

3040

12.12.55

[Tekoah to Israel Missions Abroad, December 12, 1955, {ID10, doc.0996}.]

[- -]

With Aubrey [to work] on a draft letter to Dulles.[n]

[Following is the text of the letter sent to Dulles on this date:

DEAR MR. SECRETARY: On the eve of my departure for Israel I wish to thank you for the opportunities which I have had of exchanging ideas with you in such a frank and earnest spirit.

Since our last meeting I have given much thought to your views on an Arab-Israel settlement. In accordance with your suggestion after our talk on December 6, we have remained in touch with the Department; and we have received, through Mr. Russell, a more detailed account of your thinking on the eight main problems which arise in the consideration of a settlement.

When I return home, my colleagues and I will carefully examine these ideas, which have clearly been formulated in a genuine desire to resolve the conflict. There are several points which invite comment, but in this letter I should like to dwell only on the two matters which cause us the greatest difficulty and anxiety.

The most acute of these is the territorial question. In the aide-mémoire of December 6 I reiterated our willingness, in the context of a peace settlement, to consider mutual adjustments of the present borders for the benefit of both parties. Such rectification would not involve substantial changes of territory; but they might bring about improved conditions of security and communication.

We continue, however, to be deeply disturbed by the Department's advocacy of a change in the Negev which would "provide an Arab area joining Egypt with the rest of the Arab world."

In our conversations on November 21 and December 6. I outlined the reasons which prompt us to oppose the principle of unilateral territorial sacrifice, whether in the Negev or elsewhere. Our objection is all the stronger when we reflect on the purpose which this particular sacrifice is to serve. There is something wholly artificial about the idea of Arab inter-communication between one wilderness and another wilderness, across a part of Israel where unilateral communications exist or have ever existed. On December 6 I told you of my deep apprehension that in order to achieve this dubious purpose, which responds to no essential needs of the region, Israel would be called upon either to amputate itself, or to cut itself in two and find Elath [i.e., Eilat] severed from its main body. I also expressed the fear that such a change would impede vital development work. In reply, you indicated that you had none of these consequences in mind, and believed that a way could be found of avoiding them.

Mr. Russell has since acquainted us with methods whereby it is proposed to reconcile Israel's vital interests to maintain its territorial integrity and hold Elath with the assumed need for providing "an Arab area joining Egypt with the rest of the Arab world." For example, he has described the idea of triangles of territory in the southern Negev, one to be ceded to Egypt, the other to Jordan, meeting at a point of intersection through which Israel's communications would run. I understand that amongst the various solutions discussed this is considered the most favorable to Israel's interests.

I must tell you in all candor that this kind of proposal does not allay any of our apprehensions.

(1) It involves a considerable cession of territory to two countries which

have no right to expand beyond their present frontiers at Israel's expense. (Indeed, they both gained territory beyond their 1947 positions as a result of their invasion of Israel and occupation of parts of former Palestine.)

(2) The Department seems to understand that Israel's outlet to the sea at its own port of Elath [Eilat] is a vital national asset which Israel cannot be called upon to renounce. But under the proposal in question this vital asset would be left hanging at the end of a slender thread, which the Egyptians and the Jordanians would be in a position to snap at any moment from the scissor-like position which they would acquire. In the insecurity thus created, communication with Elath [Eilat] would be utterly precarious. Economic development at [Eilat], or in the parts of the Negev adjoining the Arab triangles, would be discouraged and, indeed, paralyzed by the proximity of these two wedges of foreign territory. Prospecting for mineral and other resources would be a hopeless venture amidst such a medley of interlocking frontier lines. Thus, although the map might indicate that Israel would not technically be losing [Eilat], the actual consequences of the proposed arrangement would amount to its loss, and indeed, to the prevention of our effective control and development of a major part of the southern Negev.

(3) In an effort to get an immediate settlement, complications are created by this proposal which hold the seed of future conflicts. In this case, there is not even the prospect of a short-term settlement arising from such an unacceptable proposal. The whole arrangement is one which, if it existed under the Armistice, should be removed by a peace settlement. It is certainly not the function of a settlement to create new and dangerous sources of friction and clash.

(4) The suggested imbroglio of interlocking frontiers is unnecessary even in terms of the problem which it purports to solve. For this problem there is a simple and rational solution. I refer to our agreement to consider a transit arrangement across this part of Israel territory without affecting the existing territorial jurisdiction. Objective world opinion would surely regard such a solution as more just, more stable and more conducive to long-term peace than the explosive situation which would be created by the drawing of lines on a map, without adequate thought to their effect on everyday life in the region concerned, and on the fate of the assets which it contains.

In this connection I would again urge the fullest consideration for the proposals contained in paragraph 7 of our aide-mémoire of December 6. A settlement established on such principles of reciprocity would transform the situation in the Middle East beyond recognition, without imposing any sacrifice of national interest or honor on any of the parties concerned. It would thus meet the definition which you formulated on August 26. It is not usual for a country which has been subjected for eight years to attack, siege and other forms of implacable hostility to offer its adversaries such tangible advantages as those enumerated in our aide-mémoire. I fear, however, that dogmatic insistence on the need for "an Arab area joining Egypt with the rest of the Arab world" would thwart any prospect of settlement which might now exist or subsequently arise.

The second problem on which I desire to comment is that of Arab refugees. The welfare of the refugees themselves, the interests of the Arab countries, and the stability of the region all require a solution by resettlement in Arab lands. To such a solution Israel can contribute significantly by the payment of compensation; and by accepting Ambassador Johnston's project, under which the major portion of the waters of the Jordan and Yarmuk Rivers would be available to Arab States for new agricultural development.

The measures of inter-communication and economic cooperation outlined in our aide-mémoire of December 6 would also assist the refugees, by increasing the viability of the countries absorbing them, especially of Jordan where 500,000 refugees now live as citizens of the Kingdom. You will also recall what we have done and are doing in releasing blocked accounts, reuniting separated families and resettling in Israel, at our own expense, tens of thousands of Arabs displaced by the vicissitudes of war. All this together proves that we neglect no opportunity of contributing to the solution of a problem which would never have arisen at all, but for the folly of Arab governments in attempting the violent destruction of our State.

I must, however, say in all frankness that I cannot envisage how an Israel Government, in addition to all these burdens and contributions, can undertake to settle tens of thousands of Arab families in Israel. The economic and financial difficulties are grave enough: but even they are overshadowed by political and security considerations of the most compelling character. We cannot forget that these people have for eight years been heavily indoctrinated by Arab governments with hatred of Israel and denial of its statehood. It would not be conducive to their welfare or to our security for them to be resettled in Israel. Indeed, the very logic which moves you to uphold resettlement in Arab lands as the best solution for the vast majority, applies with equally compelling force to the minority. It cannot seriously be argued, for example, that it is possible for the vast Arab countries to absorb, say, 750,000 refugees and impossible for them to absorb 800,000. If there is a resettlement scheme, these relatively small differences of dimension would not prejudice its feasibility. For Israel, on the other hand, an undertaking to resettle Arabs would be a political and human impossibility. Moreover, the mere holding out of a prospect of repatriation, even for a fraction of the total number, would strengthen the resistance of all refugees to any resettlement at all. I therefore hope that you may see your way to pursue your thinking on this problem to its final outcome, and advocate resettlement and compensation as its total solution.

I presume that we shall continue to discuss these matters through our diplomatic channels in the coming days and weeks.

I cannot conclude without reference to the main preoccupation now weighing on my mind. It is difficult for us, in the absence of tangible supporting evidence, to assume that we are on the verge of negotiations with Arab States genuinely desirous of a settlement. Even if negotiations were to begin, there is no assurance that they would end in agreement. In the meantime, arms from Soviet sources continue to reach Egypt, while no corresponding increase in defensive strength has yet been made available to Israel. It is inconceivable to us that any friendly country should desire Israel to face its hostile neighbors from a position of growing weakness and vulnerability.

It was therefore my strong hope – especially in the light of what I heard from you on December 6 – that I might receive an affirmative answer to our request for the sale of arms before my departure. This problem continues to dominate our thoughts and I earnestly hope that we may soon have news which will alleviate our anxious suspense.

On leaving American soil I should like again to thank you and the Department for the unfailing courtesy which I have encountered during my stay in the United States.

I am, dear Mr. Secretary,
Yours sincerely,