. plane. The disparity in speed between that of MIG planes and of a Dakota does not permit a close escort, and it is therefore very possible that those in the Dakota did not notice the escorting MIGs. When the radar track was identified as a jet track approaching Israel (to a point opposite Khan Yunis) it became necessary to order planes aloft for identification purposes.

The intrusion of Egyptian or Syrian jet planes across our border is a violation of our air space and our Air Force is under orders to be on the alert and to take action against such planes. It is at the same time under strict orders to exercise precaution in regard to U.N. planes.

./3

ראש הממשלה
THE PRIME MINISTER

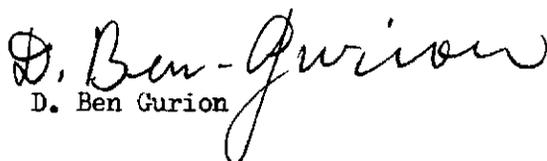
- 3 -

However, it would be preferable, were U.N.E.F. to notify us in advance in regard to planes crossing our borders and in particular when they are escorted by Egyptian jet planes.

Our Air Force had no knowledge whatsoever - and indeed could not have had such knowledge - as to the identity of the occupants of the Dakota plane. Accordingly General Gyani's assertion that "this interception apparently deliberately timed to coincide PM's arrival reception Gaza" is baseless, and indicates a hostile attitude on his part.

As I am convinced that General Gyani reported in this spirit to Mr. Nehru, I shall be most obliged if you will kindly transmit my reply to the Prime Minister of India.

Yours sincerely,


D. Ben Gurion

6/1/60

To: The Secretary-General
Copy of the
paraphrase sent
to Coenayx

R—

1 June 1960

General Gyani reports as follows:

1. There was no UAR Air Force escort for the UNEF Dakota aircraft which was carrying Mr. Nehru on the journey from Cairo to Gaza.
2. In response to inquiries made following receipt of the Secretary-General's message, General Gyani was informed by UAR authorities that four MIG's had been sent to El Arish at about the time the UNEF plane was enroute to Gaza, but UAR authorities confirmed that there were no MIG's at that time between El Arish and Gaza.
3. General Gyani states that he personally saw no MIG in the course of the flight between Ismailia and Gaza, and adds that there were no UNEF reports on MIG's flying over the Gaza Strip.
4. General Gyani states that he employed the phraseology "apparently deliberately timed" for the reasons which follow:
 - a) It was assumed that a large number of people who had assembled at the airstrip early that morning had been seen by the Israelis;
 - b) The date of the Prime Minister's visit had been reported in the international press;
 - c) In the Jerusalem Post of May 2 there had appeared a press report from Israel which in denying the UAR report had claimed that the Israeli planes came up to identify the UNEF aircraft, and did not mention the presence of any MIG's and, therefore, General Gyani had not raised any question concerning movements of UAR aircraft in connection with this incident;
 - d) Following the Dakota's interception by the Israeli planes, during which they were actually observed crossing the ADL, there was a second fly past which took place while Mr. Nehru was taking the salute on the Gaza airstrip and occurred, therefore, some four to five minutes after the UNEF Dakota had landed.
5. The UNEF Air Staff Officer, who was awaiting the arrival of the Dakota bearing Prime Minister Nehru, made the report that the Israeli Mystere aircraft had intercepted and had flown dangerously close to the UNEF Dakota on the basis of direct observation from the ground on the airstrip and his judgment was guided by the safety rules of the Canadian Air Force.
6. There would have been no reason for the Israeli planes to buzz the Dakota while it was making its landing approach, or for the subsequent low overflight of the Israeli aircraft if they were looking for a MIG escort.

7. Israel had not been informed of the UNEF Dakota flight to Gaza since Israel is not normally informed of any UNEF flights when they may briefly fly over ICT in coming in for a landing at the Gaza Strip.

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מדינת ישראל
ISRAEL

נציגות ישראל
באומות חמאהדות
DELEGATION OF ISRAEL
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

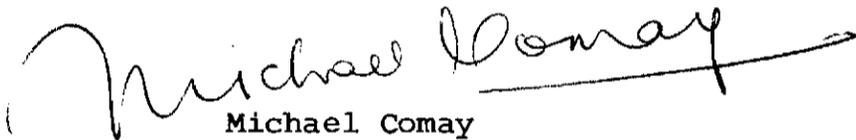
11 EAST 70TH STREET
NEW YORK 21, NEW YORK
—
TRAFALGAR 9-7600

31 May 1960.

Dear Mr. Hammarskjold,

Further to my letter of 21 May regarding the incident involving Mr. Nehru, I enclose a letter to you on this matter from the Prime Minister, Mr. Ben-Gurion.

Yours sincerely,


Michael Comay
Permanent Representative

Mr. Dag Hammarskjold,
The Secretary-General,
The United Nations,
New York.

"Here is my best
to you"

DRAFT

Letter to Mr. Ben-Gurion

Dear Mr. Ben Gurion,

I have received your letter of 27 May 1960. You may wish to see the comments
.... of General Gyani, and I therefore enclose a transcript of them.

You may remember that I personally witnessed a similar occurrence when, a couple of years ago, two Israel planes buzzed a U.N. plane out over the sea with me and General von Horn as passengers. The flight had been notified to the Israel authorities. Our plane was, of course, not escorted. Also in this other case the judgment of the experts was that the Israel planes were dangerously close.

In considering the contradiction between the information given to you and the information which we have and regarding the accuracy of which I cannot have any doubt, I remember a similar contradiction regarding the serious incident of 4 February 1959, of the explanation of which I know that you are fully aware as you admitted in the Knesset — although never to us — that the Israel version was unfounded.

I am of course willing, as you request, to transmit to Prime Minister Nehru a copy of your letter, but, if I were to do so, I would obviously be obliged to send him also General Gyani's report.

ראש הממשלה
THE PRIME MINISTER

Jerusalem, 27th May 1960

Dear Mr. Hammarskjold,

As you asked him to, our representative at the United Nations, Mr. Comay, has transmitted the text of the telegram of 20 May from the United Nations Emergency Force to you, and of your letter to the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Nehru.

According to the terms of the UNEF telegram, the UNEF aircraft entered the air-space of Israel. UNEF saw no necessity to notify us in advance of the flight or of the identity of the passengers in the aircraft. Our radar recorded six Egyptian combat planes escorting the Dakota of the United Nations, and our planes went up towards them. When our planes saw that the Egyptian planes had returned to Sinai, they too returned to their base.

I am surprised and distressed by the unfriendly wording of the UNEF telegram, which says:

"This interception apparently deliberately timed coincide P.M.'s arrival reception Gaza".

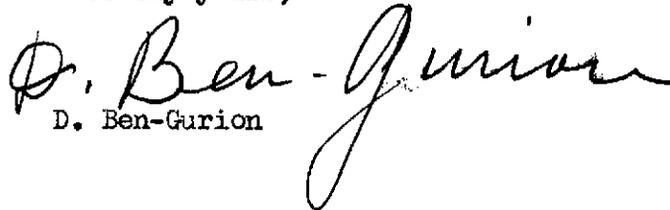
From/.

From what source did the sender know what he was cabling? Why did he not inform you that he came from Sinai with an escort of Egyptian Migs? Why did he not say that our planes returned to their base as soon as they saw that the Egyptian aircraft had returned to Sinai? This irresponsibility on his part has led you to write to the Prime Minister of India, among other things, that "Israel planes may even have exposed you (to) some danger".

No danger from Israel planes ever threatens a United Nations aircraft. There was no attempt to force down the Dakota, and the passengers in it were in no peril whatsoever.

I should be grateful to you if you would communicate this letter of mine to the Prime Minister of India. Our planes went up only and solely to engage the Egyptian Migs, and when they saw those turn back to Sinai, our planes, as I have said, went back too.

Sincerely yours,


D. Ben-Gurion

Mr. Dag Hammarskjold
Secretary General
of the United Nations
New York



מדינת ישראל
ISRAEL

נציגות ישראל
באומות המאוחדות
DELEGATION OF ISRAEL
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11 EAST 70TH STREET
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Personal &
Confidential

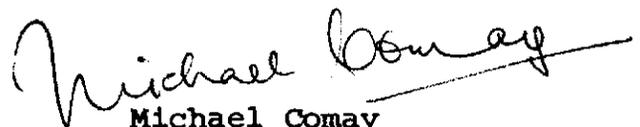
21 May 1960.

Dear Mr. Hammarskjold,

I wish to acknowledge your letter of 20 May 1960, regarding the incident involving Mr. Nehru, and enclosing copies of the telegram from UNEF yesterday and of your letter to Mr. Nehru of the same day. I am immediately cabling to Jerusalem about this.

I regret very much any embarrassment that Mr. Nehru may have been caused. I must, however, refrain from any further comment upon the incident until I get a reply from my Government.

Yours sincerely,


Michael Comay
Permanent Representative

Mr. Dag Hammarskjold,
The Secretary-General,
The United Nations,
New York.

20 May 1960

Dear Mr. Comay,

..... For your information I send you a copy of a letter from
me to Mr. Nehru.

..... I also enclose, for your information, a copy of the of-
ficial report received regarding the incident to which my let-
ter to Mr. Nehru refers. The report speaks for itself and re-
quires no comment from me.

You may wish to bring these documents to the personal
attention of Mr. Ben-Gurion.

Dag Hammarskjöld.

H.E. Mr. Michael Comay,
Permanent Representative to
the United Nations,
Permanent Mission of Israel to
the United Nations,
11 East 70th Street,
New York, N.Y.

20 May 1960

Dear Mr. Nehru,

I have just received the report from UNEF on the incident which occurred on your arrival at Gaza on 19 May.

As has certainly been explained to you, our aircraft on approaching the airstrip in Gaza for landings, must briefly overfly Israel. In this case, our investigation establishes that the crossing of the Armistice Demarcation Line was to a depth of 100 metres or so just northeast of the airstrip. The landing conditions, of course, are well known to the Israel authorities, as landings and take-offs of United Nations aircraft from the Gaza airstrip are very frequent occurrences.

I regret most deeply that on the occasion of your visit this technically necessary crossing led to an interception by Israel planes, which may even have exposed you to some danger. I thus extend to you at once my sincere apologies for any embarrassment which the incident may have caused you; I am happy to note, however, that, given the circumstances, the United Nations personnel share no blame for the occurrence.

I am most happy that you found an occasion to visit the UNEF, and I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to express to you our gratitude for the unfailing cooperation given by the Government of India, together with other governments, and for the splendid service rendered to the Force by all Indians, from General Gyani to every man in the ranks.

Dag Hammarskjöld

H.E. Shri Jawaharlal Nehru,
Prime Minister and Minister for
External Affairs,
New Delhi, India.

COPY OF TELEGRAM RECEIVED FROM UNEF FRIDAY 20 MAY AT 1600:

Quote - At 0600Z 19 May two Israeli Mystere aircraft intercepted and flew dangerously close to UNEF Dakota 666 with Prime Minister Nehru on board while approaching to land at Gaza. During this approach, as you know, our aircraft must overfly Israel.

This interception was apparently deliberately timed to coincide with Prime Minister's arrival and reception at Gaza. Aircraft made two successive flights first flight from northeast to southwest while UN666 on approach to land and second flight from southwest to northeast at low altitude after UN666 had landed.

UNMO investigation shows report that latter flight crossed armistice demarcation line to depth of one hundred metres or so in area just northeast of airstrip. - unquote

INFO COPY

MAY 20 1960

FILE NO.

ACTION

TO

EY/20 F GAZA 123 20 1637Z =

UNATIONS

NEWYORK =

UNEF 542 BUNCHE STOP//AT 0600Z 19 MAY TWO ISRAELI

MYSTERE AIRCRAFT INTERCEPTED AND FLEW DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO UNEF

DAKOTA 666 WITH PRIME MINISTER NEHRU ON BOARD WHILE APPROACHING

TO LAND AT GAZA STOP DURING THIS APPROACH CMA AS YOU KNOW CMA

OUR AIRCRAFT MUST OVERFLY ISRAEL STOP =

P2 =

THIS INTERCEPTION WAS APPARENTLY DELIBERATELY TIMED TO COINCIDE

WITH PRIME MINISTERS ARRIVAL AND RECEPTION AT GAZA STOP AIRCRAFT

MADE TWO SUCCESSIVE FLIGHTS FIRST FLIGHT FROM NNNEEE TO SSSWW

WHILE UN666 ON APPROACH TO LAND AND SECOND FLIGHT FROM SSSWW

TO NNNEEE AT LOW ALTITUDE AFTER UN666 HAD LANDED STOP UNMO =

P3/23 =

INVESTIGATION SHOWS REPORT THAT LATTER FLIGHT CROSSED ADL TO

DEPTH OF ONE HUNDRED METRES OR SO IN AREA JUST NORTHEAST OF

AIRSTRIIP STOP =

COL 542 0600Z 19 666 UN666 UN666 +

Gris. text.

From General Gyani.

No UAR air force escort was detailed for the Dakota bearing P.M. on outward journey to Gaza from Cairo. On further enquiries on receipt of your message I have been informed that four MIG's were despatched to El Arish from Egypt about the same time as Dakota was en route to Gaza, but UAR confirm there were no MIG's between El Arish and Gaza. I personally did not see any MIG between Ismailiya and Gaza, nor were there any UNEF reports on MIG's over Gaza Strip.

My statement "apparently deliberately timed" was made for following reasons:

- a) Date of visit of PM was reported in international press.
- b) Large number of people had gathered close to airstrip early in the morning and presumably seen by Israelis.
- c) Israeli press report in Jerusalem Post of 2 May denying UAR report stated Israel planes flew to identify Dakota and made no mention of MIG's, hence I did not enquire about UAR air movements.
- d) The second flight past subsequent to Dakota's interception by the Israeli planes, during which they actually were observed to have crossed the ADL, was carried out while P.M. was taking the salute which would be four to five minutes after the Dakota had touched down.

The report that the Mystere aircraft intercepted and flew dangerously close to the UNEF Dakota was given to me by my Air Staff Officer who was awaiting the aircraft's arrival and observed it on the ground from the airstrip. His judgment was based on Canadian Air Force safety rules.

If the Israeli planes were looking for a MIG escort there would be no reason for them to fly close to the Dakota while latter approaching to land and for subsequent low overflight.

It is correct that I did not notify Israel of Dakota flight to Gaza as it is not normal to inform them of any UNEF flights when they overfly Israeli controlled territory purely on approach to land.