

**STATE DEPARTMENT (Continued)**

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- B. Israel, Prospects of Territorial Expansion by [earlier expansionist aspirations have given way to acceptance of the status quo; expansionist elements contend that Israel cannot prosper within its present borders, but international agreements and dependence on foreign economic aid limit Israel's ability to move against its neighbors. Effects of the unlimited immigration policy, relations with the Arab states, truces and armistice agreements, and attitudes of the UK, US, and USSR are analyzed]. Office of Intelligence Research, Report No. 5218. Jan. 12, 1951. 17 p. SECRET. Declassified Sept. 22, 1978.
- C. [Israel] Political Implications of Syrian and Israeli Acceptance of Cease-Fire at Lake Hulah [UNTSO called for Israel to relocate the Lake Hulah drainage ditch but ruled that Israel could work in the demilitarized zone on non-Arab land. Israel accepted the truce conditions because they would add to legal precedents allowing Israel to resume work on the diversion of the Jordan River. Syria's acceptance was probably advised by Egypt and may reflect a lack of awareness of the implications of the truce]. Office of Intelligence Research and Analysis, Division of Research and Analysis for Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Report No. 7703. Apr. 14, 1958. 4 p. SECRET. Declassified Dec. 3, 1978.
- D. Israel's Manufacture and Export of Arms and Munitions [Israel is the largest and most efficient arms and ammunition producer in the Near East; the range of products has been expanded to include heavier weapons and ammunition; the munitions industry manufactures arms of foreign design for export, adapts foreign designs for the Israel Defense Force, and sometimes produces weapon innovations of Israeli design. Manufacturing rights obtained abroad, munition plants, importance of exports, and training of foreign military are subjects of discussion]. Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Report No. 8456. Apr. 25, 1961. 10 p. App: (A) Arms Plants [in Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem areas]. 4 p.; (B) Arms and Ammunition Production and Capacity. 4 p.; (C) Key Personnel Connected with Munitions. 3 p. SECRET. NO FORN. Declassified Feb. 26, 1979.
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POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SYRIAN AND ISRAELI ACCEPTANCE  
OF CEASE-FIRE AT LAKE HULAH

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Abstract

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The demilitarized zone at the southeastern end of Lake Hulah, the scene of friction between Israel and Syria since 1951, again erupted into violence late in March 1958, when Israel resumed work on the disputed Lake Hulah drainage project. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) after arranging a truce, called for a re-location of the drainage ditch but ruled that Israel could work in the zone on non-Arab owned lands. Both Israel and Syria accepted the ruling of the UNTSO. Israel's ready agreement to change the course of the ditch is somewhat uncharacteristic and was probably motivated by political considerations rather than the effectiveness of Syrian firepower. Israel wants to maintain border peace during its Tenth Anniversary celebrations and to avoid another UN request, as in 1953 at Banat Ya'qub, to halt work at Hulah. The decision also represents a major gain for Israel. It serves to solidify a formerly uncertain part of the armistice line and adds to the legal precedents allowing Israel to resume work on the diversion of the Jordan River in the central demilitarized zone at Jisr Banat Ya'qub. Thus, the surprise is not that Israel accepted the UNTSO ruling, but that Syria, for the first time, agreed that Israel could carry out drainage work in the non-Arab owned sections of the demilitarized zone. Presumably the decision on this matter was made in Cairo, not Damascus, and as such it reflects both an indisposition to press the issue with Israel at this time and possibly an unawareness of the implications of all the principles involved. In any case, UAR face was saved by Israel's having to shift the course of the ditch.

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## I. PRELUDE TO ARMED CLASH

The scene of the clashes between Syria and Israel late in March 1958 was the demilitarized zone in the vicinity of the southeastern end of Lake Hulah. The demilitarized zone was established under the terms of the Israel-Syrian General Armistice Agreement of 1949 which prohibited armed forces, military or para-military, in the zone but allowed the restoration of normal civilian life. The Armistice Agreement also provided that no military or political advantage should be gained under the truce.

The Hulah drainage project has been a source of friction between Israel and Syria from the commencement of the work by Israel in 1951. Syria protested to the Security Council against Israeli work in the area in 1951, 1953, and 1957. On the first two occasions Syria argued that by reclaiming the area Israel would derive a military advantage, thereby violating the Agreement of 1949. Furthermore, Syria claimed that the work was proceeding on Arab-owned lands, and that Syria therefore had a veto right over such development activity in the zone. On June 9, 1951 the UN Security Council denied Syrian claims and passed a resolution authorizing Israel to resume drainage work on the non-Arab owned sections of the Zone. In 1953 Israel discontinued work on the related diversion canal at Jisr Banat Ya'qub in response to a Security Council decision calling for a halt during an examination of the question. Security Council efforts to reconcile Israeli and Syrian interests in this instance were frustrated by the Soviet veto in January 1954 of a US-UK-French resolution further to explore the case. In the 1957 dispute Syria protested against the construction of a Bailey bridge at the southern end of the Lake. The UN ruled that the Bailey bridge did not violate the Armistice Agreement. The resumption of work on the system of drainage canals at the southeastern tip of Lake Hulah led to the recent series of incidents.

## II. THE CURRENT CONFLICT

On March 24, 1958, Israel began to dig the sixth and last drainage canal at Lake Hulah. Intention to resume work at Hulah had been announced by Israel on March 21. The Syrians objected, asserting that the Israelis were working on Arab-owned lands. Israel refused to recognize an Arab right to oppose work in the demilitarized zone in line with its claim, unwarranted by the Armistice Agreement, that it exercises sovereign control in all demilitarized zones. For three successive days after the work commenced, on March 24, 25, and 26, the Syrians fired on the drainage workers, but the most serious clashes took place on March 30

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and 31 when artillery duels took place between the Syrian and Israeli forces and brought about UN intervention. Tanks and small arms were used by the Israelis; Syrians used heavy mortars and small arms. The incident of March 30 lasted for about two hours and was halted by a UN-negotiated cease-fire. The fighting resumed on March 31 and lasted again for about two and a half hours. The number of casualties suffered by both sides in the clashes is unknown. However, they are believed to have been relatively light. Both sides violated the demarcation line with overflights in the period from April 1 to April 7. Israeli overflights extended deep into Syria as far as Al Qunaytirah, 12 miles northeast of the disputed area.

Following the second cease-fire a UNTSO team carried out a survey of the disputed land on April 1 and 2. UNTSO Chief Von Horn on April 5 informed both Israel and Syria of the ruling, which found Israel in error but permitted it to resume work in the zone on non-Arab owned land, thereby requiring a re-location of the ditch. On April 8 Israel resumed work, digging the trench in accord with the UN findings. Syria also agreed to accept the ruling.

## II. THE DIMENSIONS OF THE MILITARY ENGAGEMENT

Although artillery and tanks were used in the incident at Lake Hulah, they were probably drawn from units normally stationed in the adjacent areas of the two countries. There were no confirmed reports of extensive reinforcement or mobilization in either country, only re-deployment of near-by forces to forward areas.

Since the Israeli-Arab hostilities of 1948/49, Syria's army has been largely concentrated on the southern (Israeli) front and the rear area from the frontier to Damascus. During the recent Syrian-Turkish crisis, some Syrian units were moved north. Reports over the last three months of the movement of Syrian forces to the south probably reflect a shift of these units back to their customary location. There are normally an estimated 12,700 Syrian troops on the Israeli front and 35,000 supporting troops in the area from Damascus southward. There have been no significant changes noted in the disposition of these troops, and this disposition has continued to be defensive rather than offensive in character. Israel normally keeps on its Syrian frontier 7,500 troops, including tank and artillery units. There were no reports of a movement of more Israeli armor from the southern Egyptian front. Egypt's Sinai forces are estimated at about 10,000. A minor buildup in Sinai gives no indications of serious offensive intent. Thus the Hulah incident does not seem to have been preceded by a serious or offensive buildup.

The general capabilities of both groups have not been effectively changed. Israel is still capable of defending its frontiers from attack



by one or a combination of all of its Arab neighbors. In an offensive operation, the Israelis could seize and control southwest Syria and West Jordan and could secure critical ground deep in Sinai against the combined Arab forces. The union of Syria and Egypt has not materially changed the situation. Thus it appears that military factors were not responsible for Israel's ready acceptance of the UNTSO survey.

### III. TACTICAL POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS PARAMOUNT

Israel appears to have adopted a course of compromise in the recent Hulah dispute with Syria for various political reasons. Among these are: (1) the Israeli hope that border peace can be maintained during the 10th Anniversary of Independence celebration, and (2) the desire to avoid being maneuvered into a position of being requested by the UN to halt work when the conclusion of the Hulah phase of its land reclamation and irrigation schemes is so close. A minor consideration may have been an Israeli interest in getting off to a good start in its relations with the new UNTSO Chief of Staff, General Von Horn.

Above all, Israel made a major gain in the wake of the UNTSO ruling. In the Security Council decision of June 9, 1951, Israel was also authorized to carry out drainage work in the non-Arab owned sections of the demilitarized zone at Lake Hulah. Syria did not accept this ruling then, but has done so now. Should Israel again wish to resume the work in the central demilitarized zone on the diversion of the Jordan River at Jisr Banat Ya'qub, it could use this latest ruling of the UNTSO as a further precedent against any Syrian objections. In the case of Jisr Banat Ya'qub, however, an additional issue could arise, namely how the irrigation of the Arab-owned Buteiha Farm would be affected by the diversion of the river between Banat Ya'qub and Lake Tiberias. Thus, the surprise is not that Israel accepted the UNTSO ruling, but that Syria, for the first time, agreed that Israel could carry out drainage work in the non-Arab owned sections of the demilitarized zone. Presumably the decision on this matter was made in Cairo, not Damascus, and as such it reflects both an indisposition to press the issue with Israel at this time and possibly an unawareness of the implications of all the principles involved. In any case, UAR face was saved by Israel's having to shift the course of the ditch.