

Following are the questions I would be grateful for the opportunity of putting to Mr Ben-Gurion, (and from which, no doubt, supplementary questions would develop in the course of an interview):

1. Would it be true to say that the basic aims of a national government as set out by Mr Ben-Gurion in 'Davar' depend to a certain ~~extent~~ extent for their realization on the development of peaceful and stable conditions in this area?
2. If yes, would Mr Ben-Gurion agree that, in spite of disappointments in the past, a new and forceful diplomatic campaign should be carried out by Israel to persuade the western Powers and U.N., and through them one or more of the Arab States, of the necessity for a working agreement between Israel and her neighbours which would be de facto if not de jure a peace agreement?
3. Does Mr Ben-Gurion think the recent elections showed a so-called "activist" trend and does he believe in "activism" as a means of bringing relative peace and stability to unquiet frontier sectors?
4. There appears to be a widespread feeling abroad that reprisals and punitive action by Israel (which, presumably, is what is meant by "activism"), might create a situation that could fairly be described as threatening war and that would compel intervention by the tripartite Powers. Does Mr Ben-Gurion think this to be a risk that Israel must take unless other means bring about a swift improvement in border conditions?
5. Would Mr Ben-Gurion agree that a security pact between Israel and one or more of the western Powers would have a salutary effect in this area by convincing the Arab States that any hopes they may have of isolating Israel and so steadily weakening both her economy and security, had better be given up?
6. Finally, the President when welcoming the new Knesset implied that the present relaxation of world tension strengthens the prospect of a relaxation of regional tension. Does Mr Ben-Gurion agree that this is so?



Mr. Gurion

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Mr David Ben-Gurion, who has been charged by the President with the task of forming a new Government, received your correspondent today and answered questions put with the object of learning what might be his policy; as Prime Minister, in certain matters affecting Israel's regional and western relations. Mr Ben-Gurion, who is sixty-nine, looked none the worse for his year's retirement to the barren spaces of the Negev; and for that matter none the worse for having come back into party politics to become the centre of a hard-fought general elections campaign. His humorous eyes, bright, rosy cheeks and flowing hair hardly gave the impression of a man looking for trouble at home or abroad. There was no sign of the "border scourge" he is popularly supposed to have become under the influence of a so-called activist trend in last month's general elections.

He is now trying to form a broad coalition government extending from the left-wing Mapam (United Workers) to the right-wing General Zionists, excluding only the Communists and the extreme right-wing, nationalistic Herut Party. He is trying to do so against a background of election results which were disappointing to his own party, Mapai (Israel Labour Party), disarray to the General Zionists (who fell from 23 Knesset seats in the last Parliament to 13 in this), highly gratifying to Herut (which increased its Knesset representation from 8 seats to 15), and failing cheering to the left-wing parties, except the Communists, and especially to the new, "activist" party of Achdut Avoda. Each of the different parties has read into the ~~election~~ surprises the lesson that most comforts it; and from the resulting confusion of analyses has come much speculation, ~~some~~ of it alarming, about what Mr Ben-Gurion may do if he becomes Prime Minister. Most of your correspondent's questions to Mr Ben-Gurion had been suggested by this speculation.

Question. -- Political correspondents of leading Israel newspapers have written that at a recent meeting of Mapai's political committee you insisted that foreign policy should be determined by security factors and that, in effect, foreign-policy making, together with the making of defence policy, should be centralised in the office of the Prime Minister. The reports add that you and Mr Sharett (who would be expected to retain the Foreign Ministry in any new Government) were in sharp, even bitter conflict on this matter.

Answer. -- Much nonsense has been written and said on this subject. Foreign policy is determined by many factors but the Foreign Ministry's functions and authority must remain what they have always been. Foreign policy -- responsibility for it -- cannot be transferred to the Defence Ministry or any other Ministry and is subject only to the overriding decisions of the Government as a whole. As for the supposed sharp conflict with Mr Sharett, we have worked and collaborated together for thirty-two years. We have had differences of opinion during that period and ~~some~~ have them again. But I think you can say that we shall also continue to work together in full collaboration.

Question. -- The opinion has been expressed that you are impatient of the political approach to matters affecting border security and Israel-Arab relations. Do you not think, however, that the basic aims of a national Government as set out by you -- economic independence, settlement of the wastelands, increased immigration especially from North Africa, and the closing of the economic and social gap between newcomers and the old-established community -- depend for their realization on the

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development of peaceful and stable conditions, by peaceful means, in this area? Would you say, for example, that side by side with efforts to accomplish the basic aims you have set out there should also be a forceful diplomatic campaign to bring about, directly or indirectly, some kind of working agreement between Israel and her neighbours?

Answer. -- Our basic aims, the realization of them, would certainly be easier if we had peaceful conditions between us and the Arabs. But we have come a long way without peace and we can still go a long way without it. What we want to do is not in any way dependent on peace.

and foremost political
But peace is the first of our aims. Peace and co-operation with the Arabs -- economic, social, cultural co-operation -- must always be our major objective. We must seize every opportunity that will bring it nearer and try in every way to avoid action that may push it farther away. But I have no illusions about peace with the Arabs. It is not just around the corner. I doubt if we shall get it until there are thoroughly stable governments in the Arab States instead of cliques which are perpetually afraid of being thrown out by other cliques. Our highest political aim remains, however, an Israel-Arab alliance question. -- Do you think anything at all can be done to start, so to speak, the ball of peace rolling?

Answer. -- Yes. Peace between us and the Arab ~~States~~ cannot be achieved in one stroke. It must come, I believe, in three stages. They are (1) Genuine fulfillment of the conditions laid down by the Armistice Agreements, with quiet on the frontiers and a cessation of all such hostile activities as the economic boycott; (2) ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ a non-aggression pact between us and the Arab States; (3), the final stage of peace, with active co-operation economically and culturally.

That must be our aim irrespective of other aims, because peace is in itself a moral and political necessity.

But there can be no evading the preliminary stage -- complete fulfillment of the armistice conditions.

As for starting the ball rolling, it is my view that a security pact between us and the United States would have the effect of convincing the present Arab Governments that they cannot isolate us, and would create the conditions in which some progress towards peaceable relations would become possible.

Question. -- There is a widespread feeling abroad that reprisals and punitive action by Israel (the "activism" much talked about in the election campaign and described as a trend in public opinion, as shown by the election results) might create a situation that could be fairly described as a threat to the peace, or such peace as there is, thus compelling intervention by the Powers signatory to the Tripartite agreement. Do you think this to be a risk that Israel must take if there is no improvement, by diplomatic means, in border conditions?

Answer. -- The Israel Government must protect the lives and work of the people of Israel. When political action fails, and even the United Nations representatives are unable to ensure the observance of the armistice agreements by the Arabs, military action by the Israel armed forces may become necessary. But under no conditions should indiscriminate punitive action be taken.

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This is not a question in any way affecting the tripartite agreement. That agreement was made without our, or the Arabs' participation. It is a one-sided declaration and does not confer on the signatories any rights in this country. I doubt if the agreement is even binding on those who signed it. At any rate, by providing arms to certain Arab States, two of the parties to the tripartite declaration have shifted the power balance in the area covered by the declaration and therefore have acted contrary to the terms and purpose of the declaration.

Question. -- If it were proposed as a means to peace, would Israel agree to a modification of the present borders with the Arab States?

Answer/ -- We can agree to no changes whatever in the present frontiers. We would be prepared to consider minor frontier corrections by mutual agreement, but as a result, not as a condition, of peace. There can only be peace with Israel as it exists geographically today, and that means peace with the Arabs as they exist geographically today.

THE BEN-GURION ARCHIVES