

2446/14 I :js DOC 2763

16. Sept. 1948

A press conference was held here to-day, at which Mr. Moshe Shertok, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, ~~Mr~~ Col. Yigal Yadin and Col. Moshe Dayan were present, and at which Mr. Shertok said the following:

"I feel quite secure, being flanked with two distinguished representatives of our Defence Army, and I should like you too to feel secure against any explosive surprises; it is not my purpose to spring anything of the sort on you, but rather to warn you of jumping to rash conclusions. I only wish to draw your attention to certain aspects of the present situation and to help in an effort to try and make the public see things in their perspective. The special subject of this press conference is a time-honoured one "the truce", and I should like to draw attention to certain highly unsatisfactory aspects of the situation regarding the observance and observation of the truce. We will have to say something about the way the observation of the truce is being carried out and I should like to make it clear from the outset that we have no ^{intention} feeling of ~~impartiality~~ ^{impartial} ill-will or bias towards the gentlemen engaged in this work. We believe they are honestly anxious to carry out faithfully the extremely difficult and sometimes - perhaps very often - dangerous tasks of making ~~that~~ sure that this truce is implemented and of at least finding out what is wrong when something does go wrong. But by now we have had fairly extensive experience with the way things work, and we believe that this experience justifies an attempt at summing up on our part, and the drawing of certain conclusions as to the effectiveness of the observation machine. I should like to say, that though major fighting is not in progress, as regards the detailed observance and observation of the truce, the general picture, to our mind, is one of the futility of the observation machine as regards the enforcement of the detailed conditions of the truce. There is little wonder perhaps that we should formulate the situation as being one of the futility of the

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looking at the extended frontiers which they presumably have to

observe, at the inordinately long shore line and at the numerous, perhaps innumerable ports and air fields. They obviously cannot be everywhere at all times. The surprising feature of the situation is not that they cannot be everywhere at the same time, but that they have taken upon themselves to assure us and the public that everything is under control when it is quite quite inconceivable that it should be. According to official figures that we have from the mediator's staff, the latest figures (and presumably there has been a slight increase of deviation since then) are that there are 305/^{U.S.}observers ~~in the area~~ and of these only 55 have been assigned to the neighbouring territory.

It is perhaps logical that the scale and the distribution of the observers should be weighted in favour of our country, both Israeli territory and the remainder of the country, because this is the main scene of action, but nevertheless, the truce does embrace the entire length and breadth of the territories of the Arab States engaged in this war. There are certain specific and very clearly expressed conditions that apply to the entire area of this country. Conditions with regard to the importation of war materials and with regard to the movement of troops, and it is quite inconceivable that 55 people between them should be able to enforce the proper and continuous fulfilment of these conditions in that vast aggregate area. To ment:

3 } had reasons to ensure that certain forces have been crossing the Jordan to reinforce the Arab armies and we have pointed this out to 3
the observers on a number of occasions. Invariably the reply given was a denial that such crossing have taken place and we submit, in all deference, that it was physically impossible for the mediator's staff to be satisfied, beyond any reasonable doubt, that such crossings have actually never taken place, and in assuring us that they have not, we believe that they have taken too much on themselves. The same applies to the northern frontier where accurate information tells us that there has been movements of troops, changing of positions and considerable activity of building fortifications which, the observers assure us, have not taken place. There are a few, quite outstanding instances of the truce being violated by the other side. Some of these, as I said, have been denied and some have been admitted but no proper reaction has been forthcoming. I said at the beginning that nothing is further from our kind that to ~~impute~~ repute any bias or any intention to discriminate between us and the other side. Assuming that that is the position, and I quite frankly do, the only way for me to rationalise certain contrasts in the way alleged breaches of the truce by our forces, and violations by the other side would be to assume that the political theory on which the observers proceed is that in the interests of the

64 decision even if they entail one-sided enquiry without the ^{case} of the Israeli forces having been heard; but on the other side, in the interests of ultimate peace it is preferable to be a little more lenient and patient with the Arab side, to plead and argue and wait until wiser councils should prevail, and, in the meantime, not to strain the threads too much. There is this most potent illustration - the case of the Jerusalem water supply. It is true that the mediator has gone on record by stating that there has been a gross violation of the truce in that regard, but there has been no firm reaction to it and the general impression produced was one of complete impotence. The thing is too well known to require elaboration, but were it not - as it has been exercised by the Jews of Jerusalem - were it not for such high adaptability and the organisation ability shown by a group of people in Jerusalem, not for the luck in our military operations and the far-sightedness we managed to exercise by running a reserve water pipe, the dilemma which would have faced the Jews of Jerusalem would have been either to die of thirst or submit to the Arab military forces. It was not the United Nations machinery that has saved them from having to decide the issue between the two.

is that
Another example/~~instance~~ there was a very clear injunction in the first truce resolution of the Security Council about the freedom of access to the Holy Places, but to this day no Jew has been able to

effectively barred as further examples than have been given of
cases of confiscation of consignments of goods/shipped either to or ^{not military consignments} 5

from Israel to harbours of neighbouring countries without any reaction having forthcome although we drew attention to it. Books, ordinary consignments of literature were confiscated, religious apertinances and relief supplies, as well as stores of clothing to be distributed to the needy in Israel etc, in fact all ordinary commercial goods. There have been cases of downright piracy when boats from the Lebanon have gone out of the territorial waters of that country to ^{divert} ~~divert~~ ships from their course and force them into Beirut to take off their cargoes for Israel. There is the, by now notorious case of the "Mount of Zion" about which a littel more will be said later by either one of my military friends, or by both of them, where there was a clear undertaking to evacuate but where the other side insisted that, as a premium for ~~its evacuation~~ evacuating a position they occupied after the truce, the Jews should give up certain positions and where, therefore, to this day the other side is in open occupation of a position where they have no business to be. And yet there has been no reaction to this violation of the truce which is continually being dragged out hoping against hope that in the end peaceful perseverance will prevail. The general position in Jerusalem is that, the considerable increase of the force of observers, carried through at the expense of essential observation

6 There is a continual shifting of enemy positions, bringing up of 6
reinforcements and, where the very process of observation has opened
the way for direct military ~~approachings~~ ^{to} approaching our positions,
as when, for example, the Arabs put forward a certain charge - a false
one - against us, the observers quite honestly declared to the Arabs
"it is not true that the Jews have shelled your positions, we have
been there and there was no gun and no mortar there." This is of course
registered for future reference but it indicates the utter futility
of the whole system to see ~~how~~ how such an effort does not even achieve
its primary purpose. The outstanding feature of the situation which
resulted from this policy of peacefully ~~passivity~~ impassivity is that
the task of ensuring a watertight implementation of the truce simul-
taneously on all sectors of the fronts would be an outstanding
phenomenon. According to our information there have been very marked
increases of Arab forces - no doubt in preparation for something. I
therefore invite the Chief of Operations to give you such general
information as he can give you while safeguarding security to Israel."

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Mr. Yigal Yadin commenced his statement to the press by
saying that he wished to add some points not only on the matters already
raised by the Foreign Minister regarding the increase in Arab troop
movements but also something about the truce and the way in which it

7 especially if carried out with such a small number of soldiers at the mediator's disposal. When telling Gen. Landstroom about the various incidents, Col. Yadin, said, he replied "I have such a small number of observers, I do not know what to do," but, he continued, "if this had happened to me, I should go to my superiors and say I have not got enough soldiers, so as far as we are concerned, this is not an excuse - either you do it or you don't, but do not pretend to us and do not delude the world. If he is not given the necessary force he should tell the public; my General, my United Nations I cannot do that job." As Mr. Shatz has already said, it is quite logical that, out of a number of 305 observers throughout the Middle East the greater part should be in Palestine - both on the Israeli and the Arab side, but in the whole vast area of Iraq, which is not one of the greatest friends in this war, the U.N. mediator has a force of six observers, or, for instance, Syria with its ports and air fields General Landstroom has only 14 observers, but more than 50% of the U.N.O. personnel were in Palestine, in Tel Aviv only being 18 observers.

Unfortunately someone seemed to have given advice to this force - advice well known to the Jews from previous times, viz. "to deal with the Jews use force and be firm and you will get what you need, when dealing with an Arab be tactful and say once and again 'in the long run you will get it'". This advice, he said, was followed in many cases,

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} tried to cut our lines by taking positions between the north and the Negev after the truce, the U.N. decision on that was delayed again and again until at last a decision was received which, unfortunately, was not carried out by the Egyptians. In reply to our complaints, that the Egyptians were moving additional forces the only answer we got was that it would take another 3 ~~min~~ or 4 days before a decision was reached. The, now famous, Mount Zion incident was another example. At a meeting between Gen. Landström, Mr. Shertok and myself, Col. Yadin said, we received clear-cut decisions they were that we should evacuate from the Red Cross compound and Deir Abu Tor and the Arabs would evacuate Mount Zion. "We took that decision as an order and we have done our share. As far as the other side is concerned, the situation is known" - and sometimes orders and counter-orders merely result in disorder. Quoting further examples Col. Yadin mentioned Deir Aslaj where, in front of the U.N. observers' eyes, the Egyptians took up new positions but the only reaction received from U.N. was "we will investigate and see what we can do" - nothing was done as far as U.N. was concerned. At Base el Ain an attempt was made to negotiate between Arabs and Jews but when the observers came to the meeting, instead of negotiations they received a hail of machine-gun fire. - Nothing was done about it. Col. Yadin

9 3) There were cases, and information had been received, of Arab forces crossing the Jordan into Palestine during the last few weeks. There were not many ways of crossing that river and that was another case where U.N. control was in default. Also trains from Egypt were running, unchecked by any U.N. observers up to the front lines, and much more frequently than they normally did. Referring once more to the Egyptian attempt to cut off the Negev in the South, Col. Yadin said U.N. knew quite well about this and their observers had flown to Gaza many times. But instead of getting a decision that point another decision was suddenly received stating that the Egyptians complained that Jewish forces had fired at an ambulance of the Red Crescent. Observers who later went to the spot, indeed saw such an ambulance riddled with holes - but although they did not know how it got there, who fired at it and how long ago, a decision was pronounced that Israeli forces had broken the truce. Another instance cited was a complaint lodged by the Egyptians that an Israeli shell had been fired at an Egyptian truck, "if this shell was fired" said Col. Yadin, "and if the ambulance was attacked, it was indeed a violation of the truce but to receive such decision in view of the lack of activity as far as the major violations of the truce are concerned, is amazing. "To sum up", he continued: "I can say that the distribution of the observers is not fair or at least does not cover the main

10 fighting us alone, it is the Arabs of the foreign countries, so the way to control them is in their country and not only on the battle field. "It is no wonder that under (or rather despite) the supervision of the observers the Arab force has grown up. Nothing is done, although, under the observers' eyes, the Arabs fortify themselves. It seems to me that the days of the truce may come to an end in the very near future because no army and no armies concentrate forces on such a scale just for defence, and we thought it is better that the world should know that, than that - by issuing decisions of minor instances - it may have got the impression that the Jews are the violators all the time while the Arabs are quietly waiting for the U.N.'s mercy. The picture I have given you shows you exactly how this impression was obtained and."

Col. Moshe Dayan who was the last to address the press conference set out the history of the development of the Mount Zion incident. When first coming to Jerusalem, Col. Dayan said, I met Col. Bagley of the U.N. who showed me a truce mpa signed by both parties. He explained that there were still two points to be discussed, a certain area in which he wanted both Jews and Arabs to withdraw a little and the area of Mount Zion. He promised to settle Arab evacuation from that point within a few days. He then

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and after getting to know the situation, he said that the Arabs were ready to withdraw from their new positions which they took after the truce - one condition, that this area would be mined. The Jews agreed to this as they did not intend to change positions during the truce ~~xxx~~ but maintained that it must be mined in conjunction with Jews and U.N. observers. Perhaps it was this small point which caused that the suggestion was withdrawn and nothing more was heard about it.. Then the Jews were asked to evacuate the area of the Girls Farm and Government House, but still the Arabs refused to evacuate Mount Zionst and are still there to-day. Nevertheless, orders from Tel Aviv stated that the Jews should comply with the U.N. decisions and therefore they evacuated from the Girls Farm and from Government House - only Mount Zion being left. During further talks the proposal crystallized that if the Jews withdrew from Mount Zion the Arab would do likewise. The position now is that the Arabs are next to our positions there.

At Col. Dayan's request the following letter was then read out....
Commenting on the contents of the letter Col. Dayan said everyone knew that the Y.M.C.A. and the whole of this area are in the centre of the Jewish part of Jerusalem and there was no question of the Jews sniping from that area, a fact which was known equally

well to the truce observers, therefore...

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instead of sending it to the Arab side, it made a new proposal to change this into a neutral zone, when I saw at the end of the letter that a copy of it has been sent to Lt./Col. Abbdalla el Tell - instead of sending a letter stating that they know that the shooting comes from the Arab side, they make a new proposal of changing the zone into a neutral one.

Mr. Shertok, commenting on Mr. Dayan's statement said:

"I want to comment on this last point which really a very important one. Schematically the procedure followed by U.N. is a) the Arabs violate the truce by advancing to new positions b) the U.N. observers come to the spot and agree that the Arabs have violated the truce and have to retreat, c) the Arabs say in order that we should retreat we must get some concessions - we cannot do it for nothing. Therefore let the Jews also retreat to the corresponding situation, d) After having declared that the Arabs violating the truce and having insisted on their unilateral withdrawal the U.N. observers turn to the Jews and proceed to insist that they should produce the compensation necessary for the Arabs to ^{give up} ~~xxxxxx~~ their positions. On the 10th of August I had the pleasure of entertaining Count Bernadotte for lunch and after the tête-à-tête part of the conversation a number of gentlemen came and we started to discuss the

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and his aides came out with a proposal that there should be an agreed three-days' complete cease-fire between us and the Arabs in Jerusalem, when discussions could take place. Count Bernadotte thought it was correct that the Arabs must withdraw from Mount Zion, and one of the U.N. observers said that they should do so to-morrow or the day after. That was on the 10th of August and last week, on the 9th of September, one month after, I again had the pleasure of receiving Count Bernadotte and his entourage and we had a real dress conference at the end of which he said, now we have a proposal to make in regard to Jerusalem to settle once and for all the problem of Mount Zion, the Arabs will withdraw from there on condition that the Jews should also withdraw from their positions there, evacuate positions they are holding since before the truce. I replied to this, the Arabs have not yet withdrawn from their positions which, according to your ruling, they should have withdrawn from. In that case I refuse to enter into any negotiations on the question and I want give it any consideration before the Arabs will withdraw from the positions they said they would and you said they should withdraw from.