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Unofficial Notes on Informal Meeting of Representatives of Governments  
supplying Military Observers for the Suez Canal Sector

held at 3 p.m. on 28 July 1969 at U.N. Headquarters

Mr. Urquhart explained that the Secretary-General intended himself to consult with the representatives of the seven countries providing Military Observers in the Suez Canal sector, but was still confined to his home. He had therefore arranged that this informal meeting should be held in the meantime for the purpose of exchanging information and points of view. The Secretary-General had asked that his condolences, which had already been conveyed in writing, should be expressed to the Representative of Sweden on the death of Major Plane.

General situation

The situation in the Suez Canal sector had steadily deteriorated since January 1969. There had been three phases of this deterioration. From January to April there had been increasingly frequent exchanges of small arms fire. From April to July there had been daily exchanges of fire by heavier weapons, and since 20 July there had been intensive air activity, as well as exchanges of fire on the ground. In this situation the dangers to which UNMOs had been exposed had steadily increased although, until 27 July, casualties had been miraculously small, comprising minor injuries to two Observers on 8 and 12 March respectively and more serious injury to a third Observer on 22 April. On 27 July a Swedish Observer had been killed.

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Action taken by the United Nations

(a) Reports to the Security Council. In addition to the daily reports to the Security Council on firing in the Suez Canal sector, the Secretary-General had submitted three special reports in all of which the dangers to which UNMOs were exposed had been an important subject. These reports were S/9171 on 21 April on the critical situation in the Suez Canal sector; S/9188 on 2 May concerning the effectiveness of the U.N. observation operation and measures to increase the security of Observers; and S/9316, dated 5 July, again concerning the increasing ineffectiveness of the cease-fire in the Suez Canal sector. In the latter report the Secretary-General had appealed to all parties to cease immediately all offensive military actions and had also appealed to the Members of the Security Council, individually and collectively, and to all Members of the United Nations to exert all influence possible to make the cease-fire effective.

(b) Protests to the parties. Lt. General Bull has addressed protests to the parties on each separate incident of firing at U.N. personnel and installations. The Secretary-General has also raised this matter on several occasions with the Permanent Representatives of the parties.

Such incidents fall into the following categories:

- (i) firing on or near OPs
- (ii) firing on or near personnel either in OPs or on other duties as, for example, repairing radio antennae
- (iii) firing on U.N. vehicles
- (iv) breaking local cease-fire arrangements made for specific purposes as, for example, removal of bodies or building of shelters
- (v) encroachments on OPs

(c) Efforts to improve the safety and protection of UNMOs.

- Construction of shelters for OPs. Good progress had been made on the west side of the Canal. On the east side, the Kantara Control Centre had been moved back into the desert, but the construction of OP shelters had been delayed mainly because of daily firing. It was intended to begin the construction of the shelter for OP Orange on 28 July.

- Safety perimeters and boats for evacuation purposes.

Discussions were initiated by General Bull with the parties on these matters in early May but so far no results had been achieved.

(d) Temporary closing of certain OPs. Lt. General Bull could in cases of emergency suspend operation of an OP temporarily, especially if the OP was not absolutely essential to the observation operation, on the understanding that such OPs would be re-manned as soon as the situation improved. Such limited emergency suspensions were notified to the Security Council. For example, at the present time General Bull had decided to suspend temporarily OPs Mike, Red and Kilo. Closing down of OPs on a larger scale would have to be notified to the Security Council in advance and, as stated in the Secretary-General's report of 5 July, such proposals would be made to the Security Council after consultation with the seven governments.

As soon as the requisite information was available a special report on the death of Major Plane would be issued.

The Representative of Chile (Ambassador José Pinera) expressed his condolences to the Representative of Sweden on the death of Major Plane. The Representative said that his Government had no intention of withdrawing the Chilean Observers. His Government supported fully the Secretary-General's report of 5 July to the Security Council and the efforts which the Secretary-General and Lt. General Bull were making to improve the conditions in which the Observers were working. He hoped that further steps would be taken to re-establish and reinforce the cease-fire in the Canal sector. He considered it correct that some OPs should temporarily be closed and that efforts to prevent encroachments on OPs should be pursued. Future developments would determine if further and more drastic measures were required. The group of seven governments had met previously at his suggestion, and, after further consultations, the desirability of suggesting a Security Council meeting on the conditions of the Observers might be considered.

The Representative of Sweden (Mr. Torsten Orn) said that his Government was naturally concerned at recent developments but did not contemplate withdrawing the Swedish Observers. This was a matter on which the Secretary-General and the Chief of Staff should make recommendations to the Security Council. His Government would like a full report on methods of improving the safety of Observers, including recommendations for further action. He felt it would also be wise at the present juncture for the Secretary-General once again to impress on the parties that the present

situation was deplorable and that it was essential both that the cease-fire be respected and that greater security for the Observers should be provided.

The Representative of Finland (Mr. Ilkka Pastinen) expressed his condolences to the Representative of Sweden on the death of Major Plane. He expressed full support for the Secretary-General's report of 5 July. The Permanent Representative of Finland had, in fact, written a letter to the President of the Security Council in May on the subject of the conditions under which the Observers were operating. He agreed with the approach suggested by the Representative of Sweden.

The Representative of Ireland (Mr. Patrick F. Power) expressed his condolences to the Representative of Sweden on the death of Major Plane. He also concurred with the general approach taken by the previous speakers and expressed his Government's particular concern about the improvement of shelters and of methods of evacuating casualties.

The Representative of Argentina (Mr. Santos Nestor Martinez), after expressing his condolences to the Representative of Sweden, said that there was no question of his Government withdrawing its Observers. His Government would support all the measures which the Secretary-General and General Bull were taking and would like advice as to any way in which it could support these efforts. He, too, expressed interest in a full report on measures to increase the security of Observers.

The Representative of France (M. Marcel Bouquin) expressed his condolences to the Representative of Sweden on the death of Major Plane. The Representative also stated the full support of his Government for the Secretary-General's report of 5 July. His Government felt that if it was impossible for the Observers to observe the cease-fire or if the cease-fire was no longer maintained the mission of the Observers was unrealizable and could not be justified. The justification for the Observers' mission had to be determined by the Secretary-General in the light of the existing situation and the possibility of the Observers to perform their duties. The Secretary-General would doubtless submit to the Security Council in due time a report on his findings.

The Representative of Austria (Mr. Wolfgang Wolte) after expressing his condolences to the Representative of Sweden, said that the Austrian Government was not contemplating the withdrawal of the Austrian Observers but hoped that all possible measures would be taken for their safety. He also approved the suggestion of getting as full a report as possible on further measures for the protection of the Observers although, obviously, the first and most important step was to persuade the parties to observe the cease-fire.

The Representative of Chile expressed strong support for the proposals of the Representative of Sweden for all measures which could be taken to try to ensure that the death of Major Plane had not been in vain. This would be the best homage that could be paid to his memory and to his family. The Representative of Chile agreed that the Secretary-General had to determine whether the situation in the Suez Canal sector justified the continuing risks which the Observers were exposed to. He looked forward to consultations with the Secretary-General in the near future.

Mr. Urquhart said that, while a detailed report on Major Plane's death would be made available as soon as possible, and hopefully within the next two days, a report on methods to improve the safety of Observers might take a little longer.

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SPECIAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE DEATH OF A  
UNITED NATIONS MILITARY OBSERVER ON 27 JULY 1969 IN THE  
SUEZ CANAL SECTOR

Report on the investigation into the death of Major Plane

1. In a preliminary report dated 27 July 1969 which I immediately conveyed to the Security Council (S/7930/Add.284), the Chief of Staff of UNTSO, Lt. General Odd Bull, informed me that a United Nations Military Observer, Major B.R. Plane of the Swedish Army, was killed by artillery fire when on duty at OP Mike (MR 7657-8037) on the western bank of the Suez Canal at 1135 hours GMT on the same day. General Bull also indicated that an investigation was in progress and that further details would be reported later.

2. I have now received from General Bull his report on the investigation into the death of Major Plane. This report, which was prepared by a board of investigation sent from UNTSO headquarters and was dated 30 July, reads as follows:

"1. Major B.R. Plane, Swedish Army, was on duty with Lt.-Colonel J.T. Mela, Chilean Army, at OP Mike, on the western side of the Suez Canal at Port Ibrahim located approximately three kilometres south of the city of Suez.

"2. Both officers had been on duty at this OP site since 25 July. During this period there had been intense air and ground activity which had made it necessary for them to take cover in the living quarters on the second floor of the OP building and, less often, in the shelter on the ground floor on a number of occasions, and to emerge again during lulls in the firing to return to the observation platform to resume their duties and forward reports.

"3. OP Mike, that is the OP proper, is situated on the top of a seven-storey building and affords excellent observation in the Port Tawfiq-Suez area. As such, it is very exposed; in the nearby vicinity there are a UAR artillery directional post and mortar positions, and during firing incidents UAR vehicles and tanks move in the near vicinity of the OP to firing positions. There are, however, no UAR artillery emplacements in this area.

"4. On 25 July, at 1059 GMT, the UNMOs (United Nations Military Observers) were on the observation platform when three aircraft attacked targets in the nearby vicinity of OP Mike with cannon fire and bombs. One bomb exploded twenty-five metres from the OP building which caused damage to the building, and fragmentation struck close to the UNMOs on the platform. The 26th of July was marked by frequent exchanges of heavy weapons fire and air attacks by Israel Air Force. During the evening hours of 26 July at 2206 GMT the northeastern side of the OP building was struck by an artillery shell. This shell created a one and a half metre hole in the exterior wall of the building, and the impact of this shell was approximately five metres from the UNMOs' living quarters. The above incidents were reported to the Israel authorities. During the morning of 27 July there were four occasions of UAR anti-aircraft fire at an Israel reconnaissance plane flying over the east side of the Canal. At 1101 GMT the UNMOs at OP Mike reported Israel artillery fire and shortly thereafter proceeded to the living quarters on the second floor of the OP building, which was often used as a supplementary OP since it affords some observation through a window and has a radio installed which can be used for reporting. Lt.-Colonel Mela stated that both he and Major Plane considered that they were safer there than in the shelter on the ground floor as the firing the evening before had made a large hole in the exterior wall, past which they must proceed to go to the shelter on the ground floor. At approximately 1135 GMT there was a lull in the Israel firing and Major Plane and Lt.-Colonel Mela decided to go to the window to see what damage had been caused by the recent firing. It should be noted that the window extends almost the full width of the room, the window-sill being at waist level. However, inside the room a brick blast wall had been built one foot back from the window to afford protection to those in the room. This blast wall is ten feet high and extends the full width of the window with a space of one foot between the blast wall and the room's interior wall which enables a man to go around the blast wall to get to the window for observation. Lt.-Colonel Mela stated that, having both agreed that they should have a look out the window, Major Plane moved towards it in a crouched position with Lt.-Colonel Mela one metre behind him. Both observers were wearing protective body armour vests and were also wearing steel helmets with chin strap fastened. As they moved around the end of the brick blast wall and towards the window an artillery shell landed in the street directly outside the window and exploded. Major Plane fell backwards fatally injured, having been hit by a piece of shrapnel. He apparently died instantaneously. X-rays of the body indicate that the shrapnel hit on the right side of the neck near the clavicle, near the collar seam of the body armour vest, breaking his collar-bone and travelling into the body cavity, causing fatal injuries. The doctors' diagnosis as to cause of death is 'acute intrathoracic haemorrhage'.

"5. The time of death was approximately 1135 GMT. Israel authorities were notified of Major Plane's death at 1140 GMT and that fire in the area continued. Sporadic artillery fire by Israel forces continued until 1157 GMT and between 1201 GMT and 1222 GMT. Mortar fire by UAR forces was reported between 1113 GMT and 1118 GMT.

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"6. In the opinion of the board, Major Plane died in the course of duty as the result of being hit by a fragment from an artillery shell which exploded in the street outside the OP. From the evidence presented to the board and from its own independent inquiries, the board concludes that the artillery shell in question came from a northeasterly direction from an area occupied by Israel forces."

Observations by the Secretary-General

3. The tragic death on 27 July 1969, at his post on the Suez Canal, of Major Plane gives a grim reality to the fears which all who are aware of the situation in the Suez Canal sector have felt for many months. That the United Nations Military Observers have carried on under extremely difficult and dangerous conditions since last March is the highest tribute to their courage and devotion. That there were, until 27 July, no fatal casualties among them, and only three wounded, is something of a miracle. I myself have drawn attention to the steadily deteriorating conditions in which the UNMOs have carried out their duties and to the increasing danger to which they have been exposed in three special reports to the Security Council (S/9171 of 21 April 1969, S/9188 of 2 May 1969 and S/9316 of 5 July 1969). The daily reports to the Security Council on firing in the Suez Canal sector also frequently mention firing of one kind or another on the UNMOs, their posts, vehicles and equipment. From 1 June to 29 July 1969, there were seventy-four instances of firing at or near United Nations posts or personnel by United Arab Republic forces and fifteen such instances of firing by Israel forces. The Chief of Staff of UNISO has protested each and every such incident to the parties concerned. These protests would appear to have been of little avail. The Chief of Staff has also made persistent efforts to improve by various means the safety of the UNMOs. So far, however, these measures have not fully achieved the desired result.

4. The loss of a United Nations Military Observer is a particular tragedy. These officers are made available by their Governments and come to the Middle East to serve no personal or national interest. They are unarmed and have no military apparatus or organization to protect them. In fact, their sole protection is their recognized United Nations status. Their job is to observe, to report the truth as far as they can establish it, and to do what they can

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to maintain or restore the cease-fire. They serve only the common interest in peace which all men, no matter what their differences, must ultimately have. They serve the United Nations and in particular the Security Council. We have paid tribute to them, in the Middle East or wherever else they may serve the United Nations, often enough, and rightly so. I feel strongly, however, that at the present juncture praise, admiration and sympathy are not enough. We must go further in trying to ensure that these devoted officers have at least the minimum conditions required to carry out their functions effectively and without an unjustifiable measure of danger.

5. The tragedy of 27 July, reported in detail above, is a dramatic symptom of the breakdown of the cease-fire called for by the Security Council in the Suez Canal sector. This breakdown is a development of the utmost seriousness for the parties themselves, for the United Nations as a whole, for the Security Council, and for all those Governments, peoples and individuals who are working for, and longing for, a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. It could also prove to be of the utmost seriousness for the peace of the world. The basis for the United Nations observation operation in the Suez Canal sector is the unanimous call for a cease-fire made by the Security Council in June 1967 and the acceptance by the parties of that call. This acceptance, in deed as well as in word, is the only basis upon which the observation operation can function effectively or upon which such an operation can for long be justified. This basis of acceptance can only be provided by the parties themselves, regardless of their relations with each other. During the recent escalation of firing in the Suez Canal sector, each of the parties has accused the other of flouting the decisions of the Security Council. Without passing judgement on their respective positions, I can only note that both parties, whatever their reasons may be, have been violating the cease-fire, with the result that the situation in the Suez Canal sector has greatly deteriorated and a United Nations Military Observer has died.

6. There is a wider implication of the current situation in the Suez Canal to which I feel obliged to draw attention. United Nations observation operations have been painstakingly developed over the last twenty years, mainly under the aegis of the Security Council, as a practical instrument for peace in troubled

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areas and as a most useful adjunct to the other efforts which are constantly made, within the framework of the United Nations, to maintain the peace and to find acceptable and peaceful solutions to conflict. It has been found to be a general rule that cease-fires are not self-executing and that some impartial supervision is essential if a cease-fire is to be effective. These United Nations observation operations have, time and again, proved their value in critical situations, and there can be little doubt that they will prove their value again and again in the future. United Nations Military Observers must, however, receive from the parties most intimately concerned the necessary co-operation and respect for their status as impartial international observers. If a trend were to develop toward a disregard and disrespect for the status, functioning and reasonable safety of United Nations Military Observers, there can be no question that lasting damage might be done to this valuable instrument for peace.

7. In the light of all the circumstances mentioned above, I express to the Security Council my earnest hope that it is still not too late for events to take a new turn in the Suez Canal sector and in the Middle East in general. I therefore reiterate my appeal to the parties themselves to respect both the cease-fire and the United Nations Military Observers who supervise it, and at the same time to respond positively and constructively to the efforts that are now being made, within the framework of the United Nations, to reach a peaceful settlement. I appeal also once again to the members of the Security Council, both individually and collectively, to do all within their power to influence events in a new and constructive direction. The Security Council has taken decisions regarding the establishment of peace and justice in the Middle East which are far wider in scope than its resolutions on the cease-fire. It is increasingly evident that the absence of an early prospect of the implementation of its resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967 is one of the factors which tends to increase the incidence of cease-fire violations not only in the Suez Canal sector but also in other sectors in the Middle East.

8. I also appeal to the members of the Security Council, both individually and collectively, to consider what more can be done to ensure that decent and proper conditions are afforded to the United Nations Military Observers who serve the

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United Nations in the Suez Canal sector. A marked improvement in these conditions is essential both for the short-term and the long-term reasons which I have mentioned. Such an improvement would, it seems to me, be the most meaningful tribute that could be paid to the memory of Major Plane.

9. Finally, I wish to pay my personal tribute to the memory of Major Plane and to his fellow Observers who remain at their posts on the Canal. I also express to the Governments who have provided these Observers my appreciation for their understanding and steadfast co-operation in making possible, even under the present conditions, the continuation of the observation operation in the Suez Canal sector. After further consultation with them, and in the light of future developments in the area, I shall make further recommendations as necessary to the Security Council.

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Secretary-General's meeting with representatives of the  
seven governments providing Observers in  
the Suez Canal sector

To be held on Friday, 1 August 1969 at 4 p.m.  
in the Secretary-General's Conf.Room

The following have been asked to attend:

- Argentina (Chargé d'Affaires)
- Austria ( Mr. Wolte)
- Chile (Amb. Piñera)
- Finland (Mr. Pastinen)
- France (Mr. Chayet or Mr. Bouquin)
- Ireland (Mr. Power and Mr. Connolly)
- Sweden (Mr. Orn)

Secretariat:

- Mr. Urquhart
- Mr. Liu
- Col. Koho
- Mr. Lansky
- (Mr. Vaughan is away)

1 August 1969

Notes for the Secretary-General's meeting  
with seven countries providing Observers  
in the Suez Canal sector - 4 p.m. Friday,  
1 August 1969

1. Introductory remarks

Refer to the first working meeting on Monday of this week. Sorry could not be there.

Draw attention to the special report on the death of Major Plane and Secretary-General's observations contained therein (S/9368). This report contains a new appeal to the parties as well as to the members of the Security Council.

2. Safety of Observers

General Bull has been asked for a further detailed report and recommendations on measures to be taken to improve the conditions in which the Observers are working. He has already sent some ideas and others have been worked out here.

Of course, the only really effective measure for this purpose would be the observance of the cease-fire by the parties, and efforts will continue to bring the parties back to the observance of the cease-fire. It would be something if it were possible to de-escalate the level of the firing and to stop the air attacks which are a new and particularly dangerous element in the situation.

Failing a restoration of the cease-fire, however, efforts should be made to ensure the safety of observers to all extent possible. Efforts could be made in the following fields:

(a) Encroachment and safe perimeters

As can be seen from the special report on the death of Major Plane, encroachment of United Nations observation posts by the armed forces of the parties is a serious element of danger to the observers. The problem is especially bad on the west side of the Canal. At present, all OPs on the west side of the Canal have military positions in very

close proximity to them. On the east side, the closest military position to an OP is approximately 200 to 300 metres.

In this connexion, General Bull has proposed that a safe perimeter be provided for each OP. This perimeter would be clearly marked and enclosed with barbed wire.

General Bull began discussions with the parties on his proposal for the establishment of safe perimeters in May, but so far has not achieved the desired result. It is intended that he should raise this matter again. In this connexion, it may be necessary for him to give notice that those OPs which are still heavily encroached upon will be suspended if the encroachments on them are not removed within a stated time. It should be realized, however, that this may prove to be a self-defeating ultimatum.

In addition to the establishment of safe perimeters, General Bull believes that assurances must be obtained from the parties that they would not encroach upon the OP sites at any time. While safe perimeters would preclude encroachments, the parties must also agree that their forces respect the UN safe perimeters, even during exchanges of fire.

(b) Improvement of shelters

Here, the problem concerns mainly the east side of the Canal. On the west side of the Canal, only two OPs require improved shelters (OPs Lima and Kilo). On the east side, most shelters are of lighter construction and require improvement. It should be observed that delay in the construction of shelters on the east side has been mainly due to firings in the area.

General Bull decided recently to close temporarily two OPs pending construction of adequate shelters (OP Red on the east side of the Canal and OP Kilo on the west side).

A new effort is being made to get the shelters completed, especially on the east side of the Canal. The main difficulty here is that constant firing holds up the work. Here again it may be necessary to give a deadline, after which OPs without adequate shelters will have to be withdrawn. Here again there is a risk of defeating our own purposes. At all events,

General Bull will again consider the necessity of closing down OPs which continue to be especially dangerous.

(c) Medical Assistance and evacuation

UNTSO's experience with the evacuation of injured personnel so far has not been satisfactory. General Bull considers that assurance should be obtained from both parties that they have detailed plans for the evacuation of wounded UN personnel from each OP on their side, should this become necessary.

General Bull also considers that the use of a boat under UN control in the Suez Canal is necessary. Such a boat would not only provide medical evacuation if necessary, but would also provide a method of relieving the various OPs if relief could not be achieved by other means.

General Bull will approach the parties shortly to discuss the above matters. Further efforts will also be made to improve medical support. This again is a very difficult problem, especially on the west side. Dr. Irwin, the Acting Medical Director of the United Nations, was at UNTSO to look into these problems two months ago, and some measures have already been taken. For example, a second medical assistant has been requested from Austria and will be provided in the near future.

(d) Firing at UN personnel and installations

General Bull has pointed out that adequate bunkers and safe perimeters would be of no avail should the UNMOs be fired upon by the parties. This has been a particularly serious problem in view of sniper fire from the west side of the Canal inclined towards the east side.

General Bull feels that this type of firing could be prevented by "positive command action" since there was no or very little such firing before February of this year.

Of course, every possible effort will be made with the authorities of both parties to prevent firing at UN personnel and installations.

3. Justification for continuing the observation operation in the Suez Canal sector

This is a very delicate question. At what point does the disregard of the cease-fire by the parties mean that the maintenance of the observation operation is no longer justified?

On the one hand, the observers in the Suez Canal sector, even in present conditions, do fulfill a useful function. They are the only objective source of information on what happens in the sector. They can still, to some extent, prevent the escalation of incidents by arranging cease-fires. They are one of the only means of communication between the parties and are invaluable in arranging such matters as exchanges of prisoners of war, hand-over of bodies, etc. The United Nations presence in the Suez Canal sector is undoubtedly still a deterrent to further escalation of hostilities. Thus the withdrawal of the observers would be a drastic step which should be taken only after the most serious consideration.

On the other hand, there is no denying that the morale of the observers has suffered from recent events, and they rightly may ask why they are required to continue to observe the cease-fire under their old terms of reference although the situation has completely changed and there is virtually no cease-fire.

This, as I said, is a very difficult and important question to which there is no easy answer. That is the reason for the new appeals made in my special report. I believe that we must, for a short time at any rate, await what results, if any, these appeals have. If there is no improvement in the situation, we should then consider what further steps must be taken.