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WARNING TO THE WEST: "DON'T ARM THE ARABS"

Q Mr. Prime Minister, since arriving in Israel, I have heard constant denunciation of the American plan to supply arms aid to Iraq. What's the reason for the tempest?

P.M. If the Arab States realize, as they are now in the process of doing, that, peace or no peace, they can get arms, why should they make peace? The giving of arms to Arab states which refuse to make peace becomes a premium upon their policy of permanent warfare against Israel. The arms themselves enhance their capacity for mischief. That is certainly not a step in the direction of peace. It is a step away from peace.

P.M. So, from the point of view of defending democracy, I think the Western powers should be warned against squandering their resources on the arming of Arab states.

Q What's the alternative?

P.M. On that, opinions may differ. But as far as Israel is concerned, there is a more crucial point, and that is that arms given to Arab states are arms directed against Israel - potentially today, actually tomorrow or the day after. So, we watch with profound dismay and mounting anxiety the policy of the American Government to arm the Arab states - Iraq today, Egypt maybe tomorrow, and Syria the day after tomorrow.

This creates an armed preponderance in the Middle East which is violently hostile to us. It forces us to increase our armaments by hook or by crook, to devote even a larger share of our meagre resources to self-defense, feel all the time that American potentiality to provide arms will exceed our capacity for buying them in such markets as are open to us. We, therefore, foresee a state of very grave peril for our security if this goes on.

We are at a loss to understand how the U.S. can reconcile that policy with her declared policy and concern to see Israel prosperous and secure.

Q Mr. Prime Minister, I've also heard considerable opposition here to the Anglo-Egyptian agreement for withdrawal of British troops from the Suez. How does that concern Israel?

P.M. I think we are justified to feel apprehensive because, first of all, the accord as such is bound to strengthen Egypt enormously, both politically and strategically. We have always said that we do not want to stand in the way of the attainment by Egypt of the fulfilment of her legitimate national aspirations, provided that consummation does not encourage aggression against us. To see a peaceful Egypt come into its own is one thing. To contemplate an Egypt pledged to a state of war against Israel achieve greater strength with which to pursue it is quite another.

The whole issue depends upon whether the occupation of the Suez base by Egypt will generate more peaceful councils within its ruling group, or whether it will entice them to embark upon a new aggressive adventure. That is the whole point. And the danger to Israel and to Middle Eastern peace of Egypt's aggressive orientation will become even greater if the accord with Britain is followed by an American policy of supplying arms to Egypt.

P.M. I think it would be safer if no arms were given to Egypt.



Q And Iraq?

P.M. No arms to Egypt, or Iraq, even if it means no arms to Israel. It would be much safer.

Q But, Mr. Prime Minister, can the United States postpone any program of military aid or build-up of defenses in the Middle East until there is a settlement between the Arabs and Israel - a settlement which, you concede, may be indefinitely delayed?

P.M. I did not suggest that. I simply do not see what America is gaining by arming the Arab states for the sake of her defenses in the Middle East, because I do not think the Arab states can be relied upon to use those arms in the defense of America - or democracy. They have no democracy and, therefore, no interest to defend it.

Q Perhaps it's necessary for America to take a calculated risk in this matter -

P.M. A calculated risk is justified perhaps when there is no past experience to prove that it is not justified. But we have a concrete experience to go upon. We know exactly how the Arab states behaved on such occasions in the past.

Q What is the practicality of the Turkish-Pakistan pact if we do not bring countries like Iraq and Syria into it?

P.M. I don't see the practicality of bringing them in - that's all. I don't see the advantage or usefulness of it. I don't think it is going to yield the expected fruit. I think it will end in a fiasco. Arms given to states inherently unstable will not make for consolidation but serve to intensify internal strife and conflict. The arms will not help to defend the Middle East against outside aggression. They will undermine peace inside the region. For Israel they spell a grave peril.

P.M. But I am afraid the United States Government is, to some extent - again judging by outward symptoms - pursuing the same policy. It is ready to woo the friendship of the Arab states, maybe not intentionally against Israel, but in the actual result of it, to Israel's detriment.

P.M. But if this state of "no peace" continues while the Arab states are armed or arming themselves and enhancing their military might, a time may come when they will feel possessed of sufficient superiority of armed strength to try again their luck with a war of invasion and aggression against Israel. I said for the time being they are not ready for it, and the memories of their defeat are still too much alive.