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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

EMBASSY, TEL AVIV

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TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

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SUBJECT: Transmission of Article by New York Times Correspondent on Interview with Prime Minister Sharett

There is enclosed a copy of an article prepared by Harry Gilroy, New York Times correspondent. It is based on an interview on January 24 he had with Prime Minister Sharett who expressed his views on a number of foreign relations problems. These views are revealing - more so perhaps than if they had been made in private and not in an interview with a correspondent of a leading U.S. newspaper. And they may be regarded as more revealing than if they had been made formally to a diplomatic representative of a foreign country. The article, submitted by telegram was not published.

The New York Times correspondent informed me of the interview at the time and he told me of the general tenor of the story he was filing. He also gave me the following background and progressive report of his experience with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in connection with this article. Mr. Gilroy said to me that, believing the tension between Israel and the Arabs might be somewhat relieved if the Prime Minister "would say something nice" about the Arabs, he seized on the date of January 26 as an appropriate time for the Prime Minister to make some sort of favorable comment about the Arabs. This date marked the one year period during which Sharett had held the office of Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. (I must admit that Gilroy's objective was a laudable one but with Sharett's recently weakened position what it was, it seemed surprising that the latter would make such a statement. This seemed especially unlikely in view of Sharett's recent underlining to me of pressures he was experiencing from "activists" and others. The publication of such favorable comment by the Prime Minister runs directly counter to the often expressed and ingrained belief of the "activists" of the country. They feel that any admission of the presence of any possible good among the Arabs would in fact be an admission of weakness of the Israelis in the eyes of Arabs and would be exploited by them. Nothing but force and abuse is regarded by the Arabs as a sign of strength.) Gilroy made the suggestion to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and an interview was subsequently arranged for January 24 between the Prime Minister and the New York Times correspondent. Apparently, Gilroy found the Prime Minister in a mellow mood and the latter talked freely.

Gilroy filed his original copy but before it was actually published in New York he left a copy of his story with the Foreign Office which in turn passed it onto Sharett. The upshot was that Gilroy soon received a hurried request to hold up the

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story until some changes in the text were made. These changes were apparently trivial in character as will be noted in the enclosure. Then Gilroy received a call from the Foreign Office requesting that the section on Cabinet meetings be eliminated. A few hours later a request from the Foreign Office suggested that the story be "killed" and this was quickly followed by the request that it be run with the suggested changes. And still a few hours later there was a final request from the Foreign Office that the story be "killed". This was done and the New York Times did not publish it.

These details show a surprising amount of indecision. Also, they are significant in that they reveal, it is believed, an instinctive feeling by Sharett from the beginning that perhaps his courage in granting such an interview and permitting his favorable remarks about Egypt to be published, despite the unhappy BAT GALIM situation and the highly volatile "Cairo Spy Trials" situation was a bit unwise. His willingness to go ahead with the interview showed clearly that he was relying implicitly on advance advice he had received to the effect that the Jewish spies in Cairo would not be hung. But in this connection he may also have been swayed by the hope that his favorable words might produce lighter sentences for the spies if the commutation of the death sentences did not develop according to expectations. His courage could also be interpreted to mean that despite recent setbacks in the field of international relations and the renewal of border troubles, he felt his position within the Government was stronger than it was generally presumed to be. However, his vacillating actions and editorial interests were most revealing perhaps in the field of personal character. He showed indecision to a greater degree than had been expected and his text excisions suggest a surprising attention to phraseology and minor points rather than to the major issues and statements involved.

Subsequent developments have completely justified his judgment in withdrawing his statements. The hanging of the spies has further weakened his position politically. Had the story been published as planned, the timing as well as the content of the story would have given considerable dramatic ammunition to his "activist" foes within and without the Government. There would have been a consequent deterioration in his leadership in promoting the policy of moderation in foreign affairs.

Gilroy's story should be held strictly within the Department but it should, it is believed, be of interest as well as value to those concerned with evaluating Sharett the man as well as his position and his strength within the Government. It should, it is felt, offer some support (yet not completely conclusive) to the theory that Sharett is in fact a disciple of moderation although long within the shadow of Ben-Gurion and other strong activists.


Edward B. Lawson
Ambassador

Enclosure: 

✓ Copy of article by H. Gilroy

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Article by Harry Gilroy
New York Times
Correspondent

(Excisions are bracketed)
(Additions underlined)

Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Moshe Sharett of Israel credits the ruling junta of Egypt with "honesty, patriotism and idealism, though often misguided".

This appraisal of the leaders of a country that considers itself still technically at war with Israel was uttered today in a private talk. The government which Mr. Sharett heads was accepted by the Knesset (parliament) on January 26, 1954, and he granted an interview to sum up the year.

The comment about the government of Premier Gamal Abdul Nasser was no retraction by Mr. Sharett of any of the sharp criticisms he has made of its anti-Israel actions. It came only after he listed the dangers to Israel which he sees in actions of the Arab states and in the policy of the great powers in the Middle East.

But once he swung to the theme of hopeful factors in the area he mentioned the (emergence) aspirations to economic reform of the junta in Egypt (and also said there were "some good signs in Iran.") and said "indications of progress were to be seen (every day in all the) in several Arab states". (he said)

He expressed the view that there were (forces) trends at work (toward) (bringing) which would eventually bring the people of the Arab countries and of Israel together - "common human aspirations, economic and cultural interests."

There were old scars that will take years to heal, he said. But he condemned as "pernicious" the statements of people (inside or outside of Israel) that an unbridgeable (personal) chasm existed between Arabs and Israelis.

The Prime Minister was aware presumably that these comments would be disliked by a section of the Israeli public that regards any fair word about an Arab state as a sign of weakness. But all through an hour's talk it was demonstrated that he habitually sees the other fellow's point of view as well as his own and says a kind word where he thinks it deserved.

The training that developed this trait was revealed when he was talking about Israel's internal affairs and explaining why democracy in Israel was such a deeply rooted tradition. "Before we became a state our community could (our settlements could) not enforce rules by the police power," (because we were not a state) he said. "We could only rely on voluntary allegiance. Any man who felt oppressed could walk out. Everyone had to know he was considered the equal of everyone else. Every man had to be given his due."

Reviewing

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Reviewing the year's affairs Mr. Sharett kept assigning credit as he went along. He mentioned (the following accomplishments:) that the State's finances had improved during the year. Tax collection was now much more effective. Finance Minister Levi Eshkol was responsible. He had established the rule that current expenses would be paid for out of income and he had managed things so that the rule was now almost 100% in force.

Investments in the future and in development were coming from (out of the ordinary) extra income - and this was supplied by United States aid, German reparations and Israel bond drive. (United Jewish Appeal and other Zionist institutions) Integration of new immigrants was largely the responsibility of UJA.

A new wave of the pioneering spirit was noticeable in the country and undoubtedly the example and efforts of former Prime Minister David Ben Gurion were responsible. The young people who were leaving comfortable homes (for the) to share the hard existence of newcomers in outposts (should also be credited) were the sign of the new spirit.

All through the country improvements were being made. These were not (so much) only the work of an administration as of all the community.

One (disturbing) of the major economic (factor) problems that would have to be faced, Mr. Sharett said, was connected with the new wave of immigration. The time of change and turbulence in North Africa, he said, was causing our people to seek security. Israel was trying to regulate (and restrict immigration from there but it might still create a difficult financial problem) the flow and turn new arrivals into producers but the process for the state was not going to be easy. He felt confident that in the end the country would emerge stronger.

Mr. Sharett gave a cheerfully exasperated picture of Cabinet struggles in a coalition government such as he heads. Each time there was a rift over one issue, he said, it was immediately widened by the introduction of extraneous matters.

"Let's say we try to limit the crisis to the question of the budget. Still the agenda grows longer all the time. I realize that issues are introduced for face-saving purposes. People can go back to their parties and say that while they yielded on this point they made the other parties yield on a different point. It takes patience, patience; and patience, being a human quality, isn't inexhaustible."

All he hoped for in a political way, Mr. Sharett said, was "to keep the coalition together until next summer and then let it (decay) disintegrate decently if such was its fate."

Speaking of the Israeli-Arab border relations, Mr. Sharett declared: "The myth of Israel's aggressiveness and expansionism should be pretty well exploded by the comparatively quiet period of recent months. It has been shown that when there is quiet from the other side of the border there are no disturbances from this side."

He

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He added to this a warning which undoubtedly referred to the outrages of the last few days. "It would be a mistake for anyone to rely," he said, "on the idea that Israel would remain meekly passive in the face of a sharp deterioration of border security."

The international balance and trends in the Middle East present a wider problem, Mr. Sharett said. He phrased his thought carefully: "We have a grave concern lest the United States in her perfectly understandable impatience to build up and consolidate systems of regional defense does not do harm to the peace and stability in this region which may go a long way to upset the advantages of the regional defense organization - if there is any."

He said that there was a question about the capacity and willingness of the Arab nations to play their part in defense of democracy, or of their loyalty to any world cause. There was no question, he added, about their using any accession of strength in preparing aggression against Israel.

The American policy was resulting in the creation of facts in the area detrimental to Israel's security, Mr. Sharett said. He mentioned the intention of Turkey and Iraq to conclude a treaty among recent developments and added:

"We have no quarrel at all with friendliness between Turkish and Iraqi peoples. Nor with the organization of the region for collective defense. We are greatly in favor of collective defense. We believe we can and ought to play a part in any such organization but we find ourselves completely excluded (therefore it appears to us as a danger) and there are dangers inherent in that isolation."

He said that in the communique announcing the new agreement, Iraq had managed to bring in two points aimed at Israel. The provision that the agreement will operate against internal aggression (is supposed to have the meaning that it will work against Israel) creates an anti-Israel alignment, he said. A reference to UN resolutions seems ostensibly laudable but (means) "in current Arab political jargon", he said, "it spells external dismemberment and internal dissolution of Israel."

It was a paradox that the process of creating facts inimical to Israel was going on, he said, side by side with closer relations and undoubtedly better understanding of Israel's problems and worries.

"Yet that understanding is not being translated into action," he said. "What is the result of the understanding? Another delivery of arms to Iraq. And the Security Council backs up quietly on the issue of Suez Canal passage. We have the profession of understanding on the one hand the creation of these facts on the other."

"Israel came to be", the Prime Minister said, "as a result of a supreme effort of self-reliance by the Jewish people and we are determined to go on

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relying on ourselves." However, he said, the nation is keenly concerned with the development of world relationships.

"It has enjoyed international understanding and assistance," he said. "No leader of Israel can relish the prospect of the growth of a feeling of enforced isolation in Israel - a state abandoned to its fate - being left to fend for itself against the hazards of its loneliness."

Mr. Sharett questioned what education the Israeli people would get from such a state of affairs. Would they be educated in the hope of international solidarity, he asked, or on the lines that they have only themselves to rely upon.

As for the idea that some of the "facts" being created in the region might eventually work for Israel's benefit, he said that it was possible for a large secure state to work things out on a long-range basis. Israel had to think of the immediate situation. He quoted a proverb that the sun will eventually dry things up but meantime the night dew might put your eyes out.

How about the assurances which Israel has received during recent months from Britain and the United States, he was asked. "I would be glad to leave out the assurances," he said with a smile. "Let's have some arrangements."

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