

"The value of any declaration of policy can only be judged by the actions it inspires". It was in these words that in an exclusive interview today, Moshe Sharett, Foreign Minister of Israel explained the calm tinged with scepticism with which Russia's announcement that she is anxious to assist the United Nations to find a solution to the problem of Israel or in other words to assert her claim to intervene in Middle Eastern affairs has been received in Israel. Taking the joint communique issued at the conclusion of the talks between the Russian Prime Minister and Sir Anthony Eden as his theme, Mr. Sharett stated that in his view the source of threat to peace and security in the Middle East lies in Egypt's dreams of glory and revenge, the domination of the Arab world and the destruction of Israel. "Each has its own lure but they are interconnected. Israel is the only barrier to the North-African and West Asian sections of the Arab world being joined together under Egypt's sway. At the same time nothing but the elimination of Israel can win for her the adulation of the Arab masses which she hopes will enable her to gratify her lust for expansion. The peril has been rendered imminent by the overwhelming superiority of armaments she has recently acquired as the result of the Czech arms deal. Actually both signatories to the London communique are in varying degrees responsible for creating the present explosive situation. Britain's contribution has been a relatively minor one while that of the Soviet Bloc has been massive and menacing. From the point of view of precedent and the moral principle involved Great Britain assumed a grave responsibility by supplying Egypt before the Czech arms deal with Centurion tanks which it has denied to Israel to this day. Now that the two Governments proclaim their resolve to exert themselves on behalf of peace in the Middle East they might well be asked to explain how aggression is to be averted as long as the present ominous imbalance of armaments remains".

"Many of those who have met Colonel Nasser", I said, "believe that his policy is not warlike but is aimed at promoting the welfare of his people and the social development of Egypt. What is your view?"

"Unfortunately Colonel Nasser appears to talk in one language to his visitors from Europe and the United States and in quite a different one to the people of Egypt and Arab lands. I am tempted to compare him to a truly great man in the contemporary Middle East. Kemal Ataturk concentrated on the consolidation and reconstruction of Turkey proper. He abjured all expansionist tendencies and irridentist ambitions and became a hero by working only for the salvation of his people. To Colonel Nasser however the rescue of Egypt from misery, ignorance and disease does not seem to be enough. It is a long time since he relegated the struggle against his country's economic and social evils to the background and gave priority both politically and financially to large-scale rearmament and the pursuit of aggressive designs. Apart from his declarations there is the evidence of deeds - accumulation of massive armaments, military pacts subjecting the armies of Syria and Saudi Arabia and recently the Yemen to Egyptian command, attempts to control the Jordanian Government, relentless hate propaganda against Israel and the Jews, massing of troops in Sinai and finally the organisation of gangs of murderers and saboteurs."

"According to a statement recently published in the United States press he said that in his view the only solution to the Arab-Israeli problem was "for Israel to undergo an enormous surgical operation" while one of his colleagues suggested that if the operation was not performed immediately "the total extermination of the patient would soon become the minimum demand."

"What is your view of the statement in the Anglo-Soviet communique that the two countries will support the United Nations initiative to secure a peaceful settlement on a mutually acceptable basis?" I asked.

"We have always upheld a peaceful and mutually agreed settlement of the conflict between the Arab States and Israel, to be attained by free negotiations. We would welcome any influence which may be brought to bear upon the recalcitrant party in order to induce it to accept the principle of a freely negotiated peace settlement," answered the Foreign Minister.

"Have you any comment to make on Churchill's recent statement on the Middle East?"

"It was characteristic and deeply encouraging that Churchill, who will go down to history as the very embodiment of the condemnation of appeasement, should have raised his voice at this critical juncture in warning against appeasement,

in support of Israel's urgent claim for arms. A fearful price was once paid for the disregard of his timely warnings. May his present warning not go unheeded."

"Do you believe that the Hammarskjold mission will result in establishing peace in the Middle East?" I enquired.

"Mr. Hammarskjold's mission is an important departure. We have pledged him our full and wholehearted cooperation. He has already achieved a notable success in obtaining an undertaking strictly to observe a cease fire and refrain from crossing the Armistice lines. We regard it as his primary task to secure a complete and integral implementation of all provisions of the Armistice Agreements, of which the most fundamental one is to abstain from all hostile acts and threats of war. The crucial question is whether the Arab States, and primarily Egypt, will be ready to make the Armistice regime a living reality or whether they will continue to violate its basic principles by practising a sea blockade and other forms of economic warfare, by conducting guerilla activities, and by otherwise using it as a shield for the preparation of war and as an opening for the resumption of major hostilities. While waiting to see what the future holds in store and always hoping for the best, Israel must be prepared for the worst. It cannot rest its security on the slender hope of a change of heart in the other camp. Moreover, its readiness and ability to ward off an onslaught is the surest, nay the only, way of averting it, and sparing to itself as well as to its neighbours the horrors of a new war. Therefore, the placing at Israel's disposal of adequate quantities of defensive weapons remains an imperative necessity. Far from conflicting with the mission of the Secretary General of the United Nations, by effectively deterring aggression, this will only help to ensure its lasting success."

"Do you consider that Russia's motive in supplying Egypt with arms last year was a preliminary move to enable her to intervene in Middle East affairs at a later date?"

"Do you feel that she has now undergone a change of heart and genuinely desires peace?" I asked.

"Russia's declaration indicates a change of tone and a more balanced approach to the Arab-Israel problem. But the value of any declaration of policy can only be judged by the deeds that it inspires", declared Mr. Sharett. "The Soviet Union", he continued, "has implicitly justified the Czech arms deal which is the source of the present tension and threat to peace and stability - nor is it yet clear whether she is prepared to discontinue the process of the one-sided arming of the Arab states."

"Israel has asked the Great Powers to supply her with arms to counterbalance the Czech arms deal", I said. "Would not this start an arms race in the Middle East?"

"The arms race is already in full swing. The problem is to put an end to it by restoring some kind of balance, if not in the quantitative sense then at least as regards the quality of arms among which aircraft is of primary importance."

"Do you seriously believe that Egypt intends to make war upon Israel?"

"Egypt is certainly doing everything to be in a position to launch a major offensive and we are not prepared to leave Israel's safety to the mercy of Nasser's statesmanship."

"What importance do you now attach to the Tripartite Declaration of 1950?"

"We never attached much importance to it and now even less than at any time in the past."

"Will the Lake Tiberias irrigation project be recommenced on May 1st? Was this discussed with Hammarskjold and with what result? If work is restarted do you believe that Syria would intervene by force of arms?"

"There has never been any date fixed for the resumption of work, but we certainly would not like to lose yet another season in carrying this vital project a stage further. We have already lost three seasons and patience has its limits. The question was discussed with Hammarskjold. If Syria intervenes by force she would be the aggressor."

"Did the Prime Minister discuss the question of the Egyptian blockade of the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba with Hammarskjold?"

"Definitely", Mr. Sharett answered, but declined any further comment.

"Do you think that the recent changes in the Communist world, for example the anti-Stalin movement, are likely to assist the immigration of Jews from Russia and the satellite states?"