

DISENGAGEMENT BETWEEN SYRIA AND ISRAEL

A/ 24

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"Both Sides Share A Common Interest" said

Golda Meir, former Prime Minister of Israel

"On May 29, the Government of Israel decided to sign the separation-of-forces agreement with Syria, attained through the good offices of Dr. Kissinger, the U.S. Secretary of State...

The receipt of the names of the Israeli prisoners in Syria made it possible for us to undertake the formulation of our ideas on a disengagement agreement. At the end of March,\*Defence Minister Moshe Dayan went to Washington and presented our general ideas to the Secretary of State.

In the second week of April the military representative of Syria, General Shihabi, the director of intelligence, went to Washington and submitted the Syrian ideas on disengagement to Secretary of State Kissinger. But the detailed and practical negotiations began only on May 2, when the Secretary of State came to Israel and on the following day, went to Damascus.

Staying on Mt. Hermon

Following are the contents of the agreement:

- 1) A mutual commitment to scrupulously observe the ceasefire on land, at sea and in the air, and to refrain from all military actions.
- 2) Separation of the forces by an area of separation, within which no military forces will be stationed. UN units will be stationed in this zone.
- 3) The principal military forces will be separated from each other on both sides of the buffer zone. An area shall be determined on each side within which a thinning-out of forces and arms will be mandatory. Long-range artillery and missiles will be stationed at an additional distance away.
- 4) The UN will supervise the agreement in the areas of separation and limitation of forces. The UN force will be recruited from States who are not permanent members of the Security Council.
- 5) Israel will evacuate the area of the enclave which was captured in the Yom Kippur War.
- 6) There will be Syrian civilian administration in the area of separation.
- 7) Prisoners of war will be exchanged after signature, and prior to the stages of implementation.
- 8) Bodies of the dead will be returned.
- 9) Residents who left their villages in the salient and in the area of separation will be permitted to return.

In the territory held by Israel, the separation line for most of its length will coincide with the violet line, except for the town of Kuneitra and the

\* Now replaced by Shimon Peres



Rafid junction. The town will be located inside the UN area of separation, and inhabitants and civilian Syrian administration will be permitted to return.

The Hermon positions captured in October 1973 which are located within the area of separation will come under the control of UN units. The Hermon position held by us since 1967 remains in our hands.

The military line which for the most part is identical with the line which preceded the Yom Kippur War remains valid. This line ensures the defence of the Golan Heights.

It is our belief that both sides share a common interest in achieving a separation-of-forces agreement, and we hope that there will be a lessening of tension on the northern front which will even make it possible to reduce IDF forces in that area.

In accordance with the agreement, within 24 hours of the signature at Geneva all the wounded prisoners-of-war held by both sides will be repatriated, and on the morrow of the day when the military working group concludes its assignment, that is to say, in a week's time--the remaining prisoners-of-war will be returned.

#### Diplomacy and the Syrians

It took only three days of businesslike contacts between Syrian and Israeli officers at Geneva for the disengagement agreement, worked out by Dr. Henry Kissinger in a month of hectic negotiation, to be ready for the final signatures.

Senior military officers of the two countries said in a communique released after a two hour 45 minute meeting--their third in successive days--that they had "completed work on all basic documents" on the separation of forces. The delegations, headed by Israel's Major General Herzl Shafir and Syria's Brigadier Adnan Tayara, met for the final signing on Tuesday morning.

These maps and documents spell out in detail the brief agreement announced by an excited President Nixon and by the Governments in Damascus and Jerusalem.

Kissinger said he thought the agreement presents "the beginning of hope that the desire for peace (on both sides of the border) is taking on ever more tangible form." Referring specifically to Israel, he said: "No gift can be greater than the possibility of lasting peace for this country and people who have suffered so much."

Next day, the Knesset voted Israel's approval by a handsome 76 votes to 36, with six abstentions. Even a short-lived rowdy demonstration in the gallery did not disturb the Knesset's sober mood. The Government's supporters showed no euphoria and the Opposition avoided hysteria, with each side voicing the unspoken hopes and fears of the other.



Likud leader Menachem Begin argued that if Syrian shelling was the compelling factor in Israel's withdrawal, nothing would prevent the Arabs from applying the same tactics next time.

But it was also clear that a chance had to be taken to stop hostilities and to experiment with the possibilities of negotiations. The general consensus was that a respite had been achieved which would last at least until the autumn.

At the UN Security Council, only China and Iraq failed to back the creation of the UN observer force. However, the first troops took up positions on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights front. A 29-man Austrian reconnaissance team were the advance guard of a force of about 1,240 men.

They will police a buffer zone stretching along both sides of the pre-Yom Kippur ceasefire line. It is considerably narrower than that dividing the Israeli and Egyptian armies in the south. At its widest point, the buffer area extends about four miles into the salient occupied by Israel last October. At its narrowest it is a little over a mile wide.

Restrictions: The zone embraces the whole of what is left of Kuneitra but not the three strategic hills over-looking it. It is flanked by three strips on either side in which the strength and armament of Israeli and Syrian forces are restricted. In the first, six miles wide, each side can keep up to 6,000 soldiers, 75 tanks and 36 guns. Next comes a slightly wider zone in which long-range artillery, and ground to ground missiles are banned, but admitting up to 450 tanks.

In the third zone, about three miles wide, it is forbidden to station anti-aircraft missiles. But both countries' airforces are permitted "to operate up to their respective lines without interference from the other side."

#### Stopping the Terrorists

In the first paragraph of the agreement, Syria and Israel explicitly undertake to observe scrupulously the ceasefire on land, at sea and air and to refrain from all military actions against each other--from the time of the signing of the agreement.

The Israel Government attaches supreme importance not only to the prevention of offensive military actions but also to the absolute cessation of raids and penetrations from Syrian territory for the purpose of sabotage and assault. It should be noted that terrorist activity not only causes killing and bloodshed but may also lead to developments which do not remain within the bounds of attacks and reprisals alone.

Terrorist activity may bring about a dangerous escalation. The aims of terrorist activity are not only to cause bloodshed. They also have a purpose which is principally political: to delay any positive development in Arab-Israeli relations, to interfere with any discussions or agreement. I have already said in the Knesset that the atrocities in Kiryat Shmona and Ma'alot were also



intended to sabotage the disengagement agreement with Syria before it was achieved.

As for the prevention of terrorist activities, the United States has informed us of its position on the first paragraph of the agreement, and this is: *"Raids by armed groups or individuals across the demarcation line are contrary to the ceasefire. Israel, in the exercise of its right of self-defence, may act to prevent such actions by all available means. The United States will not consider such actions by Israel as violations of the ceasefire, and will support them politically."*

I assume that the United States would not have made such a declaration to us had it not had a solid foundation for doing so...

The Government will give the Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee additional information on the prevention of terrorist activities, as on other subjects.

#### Introducing UNDOF

In the document which we are going to sign, it is stated: "This agreement is not a peace agreement. It constitutes a step towards a just and lasting peace." The agreement is an open document which is being published for public knowledge. We have not undertaken any secret obligations on territorial or on any other subjects.

On everything concerned with fixing the agreed separation line, we have acted on the constant advice of the Chief of Staff, Lt.-General Mordechai Gur. We have taken care to safeguard the military line as well as the security of all our settlements on the Golan Heights and their continued strengthening, consolidation and development.

The Syrian assault in October 1973 forced us to fight back, to advance into the interior of Syria and to reach the vicinity of Damascus. Israel had no interest in permanently occupying her military positions in the enclave. More than once we have made it clear that our presence there is only temporary. In accordance with the agreement we will evacuate the enclave. In this the Syrians are making a great gain, thanks to our desire for peace and the continuation of our efforts to lay a foundation for the way to peace.

The agreement constitutes a great opportunity. The signature and scrupulous observance of the agreement create a mutual possibility for bringing about a positive change of great value in relations between Israel and Syria.

As is known, the Israel-Syria disengagement agreement resembles the Israel-Egypt disengagement agreement. But there is also a difference. In Sinai there is a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), while on the Golan Heights a special force has been created which will be called the United Nations Disengagement Force (UNDOF).

Although the subject has not yet been discussed in the Security Council, it is



clear from the agreement between us and Syria that the UN units posted on the Golan Heights will have substantial authority. They have been charged with effective duties for maintaining the ceasefire, and supervising the limitations and the area of disengagement. The force will be mobile and will number 1,250 men armed for self-defence. The UN units will carry out inspections and report their findings to the parties. The force will mark on the ground the boundaries agreed upon. The number of its men will remain stable.

The disengagement agreement on the Egyptian front prevented the resumption of a war which we did not want, despite our military advantage. I am pleased to note that the disengagement agreement with Egypt is being properly observed. Recently, since the agreement, we have heard the rulers of Egypt say that they are interested in development and rehabilitation, especially in the region of the Suez Canal. And just as we must take care not to place credence in illusory statements which have no basis in fact, so, too, must we pay attention to genuine encouraging signs.

In any case, we would like the same process to develop on the northern border as well.

Furthermore, the disengagement of forces agreement between ourselves and Syria is likely to strengthen the agreement with Egypt, for if the situation on the northern border had deteriorated, this could have adversely affected the southern border as well. Stabilisation of the ceasefire on the Syrian border, and the positive developments that may follow, improve the prospects of a general relaxation of tension on our region. and if this hope proves not to be illusory, the prospects of a dialogue towards the attainment of peace will also be improved.

When I made a statement to the Knesset on the separation of forces with Egypt I said, amongst other things, that "The alternative to this agreement is nothing but the renewal of war." I went on to say that "I have no doubts as to the strength of the Israel Defence Forces. Had warfare been resumed, the IDF would have overcome the aggressor. But responsible and sober judgment requires us to prefer a different line of development."

These words, which were correct when applied to the Egyptian sector, are all the more applicable where the Syrian sector is concerned. I have no doubt as to the strength of the IDF and their ability to defeat the Syrian army in war. We aspire to avert a war even though we know beyond the shadow of a doubt that any war forced upon us will end in our victory. What our two countries need is to embark upon the road of peace, and it is this recognition which has guided us in the negotiations. The agreement is the fruit of our confidence in the strength of the IDF, and the desire to guide developments in the right direction, as far as this is possible.

#### Firm Hold On Golan

In our decision in favour of a separation-of-forces agreement with Syria, there is also a response to the aims and needs of nations friendly to Israel and



which are particularly interested in stability and pacification in our region. We are alert to every manifestation of the will to reinforce peace in our region and we are especially sensitive against any tendency evinced by any country whatsoever to achieve stability at the price of sacrificing vital Israeli interest--as has already been the case, to our regret, in the past.

We do not accept a "justice" which means the denial of Israel's rights and needs. We do not have to acquiesce in the ignoring of our rights and the appeasement of our enemies for selfish reasons. On the other hand, we welcome every meeting and community of interests between ourselves and other peoples and countries, as has been shown in regard to the separation of forces and stabilisation of the ceasefire.

And we deeply appreciate the achievement of a cessation of fighting and the beginning of progress towards peace, and for the sake of this goal we preferred to agree to give up the military advantages of our hold in the Syrian enclave.

Our hold on the Golan Heights remains firm. Our consent does not deprive us of the basic conditions for self-defence and for defeating the aggressors should they violate their obligation and renew the war against us.

#### Israel's Inner Strength

Israel's stability and permanence depend first and foremost on her own strength and unity, her creative spirit and her covenant with Diaspora Jewry.

Israel's capacity to endure trials, stresses and wars depends primarily on her inner strength, on the readiness of all Israeli citizens, especially the younger generation, to shoulder the burden and face danger in defence of the country.

Israel, however, needs and deserves assistance. We have been in a state of siege for 26 years and we have had to make every effort to win understanding and obtain the generous assistance of allies. This vital interest of Israel's must necessarily influence our considerations and our actions.

I will not deny that in our decisions on the question of the disengagement of forces we also took account of the advice and the policy of the United States, which has shown a fruitful political activity in the direction of achieving tranquillity and peace in our region. This policy of the United States goes hand in hand with the needs of the peoples in the region.

The deterrent power of the United States made itself felt during the Yom Kippur War, and its services contributed greatly to the achievement of a separation of forces on the Egyptian front and, now, on the Syrian front.

The phenomenal effort of the Secretary of State, who did not spare himself and spent days and nights working for the relaxation of tensions and the disengagement of forces, merits great praise.

When I spoke in the Knesset on January 22, I said: 'The growth of Israel's



strength has been greatly assisted by this policy, and I have every reason to believe that the United States will continue to be alert to Israel's security requirements maintaining a continuously positive approach.' Now, during the period that Dr. Kissinger has spent in our region, we have held discussions with him on various matters vital to our two countries, and I can say with more assurance that not only have my words in January not been disproved, but the consistent aid of the United States to Israel has been assured for the future by the President of the United States."

(First published in Jewish Observer and Middle East Review, 7.7.74)