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Top Secret and Personal

Jerusalem, 12 May 1955

Dear Morrison,

I most warmly appreciated your personal and confidential communication of 7 April 1955. I have now also had the opportunity to read the report in Hansard of your speech in the House of 4 April 1955 on the Turco-Iraqi Pact and in addition I have heard from Mr. Blath of your approach together with Mr. Dalton and Mr. Shimwell to Sir Anthony Eden, to which indeed you make reference in your letter. These various initiatives on the part of yourself and your colleagues reflect a friendship for Israel which is most heartening, particularly, may I add, at a time when the feeling here despairs that, as far as the attitude of the governments of the day is concerned, we stand alone.

Sir Anthony's speech in the Debate of 4 April has of course been the subject of our earnest attention. In frankness I must say that, on the balance, it caused us disappointment and anxiety. Our entire region is being criss-crossed with security pacts. Britain is the architect of, or a principal party to, several of these. Israel alone is left to its own devices, and all that Britain is prepared to do is ultimately to underwrite a settlement between Israel and the Arab countries if such settlement is ever reached.

Thus the paradoxical result is achieved that we are offered a more effective guarantee only when we may no longer require it. In the meantime - and it may be a very long time indeed, during which our relative security position is likely to change radically for the worse - Israel, apart from her own resources is to rely for her defence against the ever-present and ever-growing threat of Arab aggression, on the somewhat imprecise declaration which Britain jointly with France and the United States issued in 1950. Simultaneously, the provision for maintaining the existing equilibrium of arms between Israel and the Arab States seems to have lost all meaning. Our efforts to enter into conversations with Her Majesty's Government with a view to clarifying the circumstances and manner in which this declaration by three partners, each with its own special views and considerations, would come into operation, have remained fruitless.

Mr. Herbert Morrison, M.P.,
House of Commons,
London.

No wonder that the Israeli public, feeling that the balance is being unjustly tilted against Israel, and that her friends are joining in alliances with those bent on Israel's destruction, is experiencing a sense of growing frustration and responds with resentment to calls for self-restraint in the face of a steady series of murderous assaults from across our borders.

As regards possible proposals which Sir Anthony may have in mind, I am at present without information. As you will know, we have always indicated our readiness to meet with the Arabs in order to reach a final or a partial settlement and we continue ready to consider in a spirit of cooperation any reasonable proposal to that end. I must add however, in the light of Sir Anthony's somewhat elliptical references to the matter of boundaries and refugees - references which have, I fear, served as a quite unintended source of encouragement to Arab intransigence - that we would not regard as reasonable any proposal for the curtailment of our very modest territory; or one involving, by a return of Arab refugees, the establishment and perpetuation within Israel of an explosive and irredentist factor. For this reason, while we would welcome an effort which Her Majesty's Government might be able to make in order to bring us and the Arabs together - in the first instance, us and Egypt - we would not deem it advisable that they should come forward with compromise proposals of their own. Such proposals might conceivably entail concessions on our part which we would be unable to accept, whilst the Arabs might perceive in them a premium upon their intransigence and proceed to press us for more. Nothing would contribute more towards getting the Arab States to adjust themselves to the reality of Israel's existence than an unequivocal act on the part of Her Majesty's Government committing themselves, on the basis of a reciprocal defence relationship with Israel, to the maintenance of Israel's territorial integrity and political independence.

I am asking Ambassador Elath to amplify with further explanations what I have said here. I would only add that in this private letter in response to your own I have written, as I am sure you would wish me to, with complete candour. I believe that I owe it to you and to your colleagues to do so by the very reason of your generous concern with Israel's problems and interests. I can only say again how much I appreciate both what you and they have done and the indication of a continuing willingness to concern yourselves with our affairs born of a far-sighted conception of the basic unity of purpose and ideals between our countries.

With kindest regards and all good wishes,

Yours sincerely,