

CONVERSATION WITH THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
MR. JOHN FOSTER DULLES ON JANUARY 15, 1954

I asked Mr. Dulles to see me before his departure for Berlin in order that we might survey the Middle Eastern situation with special reference to American defence plans for the area. This was after Mr. Byroade in his conversation with Mr. Shiloah had made it clear that the newspaper reports about plans for military aid to Pakistan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia were well founded.

Before the conversation I formulated my main points in a written Aide Memoire. Mr. Byroade and Mr. Waller attended the meeting. I was accompanied by Mr. Shiloah.

I said that I had refrained from raising specific issues with the Secretary too frequently, as I preferred to devote our meetings to general trends of policy in American-Israel and Arab-Israel relations. We had had two conversations in this spirit which were of great value and of some encouragement. Unhappily, they had been succeeded by discussions of critical issues which, though grave in themselves, were nothing but the symptoms of the abnormal regional conditions under which Israel was forced to live.

I now wished to return to the scope and perspective of our earlier talks. I felt that since our last meeting on November 23 a new and disquieting trend could be discerned in the development of Arab policy. Hitherto the main source of our mutual concern in the United States and Israel had been the refusal of the Arab States to envisage any progress towards peace. This refusal appeared to condemn us indefinitely to the maintenance of an armistice system which even in the best of circumstances was bound to reveal growing tensions and strains. There was nothing positive or constructive in the relations between the Arab States and Israel under the Armistice. Nevertheless this system did assure the basic conditions of an international relationship, namely the absence of fighting and legally established spheres of sovereign jurisdiction. It was clear, however, that even this passive stability would be endangered if there were no forward movement for a number of years. Thus the United States and Israel had jointly believed that the Arab refusal to negotiate a peace settlement was unfortunate and potentially dangerous. I understood that the Secretary during his tour of the Middle East had been impressed by the vehemence with which the Arabs opposed the very principle of progress towards a final settlement (the Secretary nodded his assent). Sometimes they expressed this opposition to peace in frank terms. At other times they sought to conceal it by making negotiations conditional on the prior acceptance of their demands. More frequently still they retrospectively invoked the international programs of the past whose validity and practicability they themselves had destroyed by force of arms. These, however, were only different tactical expressions of the same position, namely the rejection of peace with Israel itself as an objective or principle of policy.

In these circumstances our consolation had been the integrity of the armistice system. This by no means excused the Arab refusal to make peace; but it did preclude some of the worst results of that refusal. It was a shelter behind which we could take cover until such time as Arab intransigence was modified.

The situation which has now developed appeared far more serious. The Arab States not only maintained their refusal to make peace. They were now abandoning the armistice system. They appeared unready to



accept anything in the Armistice Agreements which was not congenial to their policy of intensified hostility.

I said that this might seem a drastic appraisal; but I should like the Secretary to consider the accumulation of specific incidents from which I drew this sombre conclusion.

The Israel-Jordan armistice was particularly unstable and gave rise to many dangerous incidents. This had become clear in the Security Council's debates last October, since when many further incursions from Jordan had taken place. In an effort to eliminate some of the conditions which created this danger the Israel Government had invoked Article XII of the General Armistice Agreement. The Secretary-General of the United Nations was attempting to convene a conference under that Article. The Government of Israel was lending its full support to his efforts. It was clear, however, that no such cooperation had come from the Government of Jordan, whose replies and reactions had been entirely negative. Thus the Government of Jordan was showing its contempt for its obligations under the Armistice Agreement by failing to carry out the obligatory provisions of that Agreement. The Government of Israel was fully entitled to invoke its rights under the Armistice Agreement, and the Jordan Government was legally and morally obliged to respond. I knew of the efforts which the United States Government had made in this matter; and in the light of those efforts the Jordanian intransigence was all the more sinister. It should not be overlooked that this violation by Jordan of her international obligations had been supported and indeed incited by the Arab League as a whole.

No less grave was the position of the Egyptian-Israel armistice. Not satisfied with maintaining illicit blockade restrictions condemned by the Security Council, the Egyptian Government had now taken its defiance further and had extended its blockade both in space and in form. Interference with maritime traffic was now regularly practised in the Gulf of Eilat in an effort to stifle Israel's promising trade relations in the African continent. In the Suez Canal itself the form of the blockade had been intensified by the application of restrictions not only to oil, ships and so-called war material - restrictions which were themselves illegitimate - but now also to food and other commodities which had previously been exempted on the whole from these arbitrary regulations. There was no precedent for such a position in the history of the United Nations. A Security Council decision had not only failed to evoke any compliance for a period of three years, but had actually been greeted by intensified violation.

For the Government of Israel this problem raised many grave issues. If we were to acquiesce in the position we should acknowledge that armistice rulings in our favour had no force; that requests of the U.N. Chief of Staff to Arab States have no validity; that Security Council decisions on armistice questions were not binding on Arab governments; that Egypt was entitled to a belligerent status which the United Nations had emphatically condemned; that Egypt had a right to impose both upon Israel and upon other governments, especially maritime powers, its own policy of unilateral hostility; and that Israel at Egypt's behest must surrender its hopes and efforts to trade and communication with other friendly countries. The practical effects were also important. The loss to Israel directly and indirectly through Egyptian interference with lawful trade at Suez could be measured in tens of millions of dollars; indeed over a period of five years this loss might well be not much less than the total of financial assistance which Israel had received from the United States.



No government could possibly acquiesce in such a comprehensive violation of its rights and interests. My Government had decided to take action with a view to the protection of its maritime rights. We would be entitled at any time to exercise freedom of navigation and commerce through the Suez Canal. Our immediate thinking, however, lay in the direction of political action, designed to mobilise world opinion through the United Nations in condemnation of the Egyptian practice, in an effort to bring it to an end. We had abstained from this course for a long time at the behest of friendly governments which had asked us to await the outcome of Anglo-Egyptian negotiations. We had never received from Great Britain any firm assurance that an Anglo-Egyptian settlement would automatically restore the legitimate rights of Israel and of all maritime nations to free passage through the Suez Canal. It had been represented to us, however, that an Anglo-Egyptian agreement would at least bring such a solution of the waterway problem nearer. We no longer, however, had any reason to await this contingency, which seemed more remote than before, and even the British Government no longer exhorted us to delay. Moreover Israel's rights in respect of the Suez Canal had an identity of their own, whether or not an Anglo-Egyptian settlement was reached. We had no desire to impede Egypt's national aspirations, but surely Egypt could only improve its case by demonstrating its capacity and will to respect international rights in the Suez Canal. Conversely, Egypt's piratical behaviour cast a shadow upon her ambition to be left alone as the guardian of the waterway. Accordingly my Government would raise this matter in the Security Council and would ask all members of the United Nations to give their support to the resolution of 1 September 1951 and to use their influence for its implementation. Our object was not the release of a specific cargo, but the total abolition of all these regulations, both old and new, in order to bring the situation in the Suez Canal waterway into conformity with international law.

In the north we had another symptom of growing Arab intransigence. The Syrian Government, abetted by the Lebanon and the Soviet Union, was opposing a very mild compromise solution of the Bnoth Yaacov dispute. A Western resolution which gave Israel no more than the opportunity to prove its case for resuming work on this legitimate project had encountered fierce resistance. Syria was afraid that any discussion of this plan by the Chief of Staff on its merits would inevitably lead to a verdict for resuming the work. Syria therefore was against giving the Chief of Staff this opportunity. The Syrian position appeared to be that General Bennike possessed authority when it came to stopping the work, but possessed no authority for facilitating its continuation. This obstructive attitude made it clear that the Arab governments were incapable of accepting a moderate compromise solution on anything. They must have their way entirely. We had been gratified by the American opposition to the doctrine of indispensable Syrian consent. We hoped that that position would be maintained to the last.

Here I informed the Secretary of my talk with Mr. Vishinsky, and he asked me to tell him as much as I could about it. I informed him that Mr. Vishinsky's main objection to the resolution appeared to be his suspicion that the operative paragraph constituted an international sanction of the TVA plan, which he chose to regard as the domination of the Middle East by "American monopolies". I was not much impressed by Mr. Vishinsky's critique of the Johnson plan nor did I think that his interpretation was accurate. He had indicated, however, that if this suspicion could be dispelled by appropriate formulation "the position

In these circumstances, since my Government held



Mr. Vishinsky had not said specifically how he would vote either if the resolution were thus amended or if it were not.

The Secretary interrupted immediately to say: "Can't we find a change of language which would take care of that point? I agree that the Johnston plan should be kept out of the Broth Yasacov dispute." I said that I would be prepared to cooperate in an amendment of the resolution with this sole object in view and would be willing to discuss the matter with his associates in New York. Mr. Dulles agreed to this and Mr. Byroade said that formulas to this effect were already under consideration by the three delegations.

Mr. Byroade added that with respect to what I had said about Jordan, the United States would regard a Jordanian refusal to attend the conference under Article XII as a grave violation of the Armistice Agreement.

Continuing my survey, I turned to Saudi Arabia and referred to the violent threats of its monarch. In Israel we were not disposed to take these bombastic statements lightly. Memories of invasion five years ago were still fresh. While we were confident of our ability to repel such aggression we knew only too well how serious was the cost and how grave the hazard. I was not aware of any other region in which the leaders of governments openly threatened to overthrow by force the territorial integrity and political independence of a neighbour.

I went on to say that these four incidents in their cumulative effect could certainly be described as a trend of Arab policy towards abandoning everything in the armistice agreement which conflicted with the doctrine of intensified hostility.

This raised the question of western, and especially American, policy. One of the reasons for this intensification of Arab hostility was an impression in the Arab world that the policy of the Western Powers, and especially of the United States, was now one of extreme indulgence. The Arab Governments had interpreted the Kibya resolution as an endorsement of their policies. In my last talk I had drawn attention to this danger, which was increased by the character and formulation of the Resolution adopted by the Western Powers. I indicated that there was a widespread belief in the Arab States, and I must say in Israel itself, that the United States in its desire to strengthen its influence in the Middle East would be reluctant ever to call the Arab governments to account. The impression of excessive indulgence to the Arabs in matters relating to Israel had already done much damage and was partly responsible for the deterioration which I had described. It would therefore be most timely for the United States to clarify its position diplomatically and publicly in favour of the Armistice Agreement and in opposition to any act or expression of hostility.

In making this suggestion I was animated by the belief that the United States stood for the maintenance by all governments of the Middle East of their Charter obligations and international treaties. I had believed and advocated to my Government the view that this was the correct interpretation of what President Eisenhower had called "impartiality". I presumed that this did not mean that the United States would be automatically impartial between any Arab position and any Israel position irrespective of their merits. The United States would not be impartial between the observance of Article XII of the Jordan agreement and its violation; between an illicit blockade and free navigation; between Israel acceptance and Syrian rejection of a constructive solution of the Broth Yasacov dispute; between the Israel position and the Arab position.



I assumed that the meaning was that the basic attitude of the United States was one of sympathy and friendship for all Middle Eastern countries, but that on each issue which arose the United States would apply objective criteria such as fidelity to the letter and spirit of the armistice agreements. If that were correct then I could confidently expect the support of the United States for our forthcoming complaint against Egypt, for our case against Jordan of the violation of Article XII, for a constructive solution leading to the resumption of work at Ennath Yaacov, and for resistance to such statements as those made by King Saud.

In addition to these things which I hoped the United States would be able to do, there were things which I hoped that the United States would avoid out of regard for peace in our area. It was inconceivable that this moment, this new climax of Arab hostility, should be regarded as a suitable time at which even to consider the despatch of arms to any country of the Arab League. Not only would such military reinforcement be highly imprudent but the political and psychological effects of any military aid, however, modest, would be little short of disastrous. The Arab governments would see the receipt of such arms at this moment as an implied endorsement of a policy towards Israel which the United States should surely rebuke and by no means encourage.

I had no comment to make on the plan for military aid to Pakistan. The States of the Arab League, however, were all collectively responsible for each of the acts and expressions of hostility to which I had referred. In particular, Iraq was not a remote country in whose reinforcement Israel would have no legitimate interest. Iraq had provided the command of the original invasion of our country by volunteer forces late in 1947 and the Iraqi army had taken a considerable part in the official invasion launched in May 1948; Iraqi troops had come within a few miles of Tel Aviv and had cut the water supply to Jerusalem. Whereas the other Arab countries had to some extent mitigated their aggression by signing armistice agreements, Iraq had simply invaded a country hundreds of miles away, inflicted as much destruction and killing as possible, and retired without signing any agreements. Since the armistice was signed by her neighbours, Iraq had persistently given expression to the most violent and intransigent hostility against Israel. Israeli and Iraqi Jews had been hanged in public. The life of the Iraqi Jewish community had been rendered so intolerable that a mass exodus had taken place; while the current Iraqi attitude to Israel was well illustrated by the recent detention of persons with Israeli passports whom the fortunes of air travel had brought down on Iraqi soil.

We fully understood the impatience of the United States at seeing no commencement in the reinforcement of Middle Eastern security against global danger. This, however, must surely yield to the overriding consideration of regional peace. Talk of arms supplies to Arab States, and still more the actual supply of such arms, would have very little effect in deterring aggression by a Great Power, but would have a potent effect in aggravating all the tensions of our region. The plan to supply arms to the Arab States and not to Israel was especially surprising since three years had elapsed since Israel had raised the question of military assistance from the United States. Israel, unlike her neighbors, did not maintain or uphold a policy of regional hostility. Her military prowess was universally acknowledged. Yet Israel's requests for arms under the Mutual Security Act had evoked no tangible response, except under the provision for reimbursable aid. The provision of arms



to Israel. It might be that the plan to arm certain Arab States together with Pakistan had been conceived on a purely military basis without regard to these overriding political considerations. I was confident that if the Secretary would take what I had said into account, he would not find it difficult to reach a conclusion in favour of withholding American military assistance at this time from any State-member of the Arab League.

The Secretary had absorbed all this with deep attention and without interruption except for his instruction on the Bnot Yaacov amendment. He began his reply by saying that I had given him an impressive and disquieting picture. He must admit that he shared my view that there had been a deterioration. At this moment he saw no prospect of increasing the chances of peace and prosperity in our region. This did not mean that the United States had despaired of this problem or had lost interest in it. At this moment, however, he must admit that he saw no avenue of fruitful progress. He would like to say at the outset that I had correctly defined and determined American policy. That policy was not one of indulgence to anybody's hostility or of a mechanical impartiality. There were certain principles which the United States would apply to each situation as it arose. The United States would support the armistice and would oppose any violation of it from any quarter. Impartiality meant that an objective criterion would be applied to every case. It did not mean that the end result of American consideration must always be equally favourable to either party. This was American policy and therefore what I had said to my Government on this point was true.

He hoped that the Arab Governments had no misunderstanding on this point. He found it hard to share my apprehension that the Arabs felt that the United States would always be indulgent to them. They could hardly feel any such thing after his talk to two Arab Ambassadors concerning the Bnot Yaacov project. He had told them directly that water was too precious and rare for it to be imprisoned by a dead hand and withheld from constructive use and that such would be the effect of making the issue dependent upon Syrian consent. They had pressed him hard on this point and he had stood his ground. With reference to the Jordan conference he contented himself with the remarks which Mr. Byroade had made.

On the question of the Suez Canal he would like to know when we contemplated raising the matter in the Security Council. Before I could reply, he amended the question to enquire whether I was asking his advice on the timeliness of raising the issue, or whether I was informing him of a decision that my Government had taken. I replied that the advice of the United States on this or other problems would always be most welcome and instructive, but that my Government did not feel that it could evade its own responsibility for defending its international rights. The position was that the Israel Government had decided that the issue would be raised in the Security Council at an early date unless, of course, the Egyptians would in the meantime abolish the blockade regulations and bring their position into conformity with the existing Security Council resolution. As for the time of the discussion, we were influenced by the fact that the Security Council was already preoccupied with another case in which we hoped for an early conclusion. It was therefore our present intention to raise the matter some time in February. The Secretary nodded assent and said: "I think it would be best to wait until the Bnot Yaacov discussion is completed". He made no attempt whatever to dissuade us from bringing the matter for discussion.

The Secretary said that he was disappointed by the present



was the intention of the United States to use all available pressure to induce Egypt to reach a peace settlement with Israel. For this reason he ventured to suggest that Israel had a positive interest in the success of the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations. He had heard that some of our friends had taken a different view and were urging the British Government not to agree to evacuation. He for his part thought that an agreed evacuation would contribute to the peace of the region and might be the prelude for important developments between Egypt and Israel. I said that I welcomed an opportunity to clarify our position on this point. Mr. Sharett had clearly stated that Israel had no desire or reason to oppose Egyptian national aspirations. I had made a similar statement in the Security Council in the actual hearing of an Egyptian representative, and I knew that he had conveyed this to Cairo. We had communicated a similar expression of our views to Egypt through such direct channels as we had. I was quite certain that the British Government too understood our position clearly. On the other hand, we were fully entitled to draw attention to the effect of an Anglo-Egyptian agreement on Israel's vital interests. We found it difficult to imagine that any British Government could sign a treaty with Egypt which did not secure the international interest for free passage through the Suez Canal. Great Britain as a member of the United Nations surely had a responsibility to have this international aspect in mind. Moreover, the withdrawal of British troops from the Canal Zone, which we did not oppose in itself, would constitute a veritable revolution in the military balance. It would be serious for Israel if Egypt were to inherit arsenals, installations and arms factories at a time when she maintained active hostility towards Israel.

The Secretary said that the treaty envisaged between Britain and Egypt would have no such effect.

I replied that even if this was so, the removal of such a formidable military barrier between Egypt and Israel must, in the context of Egypt's current attitude, create for Israel a legitimate security interest in the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations. These two problems, free passage through the Canal and the balance of Israel's security, might appear marginal to the Anglo-Egyptian negotiation. They were, however, of great importance to us and we were fully entitled to raise them.

Secretary Dulles said that what I had said caused him no difficulty at all and he fully understood our position. Some of our friends, however, appeared to be invoking us for substantive opposition to the idea of British evacuation as such. I said that we could not be responsible for such use as was made of our position by those who, for any reason, opposed an Egyptian settlement. There were some in Britain who were seriously impressed by the responsibility towards Israel which they would incur by an evacuation which took no account of the two considerations which I had enumerated. There might be others who were opposed to an Egyptian settlement for their own British reasons but who preferred to give such altruistic grounds as concern for Israel's future. These, however, were the facts of political life, in which there were often tactical alliances of interests between those who wanted the same things for different reasons. Our position, however, should not be misrepresented. We were not against an Anglo-Egyptian settlement as such -- indeed we would regard such a settlement as a contribution to the peace of our area; we merely urged that within the framework of such a settlement, if it were reached, the two elementary conditions which I had defined, both entirely justified, should be given due satisfaction.

The Secretary said that it was both gratifying and useful to receive this clarification. The Department of State would continue to



consider the specific issues which I had brought to his attention.

On the question of arms the Secretary was brief and incisive. He said that he understood the concern which I had expressed. Any arms which the United States might give to any Arab State would be very meagre. I must not, however, by any means take this to mean that he had decided to give any Arab State any arms at all. (This latter statement appeared to embarrass Mr. Byroader who had previously given Mr. Shiloah to understand that a firm American decision had been taken in this regard).

This was the fourth comprehensive discussion that I have had with the Secretary of State since I returned from Israel in mid-September. The distinguishing feature of this talk was his unreservedly defensive tone. For the first time he had no complaints to make about Israel and no advice on how to alleviate regional tension. The legal orthodoxy which he had applied against us in the cases of Kibya and Bnot Yaacov now obliged him, whether reluctantly or not, to support our case against Arab violations of the armistice. He is understood to be irritated by the rejection of American overtures at Amman, and is known to have been unimpressed by the representations of Dr. Malik and Mr. Zeid ed Din on Bnot Yaacov. The Egyptian position on the Suez Canal question is too indefensible juridically for him to condone. In relations with the State Department under Mr. Dulles' direction the importance of correct legal positions cannot be too emphatically stressed. I do not imagine that we can look forward to great enthusiasm in American action on behalf of our armistice positions. It is, however, an important political fact that in these three issues affecting Egypt, Jordan and Syria respectively, the United States is in principle allied with us and in conflict with the Arab position. The same is true in a moral sense of King Saud's statement which has evoked both surprise and disappointment in the State Department, not least because of its effect on the plan for the inclusion of Saudi Arabia in the armament plan. At this date the talk of arming Saudi Arabia has been dropped.

The public comment on my visit to the Secretary centred upon the arms question. The two front page stories in the New York Times gave considerable reverberation to our protests, and this was deepened further by the editorial published a few days later. According to James Reston, the Administration was on the verge of taking a positive decision in favour of the arms plan during January. They believed that the mention of Iraq and Saudi Arabia and the elimination of our contiguous neighbours would either preclude or soften our opposition. Mr. Reston understands that in the light of subsequent events the decision has now been delayed and its adoption no longer regarded as certain.

While attaching all due credence to this report from such a responsible source, I do not draw any conclusion at this stage except that we may have contributed to the deferment of what was apparently an imminent decision. It should be noted, however, that the Secretary's statement that a decision had not been made contained no promise to drop the scheme or to eliminate its Arab features. There is no doubt that the armament of Pakistan in alliance with Turkey is the centre and crux of the operation, and that the adhesion of Iraq is incidental. But the idea has certainly not been abandoned.

On the arms question it would be useful to clear up two obscure points: (1) What is the Turkish attitude? There are some who say that Turkey's name is being taken in vain and that Turkey is not interested



that the entire project is the fruit of Turkish initiative;

(2) What is the British attitude? It is universally believed here that the American plan has full British support or, as the Indian Ambassador put it to me, British acquiescence. On the other hand there are cables and letters from our Embassy in London in which various Privy Councillors express profuse sorrow at our plight and describe the new American plan as a joint danger to Britain and to Israel, but a danger to be overcome, apparently, by Israeli efforts without British aid.

I raise these two points because while our own exertions will be fully maintained, it will require Atlas-like efforts for us and our friends unaided to thwart a strategic policy conceived in the American national interest and supported by America's partners in the free world. If the Iraqi part of the plan were to encounter not only Indian and Israeli opposition but also serious challenge, or at least indifference, from Britain or Turkey, or both, the prospect of long term success would be far greater. At present we are gaining valuable time but not finally eliminating the threat.

January 25, 1954

cc. *Cheneston, Washington*  
*Segel* "  
*Mahar*  
*U.S. Delegation* } *New York*  
*Consulate*