

Peace, Peace, When There Is No Peace (Israel and the Arabs 1948–1961)

N. Israeli (Akiva Orr and Moshé Machover)

Translated from Hebrew by Mark Marshall

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Translator's note

A few minor factual errors that have been identified in the text, such as incorrect dates, have been corrected in this translation. In addition a major error was identified by the authors in Chapter 3: the “Rockefeller letter” that was purportedly sent to US President Eisenhower in 1956 has subsequently been revealed to have been in fact a forgery manufactured by the East German intelligence agency. That is also acknowledged in a footnote appended to the text on the relevant page in the text.

Many of texts quoted in the book were originally written in English or have been published in English translation. Wherever possible, I have consulted and quoted from those English texts instead of re-translating them back into English from Hebrew. For only two of many examples: Chaim Weizmann's memoir *Trial and Error*, and Jorge García-Granados' *The Birth of Israel: The Drama As I Saw It*. However, unless otherwise indicated (e.g. by a parenthetical or footnote or bibliographical reference to an English-language source), it should be assumed that everything in the text has been translated from Hebrew. The most frequently-cited source in the book, *Knesset Records (Divrei haKnesset)*, is in Hebrew only. It is sometimes also referred to as “Knesset Reports”, “Records of the Knesset” and “Knesset Minutes” in English-language sources – presumably only the Hebrew title is official in Israel.

Appendices 6, 7, 14, 15 and 16 are new to this translation.

A word about Hebrew-language sources and the transliteration of their names: *Al Hamishmar*, *Davar*, *Haaretz*, *Kol Ha'am* and *Yedioth Aharonoth* are Hebrew-language newspapers, of which only *Haaretz* and *Yedioth Aharonoth* are still being published today. *Haolam Haze*h was a Hebrew-language weekly news magazine. You will notice that many transliterated Hebrew words in this text begin with “ha”. “Ha” is the definite article in Hebrew. “Haaretz”, for example, means “the country” (ha = the, aretz = country). “Haolam Haze”h means “this world” – literally, “the-world the-this [one]”. “Hashomer Hatzair” means “the young guard” – literally, “the-guard the-young [one]”. Sometimes the “ha” is separated from the substantive by a dash in transliterated terms appearing in this text, and sometimes not. I have been guided in transliteration in part by the occurrence of certain well-known Hebrew words or names that frequently appear in

English transliteration in print or the Internet. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, for example, which has a very popular English-language edition on the Internet, is the most obvious example.

“Mapai” is the Hebrew acronym for “Mifleget poalei erez yisra’el”: the Party of the Workers of the Land of Israel – i.e. the Labour Party. “Mapam” is the Hebrew acronym for “Mifleget ha-po’alim ha-me’uhedet” – the United Workers’ Party. “Maki” is the Hebrew acronym for “ha-Miflega ha-komunistit ha-yisra’elit” – the Israeli Communist Party. “Aliyah” – literally “ascent” – is the Hebrew word used in Israel to refer to the immigration of Jews to Israel.

All the Appendices were added in the 1999 Hebrew edition of this book, except for Appendices 6, 7, 14, 15 and 16, which were added to the English translation, done in 2009.

Mark Marshall

Toronto

July 2009

(Updated October 2011)

In memory of Tzvika Tamir [Lipsky] (1935-1995), a comrade, and the designer of the cover of this volume.

First publication, Jerusalem 1961. Second publication, Jerusalem 1999

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Second introduction, after an interval of thirty-eight years

This book was written in the years 1957-1961 and was first published in 1961. We were mathematics students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and we wrote it in our spare time. We decided to republish it now as a historical document – with no changes, apart from corrections of typographical errors and the addition of the appendices – even though today our views on some subjects are different from those reflected in the book.

At the end of 1962 we participated in the founding of the Israeli Socialist Organization (“Matzpen”). In the framework of this organization we developed, together with our comrades, a principled critique of Zionism that was far more extensive than the one we had formulated in the book. We no longer see the 1948 war as an Israeli liberation struggle against British imperialism, as the book suggests, but as a continuation of the colonizing enterprise of Zionism. Our position on the Soviet Union also became, after 1962, much more critical than the one reflected in the book, but the roots and basic direction of our critical position on Israeli policies and Zionism are clearly discernable in this volume.

Our original plan was to show that Israel’s participation in the British and French invasion of Egypt in 1956 was not a “war of no choice”, as the Israeli government – and most of the public in Israel – insisted, but rather a contrived war and an integral part of Ben-Gurion’s policy: he preferred alliances with colonial powers over compromise with the Arabs. As we gathered material for the book, additional facts became clearer, especially in relation to the importance of the secret accord between Ben-Gurion and Abdullah in 1948. This accord violated the UN’s Partition Resolution of 29 November 1947, which had called for establishing two states in Palestine – one for Jews and one for Palestinians – and which led to the creation of the State of Israel.

By signing that accord, Ben-Gurion robbed the Palestinians of half of the area allocated to them by the Partition Resolution. Abdullah robbed them of the other half. The Palestinians were left with nothing. The Ben-Gurion–Abdullah accord was intended to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state. Israel was in violation of the UN Partition Resolution, and with this accord became a direct dispossessor of Palestinian lands and Palestinian independence.

The Israeli-Arab conflict did not begin in 1967, or even in 1948. It started in 1897, at the moment when Zionism claimed Jewish sovereignty over a land in which the majority of inhabitants had been – for more than a thousand years – Arabs.

This is not a conflict between Jews and Arabs; nor is it a conflict between Judaism and Islam. For hundreds of years Jews lived in Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed and Tiberias, without any serious friction with the Muslim Arab majority in the country. It is a conflict between a political movement – political Zionism – and Arab nationalism. Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg) in his article "Truth from the Land of Israel" (1891) had foreseen this conflict even before Herzl established political Zionism.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky, in his article "The Iron Wall" (1923), remarked that the Arabs in Palestine were reacting to Zionism as would any people in the same circumstances. The Zionists immigrated to a country inhabited by a majority of Arabs with the goal of setting up a state for the Jews. Were the Palestinians (who in 1920 numbered 600,000 as opposed to 60,000 Jews) supposed to accept with cheers of joy a movement that openly aspired to create in Palestine a state for the Jews, in which the Palestinians would be relegated at best to the status of a tolerated minority, and at worst to that of refugees evicted from their lands and their country? What people would agree to such a thing? Even though the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians was inevitable, there were a number of opportunities for compromise. One opportunity came in 1956, following Egypt's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal. The British and French governments responded with plans to invade Egypt and re-occupy the Canal by military force. World public opinion opposed such an invasion. The governments of Britain and France, however, colluded to deceive the public. They signed a secret agreement with Ben-Gurion, according to which Israel would invade Egypt and provide a pretext for French and British armies to invade the Suez Canal, supposedly in order to separate Israeli and Egyptian forces and to guarantee freedom of navigation in the Canal.

Nasser feared that possibility and was prepared to reach a peace accord with Israel. He was the first Arab leader who proposed peace with Israel (at the Bandung conference in 1955) – provided Israel complied with the UN Partition Resolution of 29 November 1947 and restored to Palestinians the territory allocated to them by the UN.

Ben-Gurion rejected Nasser's peace proposal and labelled it a "sanctimonious accusation". Nasser was held in high esteem in the Arab world, and an accord with him could have led to a resolution of the conflict. But Ben-Gurion preferred military collaboration with France and Britain and rejected Nasser's peace proposal. Ben-Gurion continually denied that he had signed an accord for Israeli-French-British military collaboration, even though it was an open secret that French armour was unloaded at the port of Haifa and French warplanes landed at the Lydda airfield a full week before Israel invaded Egypt, on 29 October 1956.

Originally the aim of this book was to explain why in 1956 Ben-Gurion preferred an invasion of Egypt in alliance with France and Britain over peace with Nasser. The intention was to provide an explanation without recourse to secret information; our sole source would be material published in the Israeli press between 1948 and 1956. The reader will judge to what extent we were successful.

The majority of the Jewish Israeli public continued to deny the existence of an Israeli-French-British collaboration, even after the publication of the memoirs of French and British generals and politicians, who reported that on 23 October 1956 Ben-Gurion went to Sèvres, near Paris, and there concluded a secret accord for Israeli-French-British collaboration according to which Israel would launch a war (which in Israel was dubbed "Operation Qadesh") against Egypt on 29 October 1956 and afterwards the armies of France and Britain would invade Egypt, depose Nasser, and return the Suez Canal to British/French ownership. In return Israel received from France aircraft, tanks, artillery, and air defences for Tel Aviv.*

Ben-Gurion also planned to annex the Sinai Peninsula to Israel; he claimed that Sinai was not part of Egypt. This was also the view of most Israelis after the military victories of the wars of 1956 and 1967. When our book was published in 1961 it was greeted with silence. Journalists, academics and historians all refrained from reviewing it.

Most Israelis responded to the book according to the principle, "facts won't change my mind". They insisted that "Operation Qadesh" was a war of "no-choice" that was imposed on them because of Nasser's ambition to destroy Israel. Ben-Gurion denied to

* It later transpired that France also agreed at Sèvres to build a nuclear reactor in Israel and supply it with fissible material. This eventually led to Israel becoming the world's fifth nuclear power. See *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 23 December 2005 – added by authors for the English translation

his dying day that he had visited France on the eve of the war and signed an accord for military collaboration with France and Britain. Even Shimon Peres, who served in 1956 as Ben-Gurion's envoy for his contacts with France, continued to deny the collaboration for 30 years. But in October 1986, on the 30th anniversary of the Israeli invasion of Egypt, at a public ceremony at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheva, and accompanied by his French comrades from 1956, Peres celebrated the collaboration that he had been denying for 30 years.

In order to explain Israel's invasion of Egypt in 1956 we had to explain the background to the invasion, the Israeli "reprisal operations" in the 1950s, as well as the 1948 war. In the course of gathering the material, it became clear to us that the root of the Israeli-Arab conflict lay not in a conflict between Israel and Arab states, but in a conflict between the Zionist settlement movement and the Palestinians over the lands and independence of Palestine. This basic fact was vigorously denied from 1950 up to the Intifada of 1987 by nearly all the leaders, teachers, journalists, historians and academics of the Israeli establishment, as well as by the majority of the Jewish public in Israel, including many of those who fought in 1948.

It took six years of Intifada and a great many fatalities before the majority of Israelis were ready to acknowledge the existence of the Palestinian people and the justice of their demands. For 40 years the majority of Israelis insisted that "there is no Palestinian people", and thus no political cause for the Israeli-Arab conflict. Because of this assertion, many concluded that the "cause of the Israeli-Arab conflict is Arab hatred of the Jews." This led to the conclusion that Israel had no choice but to continue to defend itself against destruction. Many Israeli youths were ready to sacrifice – and did sacrifice – their lives, in their belief that they were protecting themselves from annihilation because there was "no choice". The truth is that from 1936- 1939 there was the choice of supporting the Arab Revolt against the British and forging an alliance with the Palestinians. In 1948 there was the choice of remaining within the UN partition lines and not grabbing the part of Palestine that the UN had allocated to the Palestinians. In 1956 there was the choice of signing a peace accord with Nasser and not invading Egypt alongside France and Britain. In 1967 there was the choice not to attack Egypt, Jordan and Syria. In 1971 there was the choice of giving back Sinai in return for a peace accord

with Egypt and thereby preventing the Yom Kippur war of 1973. In 1982 there was the choice not to invade Lebanon, and there was the choice after the outbreak of the Intifada of 1987 to discuss with the Palestinians a compromise arrangement and not to “break their arms and legs”, as Rabin ordered.

But from the 1930s on, Zionism preferred the use of force against the Palestinians rather than compromise. The compromises that Zionism made with the Arabs did not come on its own initiative; rather, they were imposed on it by foreign powers. The withdrawal from Sinai in 1956 and the peace with Egypt in 1978 were imposed on Israel by the USA. The Oslo Accord was an Israeli response to American pressure to continue the Madrid talks. The implementation of the Oslo Accord is being carried out as a result of American pressure on Israel. A fair agreement with the Palestinians is possible, but it requires concessions that Zionism is not prepared to make.

As long as Israeli policy is based on the principles of Zionism, genuine peace with the Palestinians will remain impossible. A necessary condition for a peace accord – one that the two sides are not coerced into accepting but rather support willingly – is that Israel change from being the state of the Jews of the world to being the state of its inhabitants, both Arabs and Jews. Anyone who is opposed to this concept cannot complain about the continuation of the conflict.

The Oslo Accord is not real peace but an “apartheid” solution, a fraud intended to enclose the Palestinians in a political Bantustan-like corral in order to bypass a just solution to the conflict. Sooner or later this experiment will end, as did the Bantustan experiment in South Africa. In South Africa a prolonged and bloody conflict was resolved with the establishment of a shared state. This demonstrates that here too there is a reasonable chance for a shared life under equality.

Appendices have been added to this edition, which include information that was concealed at the time we wrote the book and was revealed only decades later.

We felt then that our analysis would eventually be confirmed. And indeed, the facts that have been revealed since then, some of which surprised even us, back up our analysis. This does not mean that all the concealed information from that period has been disclosed.

Akiva Orr and Moshé Machover, 1999

If His Majesty the Sultan were to give us Palestine, we could in return undertake to regulate the whole finances of Turkey. We should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism. We should as a neutral State remain in contact with all Europe, which would have to guarantee our existence.

Theodore Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 1896. Translated from the German by Sylvie D'Avigdor. Translation published by the American Zionist Emergency Council, 1946.

On 12 July [1920] there was a vast gathering at the Albert Hall in London, attended by 12,000 people. Present at the gathering were Mr. Balfour, the Marquess Crewe, Lord Robert Cecil, other members of the English government, Members of Parliament, and other politicians. After the Ministers delivered ambiguous statements of sympathy and encouragement for the Jewish people, Messrs. Weizmann and Sokolov gave their speeches. They used the same words they'd been reiterating for three years: inflated phrases spoken with eloquence, of which nothing was memorable.

Then my turn came to speak. Turning to the Ministers who were present, I said: In a moment of danger during the World War you thought that we, the Jews, could be useful to you, and you appealed to us, making promises [the Balfour Declaration] that were very general, but which could be interpreted in a satisfactory way. We considered your views and were loyal to your proposals. We want only to move forward. We made a pact with you. We are well aware of the dangers and commitments involved in this pact. We know very well what you hope to receive from us. We are to stand guard over the Suez Canal for you. We will be the sentry on the route to India, which passes through the Near East. We are willing to provide this difficult military service, but it is vital that you permit us to become strong enough to fulfill our mission. Loyalty for loyalty! Faithfulness for faithfulness!

Max Nordau, *Testament to Zionism* [Hebrew: *tzava'a le-tzionut*], in Max Nordau, *Zionist Writings*, published by the Zionist Library beside the head office of the Zionist Organization, Jerusalem, 1961/62, book 4, p. 203)

[original title page]

N. Israeli

Peace, Peace When There Is No Peace

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Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone *is* given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ When *there is* no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down,” says the LORD.

Jeremiah 6, 13–15

Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who make my people stray; who chant “Peace” while they chew with their teeth, but who prepare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths: “Therefore you shall have night without vision, and you shall have darkness without divination; the sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them. So the seers shall be ashamed, and the diviners abashed; indeed they shall all cover their lips; for *there is* no answer from God.” But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

Micah, 3, 5–8

Introduction [to the first edition]

There is a saying attributed to Ben-Gurion: “What are newspapers? You read and you forget!” This is true, all the more so when it concerns the central problem of the State of Israel: the problem of its relations with the Arabs. Many facts regarding this problem that have been published in the press in Israel have dropped out of the readers’ memory. This book is intended to refresh that memory.

Isolated details that are published in the press in bits and pieces, over various time intervals, do not come together to form a unified and meaningful picture in the mind of the reader. This book is intended to put the jigsaw of details together to create a coherent picture. This is not a history book in the usual sense, for it deals only with facts *that have already been published in the press*. Israeli foreign and defence policies are like an iceberg – nine-tenths are submerged under the surface, concealed from the eyes of the citizen. When the material that is now concealed in secret files is permitted to be published, it will be possible to give a more detailed description of the history. But even the little that has been published so far suffices to shed clear light on the broad outlines of the picture.

In this book there is no disclosure of astounding secrets. Everything has already been printed, published, read ... and forgotten. If nevertheless the reader is surprised, that is only because the details *assembled together* reveal a clear and surprising picture.

We refrained from touching upon the important problem of the Arab population in Israel. In our view this problem is beyond the scope of this project and requires a separate, in-depth analysis.

If the following pages rouse readers to reconsider their attitudes to the problem – that for us will be sufficient compensation.

Tel Aviv, August, 1961

Note: occasionally we found it necessary to insert our comments into the cited texts. These comments are placed within square brackets and should not be attributed to the person being quoted.

Chapter 1

“Following Clayton’s Participation in the League’s Meetings”

“The harshest act of hostility”

The Israeli–Arab conflict is, in substance, an outcome of “the problem of Palestine”,¹ but its special current form was shaped during the 1948 war and its aftermath. “The problem of Palestine”, that is, the totality of the relations between Jews, Arabs and the British authorities in Palestine, was transformed in 1948 into the problem of relations between the State of Israel and the Arabs.

It is impossible therefore to understand this conflict properly – let alone propose ways to solve it – without knowing what was the political nature of the 1948 war, which – like every other war – was first and foremost an armed confrontation between two camps with opposing *political* aspirations. Who made up the camp that stood against the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine in the year 1948? From whom did the war of liberation liberate the Jews of Palestine?

Let us see how this question is answered now, and how it was answered at the time of the war and immediately after it.

The first year of the existence of the State of Israel was the period of the War of Liberation and Independence. The Arab states sent their armies to conquer the State of Israel, but the IDF and the entire Yishuv stood firm with a heroism that amazed all the nations of the world and repelled their enemies. (Dr. M. Avidor and Y.

¹ In the original Hebrew text of this book, the authors usually referred to Palestine as *Eretz Yisra’el*, which literally means “the Land of Israel”. That was simply the term Israeli Jews used to refer to Palestine in Hebrew at the time when they were writing the book. It was not a controversial or politically-loaded term, and even Israeli Jews who were hostile to Zionism and sensitive to the plight of the Palestinian Arab refugees used it when they were speaking or writing in Hebrew. For the English version I have chosen to translate the term as “Palestine” or “the Land of Israel” in contexts in which they would respectively be used in English normally. Accordingly the word “Palestine” is usually used, but the term is translated literally as “the Land of Israel” in contexts where it seems natural to do so: i.e. when the Jewish religious or historical tie to the land or the Zionist political claim to the land on behalf of the Jewish people is being emphasized – trans.

Spivak, *'Am yisra'el be-artzo u-ve-nekhar* [The people of Israel in its land and in foreign lands] 1954, p. 219. Hebrew)

These words are taken from a textbook for eighth-year pupils, one of whose authors was for many years the Director General of the Ministry of Education and Culture. He was thus in a position to know the history and what to instruct the pupils.

Immediately upon the publication of the UN Resolution, the Arabs launched a concentrated attack on the Hebrew Yishuv all over the country. Large bands led by trained commanders and armed with firearms openly assailed the Hebrew settlements and blocked the roads. The Hebrew security forces were forced to go on the defensive in the harshest conditions, while being impeded by the British regime. Upon the proclamation of the State of Israel on the day the British Mandate ended (14 May 1948) the invasion of our country by the armies of the neighbouring Arab states began ... To these were added the Arabs of Palestine and volunteers from Saudi Arabia, Yemen and other countries. (D. Shiffman, *Moldati yisra'el* [My homeland Israel], textbook for primary schools, Yavne, 1958, p. 17. Hebrew)

The day after the proclamation of the establishment of the State, seven Arab countries, both near and distant neighbours, rose up ... and invaded the country in order to destroy the hopes of Israel and exterminate by force of arms the enterprise of the rebirth of our people. (N. Razieli, *Artzi yisra'el* [My country Israel], textbook for primary schools, Karni, 1956, p. 14. Hebrew)

On 15 May 1948, immediately following the proclamation of the birth of the State of Israel, the armies of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and Iraq invaded the country ... With marvellous heroism the soldiers of Israel repelled the Arab rioters who treated the Jewish fighters with cruelty and did not recognize international laws of war. (Dr. Kirschenboim, *Toldot 'am yisra'el be-dorenu* [The history of the people of Israel in our generation], textbook for secondary schools, 1957, p. 373. Hebrew)

That is what the textbooks teach.

A critic of Israeli policy concerning relations with the Arab countries, U. Avnery, writes:

The simple truth is that the war of 1948 was a national war – a war between two nations who lived in one country. Each believed wholeheartedly that its national aspirations could be realized only after the decisive defeat of the other nation. (*Haolam Hazeh*, 19 August 1959, editorial)

In the foreword to the Government Yearbook (Heb. *Shenaton ha-Memshalah*) 1960, Prime Minister and Minister of Defence D. Ben-Gurion writes:

The United Nations Organization ... did not do its duty when Arab states attacked Israel immediately after its establishment. ... The harshest act of hostility, which had uniquely fortuitous consequences [!?!], was the attack of the Arab rulers on the State of Israel on the day it was founded. Following battles that lasted, with three pauses, for 61 days, the fledgling IDF subdued all the Arab armies and expanded the borders of the State.

In response to a speech by the British Foreign Minister A. Eden, D. Ben-Gurion said in the Knesset on 15 November 1955:

The only state in the Middle East that is entitled to seek recompense for the criminal attack of the Arab states in the year 1948 is the State of Israel. It was attacked by its neighbours. Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia were the aggressors, and these states still continue their war against Israel by other means – by boycott, by embargo and by recruiting bands of terrorists and assassins who are sent from time to time into Israel. The fact of the attack on Israel by the Arab states is still retained in the memory of our generation in all countries

of the world. (*Shenaton ha-Memshalah* [Government Yearbook] 1960, p. 8. Hebrew)

“Why raise matters that are long known?”, the Israeli reader will ask. “After all, it is known that the Arabs of Palestine and the neighbouring countries opposed the UN Resolution regarding the establishment of the Jewish state, and the Arab armies invaded Palestine, aiming to conquer it and thereby prevent the implementation of the Resolution.”

“I shall never understand”

And what about Britain, which ruled the Palestine from the end of the First World War to 15 May 1948? What role did *Britain* play in the battles of 1948?

Two versions are widely current among the public on this question:

1. The 1948 war was a war between Jews and Arabs, and Britain had no part in it.
2. It was a war between Jews and Arabs, and Britain supported the Arabs and attacked the Jews.

The aforementioned quotations incline mostly towards the first version. And what was written on this subject in 1948?

The Mandatory Power refused the United Nations Committee entry into Palestine, refused to permit the organization of a Jewish militia to take over defense, refused to comply with the Assembly’s recommendation to open a port of immigration, refused to hand over any of the Government services to an incoming Jewish successor; it expelled Palestine from the sterling bloc, dismantled the equipment of administration without handing any of it over, and simultaneously allowed the Government services to disintegrate. But while Palestine was closed to the Committee of the United Nations, its frontiers were open to the invasion of

irregular Arab forces, which came across the Allenby Bridge on the Jordan River, an easily guarded point. Under these circumstances it is not to be wondered at that Arab attacks multiplied. (C. Weizmann, *Trial and Error*. New York: 1949. Harper & Brothers. p. 470)

I was profoundly convinced that not only were the Jews thoroughly capable of defending themselves, but that the much-touted danger of complete administrative chaos in Palestine, following on the British withdrawal, was an illusion, chiefly created by the British course of action, but belied, in fact, by the soundness of the structure of Jewish life. (Ibid., p 472)

Is there need for any better testimony than that?

Ch. Weizmann, the first president of the State of Israel, was harshly criticized by many Jews in this country for his pro-British position. “Down with Pétain Weizmann” the Etzel (Irgun) and Lehi (Stern) undergrounds wrote on many walls in the years before the birth of the State, comparing Weizmann’s collaboration with the British to Pétain’s collaboration with the Nazis.

If Weizmann, the cornerstone of whose political outlook was collaboration of the Yishuv in Palestine with Britain, wrote these words in his memoirs, surely they cannot be doubted.

I shall never understand how the Mandatory Government could allow foreign Arab forces to cross freely by bridge and road into Palestine and prepare in leisure and with impunity to make war against the Jews and against the settlement adopted by the United Nations. I have always paid high tribute to the great act of statesmanship of Great Britain in inaugurating the international recognition of our right to nationhood.

But in exposing everything and everybody in Palestine to destruction by foreign invaders the Mandatory Government has acted against its own best tradition and left a tragic legacy to the country's future. ... (Ibid. p. 473)

It is also tragic that a central political leader, who was elected as first President of Israel, was unable to understand the position of Britain in 1948. In view of the clarity of the facts at the time, Ch. Weizmann should have said: "I will never understand how I could always uphold the political practice of Great Britain on the question of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine." But precisely at the most critical moment for his nation, he could not admit to himself and to others that the foundation of his political outlook had collapsed.

But for our part, we are not concerned with Weizmann here. Another politician wrote:

The [British] government has violated the UN resolution and breached its promise [to leave the country without causing difficulties], and it is no longer a secret that that government is trying every scheme and path to nullify the UN Resolution on the creation of the Jewish state. It is doing so in two ways. First, it is placing more obstacles on the path of the Implementation Committee [of the UN] ... Secondly, it is encouraging the violent Arab attacks, if not directly then indirectly, by giving arms to neighbouring countries, by effectively permitting the invasion of the country by armed gangs from Arab countries, by impeding the creation of a Jewish militia, by preventing the provision of arms for Jewish defence and by feigned neutrality regarding Arab attacks on Jewish communities. (D. Ben-Gurion, *Davar*, 8/1/48)

Britain had, then, a specific role in the 1948 war. This raises the question: was the role of the British restricted to support and encouragement, or did the *initiative* also come from their side?

One of the basic facts of the situation, and perhaps the decisive one, is that we have no quarrel with the Arabs of Palestine, and all the more so is the conflict between

us and the neighbouring Arab states ... but an artificial one. There is a third party that has an interest in the conflict and is doing everything possible to incite discord and to fan the flames. The world evidently knows who that third party is, but in these days of ceasefire without cessation of fire, this fact is being banished from minds in the outside world. London is succeeding to a great and growing extent in dissociating itself, by means of propaganda, from the entire conflict in [the eyes of] the world and in representing it to world public opinion as a conflict between Jews and Arabs. (*Haaretz*, 29/6/48, editorial)

The liberal newspaper was friendly to Britain before the War of Liberation and also after it; the war of 1948 and the period of struggle is now regarded by it as an unpleasant and isolated interlude in the continuum of good and friendly relations between the Jews of Palestine and Britain. It is to be regretted, therefore, that the author of the article did not have at his disposal the textbooks which today are available to every schoolchild.

“A covert and two-faced war”

In the War of Liberation it is possible to discern three stages in the opponent’s conduct of the war:

The first stage, which was launched immediately after the publication of the UN Resolution on Palestine, was run by the Arab Higher Committee of the Palestinian Arabs. During this stage attacks were carried out by local Arabs on Jewish transportation as well as on individual Jews and on Jewish settlements.

The second stage, which started about two months later, was guided by the Arab League – an umbrella organization of the Arab states. At this stage the Liberation Army, composed of Arab volunteers under the command of Qawuqji, invaded from Syria and attacked Jewish settlements (Tirat Zvi, Mishmar Ha-‘Emek and others).

The last stage, which was launched the day after Britain left the country, on 15/5/48, was also coordinated by the League; the regular armies of Iraq, Syria, Transjordan and Egypt invaded Palestine. What then was the nature of the Arab League that led the last two stages of the war?

Following the accord between Salah Jaber [the Iraqi Foreign Minister] and Bevin and following Clayton's participation in the League's meetings, the borders were opened for the invasions of Syrians, Iraqis and others. For the first time we are facing a serious effort by the rulers of neighbouring countries to fight by force against the creation of Israel. There assuredly is someone who is whispering to them: Don't worry! You will have defenders! You can be members of the UN and wage war on its resolutions. The war on the Jews – as Churchill put it – is despicable; and it is despicable because it is covert and two-faced and is being waged by mercenary forces.

Those who control British policy must use mercenary forces against us. It is doubtful whether the Arab League alone – which has not demonstrated any capacity to act on small or large matters of importance to Arabs, neither in the development of their countries nor in curing their diseases nor in the elimination of ignorance – had the strength to rebel against the UN and go to war against us. We are faced with a campaign conducted by a great power, whose capacity to inflict harm is still great, and it is best if we realize what we are up against. (D. Ben-Gurion, speech at a rally of the Mobilization Fundraising drive, *Davar*, 18/2/48)

Blunt words: the war against the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine is conducted by a “great power”. “Those who control *British* policy must use mercenary forces” against the Jews, because they cannot afford to appear before the world as violators of the UN Resolution. They use the armies of the Arab states and wage a “covert war”. The Foreign Minister of Britain's government conducts personal talks with the Iraqi Foreign Minister, and not only with him. The meetings of the Arab League are attended by one of the most influential and mysterious key figures in the Middle East at that time, Brigadier Clayton, who is the liaison between the British Foreign Office and the Arab League. The League,

which serves (as Ben-Gurion put it in the same speech) as Britain's "pawn", is organizing a ragtag invasion of the country.

British colonialism is appearing before us in its classic form: as an instigator of conflict among the colonial peoples; not as a neutral party or as one "aiding" the Arabs, but as the puller of strings. It is not Britain that is behind the Arab initiative, but the Arabs are serving as a pawn of the British initiative.

One day before the Arab invasion of Palestine Dr. Herzl Rozenblum wrote:

What has changed? Tonight the [High] Commissioner leaves Jerusalem in order to sail from Haifa to his country, and the question is: what has changed? Why is this night different from all other nights? This is the difficult question, and the answer is this: that on "all other nights" the Arabs have waged war against us with the encouragement of the English whereas now it is the other way around. Now the English will wage war against us with the encouragement of the Arabs. Abdullah's Legion has become – even *legally* – a British army: General MacMillan has been ordered by Britain to urge the British officers in the Legion to go on doing their job (in the war against the Jews) – so it has been reported today from London. Open, simple and undisguised. The Egyptian forces that are heading in our direction are British armed forces too, and they are forces that Britain's commanders hired from King Farouk – explicitly and overtly hired them after King Farouk was about to dissociate himself from the whole Palestinian business. At the head of the Egyptian battalions marches Brigadier Clayton. And here in this country appears MacMillan, he too an English general as we know, and the role of his "zone of occupation" in our country is to help them. We are facing military England, which is trying to do what civilian England could not do. And it matters little that the soldiers are mostly "Arabs".

Montgomery too, in his time, commanded Indians and Poles in Italy, but all understood very well that they were a *British* army. And as of today a *British* army is in action in the Near East. (*Yedioth Aharonoth* 13/5/48)

On the day the regular armies invaded Palestine, Foreign Minister M. Sharett said:

Last night at midnight the British regime ended the era of its presence in the country, but it did not end its existence throughout the Middle East. The account between us and England has not been settled. England is still a force in the Middle East and it has means of action and influence. The Arab Legion is still a military tool of Britain, it is a British officer who heads the Legion that overran Kfar Etzion, the Legion still subsists on money from England and under the terms of his military alliance the King of Transjordan is obliged to consult with Britain before he goes to war. The promise of British representatives that the Jordanian Legion would leave the country before the end of the Mandate – has been broken. But even if it was fulfilled, England's responsibility continues as long as the treaty exists and as long as it pays the subsidy. And it is not only a question of the Legion. The Arab League is an instrument of British influence in the East. All the threads of the extensive web of England's political support in the East are tied to the League, which is after all our mortal enemy, and which has waged war on us. England cannot evade responsibility for the Arab attack on us as long as its ties to the League remain as they are. (*Davar*, 16/5/48)

And his successor as Foreign Minister said:

We assert that the British are responsible for every drop of blood that has been shed in this country. They are responsible for all the reinforcements that the Arab bands are getting. It is in the power of the British army immediately to stop the ongoing invasion, but the British want for the forces hostile to us to grow stronger, that the territory of the country allocated to us be reduced and that we implement the Morrison Plan with our own hands. (G. Meyerson, Davar, 28/3/48. Emphasis ours)

“Actually, I wanted to leave”

After the end of the war, at the time of the signing of the armistice agreements with the Arab countries, the Foreign Minister argued with representatives of the Herut Movement about the question as to who expelled the British from the country, and while doing so he explained the cynical calculations of British policy:

Finally the foreign regime turned to the UN. Why did it go to the UN? Indeed it announced when it went to the UN: “I am not obliged to accept your opinion, I am only asking for advice and we shall see what the advice is.” It was certain that there would not be a decision at the UN, either by two-thirds or by less than two thirds, to partition along East–West lines. It assumed that no one would present a recommendation, and so for lack of any alternative they would say: “We have no recommendation, you must administer that country.” It would then reply, “Actually, I wanted to leave the country, but if I am imposed upon to administer, I will do so as I see fit.” And then there would be another White Paper, or Morrison Plan, or some other incarnation of the same system, and then finally the rebellious Yishuv would flinch and capitulate. (M. Sharett, 20/6/49, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 1, p. 761)

A year later, when King Abdullah announced the annexation to his kingdom of his conquests in the West Bank of the Jordan River, Knesset Member M. Begin, leader of the Herut Movement, attacked the policy of the government and while doing that revisited the War of Independence:

Abdullah, on the command of Glubb and Clayton, sent his forces against us, destroyed Gush Etzion, stormed Jerusalem and wanted to conquer it and destroy it, to cross the mountains of Judea, to join up with the Legion forces that stood on the Ramle–Lydda line, afterwards to join up on the approaches to Tel Aviv with the Egyptian armoured column and inflict annihilation on us, so that afterwards Bevin could “intervene” in order to rescue the surviving remnant of Israel after the

campaign of extermination and put it into a ghetto. (M. Begin, 3/5/50, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 5, p. 1282)

So, Britain took the Palestine question to the United Nations because of the pressure of world public opinion, which was outraged after the extermination of Europe's Jews, and because of the actions of the underground movements in this country, assuming that the UN would return to it the mandate to rule in Palestine. To its surprise a majority of two-thirds was created in the General Assembly in favour of the creation of two states – Jewish and Arab – in Palestine. It was the first time after the Second World War in which the Soviet Union and the United States voted for the same resolution. Because of the large number of abstentions (10) the required majority of two-thirds was created (33 in favour against 13 opposed). Then Britain began to conduct a covert war against the Jewish Yishuv. First it incited the Arabs of this country, using the “Higher Arab Committee”; then Brigadier Clayton, the British government's official representative in the “League”, proposed the invasion of Palestine by irregulars, and when Qawuqji's invasion failed, Clayton worked out at the conference of the Arab Chiefs-of-Staff in Bludan in Syria the details of the plan for the invasion of the country by the Arab armies, the main features of which were an assault by the Legion on the Jerusalem–Ramle–Lydda line from the east, an assault by an Egyptian armoured column on the Gaza–Jaffa line from the south and the meeting of the two columns at the approaches to Tel Aviv for the purpose of occupying it. At that stage Britain, the kind “saviour”, was to appear in order to save the Jews of Palestine from the clutches of the “Arab barbarians” and to renew its rule in the country. In this assessment there is no disagreement among political rivals such as D. Ben-Gurion and M. Begin.

“British arms, British command, British money and British diplomacy”

Nevertheless, the reader may ask, was it not a war of Arabs against Jews? No.

1. Because starting a war is above all a political measure, decided upon not by soldiers but by politicians. The nature of any war is determined not by the

nationality of the *soldiers* participating in it, but according to the political attitudes of the *politicians* on the two warring sides. It is true that Arabs fought Jews in 1948, but the Arab soldiers acted according to the instructions and interests of British politicians. In 1948 the governments of Egypt, Transjordan, Syria and Iraq were not able to make any important decision without the approval of the British Foreign Office, and the decision to invade the country was one of supreme importance.

2. Not only the politicians, but also a substantial part of the technical officer corps in the communications centres, in the artillery, in the regional commands etc. was British – particularly in the Legion, but also in the armies of Egypt and Iraq.

For all of our bitter experiences in the past, we had no idea how malignant and obdurate is the wickedness of the British government. All the wickedness that was revealed in the [McDonald 1939] White Paper, everything up to then pales in comparison with the malicious campaign that is being conducted now with the purpose of destroying our independence and our existence by the force of British arms, British command, British money and British diplomacy. (M. Sharett, *Davar*, 20/6/48, speech at the Mapai [Labour Party] Council)

How can it be forgotten that on 22 February 1948 British policemen with their own hands brought cars loaded with explosives to Ben-Yehuda Street in Jerusalem, and caused an explosion that resulted in 50 dead and hundreds of wounded? It was the British too, who in that period blew up the presses of *The Jerusalem Post*.

It must also be mentioned that Britain froze the sterling reserves of the Jews of Palestine and sabotaged and restricted the supply of petroleum to Jews. These were overt measures of economic warfare, which caused great hardships to the new state. Britain and the USA imposed an embargo on the supply of arms to the Middle East and prevented with all their might the supply of arms to Jews while Transjordan, Egypt and Iraq were provided with vast amounts of arms “for the purpose of defence against Communism.”

Out through the door, back through the window

It is of interest to see how the nature of the war was grasped not only by the politicians, but also by civilians and soldiers. A correspondent of the London *Observer* who interviewed Israeli wounded in 1948, writes:

I asked a swarthy and angry-looking youth on what front he had been wounded. "In the Negev," the youth replied. "In a battle against the Arabs?" I went on to ask. "Yes, this time against the Arabs, but we would not have been astonished if we had run into the English during the battle." The words of the wounded young man reflect the state of mind prevalent in the Hebrew Yishuv – hatred of Britain alongside boundless devotion to their tiny state. This hatred is all the greater because it is love that turned into hate. Sometimes it is expressed in words of contempt spoken by those wounded soldiers, on whose faces no smile appears. Nearly everything that happens in this country feeds these feelings of hostility. For example: the fact that the Arab pilots who bombed Tel Aviv spoke English in their wireless conversations; the fact that Britain provided Transjordan in advance, before the end of the Mandate, with military supplies for eight months; the fact that General MacMillan did not fulfil his promise to take the Legion out of Palestine before the end of the Mandate; that Britain handed over the Sarafand camp to the Arabs despite its commitment to hand it over to the Jews; or that it does not allow olim to disembark at the Haifa port and they are sent to the Tel Aviv port where they are endangered by bombing. It is hard to ascertain whether there is any truth to all these facts; the main thing is that the Jewish public believes their truth and responds accordingly. However on rare occasions one hears from the mouths of old people that it is not the British people who are to blame for all this but their leaders. (*Davar*, 22/6/48)

Apart from the fact that many people in this country distinguished well between those in charge of British colonial policy and the British people, and that not all experienced "love that turned into hate", these words well describe the state of mind on the Jewish street at

that time. “The British went out through the door [the port of Haifa], and they want to come in through the window [the land borders]” was then a common expression on the tongues of all, which faithfully reflected the political reality.

J. Granados, who in 1948 represented Guatemala at the UN and later in Israel, tells of a party hosted on 26/4/48 by Senator Warren Austin, the US representative at the UN, in which the senator tried to explain the withdrawal of the US from the Partition Plan and tried to recruit support for its new position:

“Mr. Senator,” I said, “you are a man of the world. You are aware of the course of political events these last months. I am ready to bet you, ten to one, that on May 15, Great Britain will relinquish the Mandate, and on the specified date withdraw its armies from Palestine. The situation is quite clear. The British Government cannot continue this state of affairs ... Why should Britain continue this tragedy when it has an easy way out with nothing to lose and much to gain? I am not so foolish as to say that Britain will abandon Palestine entirely. If I can venture to guess Britain’s plans, it will withdraw openly from Palestine, only to return through the back door on the skirts of Abdullah, who will try to seize as much territory in Palestine as he can. Britain will have gained all the tactical and economic advantages it seeks and have achieved this without responsibility, without spending great sums of money, and without further jeopardizing the lives of its citizens.” (*The Birth of Israel: The Drama As I Saw It*. Jorge García-Granados. New York: 1948. Alfred A. Knopf. P. 277)

The very fact that a foreign diplomat in New York and the ordinary person in Israel defined British policy in very much the same terms is testimony that the state of affairs at that time was beyond any doubt.

When the British army evacuated the country, rumours spread that the evacuation ships did not sail to Cyprus, but waited in the open sea a number of days, in order to return quickly and “save the Jews”. True or not, these rumours show that the British political game was very well understood on the Jewish street.

“You have fallen victim to an imperialist scheme”

It would be an offence against the truth if we did not examine what was going on in that period in the Arab world, and how the situation there was described by both Jews and Arabs.

The extent of the hatred for Zionism that was nurtured over the years by all the tendencies is well known (and only hatred of England competed with it). But whoever follows the descriptions of the workers' demonstrations in Iraq in the recent period will find out that the “great war” on Zionism, as a means of diversion from the local internal situation, was a complete failure. The war on imperialism on the one hand and on class exploitation on the other is what captured the hearts of the oppressed and suffering people of Iraq, because the socio-economic situation there is very grave indeed. (M. A., *Davar*, 7/5/48)

The author of these words, Michael Asaf, a Mapai man, is one of this country's veteran official experts on Arab affairs.

Incidentally, the terms “imperialism”, “colonialism”, “foreign rule”, “British subjugator” were in very widespread use in Israel in 1948, in various contexts and without quotation marks.

[On 15/1/48] a new accord between the governments of Iraq and Britain was signed in Portsmouth in Britain (the Salah Jaber–Bevin Accord), the practical meaning of which was the continuation of British rule in Iraq. Demonstrations were staged in the capital and in provincial cities, reaching a climax on 19 January in Baghdad, and in the confrontation four members of the police and four demonstrators were killed and many were injured. The demonstrators tried to attack the British legation, and the office of the Baghdad Times; the (British) Arab Information Agency and the American Information Service were damaged. Students of higher and middle schools went on a three-day strike. The National Democratic Party, the Liberal party and the al-Istiqlal party published joint communiqués against the new treaty.

On the night of 21/1/48, the Regent held consultations in his palace with former prime ministers, presidents of the parliament and members of the government. After consultations the Regent's declaration was published, stating that there was nothing in the new treaty to secure the national aspirations of Iraq and that no treaty would be signed that did not secure the rights of the country. The anger subsided, but in demonstrations in Baghdad, al-Najaf and in other places the demand to dissolve the House of Deputies and set up a national government was voiced.

On 26 January Salah Jaber, Fadel Jamali and Nuri Said returned from London. Jaber made a vague declaration ("The negotiations were conducted on steadfast foundations", "The nation will examine the treaty and give its verdict", "The Regent has already announced that no treaty will be signed unless it secures the demands of the people") and he called on the people to "return to normal life." The next day demonstrations were renewed all over the country. The security forces were ordered to act with severity. In confrontations between the demonstrators and government forces dozens of people were killed. Jaber's warning, broadcast on the radio and distributed as leaflets, was to no avail. The demonstrations continued and the number of casualties kept growing. The demonstrators set fire to government buildings, tried to get to Jaber's house and attempted to kill two members of the government (who were not harmed). Newspapers that had previously supported the government crossed over to the opposition camp. Deputies who supported the government began to resign from the House of Deputies. Thirty two hours after his return from London Jaber was forced to resign. The following day a new government headed by Muhammad al-Sadr was set up – a coalition government, excluding the Democratic Nationalists and the Liberals. The session of the House of Deputies was postponed for two months, a committee to investigate the bloody events was set up (hundreds were killed and over 400 were injured). Party activities were permitted, censorship of the local press was lifted and 15 newspapers were permitted to recommence publishing. Salah Jaber fled Iraq. (A. Cohen, *Temurot politiyot ba-'alam ha-'aravi* [Political changes in the Arab world], p. 101. Hebrew)

This gripping description leaves no room for doubt that neither the “liberation of Palestine from the Zionists” nor “throwing the Jews into the sea” preoccupied the Iraqi people in 1948.

Thus far Iraq. And what of Egypt?

The creation of the two independent states in Palestine is the guarantee for its future unity. Here in Egypt at present there continues the policy of diversion from Arab problems, which exist in abundance at a time when the prisons are filled up with those who call for struggle against imperialism, at exactly the same time when the cars of the fascists roar by under police guard, in a propaganda campaign to contribute not for the sake of war against imperialism in Egypt and Palestine, but for a racial war, which is against the interests of Egypt and Palestine. Just as they were disarming the Egyptian people, for fear that they would use the arms against imperialism, at the same time they hasten to send arms to Arabs and Jews in Palestine, in order to aggravate the conflict between them so as to strengthen the British imperialist base. (*Al-Gamahir*, 7/3/48, quoted in *Kol Ha'am*, 14/3/48)

The Egyptian national movement for liberation from the British occupation started to gain strength and rapidly develop after the Second World War. The Egyptian people stubbornly insisted on the cancellation of the treaty of 1936 and the unconditional and unqualified evacuation of the British armies without any condition or qualification. The English tried to impose a new treaty on the country before they evacuated Egypt, by means of minority governments, but all their efforts were frustrated by popular struggle. So they planned, with the collaboration of their agents and their hirelings, the Palestine war among other things, so that the peoples of these countries, and in particular the people of Egypt, would be preoccupied with it and forget their national movements, which were demanding complete liberation from imperialist dependence. Is it not strange, after all, for an army to go outside the borders of its country, in order to wage war on a party that had not harmed it in any way, leaving behind it foreign armies who are occupying

its homeland and defending the interests of the foreign exploiters?! And indeed, it was a marvellous conspiracy, plotted very artfully! And here it is a historical duty to mention a noteworthy phenomenon. The Egyptian democrats, who headed the national struggle after the Second World War, proclaimed without fear or hesitation the right of a democratic and independent State of Israel to exist, alongside the independent and democratic Palestinian state. They also declared that it was a dirty war, whose purpose was to divert the national movement from its path and to decree emergency military regulations in order to suppress it. At that time the treacherous king and his political police, backed by the foreign intelligence services, decimated these democrats, and sent thousands of them to prisons and concentration camps. Shortly after this they were followed by additional thousands of Muslim Brothers, the same Muslim Brothers who had been led astray by the war propaganda and threw their units into it. This is how the Egyptian people understands the Palestine war, this was the understanding of those officers who staged the military coup, deposed the king, liquidated the regime of the Muhammad Ali dynasty and proclaimed a republic ... (Yusuf Hilmi, President of the Egyptian peace movement, in a leaflet "For Israeli- Arab peace", quoted in *Kol Ha'am*, 2/12/55)

To reinforce these words uttered by an Egyptian leftist in 1955, here is the stenographic record of a conversation that took place during the War of Liberation between an Egyptian army commander who was surrounded in the Falluja Pocket, in the south of the country, and the commander of the Jewish force, Yigal Allon:

Gen. Allon began by saying: "Colonel, permit me to express my admiration of the war-making ability of your courageous soldiers. The conquest of the Iraq Sweidan stronghold and half of the Pocket cost us great effort though not many casualties." "Many thanks, sir", replied Col. Taha. I must point out that your soldiers, who excel in their bravery, did marvellously well, and put me in quite a difficult position."

Gen. Allon: "Is it not tragic that two sides, who have no reason to quarrel, kill each other without mercy?"

“It is indeed tragic,” replied the Egyptian, “but it is the way of the world. It is fate, Sir, and there is no evading it.”

Gen. Allon: “I hope that you have taken note of the fact that the war was imposed on us against our will, and indeed it is taking place in our country and not in Egypt. I think the battle has already been decided and it would be best to put a quick end to the war.”

The Egyptian replied, “This is true, but as an officer I have no choice but to carry out the orders of my government.”

General Allon: “You would do well to take note: while most of your army is tied up in a hopeless war in the Palestine, your country is being ruled by the British army that we got rid of not long ago. Do you not think that you have fallen victim to a foreign imperialist scheme supported by its allies in Egypt?”

Colonel Taha, excitedly: “You did wonderfully well in expelling the British. It will not be long before we remove them from Egypt as well.”

“But how will you expel them?” Asked General Allon, “if your entire army is stuck here after a big defeat and on the eve of a final defeat. Do you not think that it would be better for you to return to Egypt and take care of your own affairs instead of getting involved in adventures in a foreign country?”

Gamal [Abd al-Nasser], who was following with great interest the whole time, looked on with an attentive expression. Pushed against the wall, Colonel Taha, appeared to deliberate how to extricate himself from this dilemma, and indeed had no alternative but to resort to the Conventional reply, “As long as my government orders me to fight here, I will fight. As soon as it orders me to make peace, I will make peace. As soon as it orders me to return to Egypt and to fight the British, I will do so willingly and properly.” (*Toledot milhemet ha-qomemiyut* [History of the war of independence], p. 332, Maarachot, 1959. Hebrew)

These words are quoted from a book edited by the History Department of the General Staff, a book the introduction of which was written by the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, who thereby gave it his seal of approval.

It transpires that in the field of battle, at the height of the military campaign, General Allon on one side, and Colonel Taha (the Sudanese “black panther”, whom IDF commanders praised highly as a soldier), on the other side, were of one mind regarding the political nature of the war. It does not appear from his words that the Egyptian commander “thirsted for Jewish blood”; but he was “pushed to the wall” and “deliberated how to extricate himself from this dilemma.”

In 1948 there was a “dilemma” in the mind of an Egyptian commander, and not of only one. A dilemma between his clear knowledge that he was serving as a pawn of British imperialism and his duty as a soldier to obey the orders of his government, a duty he fulfilled with obvious reluctance.

Nasser wrote on the same subject:

When I now try to recall the details of our experience in Palestine, I find a curious thing: we were fighting in Palestine, but our dreams were centred in Egypt. Our bullets were aimed at the enemy in its trenches, but our hearts hovered over our distant country, which we had left to the care of the wolves.

In Palestine, Free Officer cells found opportunity to study and investigate and to meet in the trenches and command posts. Salah Salem and Zakaria Muhyi ed-Din came to me in Palestine after breaking through the siege lines into Faluja. We sat there in our besieged positions, not knowing what the outcome would be, but our conversation dwelt only upon our country, which it was our soldiers’ duty to defend.

One day, Kamal ed-Din Hussein was sitting near me in Palestine, looking distracted, with nervous, darting eyes.

“Do you know what Ahmad Abdul Aziz said to me before he died?” he said.

“What did he say?” I asked.

He replied with a sob in his voice and a deep look in his eyes, “He said to me, ‘Listen, Kamal, the biggest battlefield is in Egypt.’”

In addition to the companions who discussed with me in Palestine the future of our country, and the experience which hammered out our ideas as to the possibilities of its fate, the enemy, too, played a role in reminding us of our country and its problems.

A few months ago, I read some articles written about me by an Israeli officer named Yeruhan [sic] Cohen, which appeared in the Jewish Observer. In these articles the Jewish officer relates how he met me during the armistice negotiations. “The subject which Gamal Abdul Nasser always talked about with me,” he wrote, “was the struggle of Israel against the English, and how we organized the underground resistance movement against them in Palestine, and how we were able to muster world public opinion behind us in our struggle against them.”

(Gamal Abdul Nasser. *Egypt’s Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution*. Washington, D.C.: 1955. Public Affairs Press. Pp. 21-24)

That is to say, Nasser agrees that “the biggest battlefield is in Egypt” and is interested to hear from the Israeli officer about how the Jews expelled British imperialism from Palestine. Is this not a bit different from the image of bloodthirsty Arabs assailing the fledgling State of Israel on the day of its rebirth, the image that is described in Israeli textbooks for schoolchildren?

A situation similar to that in Iraq and Egypt, albeit with differing levels of intensity, also existed in the other Arab countries, those same “seven Arab states that assailed the young State of Israel,” and it was that situation that contributed more than a little to their military defeat and later gave rise to widespread transformations in the Arab world. It should be recalled that Abd al-Nasser was one of the Egyptian commanders besieged in the Falluja Pocket and Brigadier Qassim was one of the commanders of the Iraqi army who was encamped in the Triangle in the Tulkarem area.

It is claimed that the Arab governments had an independent and specific interest in diverting the wrath of the masses from themselves and they did so by channelling it against the Jews. But how is it possible politically to distinguish between the interests of [Egyptian King] Faruq, Abdullah, Nuri Said and their like in other Arab countries, who ruled only by the grace of Britain, and the interests of Britain itself?

Britain had an interest in diverting popular anger in these countries away from itself and away from its agents towards a different target. When a puppet’s strings are pulled by a puppeteer, it is hard to speak of the independent interest of the puppet. Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Transjordan, and certainly Saudi Arabia and Yemen, did not have any border dispute with Israel. The Partition Plan did them no harm and robbed them of nothing. The main party to be harmed by this plan was Britain, which lost its political and economic rule in Palestine and a strategic base that it had held since the end of the First World War.

Indeed, right-wing circles in the Arab world participated enthusiastically in the British operation to “rescue Palestine”, and part of the masses inclined that way at first. But those who had been misled quickly understood that they were being used as instruments of British policy and that the leftist circles who had opposed the war from the beginning were right.

“A very important political fact”

What part did the Palestinian Arabs play in the war of 1948? Here is the opinion of David Ben-Gurion:

A double war has been imposed on us – one, an overt bloody war declared by pro-Nazi rulers and leaders of Arab states; the other a covert and two-faced political war by the Bevin government, and the two wars are connected. For over two months bloody attacks have been mounted on our transportation network, on our agricultural settlements, on our cities. This war was declared without consulting the Arab people, in whose name it is supposedly being waged; moreover, so far the majority and main sections of the Arab people in this country refuse to participate in the war, despite the increasing pressure, and despite the coercion that is being attempted, by all the tried and tested means of Nazism: by religious and racial incitement, by the spreading of lies, by calumnies, by atrocity-propaganda, by fanning the flames of base instincts, by promise of plunder, by threats and terror. Despite all this, the greater part of the Arabs of Palestine refuses to enter the battle, although it has been going on for over two months ... (D. Ben-Gurion, *Davar*, 8/1/48)

After more than a month, again Ben-Gurion emphasizes:

The representatives of the Arab League too admit that the Arabs of Palestine have not risen up, despite all the pressure, apart from a negligible number of gangs. Most of the Arabs of Palestine have refused to enter the battle, and that same British Foreign Office and the League that is a pawn in its hands [!] were forced to open all the borders wide so that covert gunmen would flood in to undertake the war against the UN and the Yishuv. This is a very important political fact ... One prophecy which was used to scare us, an uprising of the Arabs of Palestine, proved false. From Jaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem they sought peace. The [Arab] village in its great

majority remained on the sidelines. (D. Ben-Gurion, speech at the Mobilization Fundraising Drive, *Davar*, 18/2/48)

And when the battles were over the *Davar* Annual concluded:

... It is a fact that most of the [Arab] village districts that were next to Jews or near them were absolutely quiet during the first two months (the Yazur-Salama-Yahudiyya area was almost the only exception); it is a fact that in most places near-normal contact with the Jewish neighbours was maintained; it is a fact that even the Bedouin district in the Negev, which had showed signs of great hostile restiveness in the first weeks, largely calmed down later on. Even the villages in the mountain district, which were far from Jews – and which in the past were the first to mobilize for action and form gangs – contributed few people and showed little activity. (Y. Shimoni, “The Arab Fighters’ Camp”, *Davar* Annual [Hebrew], 1948-1949, p. 171)

And what happened after February 1948?

If the picture changed in the spring of 1948, it appears that this development had four reasons – and a fifth, principal reason.

1. The ongoing, gnawing, feverish incitement and activity of the Husseinis, in addition to the disintegration of the regular government apparatus and the general state of lawlessness.
2. The fact that even those villagers who were not prepared to form gangs and commit aggressive acts stood armed and equipped for self-defence; and from this flowed more than a few attacks that were based on “error”, the villagers thinking that a Jewish patrol unit or a unit on its way to another place were coming to attack them.
3. The fact that it was difficult even for a quiet Arab village that refrained from acts of aggression to exercise self-control and self-restraint when it was given the opportunity to show its heroism and its agility and to plunder and kill with impunity.

4. “Faza” – an alarm call for help to the masses of villagers, when a battle breaks out in a nearby place, or in a case in which someone shows up with cars and calls for help, even in a distant place; it is an ancient, firmly entrenched custom, that no love of peace and no desire to avoid entanglement in the war with the Jews can uproot. When the rumour spreads in the villages – and they spread with astonishing speed – that in a certain place a battle has been joined between Arabs and non-Arabs (and the same applies if it is between members of the tribe or clan or fellow-villagers, or allies and their enemies), villagers from the whole surrounding area flock to the place of battle, in most cases without any order or plan or military coordination (a good example: the battle of Kfar Etzion).

And the fifth and main reason: the very development of the military situation in the country by the nature of things had to bring about a widening of the maelstrom. It was hardly possible that calm would prevail in one part of the country over a period of days while another part was caught up in a life-and-death battle. Even the most quiet and peace-loving villager – his brother or relative is killed in the city, and the story of revenge begins; or he himself happens to be a place where Jews are responding [to an attack] and is wounded; the general breakdown of security in the country, of the police and the entire government apparatus, the semi-“legal” way in which the Husseini guards, and later the foreign Liberation Army, took control of the country, the targeting of transportation vehicles and routes; all this gradually pulled the Arab villagers into the whirlpool of blood, in spite of themselves and without desire or initiative on their part. And it should not be forgotten that even after all that, most of the villagers who have a choice are *not* actively participating in the war. (Ibid.)

The author of these words, Y. Shimoni, was editor of *The New East* [ha-Mizrah he-Hadash] (the quarterly of the Israeli Oriental Society, affiliated to the Hebrew University), and for several years he directed the Middle East Department of the Israeli Foreign Office.

Turning to evaluate the Liberation Army – those gangs organized by Clayton, instructed in Syria and led into Palestine by Qawuqji, Y. Shimoni asserts that in this force, numbering about 8,000 men, there were 2,500–3,000 Syrians, 2,000 Iraqis, 2,000 [!] *Palestinians*, a few hundred Lebanese, Egyptians, Druze and others (Ibid, p. 175).

The Palestinian Arab people, which numbered, as has been said, about one million persons and was the only one that could perhaps claim that its interests were harmed by the UN Resolution, contributed only 2,000 men to the Liberation Army whose purpose was to liberate their own homeland! Every 500 persons contributed only one soldier!

Uri Avnery explains this peculiar fact as follows:

While the two sides were unprepared at the beginning of the war, the developed Hebrew society succeeded in overcoming this more quickly than the backward Palestinian society. So the Hebrew side won a complete victory – before the invasion of the Arab armies. (*Haolam Hazeq*, 19/8/59)

This explanation is not convincing. The truth is that even though the majority of the Palestinian Arabs regarded themselves as being harmed by the partition resolution and opposed it, their bitterness was not so intense as to motivate a firm decision to wage war on the Jews, because after all they too had been promised political independence in the Partition Resolution. True, they were to receive 45% of the area of the country although they numbered about a million people, whereas the Jews were awarded 55% and their number was about 600,000, but nevertheless, national independence, albeit in a diminished territory, after 30 years of British colonial rule – is still a respectable achievement. It was not necessary that relations of hostility should prevail between the two peoples after the British were removed.

There were villages, such as Araba and Sakhnin, whose inhabitants came out in *armed resistance* to Qawuqji's army. In Majd al-Kurum members of the "Liberation Army" beat up the headman for refusing to collaborate with them, and they could not stay in Abu-Sinan, Yarqa, Boulus and Jatt, because of the villagers' opposition. The National Liberation League (the Communist Party of the Palestinian Arabs) distributed leaflets, one of which was read on *Kol Israel* [Israeli radio], condemning the invasion of Palestine as being in the interest of imperialism and called for the creation of a Palestinian Arab state beside a Jewish state, and for support of the Partition Plan. Qawuqji's people threatened to hang the distributors of these leaflets, "in order to teach the inhabitants of

the Galilee a lesson”, and in Tarshiha these threats were even carried out. The Communist Parties of Iraq, Syria-Lebanon and Palestine issued a joint declaration, calling on the soldiers of the Arab armies to return to their countries and there to fight against their leaders who were hirelings of Britain. To distribute this leaflet among the invading armies required extraordinary courage and some who did so paid for it with their lives. All these facts cannot be explained by the relative backwardness of Palestinian society.

There is no escaping the conclusion that the judgment that “the War of Liberation was a war between Jews and Arabs”, is inaccurate and misleading, because it depends on the external-military aspect rather than on the internal-political content. This formulation blurs the difference between the nationality of the soldier and the policy that he implements.

The War of Liberation was in its *essence* a war of the Jews of Palestine against British rule, and that is how it was understood in 1948 by both Jews and Arabs, and not only by those who had a tradition of struggle against colonialism. The Palestinian Arab people who had lived in the country for hundreds of years and inhabited hundreds of villages and dozens of cities and towns barely played an active role in the war.

How has it come about that facts and conclusions which were beyond any debate in 1948 are surprising to many today?

How has it come about that both the leaders and the led, both supporters and opponents of the official policy, both teacher and student, were convinced as early as 1950 (all the more so in 1960) that the war of 1948 was “a war between two nations who lived in one country”?

How has it come about that Britain’s role in that war has been so obscured that it almost disappeared from view entirely?

Chapter 2

Borders and Refugees

The Israel-Arab conflict has many faces: the issue of the fishery in the Kinneret, the distribution of the waters of the Jordan River, the status of Mount Scopus, the passage of Israeli ships through the Suez Canal, the Arab economic boycott, infiltration and retaliation raids (the largest of which was known as “Operation Qadesh”), bitterness and hatred between Jews and Arabs – all these, and many others, are merely manifestations of that conflict. Nevertheless, two aspects of it are known to have primary political importance: the territorial issue and the refugee problem.

Let us begin with the territorial issue.

The resolution of the UN General Assembly (29/11/47) on the partition of Palestine into two states – Jewish and Arab – was accepted (whether enthusiastically or with reservations) by the vast majority of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine. It was the British who hoped to thwart that Resolution and launched a war against it using the Arab states as pawns. But the Jewish leadership withdrew too soon from its stance of explicit reliance on the GA Resolution. The reasons for this will be detailed below.

In the preface to the book *History of the War of Independence*, D. Ben-Gurion describes a meeting of the People’s Administration (the institution that preceded the government), that was conducted three days before the declaration of the Independence of Israel:

One member raised the problem of the borders – that it is impossible to declare the State of Israel without specifying its borders ... I opposed specifying the borders.

“In the Declaration of Independence of the United States there was no indication of territorial boundaries. So why not say nothing about the borders? Because we do not know if the UN will be consistent. We will not wage war on the UN, but if the UN is not consistent in this matter and launches a war against us, and we frustrate

it, then we will get the western Galilee and both sides of the route to Jerusalem, and all that will become part of the State, if we have enough strength. So why commit ourselves ...” By a majority of 5 to 4 it was decided not to include the matter of the borders in the Declaration. (*Toledot milhemet ha-gomemiyut* [History of the war of independence], p. 58. Hebrew)

That is to say, even before the Declaration of the State the government gave its view on the expansion of the borders. Elsewhere the Prime Minister writes:

After battles that went on for 61 days with three pauses, the young IDF subdued all the Arab armies and expanded the boundaries of the State. (*Shenaton ha-Memshalah* [Government Yearbook] 1959/1960 [5720], p. 2. Hebrew)

What are “the boundaries of the State”? Who set them, and at whose expense were they expanded? An indirect reply was later given by the Prime Minister himself, in his reaction to the revolution in Egypt:

There is no doubt that there was not then (in 1948) nor is there today any reason or basis for conflict between Egypt and Israel. A broad and vast desert lies between the two states, and there is no cause for border disputes. Nor was there any alleged reason for political, economic or territorial confrontation between the two neighbours. (*Ibid.*)

The same could be said about Iraq, which has no shared border with Israel, and also about Lebanon and Syria, whose ceasefire lines with Israel are nearly identical with the international border of Mandate Palestine.

The situation between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, however, is quite different. The border between Palestine and Transjordan was the Jordan River, but the ceasefire line between Israel and the Kingdom of Jordan crosses deep into the territory of Mandate Palestine, and in certain places it is only about 15 km from the Mediterranean Sea.

Does it follow from this that the Kingdom of Jordan is the main adversary of the State of Israel? How was the ceasefire line between the two states created?

Was it really only on the field of battle?

As we have said, the source of the Israeli-Arab conflict is the old “problem of Palestine”. Its essence was in the fact that the Jewish settlers did not come to a deserted area, but rather to a land that was populated by another people – the Palestinian Arab people. Tel Aviv was founded at the beginning of the 20th century next to Jaffa, which had existed for hundreds of years, like old Haifa, Jerusalem, Acre, Beisan [Beit-Shean], Beersheva and hundreds of other towns and villages like them.

When the UN General Assembly decided on the Partition Resolution, it allocated 45% of the country’s territory to over a million Palestinian Arabs and 55% of it to the 600 thousand Jews. *Two independent states united by an economic union* were supposed to emerge in Palestine. The Hebrew state emerged as a consequence of the war of 1948; but its sister, the Palestinian Arab state, did not emerge.

What happened to the independent state of the Arabs of Palestine?

“After the meeting with Abdullah”

Already during the battles in 1948 and immediately after them, Reuters, UP, the French news agency and others reported on secret negotiations taking place between the government of Israel and Abdullah the king of Transjordan, regarding the establishment of relations between the two sides and their conditions. The government of Israel vehemently denied these reports and repeated the denials until 1950, and the matter has not been raised since then and has become almost forgotten.

Incidentally, what was meant by that line in the anthem of the Chizbatron² troupe’s anthem, “after the meeting with Abdullah ...”?

² The Chizbatron was the entertainment troupe of the Palmach, the combat force of the Haganah, the underground military organization of the mainstream political faction of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine, the Labour Party, before the creation of the State of Israel – trans.

Only ten years afterwards did the details of the secret negotiations between Israel and Jordan begin to be revealed, in Dr. W. Eytan's book and also in articles and documents that were published in *Yedioth Aharonoth*. When the memoirs of Abdallah al-Tal – a former commander in the Jordanian Legion now in exile in Egypt – were published, *Yedioth Aharonoth* revealed facts connected to these memoirs by adding the observations of M. Dayan, one of the participants in the negotiations.

During the war, and especially after the end of hostilities, Abdallah would often meet with various Israeli leaders. These meetings usually took place in Amman, or in the King's winter palace at al-Shouneh, in the Jordan Valley. Among the participants in these meetings on the Jewish side were the Director-General of the Foreign Ministry, Dr. Walter Eytan, the current ambassador to Italy Eliyahu Sasson, Major-General Moshe Dayan, Colonel Yehoshafat Harkabi and others. The Israeli envoys would arrive at Amman in cars or in airplanes that were disguised as British aircraft. According to the testimony of Abdallah al-Tal, the presence of the Israelis in the palace was known to many residents of Amman, especially those who were in close contact with King Abdallah. (Y. Halmish, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 29/5/59)

During one of the visits to Transjordan that I participated in, the king began to ask, as was his wont, about the health of the President, the health of the Prime Minister and the health of the Foreign Minister (M. Sharett), in order of seniority, and when he got to Golda Meir and was told that she was in Moscow (where she was then serving as Ambassador), he responded by closing his eyes and saying with a hand gesture "khalluha hunak, khalluha hunak" ("keep her there, keep her there") ... (M. Dayan, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 29/5/59)

We learn about the substance of the discussions from Abdallah al-Tal himself, whom M. Dayan and W. Eytan praise for his honesty in their disclosures about the negotiations. He tells about one of the meetings, which took place before the armies of the Arab states (among them Jordan) invaded Palestine:

The date set for that meeting was the night of 11/12 May 1948. The King sent Muhammad al-Zubati in a pickup truck to the Jordan Valley to transport Golda Meyerson [Golda Meir – trans], who was waiting at an appointed spot among the trees, to Amman. Al-Zubati left Amman for the Jordan Valley and he arrived at his farm at nine at night. He found Golda Meir awaiting his arrival, a keffiyeh and aqal on her head. He sat her beside him in the car, and he put the interpreter who came with her in the back of the truck. They drove to Amman, without anybody knowing about it, except a few of the loyal farm guards A prolonged discussion took place between the King and Golda Meyerson, after she presented him with the demands of the Jewish Agency, which appeared to the King to be harsh and hard to implement in the form that she advanced them.

Below is a summary of her demands, as they were told to me by those who were at that meeting:

1. That the King proclaim peace with the Jews and definitely not send his army into Palestine.
2. That the King send a governor to rule over the Arab part of Palestine in accordance with the Partition Resolution.
3. *In return for this, the Jewish Agency would agree to the union of the Arab part of Palestine with the Hashemite Crown.*

The King rejected the first condition, because that would make him appear to be diverging from the unanimous decision of the Arabs and the Arab states, which were determined to send their armies to rescue Palestine. But the King agreed that two of the armies, the Jordanian and the Iraqi, would not enter the war against the Jews, and that these two armies would stop next to the border that was demarcated in accordance with the Partition Plan and would not cross it. After much argumentation and threats from Golda on the one hand, and a promise from the King on the other, Golda agreed with the King's view and received from him a commitment to that effect. The meeting concluded at three in the morning, al-Zubati drove Golda and her companion back to the farm near the border, at which

he arrived at six in the morning. Golda's meeting with the King did not remain a secret, because the King himself revealed it. (Memoirs of Abdullah al-Tal, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 29/5/59. Emphasis ours)

The secret talks also continued while official talks on a ceasefire were being conducted in Rhodes. Dr. W. Eytan relates:

They [the Jordanian delegation] seemed lost and hopeless. It looked as if they lacked confidence in the instructions that were in their hands. And indeed, it seems that they were not given any clear instructions. Not much time passed before their master and King hinted that he did not have confidence in them to conduct the negotiations in his name and that he was thinking of taking matters into his own hands. It was agreed that for the sake of outward appearance, the negotiations would continue in Rhodes, but that the substantive negotiations would take place secretly with the King himself in his winter palace in Shouneh. Only the closest confidantes of the King knew about this and people continued to watch the show in Rhodes. That was probably the King's intention from the beginning, and that was what determined the composition of his delegation. (W. Eytan, *Beyn yisra'el la-'amim* [Between Israel and the nations], pp. 41, 42. Hebrew)

That is to say, before the Arab armies invaded, during the war and even after it, during the official negotiations over a ceasefire that took place under the auspices of the UN, there were covert talks between Israel and Transjordan, the political content of which was: King Abdullah would make peace with Israel, and in return for this Israel would recognize the annexation of the Palestinian Arab state to Transjordan, would not intervene militarily and would not raise the matter at the UN.

The Palestinian Arab state had become a chip in Ben-Gurion's and Abdullah's bargaining over the conditions of the desired peace, in conspicuous contradiction to the Partition Resolution.

None of this prevented the Prime Minister, in his reply to Knesset Member T. Toubi (Israeli Communist Party) from saying in Knesset deliberations:

Knesset Member Tawfiq Toubi complained about the Government's agreement to the annexation of the Arab part of the country to Farouk and Abdullah. That agreement is fictional. This Government, which is presented to you for confirmation or non-confirmation, has not yet discussed that matter at all, and in the provisional government there has been no such decision. Knesset Member Tawfiq Toubi has also complained that we are foregoing the creation of an independent Arab state in the other part of the country. That claim also has no basis in reality ... if there is to be a government there – and I am not now expressing my opinion – then surely that is the business of the Arabs who live there ... because we believe in self-determination. Anyway, we will fight for our own self-determination, and we recognize that the right to self-determination exists for others, if others have the right to a state. (D. Ben-Gurion, 10/3/49, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 1, p. 13)

It is likely that the Government did not discuss and did not decide on the matter, but who authorized Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan and others to speak in the name of the State of Israel? Surely they were not travelling to Transjordan on their own initiative ...

“Overcoming the partition”

On 3/4/49 the official ceasefire agreement with the “Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan” was signed. The first government that called Transjordan by that name was the government of Israel, and it began doing that a full year before the annexation of the West Bank to Jordan was officially declared. Even the government of Britain, on whose initiative and under whose tutelage the annexation was carried out, took care to refer to Abdullah's kingdom as “Transjordan” until the official declaration of the annexation. The aforementioned measure taken by the government of Israel constituted a *de facto* recognition, as was claimed by the Opposition from left to right, of Abdullah's rule over the West Bank and the abandonment of the UN's Partition Plan even as a formality. The day after the signing (not before!), the matter was raised by the Prime Minister for discussion in the Knesset with repeated emphasis (anticipating the reactions of the

Opposition?) that “this accord does not settle anything politically or territorially, and it is nothing but a military accord ...”

The opposition attacked the government for not having raised the matter for discussion in the Knesset, and unanimously stressed the political nature of the accord, which indirectly conferred Israel’s agreement to the annexation to Transjordan of territories from Palestine, the recognition of the “Hashemite Jordanian Kingdom” on both sides of the Jordan River, and the acceptance of British forces in western Palestine, from which they had just been expelled, by virtue of the treaty between Transjordan and Britain.

The attack was naturally rationalized in different ways by representatives of the different factions in the Knesset. The Herut Movement emphasized the “abandonment of an enormous amount of the territory of the homeland to a vassal-king and to his British overlords”:

The accord is not military in meaning; it is political in the highest order. The meaning of this accord is that we have in effect subjugated our State to Bevin, after a war of liberation that we waged against the subjugator. (M. Begin, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 1, p. 289)

The United Workers’ Party, which then included what is today Mapam and Unity of Labour (*Ahdut ha-‘Avoda*), emphasized the missed opportunity to restore the “territorial integrity of the Land”.

... This is recognition of an annexation that no state and no international body has yet recognized ... whereas these annexations signify the control over part of Palestine by Anglo-American imperialism ... whereas this treaty represents the fact of the partitioning of the country, the Knesset annuls the ceasefire treaty that was signed at Rhodes on 3/4/49. (Motion by D. Bar-Nir, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 1, p. 290)

I am sure that it is not only the Jewish Yishuv, the Jewish people and the world Zionist movement who will never forego the chance for the territorial integrity of

Palestine and see in the proposal for a pact between the State of Israel and an independent democratic Arab state a chance for the restoration of the territorial integrity of the country, but also the democratic Arab forces, who are our allies ... (Y. Riftin, *ibid.*)

... Was there really any need for us to cancel plans and operations that could have moved our border to its suitable place and also brought about the liberation of large numbers of Arabs from the yoke of their subjugation? (Y. Ben-Aharon, *ibid.*, p. 292)

The reader will have surely noticed the distinction between the meaning of the term “territorial integrity of the country” in the words of Riftin, and the meaning of the same term in those of Ben-Aharon.

The member of the Young Guard [*Hashomer Hatzair* – a left-wing Zionist youth movement that initially believed in Jewish-Arab binationalism in Palestine – trans.] hoped to achieve the integrity of the country by means of a pact between the two states that were to have emerged according to the Partition Plan, whereas the member of Unity of Labour intended nothing other than the moving of Israel’s border to its “suitable place” – that is, eastwards, to the Jordan River.

The General Zionists exhibited a comprehensive understanding of the new state of affairs, but they nevertheless had difficulty adopting a position on the accord:

... there is no doubt that the accord with the Transjordan government, or the Hashemite one, or the government of Abdullah, is quite different in its nuances and nature from the other accords. From the perspective of our national and political future it is of great importance that, in that part of the country in which an Arab state was to emerge, according to the UN Resolution, an independent Arab state shall emerge. In my opinion, an independent Arab government would be much more convenient for us in many ways than the attachment of that part to Transjordan ... it is to be doubted whether (despite the – I will permit myself to say – far-reaching fundamental considerations of our recognition of the presence of a

foreign power, of a foreign state within the borders of the country), it by any means signifies the renunciation of any possibility of the creation of an independent Arab state in that part of the country ... because we see the need for stability in our surroundings, we are not opposed to this ceasefire accord ... from that standpoint, we will not express non-confidence in the Government, but in the light of all the facts that I have pointed out in my speech, neither do we see any possibility of expressing confidence in the Government. (Y. Sapir, *ibid.*, p. 296)

The Communist Party asserted the right of the Palestinian Arab people to its own state, a right that the two warring parties – Abdullah/Britain on one side and the government of Israel on the other – deliberately sabotaged.

This accord, known by the name of an accord on the “Hashemite Jordanian Kingdom”, recognizes in practice the rule of that British colony over the Arab part of Palestine, in which an independent Arab state was to have emerged in conformity with the UN Resolution ... the handover of that part to Abdullah did not come about only as a result of this accord, rather it is a consequence of the policy that the Ben-Gurion government took during the War of Independence – a policy of active opposition to the creation of the independent Arab state in Palestine, and this accord with Abdullah is nothing but the jewel in the crown of that policy and a stage in its implementation.

... those who fought for the creation of that independent state – those very combatants who were imprisoned by the Egyptian authorities and by Abdullah as they were carrying out their duties to conclude the war and implement the UN Resolutions – are now sitting in Israeli concentration camps, after they were released by the forces of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) at Abu Ageila ... the eschewal, therefore, of the obligation to help in the creation of an independent Arab state in Palestine, according to the recent accord with Abdullah, contradicts the interest of the independence of Israel and lasting peace in the Middle East ... (T. Toubi, *ibid.*, p. 302)

... The Arabs are fighting with growing force for their state in the other part of Palestine. The government of Israel – and this is our gravest accusation – did everything over the course of the past year to neutralize by any means the efforts of those Arab forces that were fighting for an independent Arab state. The problem was not and is not that we must shed blood for someone else; the problem is that the government of Israel prevented, suppressed, and created a situation in which a freedom-fighter against the Arab invaders was obliged to endanger his life by crossing the border-line twice: once on the Israeli side and once on the side of the invaders – the enemy. That is an absurdity that had not occurred in history ... not only because a democratic, independent and friendly Arab state is the best security buffer for the State of Israel. It should have been done (supporting the creation of that state), because if not, according to the present accords with Abdullah-Bevin – we will be forced to be in a state of constant war-preparedness and the State of Israel will be faced with constant danger ... (M. Vilner, *ibid.*, p. 298)

We find confirmation of these claims in A. Cohen's book:

When the IDF conquered Abu-Ageila from the Egyptians in 1948, they found in a concentration camp there a large group of leftist prisoners from the Old City of Jerusalem and its surroundings and from Jaffa, who were caught in Gaza and in Majdal ... (Cohen, *Temurot politiyot ba-'olam ha-'aravi* [Political changes in the Arab world], p. 105. Hebrew)

The prisoners were nabbed as they were distributing flyers, as A. Cohen relates:

On the flyers of the Arab left, which were distributed in the zones of Egyptian, Iraqi and Jordanian occupation in Palestine, it was stated that the Arabs of Palestine had not requested the Arab League's intervention, and that the soldiers of the Arab states should return to their countries and turn their weapons against those who were instigating war in the country and those who did their bidding. Indeed the flyers called for a joint Arab-Jewish war to liberate the country from imperialism

and its henchmen and to build a new Palestine in partnership with the Jewish people. (Ibid.)

However, the IDF, which occupied the concentration camp, did not hasten to liberate the detainees whose actions had also been in the interest of the State of Israel; but rather transferred them to an Israeli detention camp, where they were held for nearly two more years.

In reply to those in the Knesset who were attacking the Accord, Knesset Member E. Livneh, in the name of the Labour Party (Mapai), spoke in specific terms:

What is the goal of all of us? The goal of all is overcoming the Partition; the shortcomings of the Partition; all the shortcomings of the Partition ... what have we achieved politically from this period of negotiations? Regarding territory, we have achieved a very expansive hint from the invader that he will forego the borders of 29 November 1947, at least for the purposes of a ceasefire. Is that not worth something to those who want to overcome the Partition? If they say that behind King Abdullah stands Britain, does this not make it more difficult for the backers of the original Partition among our adversaries to defend these partition lines? (E. Livneh, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 1, p. 297)

Indeed, when dubious means are required, such as depending on Britain less than one year after the day it left the country, this is no testimony to the legitimacy and purity of the goals that were served by these means. Incidentally, a member of the Prime Minister's faction tells us that there were political achievements (not necessarily military ones) from this period of negotiations.

We conclude with the words of Ben-Gurion, who claimed that the signing of the ceasefire accords (among them the accord with Transjordan) increased "the possibilities of coexistence, of peace and friendship with the Arabs" and moved us forward towards peace with them.

All the motions of non-confidence in the government were defeated.

“The decisive question”

The question of what was preferable for Israel – the existence of a Palestinian Arab state, or the signing of a peace treaty with Abdullah even at the price of giving up on the creation of the Arab state – is asked here, as well as whether Israel was faced with such a choice.

We have already presented the positions of *Hashomer Hatzair*, the General Zionists and the Communist Party, who attacked the accord with Abdullah and favoured the creation of an independent Arab state. The Government too understood the importance of the choice. Here is what M. Sharett had to say on the matter:

The most complex, intricate and also the most decisive of the questions about peace with our surroundings, is the one of the future of the Arab part of Palestine – what is now the Arab part – and in that regard we have said it more than once, and I will repeat it here as well, if we are asked what is desirable for us regarding that part, in the framework of the existing conditions, then what is desirable, what is most in our interest, is that that part shall be a political unit in its own right (A. Ben-Eliezer: Called Israel! Is that not indeed desirable?). I am not prepared to keep repeating myself from the beginning. In my speech I said that we have now turned towards peace. I know that there is in practice a proposal that we should now go to war to conquer that part. I reject it. I am speaking on the assumption that for the foreseeable future that part will remain an Arab part. The question before us is, will that part remain as it is, or will it be annexed to some other state. I am speaking on the assumption that that is the choice and we must decide which is preferable (A. Ben-Eliezer: Why are you manufacturing that choice?). *Based on that assumption, it is desirable that that part constitute a distinct unit* for three reasons. First: because if that part constitutes a distinct unit, there are more chances of fostering contacts and affinities between that part and the State of Israel. Secondly: because I assume that this offers more security to the State of Israel. And third: because we will be relieved in advance from the tangle of alliances – and we must not ignore them – that exist between a certain neighbouring state and a certain Power. *This is*

the solution that we must favour. But even if they ask us: is it in our power to make this a reality? I say, I do not know, I am doubtful ... and that is why I said in my very much abbreviated review that now as before, this is the desirable thing, but we cannot present it as a condition. We did not present it as a condition for the ceasefire and we will not be able to present it as a condition for peace. We proposed to the mediation committee that a referendum be conducted in that part and we insist on that. A referendum will be conducted and the people living in that part will make their wishes known ... we cannot ignore the possibility that the question of this separate political unit will not be a practical one and we will be obliged to discuss another possibility as well. We will be obliged to discuss it because the State of Israel is now committed to peace and stability. That was the decisive consideration regarding the ceasefire. When we signed ceasefires we were not selective about the character of the other side. On the agenda was the matter of the ceasefire and not the character of who will sign or who will not sign a ceasefire with us. (*Knesset Records* Vol. 1, p. 758, 20/6/49. Emphasis ours)

If we add these words to the statements of those who were debating in the Knesset in April, which were quoted above, and to the fact of the existence of the secret negotiations with Abdullah, the following picture clearly emerges: reality presented the Government of Israel with a choice between adhering to the framework of the UN General Assembly Resolution, recognizing the right of the Palestinian Arab people to their own state and aiding in its creation; and abandoning the 1947 Resolution, ignoring the right of self-determination of the Arabs of Palestine, and eschewing political measures in the face of the annexation of the Arab part of Palestine to Transjordan, in exchange for a promise to make peace and for Transjordan's recognition of the Israeli annexations. The government of Israel chose the second possibility, which seemed to it more realistic and worthwhile, and thus it sealed the fate of the State of Israel and the fate of peace with the Arab states to this very day. Abdullah and Ben-Gurion divided the state of the Arabs of Palestine in nearly equal measures among themselves. Instead of 55% of the territory of Palestine which was allotted to the Jewish state under the UN Resolution, the State of Israel spread out over about 75%, and the remaining territory (apart from the Gaza Strip, which Egypt

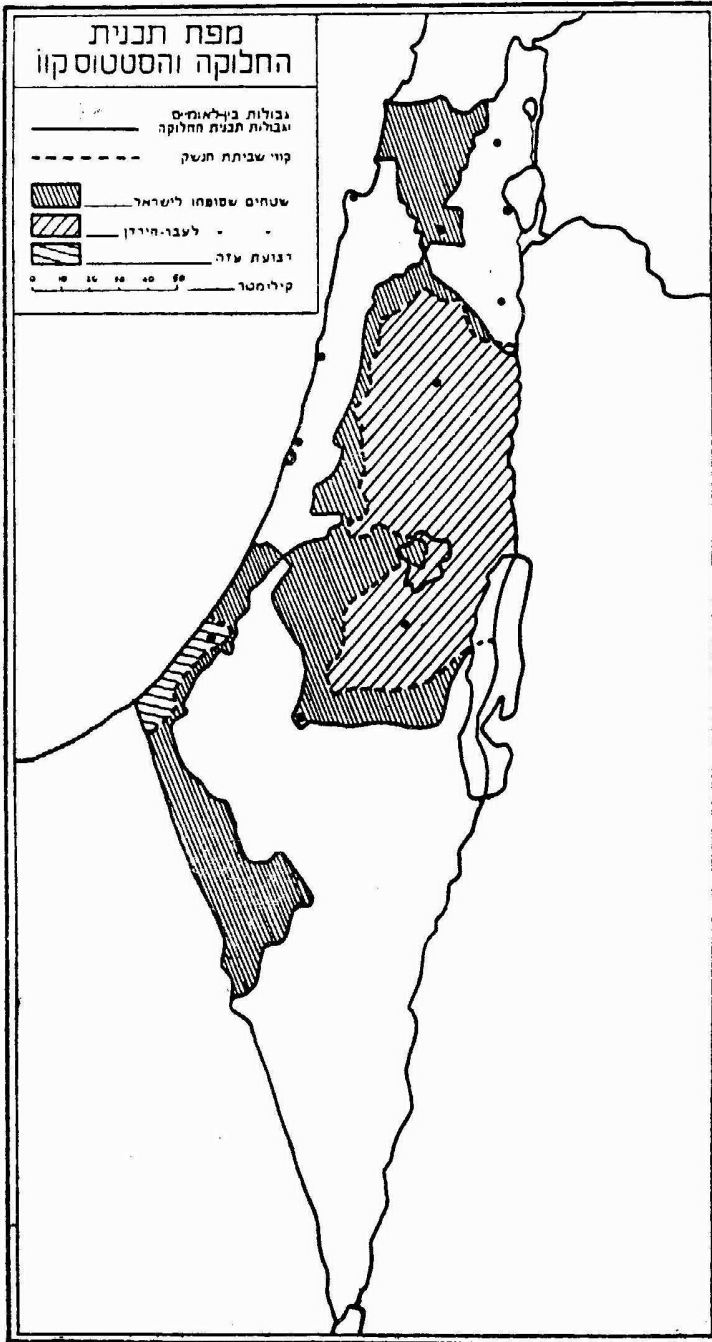
occupies, but has not annexed to this day) was annexed by Abdullah, with the agreement of Ben-Gurion.

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Map: How the Palestinian state was divided

[Legend for the map below, entitled “How the Palestinian state was divided – a map of the Partition Plan and the *status quo*”. The dark area is the part of Palestine that was allocated to the Palestinian Arab state under the UNSCOP plan that was annexed by Israel in the 1948 war; the large area with diagonal lines is the part that was annexed by Transjordan (later Jordan) during that war, known as the West Bank, and the small area with diagonal lines is the part that was captured by Egypt during the war, known as the Gaza Strip. Jerusalem, which was to have been a *corpus separatum* under the UNSCOP plan, was divided between Israel and Transjordan – trans.]

כיצד חולקה המדינה הערבית הפלשתינאית



Who is an adversary and who is a partner?

The Arabs of Palestine remained without a state, and as the then-Foreign Minister put it so fittingly, this is “*the question that is perhaps the most complex and the most intricate and also the most decisive of the questions about peace with our surroundings ...*”. It is “the most complex and the most intricate” for the foreign minister of a small state that decided to circumvent and disregard a Resolution that gave his people international recognition of its right to political independence. Even today, in 1961, it is still a determinative issue on the road to peace. It is the new image of the “Problem of Palestine”. It is the source of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

From an objective standpoint, the main problem is that of the Palestinian-Arab people, whose right to self-determination was denied it by force and by subterfuge, and from this stem all the various other problems in the dispute between Israel and the Arabs.

The refugees, who belong to that people, remain not only homeless but also deprived of a country and a state. Their problem is more important than many other things that are subject to dispute, but it is only part of a broader problem: the problem of the Arabs of Palestine.

Israel’s territorial conflict is not with the Arab states, but with the Arabs of Palestine. In the present situation Jordan is not an adversary to Israel, but a partner in plunder.

Palestine and the Palestinians

In the period between the adoption of the Partition Resolution by the UN (29/11/47) and Abdullah’s proclamation of the annexation of the West Bank to his kingdom (24/4/50) the Arabs of Palestine did not sit on their hands. At first some of them were indeed influenced by the incitement of the Higher Arab Committee, and the Husseinis – a family that controlled key political, administrative and economic positions due to the favour of the British, opposed the Partition Plan and called for violence against the Jews. But as we have seen, that incitement did not mature into action in most cases.

After a short period during which members of the National Liberation League, who supported the Partition Plan, were condemned as traitors, the tables were turned. When it became clear to the country's Arabs that Britain was inciting them against the Jews and was intending to rule over them again through Abdullah, a strong popular movement emerged which called for the creation of the Arab state. The National Liberation League became the most influential political body on the Arab street. Thousands of people participated in rallies and demonstrations it organized, and its slogans "Down with British imperialism and its servant Abdullah", "Long live independent and democratic Palestine" became the most popular. Abdullah organized gatherings of local notables in Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron and other cities, who invited him – so to speak – to take them under his patronage; but immediately afterwards, in the same places, mass popular demonstrations were conducted at the initiative of the National Liberation League, which completely refuted the earlier false impression. With the aim of procuring a popular seal of approval for the annexation, Abdullah announced elections for a joint parliament for Transjordan and the West Bank. According to a report by the French news agency on 12/4/50, only 24% participated in these elections, and thus it was the aspiration for national independence that received a popular seal of approval. In response Abdullah appointed Palestinian deputies to the parliament. At the first session of that "parliament" a law was proposed for the annexation of the West Bank to Transjordan, which of course was approved, though it encountered opposition from the deputies from the West Bank, who feared the anger of the Arabs of Palestine.

"A fateful and worrisome moment with regard to the future"

Two years after the war, on 24/4/50, Abdullah proclaimed the annexation of the West Bank. Four days afterwards, the British government announced the following:

1. It recognized the annexation of the West Bank to Transjordan.
2. The military alliance between Britain and Transjordan had become an alliance between Britain and the "Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan", which was also in force in the annexed territory.

3. Britain recognized the State of Israel *de jure*, but *without recognizing the ceasefire lines as permanent borders*. With this declaration, Britain extended its patronage over the act of annexation and the particular form it took, which Britain itself had covertly initiated.

A few days after the British declaration the Opposition in the Knesset attacked the government over its position in the face of the annexation that Abdullah had carried out.

In the debate that was conducted on the matter, Y. Sapir (General Zionists) said:

We are confronted with the fact that the remainder of our country west of the Jordan River, and the Old City of Jerusalem, is now effectively part of a foreign state that spreads over both sides of the Jordan River. Our position has always been and remains today a preference for the creation of an independent Arab state in the other part of our country rather than its attachment and annexation to one of the neighbouring states, and we will not dwell here on the many justifications for that position. But it is a fact that the initiative in this domain has been taken from us. For many months preparations have been made for this political act, and it could not have been a secret to our Foreign Ministry. Are we to understand from this fact, that not only after the proclamation of the annexation but, even before it, the Foreign Ministry's position was one of agreement regarding the annexation? Is it not to be assumed that the absence of any response from the Israeli government over the past months would be interpreted in the clearest way as a willingness to agree to the annexation, or at least its acceptance in silence as consent and without any serious response?

... After all, as we know, negotiations were conducted with an emissary of Transjordan some time ago, and were stopped by the other side under pressure from other states. Now we find ourselves in a vacuum, in which the one salient fact is the annexation ... our relations with Transjordan are certainly more than a little influenced by our relations with Britain and vice-versa ... there is not much chance for the government that the negotiations it has begun will conclude, in the near future or in the more distant future, in a peace that is acceptable to both the mind and the heart. Has the government such confidence in the good faith of the

neighbouring state that it allows itself to give such a large advance payment on the basis of a dubious promise? ... we opposed and we continue to oppose the annexation, and we call on our State to act in the UN against the annexation. (Emphasis ours)

And at the end of his speech a prophecy was flung from his lips:

The proclamation of the annexation of part of our country and of the Old City of Jerusalem forecloses for an indeterminate period any possibility of an understanding with the Arabs who live in that part of our country and of the stabilization of our borders, at least along the Jordan Valley. In the process of the historical development of the State there are various signposts, and only with the perspective of time is it possible to determine their precise meanings and their influence over subsequent events. In the chronicles of our State, we will unfortunately be obliged to record the position of the government on the annexation as one of the most worrisome fateful moments for the future. (Y. Sapir, 3/5/50, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 5, p. 1286)

The expansionistic talk about “the stabilization of our borders along the Jordan Valley” should be criticized no less than Israel’s acceptance of the Jordanian annexation, but it should be acknowledged in fairness to MK Sapir that he had the correct perspective even then. The absence of peace today is a direct consequence of the collusion with Abdullah and the agreement to the annexation in 1950.

After him spoke Knesset Member M. Vilner (Israeli Communist Party – Maki):

The subject we are discussing today is a problem that is decisive to the solution to the problem for many years to come, unlike other questions that can be dealt with provisionally one way or another, in accordance with Israel’s peace and independence needs, and in accordance with the need to remove as far as possible from Palestine the invaders from the Arab states and the British invaders; unlike the temporary questions ... the problem of the annexation is a broader one and one that

is more determinative for many years of the fate of our security and the fate of the political situation in Palestine. (Ibid., p. 1286)

In reply and in self-defence Foreign Minister M. Sharett read the Foreign Ministry's announcement on the annexation:

This is a unilateral measure which is not binding on Israel in any way. We are bound by a ceasefire agreement with the government of Hashemite Jordan and we are determined faithfully to implement its terms. But that agreement does not include any final political arrangement, and no final arrangement can happen without negotiations for a peace treaty between the two sides. It must be made clear, therefore, that the question of the Arab areas west of the Jordan River remains an open one as far as we are concerned. When the British announcement on the same subject was published the government announced again – I am reading only the sections relevant to the subject under discussion – “Regarding the annexation of the Arab areas west of the Jordan River to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the government has already announced that it sees the status of these areas as open.” The government had previously noted that Britain had no intention of establishing military bases in peacetime in areas west of the Jordan River. The application of the treaty between Britain and Transjordan in these areas occasions puzzlement and reservations on the part of the government of Israel. (Ibid., p. 1282)

Natan Yellin-Mor analyzed the government's announcement:

Abdullah understood very well the position of the Foreign Ministry when he did his act of plunder. How did the government of Israel respond after the fact? The announcement that was published by the government of Israel the next day is a suitable symbol of a mentality that brings shame on its authors. The announcement says that the act of annexation “is not binding on Israel in any way”. “Not binding”! Why should Israel announce whether the annexation of Nablus or Jericho is binding on it or not? Did Abdullah annex them to Israel? The question is whether the act of

plunder is binding on the conquered areas of the Homeland? Does the government see this act as a hostile act or not? To that question the announcement replies clearly: not only is it “not an act of hostility”, but “we accept it”, because the Foreign Ministry immediately invokes the armistice treaty and announces: “we are determined faithfully to carry out the terms of the accord”, as if to say, “don’t worry Abdullah, you can sleep quietly, we don’t intend to lift a finger against what you have done.” Did it say “Abdullah”? No! The announcement speaks of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and not in an official document in the style of the ceasefire accord, this time at the initiative of the Foreign Ministry, without even the slightest compulsion. Even before the government decides that the annexation is binding on it *de jure* it is already recognizing it *de facto*, because the kingdom of *Jordan* is a state through which the Jordan River flows, and the territory of which extends to the right and to the left of it. After the government accorded its *de facto* recognition, it set the price for *de jure* recognition: negotiations and a peace treaty between the two sides. Until then the question remains open for us. What question? The question of the status of the Arab areas west of the Jordan River. (Ibid. p. 1298)

The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, Z. Aren, expressed reasoned support for the government’s policy:

We were faced with four possibilities in our relations with Transjordan: *status quo* according to the ceasefire accord with Jordan; the possibility of the creation of an independent Arab state in the eastern part of Western Palestine; the possibility of a war of conquest on our part; the possibility of annexation.

For my part, I would prefer a situation of *status quo* in our relations with

Transjordan on the basis of the borders that were established by the ceasefire treaty – if the existing status were stable. But the fact is that the *status quo* began to unravel; not only because of Transjordan’s annexationist inclinations, and not only because of various tendencies of certain Powers, but also because of the influence of Egypt, the Mufti and the entire Arab League. The direction was clearly marked:

the creation of an independent Arab state on the basis of the borders that were set by the UN General Assembly in November 1947 ... I absolutely and unreservedly oppose it and I will tell you why. An independent Arab state, if it were created, would have no economic basis. Economically it would be dead. It could exist only as a parasite on the body of the State of Israel. An independent Arab state, if it were created, would have no social-political basis. The most likely outcome would be control by the Mufti. Those who speak of progressive forces are referring to the Arab Communists. I consider them to be enemies of the State of Israel body and soul.

If an independent Arab state were created now, we would be faced with a front of the Arab League and its pressure on the UN General Assembly to return us to the borders of November 1947, the same borders which, if they were imposed on us by force, we would resist by military force, just as we would resist by military force if they imposed on us the abandonment of Jerusalem ... (Ibid., p. 1288)

Only a year had passed since M. Sharett announced that it would be desirable for the State of Israel for the Arab part of Palestine to be a “unit in its own right”!

Z. Aren announced incidentally – alongside a detailed announcement to the effect that Israel agreed to the annexation because it too had a share in the plunder – that Israel (already in 1950) would resist by force its return to the Partition borders.

“The UN can be appealed to on the basis of only one document”

What could Israel do when faced with the act of annexation, after it was faced with a *fait accompli*?

Three factions in the Knesset proposed appealing to the UN. Y. Sapir said, in the name of the General Zionists:

We opposed and continue to oppose the annexation, and we demand that our State take action in the UN against the annexation ... (Ibid., p. 1286)

Speaking for Mapam, H. Rubin proposed a resolution the first two clauses of which were typical of Mapam's efforts to link the "integrity of the Homeland" with the "brotherhood of peoples":

1. The Knesset considers the annexation of the areas west of the Jordan River to be harmful to
 - a. the historical aspiration of the Jewish people to restore the integrity of the Homeland;
 - b. the right of the Arab population of that part of the country, the annexation of which has been declared by Transjordan, to political Independence in the framework of an economic union with the State of Israel.

[...]

2. The Knesset declares that the State of Israel does not recognize and will not reconcile itself to the annexation and requests that the Government submit a complaint to the Security Council. (Ibid., p. 1302)

In the name of Maki (Israeli Communist Party), M. Vilner proposed the following resolution:

1. The Knesset is resolved on the State of Israel's non-recognition of and opposition to the annexation of the Arab parts of Palestine to the kingdom of Transjordan;
2. The Knesset resolves to refer the annexation to the Security Council with a demand that it take steps against Britain and Transjordan over the illegal act of annexation of part of Palestine to Transjordan, which constitutes a British base;
3. The Knesset resolves to support the war of the Arab masses in the other part of Palestine to create their independent and democratic state which will seek peace and friendship with Israel ... (Ibid., p. 1303)

P. Lavon responded to these proposals:

... I am astonished that serious people, representing entire parties in Israel, have permitted themselves to propose to us that we take the matter to the institutions of the UN ...

The UN can be appealed to on the basis of only one document. As far as the UN is concerned, the annexation affects one thing only: the General Assembly resolution of 1947 proposing the creation of an independent Arab state. That alone can justify our protest and our appeal. Are we interested in turning the clock back to that point? ... If we place the matter on the UN's table – will they deal with it only within the bounds of the question that is convenient to us (the Jordanian annexation) and not the borders that are of interest to others (the Israeli annexation)? And in that case is it in our interest to renew the involvement of the UN, which has well demonstrated its competence in resolving our issues, and at our own request to sit in judgement over matters related to Palestine, borders, conditions and annexations? Would it not be foolish and suicidal for us to take that path? Where is the political logic in our inviting of our own free will a questionable third party and appointing it judge over all matters related to all the facts that have been created in this period, most of which are not in our disfavour? ... (P. Lavon, 3/5/50, *Knesset Records* Vol. 5, p. 1294)

With these frank words, P. Lavon (afterwards Minister of Defence [in Hebrew, literally “security” – trans.] and Secretary-General of the Histadrut [trade-union confederation – trans.]) successfully identified the heart of the matter. Appeal to the Security Council? Would they not discuss not only the 54% of the territory of the Arab state that was annexed to Transjordan, but also the 44% that was annexed to Israel?!

Only a year before that, in June 1949, the Foreign Minister defended the UN's decision of 29 November 1947 in his debate with P. Bernstein (General Zionists), who criticized him for the willingness displayed by the government of Israel (under US pressure) to absorb 100 thousand Arab refugees in conformity with the requests of the UN:

... and in the negotiations in Rhodes over the ceasefire, at the price of a known concession, by means of the demilitarization of a small area near Aujeh, we got a border-line stretching all the way to Eilat. We did that with the help of the UN. Why? Because the place was ours before 29 November. First of all, there was still

somebody in that area, and that somebody disappeared. Why did he disappear? Because he knew that if the matter went for discussion on a certain table, he could not justify his being there, whereas we could justify our being there because there was a legal ruling in our favour. I could have given other examples to prove that it was not justified to rush so much to break the link with 29 November, and in any case 29 November signifies a decision of the UN, which said that in 1948 there should be an Arab state in Palestine! (M. Sharett, 20/6/49, *Knesset Records* Vol 1, p. 762)

M. Sharett knows how to defend the Resolution of the UN General Assembly when he has to, *and to mention the fact that because of that resolution the State of Israel was created* and because of it the British left Eilat, but a member of his party, P. Lavon, knows just as well to caution against relying on that Resolution when it looks to him undesirable to do so, and to dub the UN a “dubious third party”.

“The friendly enemies”

Confirmation of the mutual understanding that prevailed between Abdullah and the government of Israel, in everything related to Palestine, is found in a number of additional sources. On 9/1/50 the influential *The New York Times* reported in the name of its correspondent in Tel Aviv:

The friendly enemies – the governments of Israel and Transjordan – have reached such a state in their relations that everything that affects them directly must be decided by the two of them and not by one of them alone.

The reference, in this case, is mainly to the position of the “friendly enemies” on the Australian proposal at the UN which affirmed the conversion of Jerusalem into a *corpus separatum* under the control of the Trusteeship Council. That proposal was supported by the Arab states except for Abdullah, whose approach was very similar to that of Israel. Sharett, for his part, relied in his speech at the UN on the opposition of Abdullah, when

he declared: “the only Arab power that now controls the most important part of Jerusalem, and whose approach to the question of internationalization is therefore of prime importance, is Transjordan. That government uncompromisingly and unflinchingly opposed internationalization.”

On 24/11/49 the London *Times* wrote:

Diplomatic circles in Jerusalem believe that the Government of Israel has come to an agreement with Abdullah on the Holy City ... that fact suggests that the leaders of Israel finally decided to put the other part of Palestine under Abdullah’s rule.

At this point we can imagine what fate was allocated for Jerusalem in the secret negotiations between the “friendly enemies”.

It is typical that the commander of the Arab Legion forces in the Jerusalem sector, Colonel Abdullah al-Tal, in his memoirs, accuses King Abdullah and Legion commander Glubb Pasha [of being responsible] for the fall of the Arab neighbourhoods in the New City of Jerusalem (Katamon, Baq’a and Abu Tor) to the Israelis, by causing the failure of the plan for the conquest of the Jewish area in the city. On the other hand, many in Israel blame Ben-Gurion for the fall of the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem and the failure of the plan for the conquest of the Arab part of the city. As the official documents on this matter have still not been released [as of 1961 – trans.], we must satisfy ourselves with pointing out the fact that the accusations mentioned above, which are based on an abundance of factual material, are not necessarily mutually contradictory, and there is every reason to assume that Abdullah and Ben-Gurion did indeed partition Jerusalem between them and took care that their armies not violate that agreement.

One day before Britain’s declaration of its recognition of the annexation (and of the State of Israel) the names of Ch. Weizmann and Abdullah were mentioned in one breath, as faithful friends of Britain. Sir Winston Churchill said in the name of the Opposition: “Both Dr. Weizmann and King Abdullah have been loyal friends of Britain for the last thirty years.” (UP, Reuters, 27/4/50)

“The friendly enemies”, “loyal friends of Britain”: the words are few, but they signify much.

When Abdullah was assassinated the Israeli press was full of elegies for the “wise ruler”, “the only one among the Arabs who was friendly to Zionism”, and who “made an effort to come to an understanding with Israel.” Churchill expressed his deep sorrow over the tragedy of the death of that wise and loyal Arab ruler “who never betrayed Britain’s interests.” Of course the Government of Israel, its politicians and its official academics correctly saw in Abdullah’s death a great loss, just as in the future they would see loss in the departure of Nuri Said, Chamoun, Farouk and others.

“Hoist with his own petard”

The episode of the ill-fated negotiations between Israel’s leaders and Abdullah, for the hope that was invested in them, for their bitter end and their consequences pregnant with catastrophe, is destined to be revisited over and over again. It enfolds within it the many failures (in the past, the present, and for certain in the future) of the Zionist leadership’s and the government of Israel’s Arab policy.

That it really was a terrible failure there is hardly need to prove. The government of Israel contributed to the failure of the creation of an Arab state in the other part of Palestine – which in its declared opinion was the ideal solution to the “most decisive of the questions about peace with our surroundings” (M. Sharett) – and in return for that it did not receive peace (not even with Jordan!), nor international recognition of the ceasefire lines as permanent borders. Moreover, in the wake of this collusion the government of Israel became one of the main parties interested in the continuation of the existing situation with Jordan, as the bodyguard of the Hashemite regime – a role that was pregnant with catastrophe and that was doomed to fail just as the Hashemite regime was destined for ruin. History, like a torrent of raging water, knows no impediment, and God help whoever stands in its path.

Why did the Israeli calculations come to naught?

A factor came into play in the Arab states, which Israeli policy always mocked as a matter of principle, and that was the Arab masses, those very same peasants and city

dwellers who do not sit in any government and are not members of any committee. But they succeeded in getting rid of Farouk, Nuri Said and Glubb. “Realistic politicians” do not take them into consideration, but at the end of the day it is they who determine real new situations. They do not sign any treaty, but it is their signature that determines the fate of every treaty.

These Arab masses caused Abdullah many difficulties at home and abroad, and created a situation in which every supporter of the annexation was condemned as a traitor to the Arab Palestinian people.

Britain, fearing that these masses would undermine its position in Egypt and Iraq, advised Abdullah to proclaim the annexation without waiting for the conclusion of the negotiations and without receiving the explicit agreement of Israel. Such an explicit agreement would have openly confirmed the existence of collusion between Abdullah and Ben-Gurion.

Nine years later, an Israeli who participated in the secret negotiations with Abdullah wrote:

When it looked like this was going to take shape as a specific plan, [Abdullah] requested a delay of a few days in order to consult with his “friends” (he himself smiled ironically when he used the word in reference to the British). At our next interview with him there was an expression of distress and worry on his face and right away he told us that “they” did not agree. (M. Dayan, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 11/6/59)

Another participant in the talks, E. Elath, who was later Israel’s ambassador to Britain, stated in an interview with a *Maariv* correspondent:

Kirkbride served as the king’s right hand until his assassination, and I can say without exaggeration that he played quite a negative role in thwarting the negotiations that we held at the time with the leader of Transjordan. (*Maariv*, 9/12/60)

Sir Alec Kirkbride, at the time the ambassador of Britain in Jordan, was in fact the leader of the state. He played a role in the political domain similar to that of Glubb in the military one.

In order to prevent Israeli military intervention, Britain expanded its military front with Transjordan into the annexed territory. Despite this “precautionary measure”, Abdullah was assassinated in Jerusalem about a year and a half after the annexation, and hatred of Britain grew in the Arab street. The government of Israel found itself between two stools. Even if he had not been assassinated, Abdullah would not have been able to give to the government of Israel the recompense it was hoping for:

His situation was tragic, because he was stuck in a dead end, with no exit, even before he was assassinated. His policies were not accepted by his people, and on the other hand he could not use extreme measures in order to rule in opposition to the people’s will ... the people did not want to go with him, whereas for his part, it is doubtful that he could have broken away from his policy that was bound to the British, and his responsibility for the consequences of the War of Independence and the arrangements with Israel, even if he had wanted to. Even if he wanted to give up his throne and abdicate, he would not have won the friendship of the Arabs, for in their eyes he was stained as a traitor, as dependent on and sold to the British and as one who acted according to their interests and not those of the Arab people. When the carpenter from Jerusalem shot him in the al-Aqsa mosque on 20 July 1951, Abdullah was already a political casualty. (M. Dayan, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 19/6/59)

Those were wise words. It was only a shame that it was wisdom after the fact. When the government of Israel was faced with the choice between supporting the aspirations of the Palestinian Arab people and their right to self-determination, and proceeding with the collusion with Abdullah, who ruled at Britain’s pleasure and was hated by his subjects, it chose the second path.

This approach was by no means an innovation. The forging of the accord between the Zionist leadership of the Jewish Yishuv and Abdullah, at the expense of the Palestinian

Arab people, should be seen as a natural continuation of the Zionist policy of acquiring lands from the effendis with no thought for the peasants who had lived on them for generations and who were notified of the transaction that had been conducted over their heads only when they were dispossessed from their lands with the help of the British police.

While these deals were taking place on a local scale, the new deal was national in scope; whereas then many peasants were left without land, now an entire nation was left without political independence.

“The three governments recognize that ...”

One month after the annexation, on 26/5/50, the governments of Britain, France and the United States issued a joint Declaration on the Middle East. The reasons that motivated the three Western powers to publish their Declaration were many. The main reason was their desire to give expression to a re-dividing of our region into spheres of influence and markets, but here we will examine that declaration mainly from the perspective of its significance regarding the question of borders.

The two main clauses in that Declaration state:

1. The three Governments recognise that the Arab states and Israel all need to maintain a certain level of armed forces for the purposes of assuring their internal security and their legitimate self-defence and to permit them to play their part in the defence of the area as a whole. All applications for arms or matériel for these countries will be considered in the light of these principles.
2. ... The three Governments, should they find that any of these states was preparing to violate frontiers or armistice lines, would, consistently with their obligations as members of the United Nations, immediately take action, both within and outside the United Nations, to prevent such violation. [Source for English text: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “Foreign Relations: Historical Documents: 1947-1974” – trans. Emphasis authors’]

On 31/5/50 the government announced in the Knesset:

The government of Israel received with special satisfaction the three Powers' declaration of their profound interest in and their aspirations to advance peace and stability in the Arab states and Israel, and their emphatic opposition to the use of force or the threat of the use of force in this part of the world.

The three Powers promised to act against any violation of borders or ceasefire boundaries, in accordance with their commitments as members of the UN. That promise applies in equal measure to the borders of the Arab states and Israel's boundaries, as they were determined in the ceasefire agreements with Egypt, Transjordan, Syria and Lebanon. (D. Ben-Gurion, *Knesset Records* Vol. 5, p. 1572)

The special satisfaction of the government of Israel in the face of that declaration is not to be wondered at. Just as there is no wonder in Britain's initiative to issue a joint declaration with its two main allies.

Back in 1948 Ben-Gurion was asked by a correspondent for the French news agency, L. Frank, to what extent Israel intended to expand its borders. He replied:

Militarily, as much as we can. Politically, we will comply with international decisions. We strongly believe in international law, and between a larger territory that we acquire by force of arms and a smaller territory that we are given, whether by international decision or agreement with the Arabs, we choose the second path ... (*Davar*, 4/8/48)

A year afterwards the Prime Minister said in the Knesset:

The United Nations still has not given its seal of approval to our expanded borders – and let us not deceive ourselves, the battle is not yet over, and even the states that have recognized our State, and they are most of the states in the world, have not yet recognized our new borders. (*Knesset Records* 2/8/49, Vol. 2, P. 1230)

Despite the great importance of an international seal of approval for the borders of the State of Israel, the government refrained from appealing to the UN on the matter of the annexation, and thus it lost the international organization as a guarantor for Israel's borders. Since the Jordanian annexation, which did not bring in its wake peace and Jordanian recognition of Israel's borders, the securing of an international seal of approval for the ceasefire lines as permanent borders became the main mission of Israeli foreign policy.

The Jordanian annexation, which created an uncomfortable situation for Israel, also put Britain, which stood behind it, in a "delicate" position, because for a power like Britain it is very important to appear before the world as being in compliance with the resolutions of the UN (even in 1956, with its invasion of Egypt, Britain declared that it was proceeding only until the UN managed to organize itself and take the initiative into its own hands).

Thus was born the tripartite declaration. Britain initiated it in order – among other things – to legitimize the *status quo* in the region, without its being the only power to conspire behind the UN's back, and the USA and France willingly responded to the invitation that gave them a foothold in the Middle East.

The government of Israel was glad, of course, for the great powers' quasi-recognition of its expanded territory, which seemed to it to be a suitable substitute for the UN's guarantee of its borders. This point was particularly marked in the government's announcement, without any mention at all of the clause in the declaration that envisions Israel, together with its neighbours, as part of a military alignment of the Western bloc in the Cold War.

The Arab states rejected the tripartite declaration in a proclamation that was published on 25/6/50 and signed by Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq and Jordan (the latter evidently could not evade signing it and thereby appearing to stand against the whole Arab world).

In a debate in the Knesset, Y. Sapir (General Zionists) analyzed the political meaning of the tripartite declaration:

There are, in this announcement, in this political act, a number of positive sides and a number of negative ones. I will begin with the negative ones. In effect a political fact has been established, without our being at all party to it. The three Powers proclaimed that a certain region is located, to a certain extent – and for the moment I will not specify the extent – within their sphere of influence. And by doing so they established the fact that we are actually and in practice placed within a certain region, over which they claim influence for themselves; and the situation that has been created for us is of course not comfortable ... These Powers have determined their own policy for this part of the globe, and they see themselves as responsible for that policy, and to a multifarious extent also for this region – whether in the framework of an arrangement and relationships within the UN, or outside it. These things, of course, put us in a delicate position such that whatever political or international situation we find ourselves in, it will be not so comfortable. And in contrast to this, some positive sides ... It is a fact that actors with the capacity for direct action have an interest in preserving the peace in this region, and they are interested in opposing with all the force they have any violation of the *status quo* as it has been created ... and that, of course, cannot be interpreted as being against us ... here a specific address has in effect been created – whether we appeal to it or whether we do not appeal to it – which is a realistic fact: a specific address has been created which will be able to act. And on the negative side we must take into consideration that it is likely to act when there is a need, in its time of need, and not in our time of need. (Y. Sapir, 31/5/50, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 5, p. 1578)

It is very clear that the situation is not comfortable, because Israel finds itself, two years after the War of Independence, in the sphere of influence of the three powers, including Britain which plotted to destroy it (as opposed to the Soviet Union which did much for its creation). Except that there is an “affirmative” in the declaration, and that is partial international recognition of the *status quo* (“which is not against us”) – which fills the vacuum of the international guarantee. It is no longer the General Assembly of the UN, but the foreign ministries of Britain, France and the USA, that are the address for complaints about disturbances of the peace in the region.

The United Workers' Party (Mapam) and the Israeli Communist Party (Maki) particularly attacked the fact that Israel, by agreeing to the Declaration, joined the Cold War against the Soviet Union. Herut particularly attacked Israel's satisfying itself with the present borders. P. Lavon (Land of Israel Workers' Party – Mapai) defended the government's position:

The very announcement of the three Powers and their commitment to ensure the existing borders is an important announcement ... Let us speak clearly: is it your desire that there not be security on the existing borders, so that it will be possible to violate the existing situation? Or is it our desire that the existing situation and our security shall continue? Let us not go around in circles, but speak directly to the matter. And therefore this commitment has great value. (P. Lavon, *ibid.*, p. 1585)

“As long as the existing situation continues, the inclination to undermine it strengthens”

The considerations of the government of Israel were based on the assumption that the Western bloc would be the decisive force in the Middle East for many years; and in those years Israel would absorb several million Jews, establish agricultural and industrial settlements in its entire territory and create social, economic and military *faits accomplis* that could not be changed. The Arabs, for their part, would despair, the Arabs of Palestine would forget their homeland, they would settle in the neighbouring states, and the problem would disappear in the face of the new reality.

On 4/2/52 the leader of the General Zionists, P. Bernstein, said in the Knesset:

The expressions of hostility, and even the open declarations to renew the war against us, are left unanswered. And it is perhaps more astonishing coming from those Powers, which in a certain period declared their desire to defend the *status quo* in this region. Even in the version that was accepted by the General Assembly (in the last session of the UN General Assembly), after all the mitigating words,

reliance on all the resolutions of the UN is found in five clauses, with the emphasis on the requirement that the quest for a settlement should be carried out on the basis of these resolutions. It may be said, of course, that these resolutions do not have importance, there is an existing situation and the decisions will not change it – surely they will not send an army to impose them on us ...

(Foreign Minister M. Sharett: Only if there is an agreement will it have to be on the basis of these resolutions)

... Why is a situation which has continued for such a long time (the *status quo*) still not accepted by all the interested parties as we had thought, and why is the opposite the case – the longer the existing situation continues the more the inclination to undermine it strengthens. (P. Bernstein, 4/2/52, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 11, p. 1164)

The last sentence concisely expresses the additional development that applies to that question to this very day – and it is nearly certain that matters will continue that way in the future: as long as the existing situation persists so grows the inclination among the Arabs to undermine it and to strengthen the international tendency for a settlement of the conflict on the basis of the resolutions of the UN.

“What is in contradiction to the resolutions of the UN”

On 9/11/55 the prime minister of Britain delivered his traditional speech in the city hall of London. In order to recover the prestige that Britain lost in Egypt, he said, among other things, that “the hostility between Israel and its Arab neighbours is unhealed and in this case time does not appear to be bringing a cure”. He added that Israel must give up part of its territory for the sake of a compromise, because the Arab states are adhering to the UN resolution of 1947, and “to disregard the resolutions of the UN is not just.” His proposal was to find a compromise between the ceasefire lines and the UN Partition lines. In contradiction to the assumptions of the government of Israel that time would heal the problem, the question appeared and arose anew, and it was none other than the West,

which was supposed to preserve the existence of the *status quo* in accordance with its declaration. It was the West that brought the discussion back to its starting-point, with the intention of winning over the hearts of the Arabs. In order to avoid a discussion of that delicate subject in the Knesset, D. Ben-Gurion replied to a prearranged question by MK B. Azaniah, a member of his party:

... The UN General Assembly has never resolved to do what Sir Anthony proposed in his speech – to expand the territories of the neighbouring states (Egypt, Transjordan, Syria and Lebanon) at the expense of Palestine. That is a fantastic proposal that did not occur to anyone in the UN General Assembly ... What is in contradiction to the resolutions of the UN is the existence of an Egyptian army in the Gaza Strip. The other thing that is in contradiction to the resolutions of the UN is the annexation of a substantial part of western Palestine by the government of Transjordan – the Old City of Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus and others, and the British government, and only it, so it seems to me, recognized that annexation in April 1950 in utter disregard of the UN resolutions. If Sir Anthony Eden does not see the ceasefire agreements of 1949 as binding on all sides, and if what he says is true, that to disregard the resolutions of the UN is not just – then Egypt must immediately move out of the Gaza Strip and Transjordan must evacuate all of western Palestine. (D. Ben-Gurion, 15/11/55, quoted in the introduction to *Shenaton ha-Memshalah* [Government Yearbook] 5720 [1960], p. viii. Hebrew)

This was true. The UN Partition Resolution did not discuss Egypt, Transjordan, Syria or Lebanon, but rather the Jews and Arabs of Palestine. Accordingly, it was true that the existence of an Egyptian army in the Gaza Strip and the annexation of the West Bank to Jordan constitute a violation of that Resolution.

But D. Ben-Gurion's criticism of Britain, Jordan and Egypt for violating the Partition Resolution is morally and politically without foundation, at a time when Israel itself has taken a stand against the basis of that resolution. In the *Government Yearbook* (Heb. *Shenaton ha-Memshalah*) for 1960, D. Ben-Gurion referred to what he had said in 1955,

and affirmed that he still considered his earlier position to be correct. But on another page in the same introduction he writes:

According to the resolution of the UN General Assembly of 29 November the Jewish state was given 14,920 square kilometres. Now we have 20,662 square kilometres under our control, of which about five thousand kilometres (4,912) were occupied and liberated by the IDF in the Jerusalem corridor, in western Galilee and the Mediterranean, in southern Judea and the northern Negev. About five hundred kilometres (467) were added to us by peaceful means in the ceasefire accords with Transjordan.

In the west of Palestine only 6,940 square kilometres remained outside of Israel, the Gaza Strip whose area is 258 square kilometres and the area that was attached to Transjordan, 6,682 square kilometres. (D. Ben-Gurion, *Shenaton ha-Memshalah* [Government Yearbook], 1960, p. ii. Hebrew)

In his reply to Eden in 1955, the prime minister of Israel indicated that the annexation to Transjordan of 6,682 square kilometres that were intended for the Arab state was in contradiction to the UN resolution, and “forgot” to mention the relationship between the annexation of 5,742 square kilometres to the State of Israel and these resolutions.

The truth of the matter is that the state of the Arabs of Palestine was partitioned between Ben-Gurion and Abdullah into two nearly equal parts even before it was born. As for the Gaza Strip: Egypt never annexed it and repeatedly re-stated its recognition of the Palestinian Arabs’ right to it.

Nasser too replied to the British prime minister’s Guildhall speech:

The matter reduces to the fact that for the first time since 1947 a British prime minister is voting for the UN resolutions of 1947, which were not mentioned at all in the past 8 years. Eden’s voting for these resolutions constituted a recognition of the right of the Palestinian people whose land was robbed while it was under

British occupation. The Arabs tried in the UN to revive the UN decisions to preserve the rights of the Palestinian people but the UN did not respond to them. At the Bandung conference the Arabs succeeded in achieving a unanimous resolution expressing support for the rights of the refugees and calling for the implementation of the UN resolutions. However, the UN and the Great Powers neglected the resolution and refused to raise any interest in connection with the rights of the Palestinian people that were negated in 1948.

In that year Britain abandoned Palestine and left the rights of the Arab Palestinian people to the mercy of armed Zionist gangs. She made no effort to recall the existence of resolutions that were accepted by the UN regarding the rights of the Arabs in Palestine. The mentioning of these rights by Eden attests that the rights of the Arabs of Palestine will not be abandoned as some Powers thought, and the time has come to revive them.

... The question of the refugees affects all Arab states and no single one of them is authorized to discuss it separately (Jordan). Egypt will stand with great firmness for the rights of the Arab Palestinian people and it sees no need for discussions, since the UN passed resolutions in the year 1947 regarding Palestine and in the year 1949 regarding the rights of the people of Palestine. If the UN is to retain its honour it must act to implement these resolutions that have remained on paper only ...

The time has now come to warn the UN and the ruling Powers that ignoring these resolutions and neglecting and abandoning the rights of the Arabs of Palestine will not bring the establishment of peace as they want, at the expense of Palestine and the rights of the Arabs of Palestine. (Nasser, 25/11/55, interview with a correspondent from Radio Cairo)

Nasser's words falsify the nature of the war of 1948, but they emphasize the essential problem in the Israeli-Arab conflict – the problem of the Arabs of Palestine and their homeland.

The raising of the resolutions of the UN places Israel (which was created as a result of them) in an uncomfortable position:

To us it is clear that any reliance on the General Assembly resolution of the year 1947 regarding the borders, or on the General Assembly resolution of the year 1949, regarding Jerusalem – is a sword-thrust into our flesh. To us this matter is clear, but to readers of press conferences in the “Palais de Chaillot” it is completely unclear and in their ears the espousal of the authority of the UN has the ring of words of peace and reason. (M. Sharett, 4/2/52, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 11, p. 1183)

And thus is the situation in 1961 as well.

“Facts that penetrate deeply”

It must be emphasized that after the Suez war, and especially after the revolution in Iraq, Egypt and Iraq began regularly to raise the demands to create the state of the Arabs of Palestine, to create a Palestinian army, a Palestinian government in exile, etc. Whether it was done deliberately in order to bait Hussein or whether it came from adherence to principle, it is a fact that since 1958 the problem has arisen anew, and more intensely than ever before; “the longer the existing situation continues the more the inclination to undermine it strengthens”.

The fact that the sessions of the Arab League ended mostly without decisions being reached on the question of Palestine attests to the fact that the question did not leave the agenda and that Egypt and Iraq are demanding the implementation of the UN resolutions whereas Jordan – for obvious reasons – refuses. Israel’s joy in the face of the Arabs’ disunity on that question is absurd and only testifies to an utter lack of grounding in the seriousness of the problem.

The plan of the government of Israel is, as has been stated, to conserve the *status quo* by populating the country, especially in the areas that were assigned to the Palestinian state, establishing settlements along the length of the ceasefire lines, vigorous political and military opposition to any measure that might affect the *status quo*, channelling

propaganda and “*hasbara*”³, to foreign countries in favour of the freezing of the existing situation.

The chances of solving the problem in this way will be discussed later. As for the “*hasbara*” operation abroad, which so many Israelis see as the fundamental last resort for stabilizing the *status quo*, let us take a look at what the then-prime minister and foreign minister, M. Sharett stated:

We should not exaggerate the value of *hasbara*, and we should not hang our hopes on *hasbara* alone. Not everything can be done or justified by *hasbara*. There are facts that penetrate deeply, which make an impression that no *hasbara* can conceal. It works both ways. I have had the opportunity to compare the situation, in which the special line that characterized the position of the Jewish people was that they had camps for displaced people, survivors of disaster, who were unable to get to a resting-place, and that fact cried out and gave the human conscience no rest – with the situation in which the State of Israel finds itself. All the camps of Jewish displaced people have been removed, but camps have been set up for Arab refugees, and no *hasbara* in the world – and indeed there is *hasbara*, and that is one of the central subjects of thousands of speeches and scores of volumes – can change the final fact that these camps exist. (M. Sharett, 7/12/53, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 15, p. 320)

These words, which should be engraved in the memory of every Israeli, bring us to the other important side of the Israel-Arab conflict – the refugee problem.

While M. Sharett attributes the failure of Israeli *hasbara* to the seriousness of the facts that penetrate deeply, he who was for many years the director of the Foreign Ministry puts the blame on Arab propaganda:

Arab propaganda seized on the refugee problem as a great source of booty. By distorting the facts it succeeded in converting that problem into the most serious

³ Lit. “explanation”; also translated variously as public diplomacy, advocacy, image-building, public relations campaign and propaganda. – trans.

political obstacle on Israel's path in the first decade of its existence. The main source of all the widespread anti-Israeli feelings in the Western world is the Arab refugees. Despite its best efforts Israel never succeeded in refuting the accusation that was plastered on it by Arab propaganda – that it expelled the refugees and that since then it has cruelly been denying them the basic human right to “return home”, and that by doing so it is “defying the UN”. The world accepted the sanctimonious claims of the Arab states that they care about the fate of the Arab refugees and want only what is good for them. Even though Israel has never desisted from repeating the facts as they are, it was not able to shake the faith in the honesty of the Arabs, and it was that which inevitably led to political conclusions that were harmful to it. (W. Eytan, *Beyn yisra'el la-‘amim* [Between Israel and the nations], p. 123. Hebrew)

W. Eytan warns against “distorting the facts”. Here is how he presents “the facts as they are”:

The Arab states were determined to invade Israel the moment the British Mandate ended. They wanted to remove the Arab villagers and city-dwellers from the places of combat. They asked them to seek shelter in the different states until the storm passed. Indeed they promised them that the war would not last long and that as soon as it ended, not only would those who had fled return to their homes, but they would also receive the houses of the Jews, who, according to the Arabs, would in the meantime be pushed into the sea. A few simple Arabs refused to leave, but most of them obeyed the evacuation order and left in disorder and panic. *Those who did not obey their leaders and remained in their homes are still living in them to this very day.* There are dozens of Arab villages in Israel and thousands of Arabs still live in the cities; they listened to their hearts and did not do as their leaders told them ... It is indeed a desperate human tragedy, and it is all the more desperate in that there is no solution in sight. Not that there are no solutions; it would be very much possible to find solutions if the Arab states were willing to cooperate in resettling the refugees, and that is undoubtedly their duty, since they are the ones

who are responsible for the fact that the refugees became such. The refugee problem would not exist at all if the Arab states had not gone to war in 1948 and if they had not ordered these people to leave their homes. (W. Eytan, *Beyn yisra'el la-amim* [Between Israel and the nations], p. 112. Hebrew. Emphasis ours)

Plan Dalet⁴ of 10/3/48

For twelve years Israel has had only one justification for its position on the question of the refugees of Palestine who lived in Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, Beisan [Heb. Beit-Shean – trans.], Lydda, Ramle, Majdal [now Ashkelon – trans.], Ashdod and the hundreds of abandoned Arab towns and villages located in its territory: the Arab states created the problem when they violated the UN resolutions in Palestine and called on the Arabs of Palestine to flee from their places, and so the responsibility to solve it lies with them. Israel is willing to provide financial aid to settle the refugees in Arab countries but for security, economic and national reasons it cannot take them back into its territory.

As we have seen, the world is not convinced, and it has its reasons. In order to understand some of these reasons, let us delve a little into the complex question of the creation of the refugee problem.

There are those who disagree with Mr. Eytan's "facts as they are". Here, for example, is what one of the "Mapai Arabs" dared to say in the first Knesset:

The question of the Arab refugees is not just a question of financial compensation. It is a question of people who were exiled from their neighbourhoods, Their lands and their homeland under conditions of fear, terror and the direct and indirect use of force. The tie of people to their homeland is something that is well known and does not require investigation or proof. This is a natural thing, not only for humans but also for animals and birds. If the Jewish people held onto its right to return to Palestine and to live in it after two thousand years, how can the Arab refugees not have the right to return to their lands and their cities and their villages, after all they were forced to leave only months ago, and under circumstances of well-known

⁴ Also known as Plan D. "Dalet" – ד – is the letter in the Hebrew alphabet that corresponds to D – trans.

compulsion. And here it is necessary to respond to the statement of the honourable Foreign Minister that the uprooting of the refugees came as a consequence of the attack on Palestine of the various Arab armies. For it has been absolutely proven that the Arabs were expelled from Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias, Acre, Beisan and other places before 15/5/48 and prior to the evacuation of the country by the forces of the Mandate government, and before the eyes of these forces, and even with pressure and incitement on their part towards the Arabs to flee and save themselves. There is no connection between the uprooting of the refugees and the entry of the armies of the Arab states to within the borders of Palestine, after all, what is the interest of the Arab states here, whereas the catastrophes, destruction and bloodshed that befell this country are the conclusion of the functioning of the Mandate and also its consequences. Was the Mandate nothing more than a time-bomb that exploded in this terrible way? And was Britain's trusteeship over Palestine nothing more than a sentence for mass killing, destruction and the erasure of all signs of goodness and culture? Indeed that is what the Mandate was, and that was its trusteeship. (Amin-Salim Jarjora, 20/6/49, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 1, p. 753)

The then-foreign minister complimented Mr. Jarjora on his frankness, but did not respond in any substantive way. It seems that not a small part of the Arabs of Palestine became refugees even before the end of the Mandate, and Britain played a significant part not only in organizing the invasion but also in creating the refugee problem.

According to the account of Knesset Member Jarjoura, when the flight of the Arabs began, many Jews endeavoured to reassure them and convince them to remain in their places, that no evil would befall them, and that they would be citizens with equal rights in the new democratic state.

But there were also contradictory occurrences.

On 9 April 1948, 5 weeks before the invasion of the Arab armies, Etzel [Irgun] and Lehi [Stern Gang] forces attacked the village of Deir Yassin (today "Kiryat Shaul"), next to Jerusalem. This "attack" was effectively a *pogrom*, in which 200 residents of the village were slaughtered, including about 150 women, children, babies and old people, whose bodies were thrown down a deep well. The attackers transported the survivors in a

“triumphal procession” through the streets of Jerusalem, the clothes of the prisoners and their captors being stained with blood. In the announcement of the Hagana [the name of the main militia associated with the mainstream Labour Zionists, literally “defence” – trans.] on that action it was stated:

The Hagana Command in Jerusalem announces that the village of Deir Yassin, which was attacked by Etzel and Lehi, did not participate in attacks on Hebrew Jerusalem and was one of the few Arab places that did not provide a foothold for the invading gangs. Since the village did not attack, the Hagana refrained from expanding the battle to that sector. The dissenting organizations (Etzel and Lehi) knew that there was no military goal to their plan and that the attack in the current circumstances was not in keeping with the plan for the defence of Jerusalem. This attack, therefore, had no military value; rather, it was an exhibition attack, for propaganda purposes ... Hagana believes that the display of prisoners, including women and children, to the public in the streets of the city compromises the honour of Hebrew arms. (*Davar*, 12/4/48)

The Lehi newspaper, which was published underground at that time, stated proudly:

The conquest of Deir Yassin brought terror and fear to the Arabs in all the surrounding villages; in Malha, Kolonia and Beit-Iqsa a panic flight began which facilitated the renewal of transportation and our life-artery between the capital and the rest of the country. (*Lohamei herut yisra'el* [Fighters for the freedom of Israel – Lehi], Documents, Vol. 2, pp. 191-192. Hebrew)

An IDF historian wrote on the same subject 11 years later:

On 9/4/48 Etzel together with members of Lehi attacked the village. The attack was an easy one. Nevertheless the attackers sustained losses, especially in the battle over the *mukhtar*'s house, which dominated the village. In the process of occupying

the village about 200 of its people were killed [to put it very tactfully!], including women and children.

The Deir Yassin affair was published all over the world as the “Deir Yassin massacre”, and harmed the name of the Yishuv at that time. All the Arab propaganda channels distributed it widely and they are distributing it to this day, but there is no doubt that it also served as a factor that contributed to the collapse of the Arab rear in the following period [i.e. it facilitated the flight of the Arabs]. The publicity that the Arab spokesmen themselves gave it did this more than the incident itself. They intended to prove to their people the cruelty of the Jews and thus to fan the flame of holy war among them, but in practice they put fear into their hearts. (*Toledot milhemet ha-qomemiyut*. [History of the war of independence], p. 117. Hebrew)

This official description of the massacre and its consequences reaches the heights of sanctimoniousness: the Arabs who “survived” the slaughter for propaganda purposes, themselves caused the flight of many of the Arabs of Palestine ...

But who supplied them with these facts for “propaganda purposes”? And they – were they supposed to remain silent in the face of the atrocities of Deir Yassin? And were the residents of other villages supposed to wait quietly for their turn to come?

And so this too was a reason that contributed to the creation of the Arab refugee problem. More than a few people in Israel believe that the massacre, which they defend to outsiders, at the end of the day produced benefits by expediting the departure of the Arabs from Israel.

At one of the sessions of the first Knesset a Knesset Member from the Herut faction shouted an interjection in defence of the pogrom in Deir Yassin and the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, M. Argov (Mapai), replied to him:

As a Member of the Knesset I must respond to the heckling that took place here yesterday from the benches of Herut. The cry was: “We’re not ashamed of Deir Yassin”.

(A. Ben-Eliezer: “How many Deir Yassins did you do?”)

I want to say in your favour, that I do not believe that you are not ashamed of Deir Yassin.

(A. Ben-Eliezer: “You don’t have to use a thing that you yourselves did”.)

I do not know that we did Deir Yassins.

(A. Ben-Eliezer: “You can ask the Minister of Defence if you do not know.”)

Indeed we have freedom of speech here, but it is not to be taken advantage of in such a subversive way. If I thought the State of Israel was capable of Deir Yassins, not only would I not want to be an Arab in it – I would not want to be a Jew in it. (M. Argov, 2/8/49, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 2, p. 1219)

Stimulating words. But for the sake of clarity and in order to satisfy the justified curiosity of the reader, we must at this juncture explain the catcalls of Knesset Member Ben-Eliezer. For example, what did he mean when he asked: “How many Deir Yassins did you do?”

Lehi’s announcement of the conquest of Deir Yassin stated:

And to those inciters who would preach to us about morality we remind them: when Hagana attacked the village of Tubias in the Upper Galilee in which only women and children were killed, no advance warning was given.

Indeed it is worth reminding the hypocrites about the Abu-Laban orchard, the Semiramis hotel, Wadi-Joz, etc. (*Lehi*, Documents, Vol. 2, pp. 989-990. Hebrew)

Apparently the extent of the flight did not satisfy the “*Hagana*”, and it perceived a need on its part to carry out planned expulsions. The newspaper *Al Hamishmar* protested against this at the height of the war:

Apart from urgent military necessity, and aside from long-range political needs, if the requirements of the front demand of us more than once to remove Arab residents from proximity to Jewish settlements, then that is a necessity that is not to be condemned, but no political calculations should enter into it. Military necessity is nothing but a temporary emergency regulation, it is not to be confused with thoughts about transfer – about uprooting Arabs by force. These plans are to be rejected forcefully, whether because of their moral distortion, or because of the political harm involved or because of their impracticality. The Arabs must not be uprooted from Palestine. It is our fate to live with the Arabs in one homeland, and therefore we must establish our relationship with our Arab neighbours with an eye to this chance of living a shared life. Because even now there are friendly Arabs who seek peace, this is a fact that is known. Jewish settlements know which Arab villages in their vicinity are seeking peace and which ones are plotting hostilities, and similarly they know the Arabs who are peaceful within rebellious villages. Should the same fate befall them both, the friendly ones and the enemies? There is an Arab village next to Rehovot – it is Zarnuqa. That village refrained from actions against the Jews in 1936-9 and refrains now. More than once we read about their armed conflict against members of the gangs who sought to infiltrate the village and control it. The villagers always stressed their friendship with us and demonstrated their eschewal of acts of hostility. Other Arab villages saw them as traitors who had been warned. Is it appropriate, therefore, that the Hagana treated such a village as it treated the hostile village Yavne? This is only one example ...
(*Al Hamishmar*, 8/6/48, editorial)

This is one of many examples of the forceful uprooting of Arabs, with no discrimination between friend and foe, which was not the action of “irregular” forces, but a calculated policy of the authorized Jewish institutions.

Still more on the same subject, this time from *Haolam Hazeh*:

The Giv'ati book leaves no doubt, that *on the eve of the invasion of the Arab armies the expulsion of the Arab peasants became an important military goal of the Hebrew command*. On 10 March 1948 the Operations Branch of the General Staff published its Plan Dalet for the invasion: this plan includes among other things the following clause: "The destruction of villages (burning, blowing up and mining the ruins) especially in settlements that we are not able to permanently control." It also discussed the expulsion of Arab populations from certain urban neighbourhoods. (*Haolam Hazeh*, 15/8/59, editorial. Emphasis ours)

That order was given before the Arab armies invaded Israel.

"What the hell are we doing in this place?"

The most shocking description of that kind of action, and the sharpest protest against it, are not found in the press, but in literature, in one of the most powerful stories from the time of the War of Independence.

Thus S. Yizhar describes in his book, which has since been forgotten, the pangs of conscience of an Israeli soldier who was commanded to carry out an expulsion order:

Another and possibly better option, however, would be to begin differently, and to mention straightaway what had been the purpose of that entire day from the start, "operational order" number such and such, on such and such day of the month, in the margin of which, in the final section that was simply entitled "miscellaneous," it said, in a short line and a half, that although the mission must be executed decisively and precisely, whatever happened, "no violent outbursts or disorderly conduct" – it said – "would be permitted," which only indicated straightaway that there was something amiss, that anything was possible (and even planned and foreseen), and that one couldn't evaluate this straightforward final clause before returning to the opening and also scanning the noteworthy clause entitled

“information,” which immediately warned of the mounting danger of “infiltrators,” “terrorist cells,” and (in a wonderful turn of phrase) “operatives dispatched on hostile missions,” but also the subsequent and even more noteworthy clause, which explicitly stated, “assemble the inhabitants of the area extending from point X (see attached map) to point Y (see same map) – load them onto transports, and convey them across our lines; blow up the stone houses, and burn the huts; detain the youths and the suspects, and clear the area of ‘hostile forces,’” and so on and so forth – so that it was now obvious how many good and honest hopes were being invested in those who were being sent out to implement all this “burn-blow-up-imprison-load-convey,” who would burn blow up imprison load and convey with such courtesy and with a restraint born of true culture, and this would be a sign of a wind of change, of decent upbringing, and, perhaps, even of the Jewish soul, the great Jewish soul. (S. Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, English translation by Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck, Jerusalem: 2008. Ibis Editions. Pp. 8-9)

“Just you listen to what I’m saying.” Moische’s eyes sought mine as he spoke. Immigrants of ours will come to this Khirbet what’s its name, you hear me, and they’ll take this land and work it and it’ll be beautiful here!”

Of course. Absolutely. Why hadn’t I realized it from the outset? Our very own Khirbet Khizeh. Questions of housing, and problems of absorption. And hooray, we’d house and absorb – and how! We’d open a cooperative store, establish a school, maybe even a synagogue. There would be political parties here. They’d debate all sorts of things. They would plow fields, and sow, and reap, and do great things. Long live Hebrew Khizeh! Who, then, would ever imagine that once there had been some Khirbet Khizeh that we emptied out and took for ourselves. We came, we shot, we burned; we blew up, expelled, drove out, and sent into exile.

What in God’s name were we doing in this place!

[...]

... Certainly, wasn’t it our right? Hadn’t we conquered it today?

I felt that I was on the verge of slipping. I managed to pull myself together. My guts cried out. Colonizers, they shouted. Lies, my guts shouted. Khirbet Khizeh is

not ours. The Spandau gun never gave us any rights. O, my guts screamed. What hadn't they told us about refugees. Everything, everything was for the refugees, their welfare, their rescue ... our refugees, naturally. Those we were driving out – that was a totally different matter. Wait. Two thousand years of exile. The whole story. Jews being killed. Europe. We were the masters now.

The people who would live in this village – wouldn't the walls cry out in their ears? Those sights, screams that were screamed and that were not screamed, the confused innocence of dazed sheep, the submissiveness of the weak, and their heroism, that unique heroism of the weak who didn't know what to do and were unable to do anything, the silenced weak – would the new settlers not sense that the air here was heavy with shades, voices, and stares?

I wanted to do something. I knew I wouldn't cry out. Why the devil was I the only one here who was getting excited? From what clay was I formed? This time I'd become entangled. There was something in me that wanted to rebel, something destructive, heretical, something that felt like cursing everything. Who could I speak to? Who would listen? They would just laugh at me. I felt a terrifying collapse inside me. I had a single, set idea, like a hammered nail, that I could never be reconciled to anything, so long as the tears of a weeping child still glistened as he walked along with his mother, who furiously fought back her soundless tears, on his way into exile, bearing with him a roar of injustice and such a scream that – it was impossible that no one in the world would gather that scream in when the moment came – and then I said to Moishe: “We have no right, Moishe, to kick them out of here!” I didn't want my voice to tremble.

And Moishe said to me: “You're starting with that again!”

And I realized that nothing would come of it. (*Ibid.* pp. 107-111)

The village did not resist, not even a single isolated shot was fired towards the IDF soldiers:

... it was clear: there was to be no battle for us today, and if anyone happened to feel apprehensive – this had nothing to do with us, God help him, today we were going on an outing. (Ibid. p. 10)

“But why do we have to deal with all this?” burst from my mouth, with greater vehemence than I had expected.

“Right,” Shlomo agreed. “I’d rather have ten battles than this business!”

“What’s the matter with you!” grumbled Yehuda, scratching at the layers of solidified mud with his fingernails. “What are we doing to them? Are we killing them? We’re taking them to their side. Let them sit there and wait. It’s very decent of us. There’s no other place in the world where they’d have been treated as well as this. Anyway, no one asked them to start with us.” He paused for a moment and on reflection added: “What’ll happen to them over there? Let them ask their beloved leaders. What will they eat or drink? They should have thought of that before they started all this!”

“Started what?” I said.

“Don’t make yourself out to be a saint!” Yehuda said furiously. “Now at last we’ve established some order in these parts!” (Ibid. pp. 101-102)

And what feelings surged through those who were expelled? Despair? Fear? Rage?

Then we saw a woman who was walking in a group of three or four other women. She was holding the hand of a child about seven years old. There was something special about her. She seemed stern, self-controlled, austere in her sorrow. Tears, which hardly seemed to be her own, rolled down her cheeks. And the child too was sobbing a kind of stiff-lipped “what-have-you-done-to-us.” It suddenly seemed as if she were the only one who knew exactly what was happening. So much so that I felt ashamed in her presence and lowered my eyes. It was as though there were an outcry in their gait, a kind of sullen accusation: Damn you. We also saw that she was too proud to pay us the least attention. We understood that she was a lioness, and we saw that the lines of her face had hardened with furrows of self-restraint and

a determination to endure her suffering with courage, and how now, when her world had fallen into ruins, she did not want to break down before us. Exalted in their pain and sorrow above our – wicked – existence they went on their way and we could also see how something was happening in the heart of the boy, something that, when he grew up, could only become a viper inside him, that same thing that was now the weeping of a helpless child. (Ibid. pp. 103-104)

Apparently the writer S. Yizhar, a member of the Mapai faction in the Knesset, forgot his “Story of Khirbet Khizeh”, for he did not express opposition to bills that were tabled by the government and the practical significance of which was the denial of civil rights and ownership of the land to part of the Arab population of Israel, and giving legal validity to actions like “Khirbet Khizeh”.

But the child described in his story is now twenty years old. He and his friends did not forget, and there is no chance that they will ever forget, not them, not those who are older than they, and not even the ones who were born in the refugee camps. They will not forget their houses, their fields and their homeland.

The Jews did not forget the Land of Israel during two thousand years of exile, so why should the Arabs forget it over thirteen years?

“They left of their own free will”

“Khirbet Khizeh” was merely a literary expression of actions and folklore that were widespread in that period and a long time afterwards.

In the middle of February 1949, the villagers of *Fardi* and *Einan* on the Acre- Safed road, numbering about 500, were forced to leave their villages. Half of them were sent to the Triangle and had to cross the front-lines.

On 28 February 1949, 700 refugees were expelled from *Kfar-Yasif*. (they went to that village after they left their neighbouring villages during the war in the Galilee). Most of them were taken in trucks to the Iraqi front and compelled to cross the lines.

Israel is filled with the remains of Arab villages, many of which were destroyed months and even years after the end of the 1948 war; not all of them were entirely deserted when the IDF arrived.

On 7/7/50 a cruel search operation was carried out in *Abu-Ghosh*, and a hundred of its residents were transferred to “an unknown destination”. At the time *Haaretz* and *Al Hamishmar* expressed their opposition to that action; and thus it was known to many that the refugee problem was not merely “created”, but measures were being taken to create it.

On 17/8/50 2,000 residents of *Majdal* (today “Migdal-Ashkelon”) received expulsion orders, and their “transfer” to the Gaza Strip was begun. Food and employment were withheld from them, and in the presence of the army they were made to sign declarations of “departure if their own will”. Among the last who were expelled by force on 11 October, they didn’t even bother with declarations of “departure by free will”.

When Egypt lodged a complaint to the Security Council on that matter, and also on the matter of the expulsion of Bedouin tribes from Israel, Israel lodged a counter-complaint of threats of destruction and economic boycott on Egypt’s part, in order to create a discussion of reciprocal complaints and not a complaint from one side alone. Israel’s representative in the UN, A. Eban, a British subject, stated in the discussion that followed that the residents of *Majdal* “left of their own will”, and he relied on their signed declarations.

Families who had lived in *Majdal* for hundreds of years, residents, some of whom were born in that place even before most of the Jewish residents of Israel were born in other countries, people who had worked the fields, vineyards and orchards of *Majdal* with their own hands, who generation after generation gave birth to their children there and buried their fathers in its soil, “left of their own free will”. Happy is he who believes that. All this happened in the year 1950, a year after the signing of the ceasefire accords with the Arab states.

At the beginning of February 1951, all the residents of 13 Arab villages between Wadi Ara and Umm al-Fahem were expelled from Israeli territory.

A report by UN observers in the country from 2/7/57, reveals that on 30/10/56 (!) the 103 residents of the villages of *Baqara* and *Ganan* [Qanan – trans.] were expelled to

Syria, and their fields were burnt. The UN observers could not conduct an investigation because the Israeli authorities refused to grant them access to the area.

In 1959 there were more expulsions of Bedouin from Israel to Jordan and Egypt, which were reversed only after pressure from the UN.

We advise the reader to return now and look at “the facts as they are”, the fruit of the pen of W. Eytan, quoted above.

It is true that many of the refugees fled from their homes during the attacks of a war that Israel did not start. It was a natural phenomenon, because the shells of the two sides were falling close to their homes. It is also true that many fled in consequence of Husseinite propaganda, the Arab Higher Committee and the British Mandate government; but is that the *whole* truth? Were there not Deir-Yassins and Khirbet Hiz’ahs and General Staff orders with their known clauses?

Even if the Arab states alone were responsible for the creation of the refugee problem (and that is by no means true) does that nullify the right of the refugees to return to their homeland?

Chapter 3

Israel and the Powers (1948-1955)

The policy that the government of Israel conducts in the Middle East sector is highly integrated into its global policy, especially its relations with the Great powers, or, as it is customarily called, its *orientation*.

It may be useful, therefore, to provide a brief survey of the development of the orientation of Israeli policy and the historical process by which it reached its present form.

Although it would be preferable to begin years earlier, due to space constraints we will begin our survey with the War of Independence.

“Fatal to our long-nurtured hopes”

We have already discussed Britain’s attitude to the creation of the State of Israel in the first chapter; we have seen that at that time the Jewish Yishuv saw Britain as its main political enemy, which directly initiated and indirectly executed the invasion of Israel by the Arab states.

What was the policy of the United States at that time?

It is known to all that the USA supported the Partition Resolution of 29 November 1947 and that it expeditiously recognized the State of Israel *de facto*. That is true. But is it the *whole* truth? How consistent was American support for the birth of the State of Israel?

On the following day, March 19, Senator Austin, the United States representative in the Security Council, announced the reversal of American policy. He proposed that the implementation of partition be suspended, that a truce be arranged in Palestine, and that a special session of the General Assembly be called in order to approve a trusteeship for Palestine, to take effect when the Mandate ended, i.e., on May 15th. In spite of all the forewarnings, the blow was sudden, bitter and, on the surface, fatal to our long nurtured hopes. (Ch. Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, 1949, reprinted 1972 by Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut. P. 472)

With the passage of time this incident has been forgotten (or suppressed), but in 1951 the memories were still fresh. This is how M. Sharett described the US turnabout:

... It was at the beginning of 1948, when there was a major reversal in the policy of the United States, a very explosive reversal. All the (US Jewish) forces were then mobilized – and they did not step into the breach.

...We were dealt a final blow at that stage ...There was not yet a state then, we thought that things were being realized and suddenly there was a 180 degree turn and again we were flung into the pit of trusteeship – renewed Mandate ... To the extent that this affected the official and authorized policy of the USA – it was a very grave blow. (Foreign Minister M. Sharett, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 9, p. 1909, 30/5/51)

The trusteeship plan did not meet with success in the UN. It met with the opposition of the Soviet Union and the other states that had supported the Partition Resolution, and it was taken off the agenda. Its sponsors therefore resorted to other measures: pressure, threats and intimidation.

Before the declaration of the independence of Israel the Central Committee of the Party of the Workers of the Land of Israel [The Labour Party – Mapai – trans.] convened. The Prime Minister came from his great mission and struggle at the UN, and after the withdrawals/backtracking of America from the Partition Plan and he related a discussion he had had with the man responsible for US foreign policy, who told him, “listen, I am an old soldier, don’t be impressed by preliminary victories, when it gets hard for you don’t come to us for help.” That was General Marshall, the Secretary of State. (Knesset Member Ben-Asher, (Mapai) *Knesset Records*, Vol. 16, p. 2116, 16/7/54)

But it became evident that the leaders of the USA were not only threatening the withdrawal of assistance:

Jon Kimche, who published in *Reynolds News* that America was threatening *serious sanctions* against the Jews if they proclaimed their state, reveals that Shertok [later Sharett – trans.] received an order to reply to America that such a move would push the Jewish state into the arms of the Soviet Union. Reynolds News adds that it is likely that there will be changes in the Jewish position at the last moment. (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 9/5/48. Emphasis ours)

No less interesting than the threat was the counter-threat. At times ... at times the government of Israel had a certain capacity to manoeuvre.

And France's position?

M. Parodi, the representative of France, came to dinner, and renewed the arguments of the American delegation. (Ch. Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, p. 474)

Incidentally, the French position did not change even after the creation of the State. In August 1948, David Ben-Gurion felt a need to declare in an interview with the chief correspondent of the French news agency that he “regrets from the bottom of his heart that the French government has so far seen no need to establish normal relations with us.” (*Davar*, 4/8/48) And in October, when Israel submitted its request for membership in the UN, “... the decision was in the hands of Canada and France, and today it is hard to imagine – the French were not willing to support us”. (A. Eban, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 29/9/59)

Thus in the spring of 1948 not only the British, but also the USA and France opposed the UN Resolution on the basis of which the State of Israel was created.

The USA's support for the creation of the State of Israel was therefore somewhat doubtful. And regarding the Israeli-French “eternal friendship” which was proclaimed so often during the Suez War and afterwards, that “eternity” has a beginning and an end.

As for the Soviet Union:

Of the Powers which had supported the November decision, only the Soviet Union still insisted on the assertion of the United Nations authority. (Ch. Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, p. 472)

It is of interest to note here the following comments, which were published in a newspaper that is known for its “friendliness” toward the USSR:

Molotov, a friend of Stalin’s, recognized our State. The most prominent representative of the Kremlin inscribed his name forever in the chronicles of the people of Israel. Vyacheslav Molotov is the first foreign minister who officially recognized Israel. Truman recognized the State only as a *fait accompli*. (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 18/5/48)

The “miraculous” weapons

The positions adopted by the Powers regarding the Partition Plan in the fateful spring of 1948 did not dictate their approach to the creation of Israel. The threat that General Marshall made to Sharett did not remain a mere threat. Even though Britain was continuously providing large amounts of arms to the Arab armies, even though France did not cease supplying arms to Syria (and barred them to Israel), the USA imposed an embargo on arms shipments to the Middle East. That embargo harmed only Israel. This therefore raises the question that was put so well by M. Sharett:

This State, which emerged from rivers of blood and raging fires, which created order out of chaos – who extended a hand to it in its time of hardship? The UN Organization stood by helplessly. The United States stepped back and decreed a ban on the delivery of weapons to both the aggressor and the victim alike ... (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 1, p. 721, 15/6/49)

M. Sharett left that rhetorical question unanswered, and refrained from mentioning that at that same “time of hardship” the Czech deal was signed for the desired weapons – on a

commercial basis, without political conditions or other restrictions – and they began to flow to the country.

D. Ben-Gurion recounts the operation to open the route to Jerusalem (Operation Nahshon):

Both the Arabs and the English were surprised at the power of the Jewish striking-force and their strength of spirit, which were suddenly revealed. They did not know how much desperate bravado was in that attack. By a miracle on that night (end of March) the first shipment of machine-guns arrived by air at our hidden airfield – and the weapons were sent to the Jerusalem front right away. (Ben-Gurion, introduction to *Toledot milhemet ha-qomemiyut* [History of the war of independence], p. 49. Hebrew)

Ben-Gurion was obfuscating here; he did not specify where the redemptive arms came from, and was content to call them “miraculous”. But in the body of the book, a historian, who is not in the habit of relying on miracles, writes:

As hard as it was to concentrate manpower for Operation Nahshon, to arm them was all the more difficult ... There was a danger that the lack of arms would stymie the action. But on the night of 31/3, at the time that “Nahshon” was decided upon, the first shipment of arms that had been bought in Czechoslovakia arrived in an airplane – the arms to which everyone’s eyes had been turned.

... the continuation was not late in coming. Even before the H Hour of the operation the ship “Norah”, on which there were 200 heavy machine-guns and 4,300 rifles, arrived. Some of these weapons were immediately allocated to Operation “Nahshon” and were cleansed of grease on the way to the forward base. Not only was this a large infusion of weapons, it also gave great encouragement to those who were on their way to battle. With that shipment and other shipments that followed it, the “Hagana” was rescued from a tight spot regarding small arms, which are the important weapons of the infantry. (*Toledot milhemet ha-qomemiyut* [History of the war of independence], pp. 112-113. Hebrew)

So impressive was the fact of the arrival of the Czech arms, that the Chief of Staff in that period, Major-General Yaakov Dori, defined it, in a conversation with a correspondent for *Yedioth Aharonoth* more than twelve years later, as the event that made the greatest impression on him during his term of service (see *Yedioth Aharonoth* 29/4/60). But the source from which the arms came did not make much of an impression on the interviewee; at least, that is what one may gather from the fact that he did not mention it in that conversation.

A few years afterwards, when A. Eban hastened to ask for the *n*th time for arms from Britain and the USA, and declared with great vehemence that Israel did not have any weapon or accessory that was not of Western origin, the British Foreign Office reminded him in an announcement on 13/10/55 that “in 1948, it will be recalled, Israel received arms from Czechoslovakia”. “It will be recalled” ... but who recalls?

It is important to point out that the Czech arms (in the negotiations for the acquisition of which the Palestinian Communist Party [later Israeli Communist Party – trans.] played a decisive role) began to arrive in the country a month and a half before the declaration of the birth of the State, these arms were not provided to a sovereign state, but to the “Hagana” organization, which was then illegal.

The shipments continued – and even increased – after the birth of the State:

The “sky-train” from Czechoslovakia to Palestine took on proportions that had not been anticipated in advance ... on 1/7/48 the ATG - “Air Transport Group” – was set up. Additional Messerschmitts were brought to the country, and their number in the country approached 20. 3 Flying Fortresses that had been acquired in America were waiting somewhere to be flown to Palestine. A group of Israeli pilots went to Czechia for training. (*Toledot milhemet ha-qomemiyut* [History of the war of independence], p. 282. Hebrew)

The location of that “somewhere” can be surmised from the fact that on 28/7/48 the USA lodged a complaint with the Prague government over the fact that smuggled planes landed in Czechia for refueling and repairs on their way to Israel on 30/9/48. The

government of Czechoslovakia rejected the complaint and announced that it would continue to help Israel. Ben-Gurion, Sharett, and others claimed more than once that arms arrived in Israel from the USA too – especially heavy arms: the reference was to the bombers mentioned above. That is true; but they were smuggled, and that act was in explicit opposition to the policy of the US government. Not only did the governments of the Western powers refuse to sell arms to Israel; they did everything they could to prevent their acquisition and delivery from other sources. The Czech government was the only one that agreed, despite all the Western protests, to sell arms to the fledgling state, to train its pilots and paratroopers and to permit the landing of the bombers that were smuggled from the USA. The talk today, to the effect that “we received arms from the West too” is intended to create a false impression, by confusing the official policy of a state with the actions (and even illegal actions!) of its citizens. This is also true of the claim that the dollars that were paid for the arms came from the USA; these too were received not from the government but from individuals.

There are those who allege that Czechia was not doing any favours in supplying arms to Israel, since it received payment for them. Without entering here into a discussion of whether the arms were given for payment or for free, we would only point out that the very willingness to sell arms, even in return for payment, was a good deed. The West was not willing to sell arms for any price; and moreover, it tried to prevent the supply of any arms to Israel, even if they were paid for.

“The cease-fire rescued the enemy from total defeat”

No discussion of the attitude of the Powers to the birth of the State should be concluded without mentioning the heavy pressure that the Western powers exerted on the government of Israel regarding territorial and military matters.

The “Line 31” affair is hardly remembered any more – that is, the American ultimatum according to which Israel was to concede the Negev and to leave the entire territory south of the 31st Parallel (including Beersheva) outside the borders of the State. And of course they do not mention that the government of Israel nearly submitted to this *diktat*; but at the time of the discussion in the Knesset on Israel’s support of the US

position on Korea, Knesset Member Zizling (then a member of Mapam [United Workers' Party], now a member of Unity of Labour) flung these words at Moshe Sharett:

In the Provisional Government the foreign minister did not find strength of spirit when there was American pressure to set line 31 as the border of our country; others decided to reject the pressure and the ultimatum. (*Knesset Records* Vol. 7, p. 108, 31/10/50)

The speaker also explained the factors that made it possible for Israel to reject the extortion attempt:

The policy of the Provisional Government included in practice dependence on the USSR in the UN to invite our State as a party at the table in the General Assembly and the search for support and its reception from Poland and Czechia. Then we expected a veto from the USSR when we feared that the General Assembly resolutions of 29/11/47 would be annulled. (*Ibid.*)

If US extortion failed in this episode, things turned out differently in others.

Withdrawal from Sinai, 1948

Below are excerpts from the testimony of General Yitzhak Sadeh, which was given on 20/2/51 in the Attorney General's trial of *Kol Ha'am* (details of the trial were published at the time in the newspapers).

Defence attorney: "What was the situation at the front by the end of 1948?"

Y. Sadeh: "Al-Arish was the final Egyptian key point. If we had cut off the railway line the Egyptian army would have been left in a trap. It was known that the Egyptians had no reinforcements in reserve. Their whole army was concentrated in an area where a trap was expected. The main installations of the Egyptian army

were also there. If we had captured them, the Egyptians would not have any war materiel left. We also could have conquered Al-Arish because the unit that was surrounded by us was supposed to defend Al-Arish. We had force that was superior to that of the Egyptians, they did not prepare at all to rush up reinforcements and they did not even prepare to defend Al-Arish which was not fortified.”

To the defence attorney’s question “what happened on the days of the 30th and 31st of December 1948?”, the witness replied:

At that time the entire Negev Brigade received an order to withdraw from the Al-Arish area and Abu-Ageila as far as Auja al-Hafir, that is as far as the old border of Palestine and Egypt. It was a withdrawal of 130 kilometres that had no strategic basis. I received an order to prepare for a new battle in the Rafah area ... Indeed it was expected to be a hard battle, but I estimate that we would have succeeded in it; however, at the most critical moment I received an order to cease firing.

After this the defence attorney introduced in evidence a book, which contained the daily orders that were given at the time of the Negev campaign. The prosecutor objected to the reading of the order, which determined that “the ceasefire rescued the enemy from complete defeat”. After deliberations the judge observed that that sentence was nothing but an expression of opinion.

Defence attorney: “Who signed the order?”

Y. Sadeh: “Nahum Sarig, the commander of the Negev Brigade, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.”

To the defence attorney’s question: “Was your opinion identical to the opinion that was advanced in the above-mentioned daily order?” The witness replied (after the prosecution’s objection was overruled):

The situation on the Negev front was known to me in its entirety, and not only in everything regarding my sector. I participated together with the other commanders in consultations with the front staff, and so I can say without any hesitation, that on two occasions the withdrawal saved the Egyptian enemy from complete defeat and they were: the withdrawal from Al-Arish and the ceasefire in the Rafah area.

What, then, was the reason for the withdrawal?

“No desire to act drastically”

We will give the podium to the then representative of the United States in Israel:

By 31 December, the Jewish advance had gone so far that the Israel authorities were convinced that within twenty-four to forty-eight hours the whole Negev, save for isolated pockets, would be cleared of Egyptian troops. At this crucial juncture, Washington instructed me to deliver immediately to the Israeli authorities the substance of a cable which radically changed the whole situation. This was Great Britain’s dramatic threat – it became public a few days later – to invoke its obligations under its treaty of 1936 with Egypt to come to Egypt’s aid (though Cairo had not requested it) and to enter the war against Israel unless Israeli troops withdrew from Egyptian soil. The United States, in transmitting this British demand, strongly supported the UN position forbidding offensive military operations in Palestine or in Egypt and declared sharply that Israel must withdraw its troops at once if the war were not to spread. My diary gives some impression of the tension of those hours: ... “[The cable] was as sharp as it was unexpected, and especially serious as it was sent in the name of the President. Such phrases were used as ‘grave consequences,’ ‘review of our attitude,’ ‘no desire to act drastically if,’ and so forth.” (McDonald, *My Mission in Israel 1948-1951*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1951. Pp. 116, 117)

Forthwith upon receipt of the instruction, McDonald went to Foreign Minister M. Sharett.

...slowly I read him the paraphrase, which he took down word for word. As he wrote, his fingers tightened against the pen, and his face was white with tension. When I finished, he was silent for a few minutes. (Ibid., pp. 117-118)

The ambassador also personally conveyed the announcement to Ben-Gurion (who was then staying in Tiberias) and also to the president of the state. Ben-Gurion replied that:

...some forces crossed the line as part of a tactical [!] operation but have already received orders to return. (Ibid., p. 121)

The conclusion was rapid:

The next day we received a cable from Washington conciliatory in tone and expressing satisfaction with Israel's promised withdrawal. I went over to Sharett's with the reply. He was really pleased, and the gratification showed on his face. To round matters out, *he gave me the schedule of Israel's withdrawal*. The first order was issued on Friday afternoon [the day the cable arrived!] ... actual withdrawal began on Saturday, and on Sunday, January 2nd, "not an Israeli hoof remained in Egypt." (Ibid., pp. 123-124. Emphasis ours)

" An Ally in a future world war "

Which political orientation did the government of Israel set for itself in light of these facts, in light of the attitudes of the various Powers towards the very birth of the State?

In replying to this question, we must insist on the vast gap that existed concerning this subject, during the period from the establishment of the State until the beginning of 1951 (that is to say for over two and a half years), between official governmental declarations and announcements on the one hand, and those made behind closed doors and privately on the other; between the *declared* line and the *actual* political line.

The State of Israel was born in 1948, but not its leaders. They had already been active in the political arena, mainly as the leaders of the Zionist movement, for many years, and their attitude to global political problems had been determined a long time before the occurrence of the events related at the start of this chapter.

We will not be able to dwell here on the history of the political orientation of the Zionist movement. We must confine ourselves to pointing out that during the Second World War and afterwards the (pro-) American line became ascendant over the pro-British orientation (which had been dominant in the Zionist movement since the First World War), as in the words of the Mapai academic Michael Asaf :

It was during those very years of struggle (against Britain) that the process of a new attachment began: instead of England-Zion, came America-Zion; this process was based on the fact of the United States' penetration into the Middle East as a dominant global power. (*Davar*, 2/5/52)

Those in the know expected, therefore, that the future Jewish state would continue in that political line. Abundant evidence of this can be found in the press on the eve of the establishment of the state. Here, for example, in *Haaretz* of 6/4/1948 we read of a memorandum that was published by the American Chief of Staff at the time, General Bradley. *Haaretz* points out:

Great value must be assigned to the particular sections in the Bradley memorandum which discuss the military potential of the Hebrew Yishuv... as a force constituting a part of broader military forces.

For an explanation of the expression “part of broader military forces”, we can turn to the continuation of the report:

The American Chief of Staff gives a positive and encouraging analysis of the military potential of the Hebrew Yishuv *as an ally* in a future world war. (Emphasis in the original)

Did Bradley have something to rely on in his description of the Jewish Yishuv as “an ally in a future world war”? Did he base himself on commitments made by the Jewish Agency, or did he arrive at that conclusion merely through inference?

The reply to this question can be found, among other places, in *Haaretz* from 4/6/53. The newspaper’s correspondent in the USA, Mr. Aryeh Gelblum, met with a senior official in the State Department in order to receive clarifications about the USA’s policy in the light of John Foster Dulles’ visit to the Middle East in the spring of 1953.

Among other things, he reports to his newspaper:

The American official mentioned that in 1947 a memorandum was submitted in the name of Mr. Ben-Gurion and the Jewish Agency to the secretary of state, Dean Acheson, to the effect that if America would support the creation of a Jewish state, that state would be willing to integrate itself into a regional framework.

The expression “regional framework” coming from the State Department is nothing but a synonym for General Bradley’s “broader military forces”, that is, the military alliances that the USA was striving to create in preparation for a “future world war”.

“Non-Alliance”

The US position regarding the creation of Israel did not change the plan of the Jewish Agency leadership – that had in the meantime become a government – to put the Jewish Yishuv at the disposal of American political-military strategy. We would do well to recall the words of Mr. P. Lavon:

... Regardless of the misunderstandings, at times trivial and at times profound, between us and the great democratic states of the world, the tie between us and them will never be broken, there is no other tie with which we can replace this basic tie. (*Knesset Records* Vol. 16, p. 1610, 10/5/54)

It is not a coincidence that this was said (openly) in 1954 and not, for example, in 1949.

Two main reasons motivated the makers of Israeli policy to conceal their intentions and to hide behind official declarations that were completely different.

First, we have already seen that in its first steps Israel relied decisively on political and military support from the Eastern bloc. Under these conditions, it was not permissible to appear overtly as supporters of the West in the Cold War and as future allies in a Third World War. *Secondly*, public opinion, which was profoundly impressed by the Czech and Soviet support for the creation of the State on the one hand, and by hostile American tactics and acts of extortion on the other, was still “unripe” and unable to “digest” an official anti-Soviet line. The public’s substantial friendliness toward the Soviet Union at the time and its distrust of the West can be illustrated by the fact that Knesset Member Goldrath, from the religious faction, while wanting to advocate friendship between Israel and Britain and the USA, was forced to admit that that idea was “heretical”, and that “we know that if not for Russia, the State of Israel would not have been born”. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 1, p. 756, 20/6/49)

And if a Knesset Member from the religious faction is of that view, all the more so is the Leftist opposition. In a debate that took place in the Knesset over the basic principles of the first government (9/3/1949), the Communists, spokesmen for the United Workers’ Party (Mapam) (Yaari, Aram, Hazan), and also Mr. Friedman-Yellin (the Fighters faction), demanded the issuance of an overtly pro-Soviet declaration. Mr. Hazan even went so far as to say that “the USSR is our second homeland”. For these reasons it was stated in the basic principles of the first government that its foreign policy would be based on “faithfulness to the principles set out in the UN Charter and friendship with all peace-loving states and especially with the United States and the Soviet Union”.

To the questions that were raised in the aforesaid argument in the Knesset regarding the government’s position on military alliances, which at that time the State Department was working to create, the Government replied: “We are conducting a policy of non-alignment”.

In an interview with a correspondent of the Czech news and radio agency, Kraus Terner, M. Sharett was asked: “How does the new government describe to itself the

neutrality of the State of Israel in view of the current international situation?” The answer was : “Non-participation in a bloc aimed against any one of the member-states of the UN; not to permit any state to establish bases in the territory of the State of Israel ... (*Kol Ha'am*, 15/3/49).

The declarations of “non-alignment” that flew from the mouths of the representatives of the government of Israel in that period could fill many pages. And just as many pages could be filled with declarations in the opposite direction. The latter were generally given behind closed doors, or in an unofficial way, in the newspapers linked to the government (see for example the 18/2/49 issue of *Ha-Dor* – which supports Israel’s joining the “Mediterranean Pact” that was proposed by the West). The former American ambassador relates in his memoirs that:

A high Israeli official in a confidential conversation with Knox [stated the following]: The United States has a firm friend in the State of Israel, which is oriented toward the West politically and culturally ... (McDonald, *My Mission in Israel 1948-1951*, p. 88)

On 18/4/49, *Al Hamishmar* reported:

The expert on Israeli problems A. A. Strellson [transliterated from Hebrew – trans.], an American industrialist and engineer whose articles on Israel are sometimes published in the official daily of the American Congress, writes the following in one of these articles: “Based on a most reliable source I can reveal that ... in a secret session of the State Council the government declared in these words: Israel sees itself as a Western nation and its fate is tied to the West ...” Strellson indicates that the leaders of the government, starting with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, and including Trade Minister Fritz Bernstein, stressed in their discussions with him the anti-Communist position of the Israeli leadership and the government of Israel’s interest in a pro-Western orientation.

The government's double bookkeeping put it more than once in a "delicate" position in the Knesset. For example, we recall here the declarations of Mr. Henry Morgenthau, when he was in Israel as a guest of the government. Regarding that matter Knesset Member M. Vilner (Israeli Communist Party – Maki) declared:

... After this guest, who is an official guest of the government, met with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, he made a public declaration before a correspondent of the Associated Press that seriously harms the State of Israel. Mr. Morgenthau's declaration says, among other things, that he calls for "the signing of a defence treaty of the countries of the Middle East, including Israel, in order to set up a new barrier to Soviet aggression". The same Mr. Morgenthau declared in his previous visit to this country that Israel would act as a bulwark against Communism and against the Soviets. I think that declarations of that kind on the part of an official guest of the government of Israel are a provocation against the State, a provocation that is likely to entangle the State. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 4, p. 634, 21/1/50)

M. Vilner and Y. Bar-Yehuda (United Worker's Party – Mapam, now Unity of Labour) demanded that the government publicly distance itself from that declaration. An official dissociation from what Mr. Morgenthau said would be likely not only to stand in contradiction to secret promises that were given to him, almost certainly, in his aforementioned meetings, but also to endanger the efforts that were being made at that time in secret by representatives of Israel in Washington. On the other hand, overt support for Morgenthau would have been in opposition to the *declared* policy of Israel, and also to the political atmosphere in the State and public opinion. Therefore Mr. Ben-Gurion adopted a typical tactic in his response:

In this state everyone is free, even guests and visitors ... to say whatever is on their minds ... a person interests us as a Jew, not because of what party he belongs to in his country or his opinion on world politics – that is not our business. That is his private business alone ... we will not reply as to what is our opinion of the personal

opinions that a guest expressed on his own account, whether he expresses these opinions in America or whether he expresses them here. (Ibid., 4/636)

Mr. Ben-Gurion also found himself in an uncomfortable position when he was asked by Knesset Member Y. Ben-Aharon on 18/7/49 about a US national, Fred Harris, who served as the Chief Military Advisor to the Security Minister and the Chief of Staff, despite the fact that he did not take the oath of allegiance to the IDF. Exactly one month afterwards, a leading article was published in *Kol Ha'am* on the subject of "What is General Harris doing in Israel".

Ben-Aharon's question and Ben-Gurion's reply were omitted from *Knesset Records* and were published in internal material of the United Workers' Party (Mapam), along with a letter of protest to the Chairman of the Knesset regarding the omission. That material was later entered as a document in the file of the trial of the attorney general against *Kol Ha'am* and was brought to the attention of the public in the pamphlet: "*Kol Ha'am vs Ben-Gurion*" (published by the Central Committee of the Israeli Communist Party, June 1951). From there we quote the text of the question:

I have the honour of requesting explanations on the status of a US citizen known by the name Fred Harris.

1. Is it true that that is not his real name, is it true that he is still an American citizen, that he was not recruited into the IDF and did not swear allegiance to the State of Israel?
2. Is it true that Fred Harris is actively serving as the chief military adviser to the Minister of Defence and the Chief of Staff?
3. Is it true that the Chief of Staff and the military commanders must submit to Mr. Harris any information that may be requested by him, information that includes full reports on acquisitions, industry, manpower, unit strengths, buildings, bases etc. ... and that nothing is secret from him, even when it is forbidden for soldiers to pass information to civilians including the Defence Committee of the Knesset?
4. Is it true that Mr. Harris participates in meetings of the staff and in all the investigations that are compiled by the Minister of Defence?

The Prime Minister's reply to the question included the following:

Because you have not been satisfied with oral clarifications, I hereby give you a reply in writing. As a friend of David Marcus, who changed his name to Stone, Fred Harris too is merely a pseudonym. F. Harris is an American citizen and is not required to swear allegiance to the IDF. Harris helped the head of the operations branch and expressed his opinion on various military questions. I invited him a number of times to participate in meetings of the general staff. I am not prepared to order that his service be terminated. I see his service as a blessing.

The beginning of the “independent” policy

An official policy that stands in contradiction to the real intentions and actions of its author cannot, of course, last long. The end of the policy of “non-alignment” had already been heralded in a governmental announcement regarding the declaration of the three Western Powers of May 1950. In their declaration, the USA, England and France effectively declared the Middle East within their exclusive sphere of influence, and that meaning of the declaration was not lost on those who favoured it and those who opposed it (in the previous chapter we quoted Mr. Sapir on the subject). The Israeli reply, receiving the declaration positively (with reservations over the consignments of arms to the Arab states) constituted, therefore, a recognition of that status for the Western powers.

What brought Israel to take that position, the practical meaning of which was the abandonment of “non-alignment” not only in practice but also in theory? Had the position of the Soviet Union on the question of Palestine changed, and was that what pushed Israel into the arms of the West?

The answer is “no” on both counts. The Soviet Union remained consistent in its support for the partition plan. But the rift between it and Israeli policy begins precisely at this point. The first open expression of this state of affairs is connected to the resolution on the internationalization of Jerusalem that was adopted at the UN in the month of December 1949. The Soviet Union supported that resolution as part of the partition plan.

On the same occasion the Soviet representative in the UN, Mr. Tzarefkin [transliterated from Hebrew – trans.], called for the creation of an independent Arab state in the other part of Palestine, that being in conformity with the partition resolution. At the time the foreign minister gave a clear explanation of the Soviet position in the Knesset:

I believe that if the Soviet Union supported the resolution of 29 November, it did not do so, at any rate not primarily, out of friendship towards the Jewish people or affection for Israel, and I say this not in condemnation. It did so out of its own considerations and its own interests and therein lies the root of the stability of its position, and for that reason it has a positive value for us precisely because it did it in its own interest. What was the interest? The interest was to uproot the British regime from this country, and no independence would be established in this country unless it were, or included, the independence of the Jewish people. And therefore the Soviet Union said: “Either both peoples will create and consolidate this independence in partnership, or – if indeed in view of the relationship between the two of them, or in the wake of conflict between their aspirations a shared independence is not likely – then the partition solution must be accepted.” It was not they who invented the partition solution but they accepted it because they saw in it the sole path under the existing circumstances and thus the shortest path to independence, that is to say to attain the removal of the British regime from the country. They remained faithful to that position. In that event [the partition resolution] that position was in our favour and in this case [the special resolution on the internationalization of Jerusalem] it was to our disadvantage. They believe that those who control the other part of Jerusalem are identified with the British regime [here there occurred an interruption of the speech when a heckler, Y. Bader of Herut, called out that not only the Russians think that. Mr. Sharett continues:] I repeat, that is the main thing as far as they are concerned, they decide and judge accordingly. For them the uprooting of the British regime is more important than satisfying the demands of the Jewish people. As far as they are concerned there is only a global calculation, I stated that when I said that they judge everything according to the global calculation, and they do not diverge from that line, and that

exacts a price from us and could exact a price from our friendship. (M. Sharett, *Knesset Records* 4/1/50, Vol. 3 p. 431)

As it turned out, it was none other than Israel that changed its position in the meantime. Israel went over the heads of the Arabs of Palestine to reach an accord with Abdullah regarding the partitioning of the country and its capital.

And lo, this state of affairs is what led also to Israel's taking a stand in favour of the tripartite declaration, due to its desire to receive international endorsement of the *status quo* in contradiction to the UN resolutions. We see the logic: the collusion with Abdullah, which crushed the rights of the Palestinian Arab people, forced the government to forsake the principle of partition and to replace it with the principle of conserving the *status quo*; to forsake the UN as an institution authorized to establish law regarding Palestine and to replace it with the governments of the USA, Britain and France. That is one of the factors (we will discuss an additional important factor below) that pushed the government of Israel to accept the protection of the three Western powers, which enlisted it (not against its will!) in the Cold War against the Soviet Union.

With the territorial *status quo*, which was created by an accord between Israel and Jordan and confirmed in the Tripartite Declaration, being dependent on the political *status quo* – namely on the existence of the Hashemite Kingdom in its present form and the existence of Western control in the Middle East – Israel became the most conservative actor in the region, the Last of the Mohicans of the lost Western cause.

At the time not everyone yet understood the full meaning of Israel's support of the tripartite declaration. The speeches of members of the Coalition factions on that subject were still interwoven with declarations of “non-alignment”.

A representative of the religious faction declared:

We strongly support the policy of complete neutrality, whether regarding the states of the West, or whether regarding the states of the East. (M. Nurock, *Knesset Records*, 31/5/1950, Vol. 5, p. 1584)

A representative of the progressives went even further:

... An analysis of the will of the house tells that nearly 99% of its members are united in non-alignment with either of the two blocs, in neutrality and independence.

... it will be said clearly by every one of the representatives of the factions in this house, that today we are neutral, non-aligned ... and will continue to be so as long as there is breath in our nostrils. (Y. Harari, *Knesset Records*, vol. 5, p. 1581)

The policy of “non-alignment” came to an end, formally as well, at the time of the debate in the UN regarding Korea, which took place at the end of January 1951. In *Haaretz* from 29/5/51 M. Medzini, the newspaper’s correspondent in the UN, wrote:

The current debate in the UN saw Israeli foreign policy consistently backing away from a position of non-alignment.

He opposes this withdrawal for four reasons. The most important is the fourth:

It is not prudent for Israel to excessively distance itself from the line of the other nations of Asia and from the general orientation.

On 2/2/51 A. Gelblum, *Haaretz*’ correspondent in the USA, wrote:

With this vote Israel has not only diverged from most of the Asian states and thus strengthened the old claim of the Arabs that we are foreigners in the East, but more than that: *it lost by its own hand that degree of prestige and esteem that it had enjoyed up to now from the Soviet bloc.* (Emphasis ours)

The last paragraph speaks for itself. It should be deeply engraved in the heart of every Israeli, so that he can correctly evaluate the claims that Israel was allegedly pushed to a Western orientation following the hostile stance of the Soviet Union. Three weeks later we hear from Arye Gelblum:

Two decisions were made in recent days in the domain of Israeli foreign policy, which put an end to the Israeli policy of non-alignment, which reached its latest stages with Israel's voting in the UN in favour of the decision to declare China an aggressor. The first decision is regarding the invitation of Israel to participate in the organization for the supply of food and goods for the "Free World", and the second is the matter of the visit of General Sir Brian Robertson. These two decisions signify the end of nonalignment and the beginning of the "independent" policy that the Prime Minister proclaimed at the beginning of the year in the Knesset in his speech on the civil defense law. Because of this policy [Israel] will consider its steps from now on only in relation to the West without considering the Eastern factor. (*Haaretz*, 25/2/51)

Indeed, an interesting interpretation of the term "independent policy". And from where does that "independence" come?

The reality that subjugates Israel economically to the West will bring about a state of affairs such that Israel's degree of willingness to participate in the plans of the West will be determined according to the extent of the economic assistance it receives. (*Ibid.*)

Long live Independence! We are conducting an "independent" policy: no longer will we take the "Eastern bloc" into consideration, but only the economic assistance we shall receive from the West; the greater the assistance the greater the participation in its plans. We are so "independent", that is, economically bound to the West! A bit of typical Israeli humour.

"Our exports of eggs and poultry"

This brings us to the other important factor that shattered the myth of non-alignment: it is none other than the economic factor.

Again we give the floor to Mr. Gelblum:

Of course, it was an absurd assumption/belief that as the world crisis reached its frightening climax, and America took the line that it took, we could permit ourselves in the future some serious divergence from the American line and thereby to receive contributions in the millions in the USA, to the bonds of the government of Israel all over, and to ask from Congress a gift of double the amount it refused to give to India and more ... it is probable that in the near future no substantial military demands will be made of Israel, but it is possible that in the not distant future there will be a demand that Israel join some regional organization. In any case the situation has changed fundamentally and our leaders are not acting with wisdom. If, instead of preparing the people to deal with the bitter truth, they continue to speak loftily of “our independent and non-aligned action”. Such self-delusion in itself creates public pressure which prevents our leaders in Lake Success from adopting that position without which – as was made clear to me by highly-placed circles in Congress – there is no chance that America will respond to Israel’s request for aid. (*Haaretz*, 2/2/51)

Below we will discuss the fate of the plans to set up a “regional organization” with Israel’s participation, but first we must dwell upon the political meaning of the American economic aid in its various forms.

In Section 12 of the agreement on the granting of the first American loan (1949) of a total of 100 million dollars we read:

As long as any of the promissory notes that were issued as evidence of the amount of the loan, which were given on credit, are pending and not paid off, Israel will be obliged at the request of the bank at any time, and at intervals of time – but in successive intervals of no more than once every three months – to deliver to the (American) Import-Export Bank or to any department or agency of the of the United States government that the latter designates, information and data regarding domestic prices, indexes of wage-rates, the public and national budget, the printing

of money, rates of commercial interest, income from government securities, foreign exchange rates, regulations on control of imports and exchange, gold and foreign exchange reserves that are in government and private [!] hands, the current state and the estimated future state of the balance of payments, the state of long-term and short-term international investments, the status of foreign debts, and analyses of other aspects of the economy of Israel regarding its ability to pay its debt to the Import-Export Bank and any other reasonable request on such matters from that party; and all these facts and data will be submitted as much as possible in a detailed way, and not only on the basis of estimates.

The government of Israel suppressed that section when it published all the other sections of the agreement. Is it hard to guess why?

The man who is responsible for the disbursal of the American money in Israel is the *head of the Aid Administration*. Without his signature it is impossible to spend a single cent of that money and that fact allows him to exercise complete control over all areas of the economy of the state. So much leverage is in his hands that the government (or any other Israeli body) cannot take any large or small step in the economic sphere against the will of the American citizen Mr. John Hagerty. He is in effect the real finance minister of Israel. Only one thing is kept from him: since his knowledge of Hebrew philology is certainly negligible, he cannot propose new names in the way that tax auditors are imposed on citizens of the State. That role necessarily remains with Mr. Eshkol.

John Hagerty is not only the real finance minister; he is also the real minister of development:

The head of the American Aide Directorate John Hagerty is inclined to excessive intervention in development policy in Israel. There is no disagreement about his right to intervene [indeed!] but some circles feel that the extent of his intervention is excessive. (*Davar*, 10/2/58)

Without his authorization the Chief of Staff, who became the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Moshe Dayan, cannot even sell one Israeli egg or a quarter of an Israeli chicken abroad:

... I decided to meet here with Mr. Hagerty – the responsible for American aid to Israel – in order to talk to him about an increase in our export quota for eggs and poultry ... (M. Dayan, *Maariv*, 11/4/60)

The American agriculture secretary, Ezra Benson, who visited Israel in the middle of 1960, turned down this request of M. Dayan. The request and its rejection embody the extent of Israel's independence.

It is understood that American influence is not restricted to the economic sphere only. We have already seen that economic subordination to the USA was one of two reasons for the elimination of “non-alignment” (the other reason was the withdrawal from the principle of partition), but it would be naïve to assume that the USA would be satisfied with the establishment of a “Western orientation” on the part of the government of Israel. The political control is deeper and farther-reaching:

Perhaps no one in all Israel knows how closely the government of the USA follows every phenomenon in the Jewish state and how aware it is regarding the political mood in this country. The truth is that nothing in Israel is a secret from the State Department.

...it is in the interest of the government of the USA that its aid to Israel fall into the right hands ... the configuration of political forces in Israel is important to [the USA] ... and [the USA] devotes a great deal of attention to it.

Thus writes the newspaper *Forward* – published in New York in the Yiddish language – in its edition of 9/6/55.

These bitter facts of life are systematically ignored by the government's *hasbara* apparati, which strive mightily to explain the various grants and loans as altruistic acts of charity, which do not include any political conditions and do not serve as an instrument of political pressure. *Haaretz* protested about the suppression of the facts:

The description of the American grant by the leaders of the public as if it was merely a market factor, and the recklessness with which they turned a blind eye to its political meaning and the importance of as tight a tie as possible that will bind us to the USA should be cause for concern. (*Haaretz* 26/10/53)

One of the strange consequences of the official propaganda is that its distributors apparently begin to believe in it themselves and fall victim to it. Therefore, when on one or another occasion American political-economic pressure is exposed in its full crudeness, they are surprised (or at least they pretend to be surprised).

Thus, for example, writes *Davar* in its editorial of 21/10/53:

Who did not know the allegations of the communists and their sympathizers about the “enslaving” loan and grants from America? Against them the leaders of the USA more than once declared and emphasized that it had not occurred to them at all to use these grants for the purpose of any political pressure. There was and there is no clause in that spirit in the agreements for the giving of the grants. It is reasonable to assume that the constructive assistance that is given by the USA to underdeveloped countries and to countries that are working on their development has the tendency to raise the level of culture and the standard of living of these nations and countries in such a way that the danger of being attracted to communism will diminished of its own accord.

... did the government of the USA properly consider properly the meaning of its announcement of the delay of the grant for the purpose of political pressure on Israel?

Those words were written in anger, when the USA had stopped giving the grant to Israel in order to pressure it to stop work on the Jordan Canal as demanded by the head of the UN observation team, General Benike.

But in “normal times”, when American dictates pass through well-oiled diplomatic channels and don’t jab us in the eye, the tame media get back on track.

“A hooked fish needs no bait”

It is pertinent to mention here the affair of Nelson Rockefeller’s secret letter⁵ to President Eisenhower. That letter, which was drafted in January 1956, contains the views and the perceptions of Mr. Rockefeller regarding American aid to foreign countries and sheds a clear light on the guiding principles of the US government in that sphere. The letter is all the more important in view of the fact that its drafter is not only a very influential statesman (governor of the state of New York and the competitor of Mr. Nixon for the Republican presidential candidacy) but he also belongs to one of the wealthy families that have distributed control over the economy and the policies of their country among themselves.

The letter came into the hands of the Eastern bloc intelligence services and a photo of it was published in *Neues Deutschland*, published in East Germany. Naturally the government of the USA denied the existence of the letter, but it was widely published all over the world: *The Times* of London, *Le Monde* of Paris and the BBC quoted from it at length, and that fact alone suffices to certify the credibility of the document.

Of course *Davar* did not see a need to mention even in one word about it, and even *Haaretz* – which regularly speaks out against the suppression of the political facts connected to the aid – ignored it. Below are selections from the document:

True, on paper and on the maps, the Baghdad Pact is impressive. It brings four Middle Eastern countries into one military bloc in conformity with our interests. These countries lie right along the southern border of the communist world and they have valuable reserves of strategic raw materials and manpower. But one of these four countries, Turkey, is already linked to our defence system through NATO, and another country, Pakistan, is a member of SEATO, at the same time as most of the Arab countries have not joined the alliance because they think that the alliance, by its very nature, is in opposition to their national interests. I do not want

⁵ The “Rockefeller letter” was subsequently revealed to have been a forgery, fabricated by the East German intelligence agency – trans.

to use the well-known phrase: “what is good for Standard Oil is good for the USA”, but at any rate I cannot avoid taking note of the fact that neither the Baghdad Pact nor SEATO guarantee us the use of the important raw materials of these countries. The specific real-world example that demonstrates my premise is the Iranian experience, in which, as has been mentioned, I was directly involved. By means of the use of economic aid we succeeded in receiving access to Iranian oil, and our position in the economy of that country is now secure. The strengthening of our economic position in Iran made it possible for us to bring its foreign policy in general under our control and especially to persuade it to join the Baghdad Pact.

... The thoughts that are here expressed led my friends and me to the conclusion that our political plan should be based on the following fundamental premises:

1. We must continue with measures the goal of which is the establishment and consolidation of our military alliances, because these alliances are very effective in repelling any communist aggression and are likely to prevent nationalist outbreaks and they strengthen our general position in Asia and the Middle East. We must not forget the important fact that practically all our rubber, magnesium, chrome and zinc, along with a substantial part of our copper and oil and a third or more of the tin and aluminium that we need come from overseas, and moreover – they come above all from the underdeveloped regions of Asia and Africa that are located in the sphere of influence of one military bloc or another established by the USA. This is also true of the lion’s share of the “super-strategic” materials (uranium above all).
2. In order to strengthen these military alliances and to expand them as much as possible, we must represent a programme of economic development that suffices to ensure us political and military influence in Asia and Africa and in other underdeveloped regions, influence that is as great as that which we acquired by means of the Marshall Plan in Europe and even greater. For that reason the lion’s share of our economic aid needs to flow through such

channels as were laid to serve our military alliances. This should contribute towards making the alliances themselves more efficacious. In accordance with need certain changes should be introduced to the forms of these alliances. Thus it is necessary that we conduct ourselves with caution and patience and restrict ourselves in the first stage to ensuring quite modest political conditions in return for our economic aid (in certain cases even without conditions) then – indeed in a later stage – the path will be open to us for attaining as well the political reward and even the fulfilment of our military demands.

Mr. Rockefeller goes on to praise Eisenhower's plan to finance the construction of the Aswan dam on the Nile and continues:

If the Nasser government receives this assistance a situation will be created in which Egypt will inevitably prolong the execution of its construction plans and will need our assistance for a long period.

Below the author divides the aid-receiving states into three types. The first:

... Countries in which anti-communist governments already rule and which are already linked to us by long-term and stable military accords ... in this case the civilian grants and loans can take for the most part the form of military grants. "A hooked fish needs no bait" ... For countries like that, expanded aid is likely to lead to the strengthening of the tendencies seeking independence and the weakening of military alliances. For countries like that, direct economic aid should be given only to the degree that is required to strengthen governments that are suitable to the Administration and to restrain hostile opposition elements.

... private investments should also be directed accordingly, for with their help it is possible to ensure many political goals. These private investments can permit us a permanent means to eliminate or to neutralize all disloyal opposition or any resistance to our policies and to apply stronger economic pressure against economic

interests of certain circles whose support for us appears to be wavering or uncertain. At the same time, economic assistance to the stratum of local businessmen which is willing to cooperate with the USA should be distinct, and for businessmen of that type the necessary conditions should be created in order to consolidate them in key economic positions in the specific country, in order to strengthen their political influence.

The second type are neutral countries. These countries should be given mainly civilian grants and loans that will create conditions within them such that, at the end of the day, the economic ties that we set up will act in our favour and will make the joining to our military alliances and blocs a matter of course for these countries. The basic idea of this policy is that the development of our economic ties with these countries will permit us at the end of the day to place the key positions of the local economy into our hands.

...Private investments in these countries should support those (same) groups of individuals who stand in opposition to the existing government. Thus we will lay the foundation for a new orientation of the policies of these countries towards a more healthy direction.

Within the *third type* are countries that are colonial dependencies: ... in special cases and within certain limitations we should support local businessmen who are struggling against their colonial status ... when we assist these elements we must act on the assumption that if we do not support these forces we will lose any hope of exercising any influence over them and if that happens, the desire for independence will engender a nationalism that is so strong that it will escape not only from the control of the old colonial powers but also from our control.

... We should use all the propaganda means at our disposal in order to convey the message time and again that American assistance to the undeveloped countries is unselfish, and we cannot allow ourselves to economize in this matter. We do not economize in our anti-communist activity. At the same time our possessors of wealth, technical experts and other experts need to penetrate all branches of the national economy of the backward countries and develop them along the lines required by our interests. Along with that, the nationalist tendencies of local

businessmen whose political responsibility is not in doubt should be encouraged.
(Quoted in *Kol Ha'am*, 5-7/3/57)

Marvellous altruism indeed. It is easy to guess the place of Israel in Mr. Rockefeller's classification: until 1948 it was counted among the third type, from 1948 to the middle of 1950 or the beginning of 1951 it was included in the second type, the "neutrals".

Defenders of "the entire region"

We have reached the point in our survey of the history of the political orientation of the government of Israel in which the "non-alignment" line has been replaced by the "independence" line (in the refurbished meaning of that word). We return to the thread of the story.

As we have seen, A. Gelblum stated that when it was decided to abandon the "non-alignment" line those in the know took into account the possibility that the government of the United States would demand that Israel join a regional military alliance.

Evidently there was some basis for that expectation, not only because it is clear to every statesman of mature mind what American "altruistic assistance" means, but also because clear hints were heard from the mouths of American statesmen regarding the role intended for Israel in American strategy.

On 3/4/51 McCormack, the leader of the Democratic house leader in the American Congress, justified the proposal for a grant to Israel that was presented by him to the House:

Indeed I believe that the time has come to see the position of Israel as a true democratic nation and as an ally that depends on the USA ... In view of the present struggle between the East and the West, the defence interests of the USA require the strengthening of Israel. Being located at a global crossroads, Israel can serve as a workshop to supply Western defence forces in the Middle East through its great industrial development.

About five months afterwards, on 28/8/51, the Republican Senator Paul Douglas made a detailed public statement before the Foreign and Armed Services Committee of the Senate:

... The Israeli army, with this addition of Turkey and Greece, can prove (to be) effective resistance to any Russian attempt to conquer the Middle East. I would like to see that our dollars go to a place where they be used fittingly. I cannot imagine any other place where they will put our dollars to more effective use and where they will fight more effectively for democracy than that tiny state.

It would be a mistake to think that the leaders of Israel were anticipating the invitation to join a regional military alliance with worry and dread, or that they saw such participation as a price they had to pay –high and dangerous though it may be – for American aid. The opposite is true. Before they were invited to join any alliance, government ministers announced many times their readiness for it and their agreement to it.

How are we to understand that readiness? Is it possible to seriously believe that there was then in the hearts of Israeli politicians a fear – even a slight one – that the Soviet Union was about to attack Israel? Did they think that participation in a military alliance established by a potential enemy of the USSR would reduce that danger?

It is enough to raise the question to realize that it is fundamentally baseless. In order to plumb the depths of this problem, we must examine one of the pretexts that were given by the foreign minister for the government's willingness to join a "Joint Middle-Eastern Command":

Two circumstances equally – whether they be the absence of internal peace in the region or the remoteness of democracy from it – oblige us to raise our level of concern for the fate of the entire region in the event of a world war, for the entrenchment of our positions within it, for the recruitment of assistance and support for our efforts at economic and military entrenchment and for a more comprehensive and far-sighted approach to our security problems and our future. From such a perspective the government gave its opinion on the comprehensive

defence plans for the Middle East region that have been preoccupying the community of the Western Powers. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 10 p. 280, 4/11/51)

The link that the Foreign Minister sees between the “absence of peace” and the “remoteness of democracy” in our region on the one hand, and “our level of concern for the fate of the entire region in the event of a world war” on the other, should be noted. It is possible to determine with certainty that the “more comprehensive and far-sighted approach” regarding a “Joint Command” is nothing but a direct continuation of the government’s position on the Tripartite Declaration. The basic motivation for both is the attempt to acquire a political seal of approval for or a guarantee of the *status quo*. The government of Israel hoped that its inclusion in a regional military alliance would constitute a guarantee for the *status quo*, recognition of the cease-fire lines as permanent borders, whereas a military alliance that included the Arab states without Israel would endanger the *status quo*.

I am my beloved’s but my beloved is not mine⁶

In reality things happened not exactly as Israeli foreign policy desired; the invitation to join the “Joint Command” was late in coming.

The Arab states, which, because of their natural and human resources, were the main object of the American economic-military strategy, used their comfortable situation to demand a political reward for their participation in the American plans. But the government of Israel – with its overt abandonment of the policy of non-alignment and its unequivocal positioning of itself on the Western side in the Cold War – completely lost all bargaining power. If Israel’s politicians saw in the signing of a military treaty with the USA not a *price* they must pay, but a *political objective* desirable in its own right, then the State Department, in conformity with the principle of “A hooked fish needs no bait”, was not overjoyed to receive Israel’s signature on such a treaty. Israel reached a state of such great dependence on the USA, that an overt signing of a treaty with it would only make it difficult to attract the Arabs without conferring any other advantages on the USA.

⁶ “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.” Song of Solomon 6:3 – trans.

The State Department therefore turned to the Arab states, especially to Egypt, and passed over Israel. The Americans now conditioned Israel's participation in the proposed Command on additional concessions.

A representative of the Communist Party warned in the Knesset:

You are conducting secret diplomacy, you are conducting discussions with representatives of Truman in secret, but the American press reveals something about these discussions. Here, for example, the United Press announced at the end of October that Monnett Davis (US ambassador in Israel), requested four things of Mr. Ben-Gurion as a condition for joining this bloc. He requested of us to put the Negev at his disposal, to hand over Eilat, the port of Haifa, and to undertake a revision of the borders of Israel ... Listen to what The Times of London wrote at the end of October. "The establishment of the bloc is possible only on the basis of a dramatic reduction in the territory of Israel" ... The American journalist Sulzberger writes at the end of October in *The New York Times*: "They talk a great deal about the need to try to raise anew the plan for an accord that King Abdullah expressed in secret, and that was – to transfer to Transjordan the Gaza Strip and a narrow strip of the territory of Israel for the purpose of access to that port." (S. Mikonis, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 10 p. 290, 4/11/51)

A "Herut" representative complained about Israel's loss of bargaining power:

Most unfortunately we have seen the fact that the Powers interested in the defence of this region turned to Egypt; and not because it is stronger, not because it is a democratic country, not because it is a country that can be relied on and not because it is a country whose army has proved its strength, or because it is ready to fight against any invader, but because our political situation is such that the Western Powers think that they can make arrangements with the State of Israel in any case, the State of Israel is too dependent on them. (Ben-Eliezer, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 10, p. 282, 4/11/51)

And similar words were also heard that day from the lips of P. Bernstein (General Zionists):

The very fact that the Powers proposed to Egypt of all countries to be the founding member of this Command, should be seen in my opinion as a measure of the degree of descent of our international standing. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 10, p. 282, 4/11/51)

And as for the Prime Minister, he declared:

... America's and England's move worries us and causes great alarm and also astonishment, do America and England really think that Egypt will fight to defend liberty and democracy in the world when there is no liberty and democracy existing within it itself? (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 10, p. 327, 5/11/51)

Since that time and up to 1955, the same thing has recurred frequently. During those years, "plans for the defence of the whole region" appeared like mushrooms after rain. The government of Israel would hasten to express its desire to participate in the plans, and the Arab governments for their part were forced, under pressure from their peoples, to back away from distance themselves from them, to oppose them, to raise the price of the participating in them and to compel the West to implement substitutions, changes and cancellations one after the other. The efforts of the State Department were devoted to cultivating the Arabs; large amounts of modern Western arms flowed to Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Saudia and Iraq, but were barred completely from Israel. It was clear to the West that there would be no difficulty in linking it to any regional alliance that may be established, whereas its joining at the beginning would add an obstacle to Arab participation. Israel greatly protested and objected and declared and proclaimed and announced, it explained again, counselled, cautioned and protested – all to no avail.

After all of Israel's protests and objections and declarations and proclamations and announcements and explanations and counsels and cautions and protests, the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, announced in a session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the end of February 1956:

The USA never seriously considered a military alliance with Israel, despite the negotiations on that subject. Security is not based on arms alone ... providing arms to Israel is liable only to make the chances of a solution more remote. If Israel attacks the Arab states, it cannot count on the help of the United States.

Eight months after these words were spoken their truth was confirmed. The salient fact about that episode is that to the extent that it became more and more clear that the USA was not interested in entering into an official military treaty with the State of Israel or in supplying it with arms in the context of “military aid”, the Israeli requests were made more manifest and its courting of the USA became bolder. In so doing the “courters” succeeded only in staining themselves in the eyes of Eastern Bloc and thereby in compromising their bargaining position.

The Zionist memorandum – ours and also theirs

At the time of the testing of the waters for the establishment of the “Joint Command”, the representatives of the government were dropping hints about their willingness to participate in it, such as:

We are the only nation south of Turkey that is willing and able to fight in the defence of human liberty. (Ben-Gurion’s speech at a fundraising drive in Chicago, *Davar*, 29/8/51)

After the affair of the “Command” came to nothing, an effort was made to acquire arms from the USA indirectly, through Zionist organizations. Mr. Gelblum, the correspondent of *Haaretz* in the USA, elucidates:

An official request regarding American military aid to Israel came in a memorandum from the Zionist Council, which was submitted today to members of Congress in Washington. Even though this is an American organization, it can be

assumed that this was not done without consultation with the Israeli authorities.
(*Haaretz*, 11/4/52)

The view was expressed in Israel (see, for example, *Al Hamishmar* from 13/4/52), that the real author of the Memorandum was none other than A. Eban, who was then Israel's ambassador in Washington and its representative in the UN.

Additional details about the contents of the document were revealed in a session of the Zionist Executive Committee in mid-May 1952.

The Executive Chairman, Dr. Nahum Goldmann, confirmed yesterday, in reply to a question by Y. Bankover (Mapam) [today a member of Unity of Labour], that the "American Zionist Council" had appealed to the government of the United States regarding parallel aid to Israel and the Arab states [!], in the framework of the global anti-Soviet policy of the United States.

The above-mentioned appeal was mentioned a few days ago by M. Vilner (Israeli Communist Party). A few days before that, Dr. Goldmann had replied to a question – Mr. Bankover indicated – that the Executive did not know anything about the existence of the Memorandum of the American Zionist Council. Meanwhile a copy of the Memorandum appeared in Israel. Its authors propose, as Mr. Bankover quoted from the document that was in his hand, the services of Israel for the military interests of the West in exchange for military and financial aid from the United States. The memorandum defines Israel as an enemy of the Soviet Union and its allies [!] and the immigrants from eastern Europe as refugees from their countries of origin and as enemies of these countries, and proposes American aid also for the Arab states – that is, as Mr. Bankover emphasized, for states that were still in a state of war with Israel, and thus the authors of the memorandum are increasing the danger of a "second round". Moreover, the memorandum reveals numbers from the Israeli security budget, which are secret even from the Knesset plenum. Mr. Bankover demanded of the Executive to dissociate itself from "this misguided memorandum".

Dr. Goldmann confirmed receipt of a copy of the memorandum and acknowledged its existence, but because he had not yet read it with the required attention, the Executive had not sufficiently discussed it, he was not prepared to submit an announcement on his position or that of the Executive. When members of the American branch of the Executive would sit in New York, they would examine the matter while in contact with the authors of the memorandum and only then would they pass judgement on the matter and decide if it would be appropriate to publish an announcement on behalf of the government, and if the answer were positive – how to respond to the memorandum. (*Haaretz*, 16/5/52)

Of course neither the Zionist Executive nor the government of Israel found it necessary to dissociate themselves from the memorandum, despite the fact that in it the government of the USA was asked to extend equal aid also to the Arab states. Indeed, it was announced more than once that “If the government of Egypt uses the arms that America and England are about to give it only once – it will use them against the State of Israel ... “ (Ben-Gurion, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 10, p. 327, 5/11/51), but it was clear that a request for the giving of American arms to Israel could be justified not in terms of Israeli interests, but only in terms of American interests, and the latter required that they be given also to Arab states.

“The Secretary of Defense of the United States will be in control”

On 30/7/52 Foreign Minister M. Sharett already announced *openly*:

Before I left the United States I was asked at a press conference if we are interested in receiving military assistance from the government of the USA. I replied that we are interested in receiving military assistance from any possible source. When I came to Israel, I was asked in a press conference if we had requested or if we were in the process of requesting military assistance from the USA. I replied that we had requested, were requesting and would request military assistance from any possible source, including of course the government of the USA. I was asked if I knew that

there existed a law called the “Military Aid Law” or the “Mutual Defence Law” in the USA. I said that the framework of laws that exist on this subject was known very well to the government and that it would not occur to us that the legislative institutions in the United States would pass special laws to permit the granting of assistance to Israel. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 12, p. 2774)

Regarding the nature of the conditions attached to the American military aid, conditions which the government of Israel expressed its agreement to honour, we hear from the lips of Knesset Member Ben-Aharon (Mapam; now Unity of Labour):

...On 23 July 1952 a representative of the government of Israel signed an accord with a representative of the USA for the acquisition of arms with payment. According to the impression created for the public by the government or its spokesmen, this was a regular commercial transaction ... But in the Committee (The Foreign Affairs and Security Committee) information was provided according to which even this acquisition, that was made for full price, was linked to the signing of a pact between the government of Israel and the government of the USA. *That pact was signed without its contents being brought to the knowledge of the Knesset or the public even after its signing ... that pact ... stipulates, in principle, that even the arms that were acquired with full payment, with our money, will not be at the disposal of the State of Israel and its government, even these arms are under the primary jurisdiction of the government of the United States regarding their use.*

... Israel also would be obliged to provide supplies and arms from its production to a third party, if it was requested to do so on the basis of this pact.

The supplies and the arms that are acquired in this way are intended not only for the defence of Israel; they are intended first of all for the purposes of internal security, for defence of the region or any region of collective security, in accordance with the instructions on which the government of the USA and the government of Israel will agree. The government of Israel, of course, will not be able to use these arms based on its own decision.

... but even before they signed that accord we were informed that the government of Israel submitted a request to enjoy the possibility of military aid in conformity with the Law of Mutual Defence of the government of the USA. I regret that the economic commitments in the law did not include at least this one commitment: that the state and the government that receive arms according to this law would be obliged to translate it and to bring it to the knowledge of the public so that that role would not fall upon a member of the opposition.

... among other things the state receiving the military aid must “commit itself to taking the required measures, as will be agreed mutually, to participate in extirpating causes of international tension, to fulfil the military commitments it took upon itself by means of bilateral or multilateral accords to which the government of the USA is a party, to make a full contribution of manpower, economic resources and services, for the development of the self-defence force and the defence force of the free world, to make efficient use of the economic and military assistance from the USA. No state will receive aid unless it takes decisive steps to put its full forces and resources at the disposal of its integration and standardization with regional defence plans and to participate in programmes the role of which is to establish collective security in that region.” The authority that is given by this law to the President, to the Aid Director and to the Secretary of Defence of the government of the USA include among other things: controlling the development and the management of the programmes; mobilization and strengthening of the war effort of the state receiving the aid, including production, the establishment of facilities; the acquisition of supplies in every state or group of states that enjoy US military aid; providing materiel and arms in the extent and type required to realize the joint defence plans. The Aid Directorate will ensure that in the receiving states all that is required to establish the industry for the mutual defence etc. is done; that they mobilize their full physical, budgetary, political and military resources as well as the money for the immediate fulfilment of the goals of this American law for mutual security. The Secretary of Defence of the government of the USA will determine what are the kinds of military supplies that are required for the state receiving the aid. He will be in charge of providing military supplies in

a way that will make possible its integration into the general defence plans. The Secretary of Defence of the government of the USA will be placed in control over the supplies and their way of use by the aid-receiving states. He will appoint for this purpose an American military committee that will be located within the state receiving the aid and will control the use of it, he will control all the training of the members of the army of the aid-receiving state, he will be responsible for the means of transferring the arms and the places where they will be handed over, and the ways of using them. (*Knesset Records* Vol. 12, p. 3163, 27/8/52. Emphasis ours)

This framework of laws was known not only to the government of Israel but also to the government of the Soviet Union. It may be assumed that it not take kindly to it.

Only nine years afterwards (25/5/61), the government saw fit to publish openly in an official document (“Records”, Credentials 374, Vol. 12) the “Exchange of letters constituting an accord between the government of Israel and the government of the United States of America on mutual assistance and military matters”, which was signed on 1/7/52 and went into force on 23/7/52.

We can see the extent of the direct military aid that the USA in fact gave to Israel from the following data, which constitute a part of a table of official US government data which were first published in 1960 and submitted in a session of the American Senate on 14/3/60 by Senator Ellender from Louisiana.

From: the military aid plan, values of the plans and transfers⁷ for the fiscal years 1950-1960 according to area and state (thousands of dollars)

Programs⁸

	1951	1950-59	1960
Iraq	--	49,761	--
Israel ⁹	900	936	35
Jordan	560	12,660	5,136
Lebanon	1,366	7,806	¹⁰

Transfers

	1959	1950-59	1960 estimate
Iraq	974	49,761	--
Israel	385	385	518
Jordan	2,326	11,102	2,182
Lebanon	3,853	7,050	612

(*Congressional Record*, 14/3/60, p. 4983) [N.b. at the bottom of the page in the original there is a footnote # 3, called “financed with partial credit”. But the marker for that note does not appear anywhere in the main body. That is why only 4 footnotes appear here – trans.]

A brief examination of the table reveals that Israel received direct military aid of a total of only 385 thousand dollars from the years 1950 to 1959; all of that aid was given in

⁷ Including plans and the transfer of surplus products of the military departments of the USA, which were estimated in the price of reception, and the sale of military supplies and provisions that were initially financed by the military aid funds. Transfer encompasses also expenses on services, for example “training”.

⁸ The fact that there is a military aid program for a state is not to be interpreted as a commitment on the part of the USA.

⁹ All with credit financing.

¹⁰ Included under “undistributed”.

1959. Thus in the years 1950 to 1958, Israel did not receive, despite all its entreaties, requests and promises to cooperate in the “defense of the free world”, not even one cent of the American military aid. It is a mistake to conclude from this that Israel’s commitments lost their value and their political meaning because of this. All the covert and overt declarations to defend the “entire Middle East region” remained in force even though the US government gave a large amount of military aid to Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon and not to Israel. Indeed Israel did not win American military aid, but its willingness to accept the conditions that it involved determined the policy of the Eastern Bloc towards Israel.

“A bomb and a request”

In that same period (and especially after the “Prague trials”), anti-Soviet propaganda increased in Israel, and in February 1953 a bomb was thrown at the building of the Soviet embassy in Tel Aviv. Three days later the USSR broke diplomatic relations with Israel. The government of Israel expressed its shock and dismay over the attack, but its embassy in Washington hastened to take advantage of the break in relations in order to renew its request for American arms:

In the wake of the break in relations between Soviet Russia and the State of Israel the ambassador of Israel in the USA, A. Eban, appealed to the eastern powers to give material and spiritual [!] aid to the State of Israel so that it would be able to withstand the Soviet campaign of hostility. Abba Eban said this *in a statement prepared in advance* that he read to journalists. Eban indicated that *Israel had aroused the anger of the Soviet rulers by means of its overt democratic and pro-Western policies* and that imposes a moral obligation on the main Western powers to increase their solidarity with the Hebrew state. (*Davar*, 15/2/53. Emphasis ours)

The voice of the ambassador was like a voice calling in the wilderness. The break in relations with the USSR did not strengthen but rather weakened the Israeli bargaining

position. Mr. Eban's declaration stood in complete contradiction to the government's expression of dismay.

At the beginning of 1953 plans to set up a regional military alliance were raised again and in preparation for it, large amounts of arms and modern matériel were sent to Egypt. Again the familiar play was performed, again the usual Israeli declarations were made, but this time in a more overt way:

“This is the first time since the establishment of the state that the State of Israel fears that war with the Soviet Union is more likely, both in terms of possibility and in terms of time, than a second round with the Arab states. Accordingly interest has grown in the country in steps to create the Regional Command and the consolidation of the Western defense system in the Middle East,” declared Foreign Minister M. Sharett to Sunday Times correspondent Eric Soslau. According to Sharett it is understood in Israel that the West is expending more efforts to this end to win over the forty million residents of the Arab states than the Jewish state with a population of only a million and a half. But Israel believes that Britain and the USA will be able to prepare for its joining the proposed defense organization through timely discussion of economic and military assistance in anticipation of all possible developments and thereby to facilitate the immediate execution of the large strategic investments that will be required for that purpose, such as paving roads and construction of seaports and airports. According to Sharett it will be difficult for Britain and the USA to realize their strategic plans in cooperation with the Arabs only, as the latter are bypassing the two articles and are basing their calculations on the assumption that they can only gain, and have nothing to lose by prolonging the delay. (*Davar*, 26/1/53)

It is no wonder that in this declaration Sharett displays such a good understanding of the efforts of the West to cultivate the Arabs and is content to suggest that their calculations should not be based on them *alone*. Here, as in the US Zionists' memorandum and as in other declarations that were made by representatives of the [Israeli] government while they were abroad, or to foreign correspondents, the words are addressed to the Western

powers, and the “rules of the game” demand, therefore, a presentation from the point of view of Western interests. Despite that, when these statements are published in Israel itself, they make a very bad impression, due to their contradicting to a certain degree the many declarations of government spokesmen from different podiums within Israel to the effect that “foreign policy is conducted in conformity with Israeli interests alone”. Therefore, for internal needs, it is sometimes necessary to deny, in whole or in part, the statements that were made for the purposes of foreign policy. That is the second part of these “rules of the game”.

In this case as well, the foreign minister claimed afterwards that what he had said had not been correctly understood.

Bonds, patriotism and American boys

It is possible that in the eyes of the leaders of the State themselves there was not, in the final analysis, any contradiction between Israeli interests and Western interests; we have already seen that – as a consequence of the accords with Abdullah – the aspiration to consolidate Western control in the Middle East became the cornerstone of their efforts in the political arena.

The propaganda that is being conducted among the Jews of the USA for the sake of the various fund-raisers and Israel Bonds comes from the perspective of American interests; they are endeavouring to prove to the Jews of the USA that support for Israel is first and foremost their duty as American patriots. Typically, the advertisement in the *Chicago Sentinel* in January 1952, under the heading “*Why it is the duty of the patriot is to buy Israel Bonds*”. In the advertisement we read:

First and foremost stands the security of the USA in the Middle East. Arab oil, the African air bases and the uranium mines of the Belgian Congo are vital to our country. Israel’s extraordinarily effective army, which numbers over 200,000 men, constitutes a formidable weapon for the defense of these interests. The use of the Israeli army for this purpose means that American soldiers will not be sent to these

places. It will prevent endangering the lives of thousands of American boys, as well as saving many millions of American dollars.

Such reasoning truly gladdens the heart. Take note: extending assistance to Israel is not only an act of charity, it also saves property and lives!

“I am hearing of this for the first time”

And more on the same subject: on 9/3/53 a report was published in *Haaretz* – again the fruit of the pen of Mr. Aryeh Gelblum – about the “Independence Loan” conference. In that conference American personalities (Herbert Lehrmann, Henry Morgenthau, Senator Taft – the latter even received a gold map of Israel on that occasion) and Israeli personalities (Development Minister D. Yosef and Ambassador A. Eban) spoke. In that same article we read:

Mr. Henry Morgenthau said that Georgi Melnikov is definitely much worse than Stalin, and when it comes to the test Israel will mobilize about 200,000 soldiers alongside the USA.

The Ambassador of Israel Mr. Abba Eban expressed his full agreement with Mr. Henry Morgenthau’s assertion that Israel could mobilize 200,000 soldiers alongside the USA in the event of a war and added that Mr. Morgenthau had underestimated Israel’s capacity for mobilization ...

The organ of the Israeli Communist Party, *Kol Ha’am* (“Voice of the People”), responded to this news in a sharp editorial under the headline “Abba Eban can go and fight by himself”. The Minister of the Interior ordered the closure of that periodical for 10 days, but as *Haaretz* noted, the story itself was not officially denied. M. Sneh (“Left”, today Communist Party of Israel) and Ben-Aharon (United Workers’ Party, today Unity of Labour) submitted questions to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Security on the issue. Knesset Member Sneh asked:

The press reported that the ambassador of Israel to the USA, Mr. Abba Eban, confirmed in a public conference the statements of Mr. Henry Morgenthau, the Chairman of the United Jewish Appeal, that in the event of war Israel would be able to mobilize about 200 thousand soldiers alongside the USA, but dissociated himself from that estimate of Israel's mobilizing power to the extent that Mr. Morgenthau underestimated Israel's true capacity. That report was not denied by any governmental body. Because the Knesset never affirmed a military alliance between the State of Israel and the United States of America, I have the honour of asking Mr. Prime Minister: is he prepared to announce from the podium of the Knesset that Ambassador Eban was not authorized to make the fore-mentioned announcement and that the people of Israel will not hand over its sons as cannon-fodder to the USA for the purposes of aggressive war?

The Prime Minister replied:

The first part of the question of the honourable Knesset Member is based on a journalistic fabrication, and the second part on communist propaganda. Our ambassador said: "The governments of the free world are very well aware of Israel's declared intentions to defend its borders and government from any subversion or attack". That is a reiteration of many declarations made in the Knesset by the government of Israel on several occasions.

M. Sneh:

In view of the fact that a year ago the then British Deputy War Minister Mr. White declared, on the basis of a discussion with Mr. Ben-Gurion, that the government of Israel could put two hundred thousand soldiers at the disposal of the West, does the honourable Prime Minister also call Mr. White a fabricator or a Communist Information Bureau propagandist?

Mr. Ben-Gurion:

I am hearing this for the first time from your lips and I must verify whether you have spoken the truth or not. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 13, p. 1096, 25/3/53)

We still are waiting for the results of the verification.

As for the statements of Morgenthau, the Prime Minister replied to Ben-Aharon:

The questioner knows as well as I do that an American citizen can say whatever he wants in America and as such the questioner knows that no American citizen represents the State of Israel [Mr. Eban himself received Israeli citizenship only in the year 1959!] And even if was the Haaretz story regarding Mr. Morgenthau is correct, it has no bearing on either the honourable Member of the Knesset nor on the government of Israel ... (Ibid.)

Morgenthau continued to exercise his right “to say whatever he wants”. In September of that year he appeared again at the conference on behalf of the Independence Loan, this time in the company of A. Eban. The [Zionist] Palestinian Telegraphic Agency¹¹ reported that he “emphasized that the State of Israel was able to mobilize a quarter of a million first-class soldiers alongside the USA [the estimate was adjusted!] who constitute by European standards a strike-force that the USA could not ignore”. (*Haaretz*, 28/9/53)

Did all these Israeli declarations which were made at the beginning of 1953 (we are referring to the declarations at the Conference for the Independence Loan in March, to Sharett’s comments to the *Sunday Times* correspondent in the month of January, and others) bring about such a state of affairs that the USA asked Israel to join the “Middle East Command” that was then again on the agenda? Absolutely not. After difficulties emerged in convincing the Arab states to join that organization, the American Secretary

¹¹ In Hebrew, “*soknut telegrafit erez-yisra’elit*”. Literally: “Land of Israel Telegraphic Agency” – trans.

of State, John Foster Dulles, decided to take tour of the countries of the Middle East in May 1953.

The foundation-stone of Israeli policy

On 2/6/53, upon his return from his tour, Dulles appeared on television to deliver a speech to the people of the USA. In his speech he gave his conclusions from the tour and described the policies that he believed should be implemented in order to advance American interests in our region. Dulles had determined that the plan of the “Command” failed in the face of Arab opposition and that the USA therefore should take substantial measures to appease them and effect their rapprochement with America. He supported the internationalization of Jerusalem and the return of 800,000 refugees to Israel, and referred to the Negev “territories with sentimental value that are held by Israel”. “The leaders of Israel itself – determined the American Secretary of State – agreed with us that the policy of the USA should be an impartial one, in order to garner not only the recognition and estimation of the Israelis, but also that of the Arab peoples. We seek such a policy”. The line that Dulles laid down in his speech was for the official policy of the Republican Administration.

A few months later, the influential Paris newspaper *Le Monde* explained the considerations that led Dulles to taking this line thusly:

The American Secretary of State “discovered” this part of the world [the Middle East] a few months ago. He was impressed by the strength of the young Jewish state and by the friendship that it exhibited towards the USA. On the other hand, the hostility of the Arab states towards the West and especially to America clearly inspired alarm in his heart. Upon his return to Washington, Dulles drew unexpected conclusions from his tour: in his secure knowledge of the support of Israel he decided to minimize to a certain extent American aid to the State of Israel [“a hooked fish needs no bait!”] and to dedicate all his efforts to the task of acquiring the friendship of the Arab states, by all possible means. That policy seemed correct to the State Department, especially in view of the fact that at that time diplomatic

relations between the USSR and Israel had been cut off and the Jewish State had thereby lost all the advantages that stemmed from balancing the two blocs. (*Le Monde*, 21/10/53)

Israeli foreign policy had reached a dead end. It became more and more apparent that a power that has something to lose in the Middle East is not prepared to overtly support Israel. Afterwards, at the time of the Sinai Operation, it was possible to learn the other part of that lesson, that is: when a Western power finds itself in a state in which it has nothing to lose, then support for Israel is not beneficial...

Dulles' speech aroused an angry response in Israel. Not only opposition spokesmen but also Mapai [Labour] members attacked the speech in impotent rage.

"The smell of oil wafts from Dulles' speech!" cried Knesset Member Yonah Kesse (*Knesset Records* Vol. 14, p. 1616, 16/6/53). His Mapai comrade, Knesset Member Ben-Asher, commented: "That entire speech on television – to the simple man it arouses in our memories the mission of British imperialism from our past." (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 14, p. 1606, 16/6/53)

In addition, the Foreign Minister found it necessary to declare:

Friendship with the USA and ongoing efforts to strengthen and to nurture that friendship – that is one of the foundation stones of Israeli policy. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 14, p. 1642, 16/6/53)

In an effort to recover a little bargaining-room, Sharett addressed the Soviet Foreign Minister with a request to renew diplomatic relations. In his letter Sharett promised that "Israel will not be a partner in any alliance or accord directed against the Soviet Union." On 20/7/53 relations between the USSR and Israel were renewed.

The above-mentioned declaration of Sharett already did not/has not aroused much of an impression in the West; it was clear to alert student that if indeed "Israel will not be a partner in any alliance or accord directed against the Soviet Union", then it was only

because the energetic efforts of Mr. Sharett and his friends to join such an alliance had not borne fruit.

Logic and the speeches of Byroade

Large quantities of Western arms were again sent to the Arab states, and the American Deputy Secretary of State for Middle East Affairs, Mr. Byroade, announced that the USA intended to extend much more military aid to the Arab countries than to Israel.

A few months afterwards, the USA compelled Israel, by means of temporary suspending the grant, to stop work on the Jordan Canal (we have quoted above the reply of *Davar* to that matter). Relations between the two governments continued to deteriorate. In April 1954 Byroade spoke again (this time in a speech in the city of Dayton, Ohio) in defence of the line that had been taken by Dulles. He denied the view that the USA was conducting a pro-Arab policy or a pro-Israeli one:

If there is a need to accuse us of taking a “pro”something position, then let us make it clear that this “pro” can relate to only one thing – and that is the main concern of our policy: pro-American. (See *Haaretz*, 12/4/54)

Davar omitted that part in its report on the speech.

Byroade declared that “There is no area strategically more important in the entire world” than the Middle East, and that “without the Middle East’s oil our industry and that of our allies would be paralyzed.”

It is well known that one of the leading factors that guide US policy in our region is the oil interest. Whoever wants to understand the rising weight of American influence vis-à-vis Britain need only take a look at the following table:

The shares of the USA and Britain in oil production in the Middle East

(in percentages)

Year	Britain	USA
1938	79.6	13.9
1939	76.0	17.0
1946	64.5	31.0
1950	52.9	44.4
1951	38.8	58.0
1952	33.0	59.0

According to an economic survey of the Middle East that was published by the UN on 6/7/1956, 64% of the oil reserves of the region are in the hands of American companies. Is it any wonder, therefore, that the efforts of the USA were directed mainly towards cultivating the Arabs?

It turns out that that not everything that is clear to every attentive schoolboy is clear to those responsible for Israeli policy. The latter are very fond of offering advice to the Americans on how to manage their affairs; for example:

... it is hard to find in the Mr. Byroade's performances any practical advantage regarding the goal that he himself sets for US policy. It is hard to discern in them simple logic. (*Knesset Records* Vol. 16, p. 1598, 10/5/54)

That is how the then-Prime Minister responded to Byroade's speech.

Knesset Member Sneh mocked the Prime Minister:

If you reply to the rulers of America "yes" to a Middle Eastern alliance, then it is they who will decide how to build it, not Moshe Dayan and certainly not Shmuel Dayan. It is they who set the Karachi-Ankara axis, and you are telling them that

between Karachi and Ankara there is no Baghdad, but on their map there is Baghdad.

We should have opposed to the establishment of the axis in the first place, but when we (the Communist and Left factions) proposed here in the Knesset to express opposition to the Ankara-Karachi axis before arms were given to Iraq, the Foreign Minister moved to take the proposal off the agenda on the pretext that it was not our business.

When did it become his business? When they discovered Baghdad in the middle of the axis. Before that he did not know that it would be discovered. (*Knesset Records*, vol 16, p. 1625, 11/5/54)

Proffering advice to the State Department turned from being a hobby to an obsession. Ambassador Abba Eban, who was called to Israel for consultations, “warned [in a cabinet session] about the state of mind that he observed in Israel, that set up the USA, in the political debate with it, as an unfriendly state”. In his opinion “Israel should relate to the USA as a friendly state and thereby prove to it how misguided is its approach to the Middle East, to protest against arming the Arabs and to point out that it is a political and military measure that is not correct even from the perspective of American interests ... the very fact that the State Department agreed to soften its position and to acknowledge the need to offer guarantees to Israel in the face of the distortion of the balance of power in the region is an important achievement for Israel”. (cf. most Israeli newspapers from 27/8/54)

“Communism is not the reason ... it is the pretext”

A few days after this there was a political discussion in the Knesset. At the time, the British were compelled to agree to evacuate their military base in Suez after they were unable to withstand the struggle of the Egyptian people and the diplomatic pressure of the Americans who hoped to inherit their place. According to the agreement, Britain would be permitted to reactivate the base in the event of an attack on one of the countries of the Middle East *except Israel*. With the implementation of the accord, large amounts of

British arms that were stored in the Suez bases were transferred to the Egyptians, and the Americans too announced that they would give military aid to the Egyptians. When he opened this discussion M. Sharett said:

... what disturbs ["disturbs"! What a delicate formulation!] us at this moment is the initiative of the government of the USA to put additional weights on the side of the scale that is already weighted against us ... we have heard much about the promise for the future granting of military and economic aid to Egypt. At long last this promise has been published openly, and we realize that it was given upon the reaching of an accord between Egypt and England, but it contained not a single provision in our favour – no condition for peace was attached to the military aid, nor was there even a condition for ending the blockade attached to the economic aid [what happened to Abba Eban's guarantees?], a principle that has been applied to others was not applied to us, and the nature of the discrimination becomes clear yet again. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 16, p. 2540, 30/8/54)

Does it emerge from this that Israel will take an assertive stand in the face of such treatment from America? God forbid! Only the usual counsels to the State Department were heard from M. Sharett's lips:

We have denounced and will continue to denounce the discrimination and the lack of sense in the granting of these arms for the purpose of defending democracy. How can democracy be defended in a place where it does not exist and how can it be defended by rulers who trample it underfoot and by masses for whom it means nothing. We will also reject the invalid premise that this is the shortest path to internal stability in the Arab countries ... they will probably accuse us of carrying this policy to the point of absurdity. But this policy itself has brought about an absurdity, by purporting to establish a front for a regional defense of the magnificent bastions of democracy that are the countries of the Arab League to the exclusion only of Israel. (*Ibid.*)

Take note of this fine moral preaching: if you, the rulers of the USA, want to learn how to “defend the free world” from “Soviet aggression”, go to Moshe Sharett and he will explain it to you.

The problem is that the USA has considerations that differ from those of the one who is proffering advice; M. Begin tries to explain this, and from him we also hear a terrible accusation against America: the latter, he announces with alarm, has not intention of defending the Middle East from Communism:

The truth is that the reason for the arming of the Arab states is completely different. It is not related to a global strategy but to Middle East strategy. It is embedded in the competition that is taking place between America and Britain in the Middle East, as was admitted in *The Times*, which a short time ago wrote on its pages in unforgettably harsh language that the USA is conspiring to remove Britain entirely from the Middle East, which, in the opinion of the London newspaper, was traditionally the sphere of influence of the British Commonwealth.

... America has today a syllogism in the Middle East; they want to remove the British entirely from this region, and for that reason they want to befriend the Arabs; in order to win the hearts of the Arabs it is necessary to harm the State of Israel, it is necessary to strengthen the forces of its enemies.

... in that language we can say to the Americans: Communism is not the reason for your policies – it is the pretext. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 16, p. 2556, 30/8/54)

And he criticizes the policy of the government:

... today I heard the Prime Minister trying to give advice to himself and us about what to do, and this is what I heard:

We have declared, and we shall continue to declare; we have protested – and we shall continue to protest; we have denounced – and we shall continue to denounce, would that the Foreign Minister knew politics as well as the Prime Minister knows Hebrew [Sharett was filling both positions at the time]. Such Hebrew – but such a policy! We have declared – our declaration was to no avail, we have protested – our

protest did not help, we have denounced – and our denunciation was of no use. But for all that we shall continue to denounce and declare and protest. (Ibid.)

And what solution does Mr. Begin propose?

I state with clarity: military operations are required while there is still time, for as long as we have not missed the deadline. (Ibid.)

According to the Herut Movement, there is no deadline. From its inception, it has repeated the same proposal. In one of the following chapters we will speak more about what happened when the government of Israel adopted for itself Mr. Begin's line about "military operations".

Before we conclude this chapter we must point to the disgrace and ignominy that resulted from Israel's unilateral courting of the USA. When all hope was lost, and all the attempts to convince the government of the USA that its policy was incorrect had failed, Israel tried to create facts that would convince the Americans. In this connection we must recall the "unfortunate affair" from late 1954 that emerged on the newspaper headlines in late 1960. For reasons that are well-known, we cannot describe that "unfortunate affair" in detail here. The interested reader will find a very good appraisal in the 9/1/61 issue of Newsweek, p. 20. The above-mentioned "unfortunate affair" constituted a consistent, natural and contiguous extension of all the policies that preceded it.¹²

"I feel very comfortable"

Another salient example of such ignominy was the affair of the visit of the Chief of Staff, M. Dayan, to the USA. In July 1954 the US government invited the Arab chiefs of staff

¹² This is a reference to the Lavon Affair, when the Israeli government recruited Egyptian Jews to bomb US and British targets in Egypt in an effort to sabotage Egypt's relations with those countries. It came to light when one of the Egyptian Jewish terrorists was caught red-handed while trying to plant a bomb in a British-owned theatre in Alexandria. Apparently when this book was written in 1961 Israelis were still barred by military censorship from publishing details about the affair – trans.

to visit the USA. One does not need an over-developed imagination to surmise what was discussed during that visit.

The invitation passed over the Israeli chief of staff. At the same time the government of Israel asked if it was possible for the Israeli chief of staff to go on a private visit, not an official one, at his own expense. Needless to say, any link between M. Dayan's trip and the visit of the Arab chiefs of staff was purely coincidental ...

None other than the Prime Minister himself denied such a connection. The United Press agency (17/7/54) describes the affair thus:

Asked by journalists if he felt comfortable, Dayan replied:

“Me! Yes, I feel very comfortable, this is a vast country”. He also indicated that he was quite satisfied by the reception he was given.

UP adds with emphasis that:

Dayan arrived in the USA in a commercial aircraft and he made his own arrangements to travel to the places he intended to visit. He denied that there was anything unusual in this phenomenon.

The American authorities also had previously given a similar explanation with their announcement that the Iraqi chief of staff, Muhammad Aref, came at the invitation of the US Defence Department whereas Dayan came at his own request, and that they were “happy to grant that request”...

There are some in Israel for whom that reply is a timely rain. To us it feels more like spit.

The beginning of the eternal friendship

Eventually the recognition of the failure of the American orientation of Israeli policy engendered two important changes in that policy. When it became clear that the State Department scorned the value of Israel, the tendency to improve Israel's bargaining

position by means of displays of strength and military operations increased. Thus the government appropriated for itself the line known as “activism”, a line that the Herut party had been ceaselessly recommending to it for some time. The implementation of that line began shortly after the visit of John Foster Dulles to the Middle East and it continued – with one pause (when Ben-Gurion resigned from the government) – until it reached its climax with Operation Sinai.¹³ The second change occurred in 1955. When the leaders of the State of Israel finally understood the futility of their fervent courting of the USA, they began to seek another ally, another orientation.

We have already discussed the reasons for which the government policy turned its gaze towards the west. Only Britain and France, therefore, emerged as candidates for the role of new allies, as Germany did not yet have the status of a Power. But a pro-British orientation was out of the question, not only because of the memory of the conflict between Britain and the Jewish *Yishuv* in Palestine during the years of the struggle and the War of Independence, but also, and mainly, because Britain retained some influence in the Arab world despite everything. Overt support for Israel would not have been advantageous to Britain.

Therefore only the third possibility remained: France no longer had anything to lose in the Arab world; its war of repression in North Africa mobilized the Arabs against it to such a degree that the possibility existed that the Arab states – and especially Egypt – would actively intervene in the conflict. France clearly would not lose a thing from its open ties to Israel, on the contrary – it was able to profit by diverting the strength of the Arabs towards a different front by means of Israeli “activism”. Thus was born the French orientation of the government of Israel. On this point too the Herut party preceded the government and not by chance: “activism” and the pro-French line were intertwined from the beginning.

¹³ i.e. the Suez Crisis, during which Israel conspired with Britain and France to provide the latter two with a pretext to occupy the Suez Canal Zone by means of an Israeli invasion of Egypt and occupation of the Sinai Peninsula – trans.

Chapter 4

Israel and Changes in the Arab World

In the previous chapter, in our discussion of Israel's political orientation in the period from 1948-1955 we referred to the Arab states more than once, without discussing the changes that took place within them in the meantime.

In fact, the period beginning in 1948 was a period of far-reaching transformations in the Middle East, especially in the Arab states. One of the most important processes in the history of our times, especially since the Second World War, is the deterioration and collapse of the colonial system. In that regard the following table is instructive:

Country	Year of independence	Territory (square kilometres)	Population (millions)
Vietnam	1945	330	26
Korea	1945	221	30
Indonesia	1945	1,492	84
Syria	1946	181	3.7
Lebanon	1946	10	1.4
Jordan 1946 97 1.3	1946	97	1.3
Philippines	1946	229	22.3
India 1947	1947	3,288	392
Pakistan	1947	994	84
Burma	1948	678	19.2
Israel 1948 20 1.8	1948	20	1.8
Ceylon	1948	66	8.5
China	1949	9,898	626
Libya 1951	1951	1,760	1.1
Laos	1954	237	1.4
Cambodia	1954	139	4.1
Morocco	1956	410	9.6
Sudan	1956	2,506	8.9
Tunisia	1956	156	3.7
Ghana 1957 238 4.6	1957	238	4.6
Malaya	1957	131	6.1

(Kol Ha'am, 21/10/57)

And more instructive than the table itself is the fact that it quickly became outdated. In the few years that have passed since Knesset Member Sneh compiled that table, so many additional states have attained their independence, that a similar table, if it were compiled today, would be twice as long.

If to this we add the states that had previously attained formal independence but in the meantime broke the economic ties of colonialism (like Cuba and Iraq), or states that tried to break these ties and have achieved a lesser degree of success for the moment (like Iran, Jordan and Guatemala), a picture of one of the most comprehensive processes in human history will emerge.

“How do you imagine”

Every rational person will admit that the chances of Algeria attaining independence in the way Tunis and Morocco did are infinitely greater than the chances that Tunisia and Morocco will revert to being French colonies like Algeria. But the matter is not restricted to calculations of probability. We are facing a *causal* historical process, which can be predicted in advance with *certainty*.

It was perhaps by chance that Nasser and Qassim came to lead the national movements that took them to power, but no coincidence will ever restore people like King Farouk and Nuri Said to their previous greatness. It will be a coincidence if King Hussein is assassinated like his grandfather and his uncle, but no coincidence (including Israeli intervention) can prevent the changes that are poised to take place in his kingdom with the passage of time, like those that took place in Egypt and Iraq.

In retrospect, it is impossible not to see this pattern, of which developments in the Middle East are a part; in retrospect, only a blindfolded person would have predicted less than a decade ago that the Middle East would always remain a sphere of political influence and economic control for Western colonial powers. And that being the case, the eyes of the man who said the following were surely dazzled:

How can the State of Israel stand alone within a zone that is Western not by our decision, by a decision that was taken in the world not on your authority and not on our authority? How do you imagine that the State of Israel, in such a closed Western zone, can act as if it had a realistic plan to replace all the actors that exist in this geographic area, Farouk in Egypt, the other Arab feudal leaders, and to

replace the West and its influence in the Middle East? How will you replace them and with whom will you replace them?

And these words were spoken not by an ignorant yokel, but by a Mapai member, Baruch Azania, an Israeli professor, specifically a professor of sociology; and they were uttered before the Israeli legislature in a debate on foreign policy on the fifth day of the month of November, in 1951, and were recorded in black and white on page three hundred and eighteen in the tenth volume of *Knesset Records*.

All that, about four months after a Jerusalem carpenter shot and killed Britain's loyal representative in the Middle East, King Abdullah (and he was not the last of his family to die a distinguished death), eight months before the revolution of the "Free Officers" in Egypt, less than five years before the nationalization of the Suez Canal and less than seven years before the Iraqi revolution.

This was no small mistake in guessing, but a political error fraught with disaster.

"Disastrous shortsightedness"

The decision to forego the demand to establish an Arab state in the other part of Palestine and to agree to its annexation to Abdullah's puppet kingdom, to bypass the UN's seal of approval and to substitute for it that of the Western Powers – that fateful decision could only be based on the assumption that Western control of the Middle East would continue for a long time and that the current arrangements in our region could be considered stable, without taking into account the national interests and aspirations of the peoples (in whose names these arrangements were supposedly made).

Israel's politicians never grasped the simple truth that in the Middle East, as in other colonial and quasi-colonial areas, policy made on the basis of the current reality is the most unrealistic policy. The situation in the Middle East is reminiscent to a great degree of the famous discussion between Alice (*Through the Looking Glass*) and the Queen:

"Well, in OUR country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else – if you ran very fast for a long time, as we've been doing." "A

slow sort of country!” said the Queen. “Now, HERE, you see, it takes all the running YOU can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!” (Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*)

Defenders of Israeli policy cannot absolve Israel of guilt by claiming that nobody could have foreseen the developments in our region. There was one voice that repeatedly warned:

The government of Israel, *with disastrous shortsightedness*, with an utter lack of national responsibility, is these days positioning the State of Israel against the movement for national liberation in the Middle East. (S. Mikonis, *Knesset Records* Vol. 10, p. 291, 4/11/51. Emphasis ours)

And even leaders of Herut, who today support the colonial war of oppression in Algeria, once knew enough to declare that:

... there are still subjugated groups, some of whom have already risen in revolt and others whose time will come, and they will endeavour to free themselves from the yoke of foreign conquest. I hope and I am confident that an important and large part of our people will want to help those who will be fighting against imperialist rule in their countries. (S. Merlin, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 2, p. 1194, 1/8/49)

The leaders of the State cannot cling to the allegation that the revolutions and the changes in the Arab countries occurred unexpectedly. It is indeed true that there are few people who were not surprised by the rapid pace of developments, and that those who expected so many and such fundamental changes in such a short period were few and far between.

But that is only one side of the coin. If no one in Israel could have guessed, for example, on 13 July 1958, that on the very next day the regime of Nuri Said would be destroyed, then all who had eyes in their heads could have known that the days of the

decadent Hashemite regime were numbered and that revolution in Iraq was sure to succeed eventually, even if it had failed more than once in the past.

A million people in one demonstration

The revolution in Egypt (1952) and in Iraq (1958) do not resemble the coups that took place in Syria from 1948-1953, which were unstable and resulted mainly from competition between the Western powers for influence in the region. The revolutions of Egypt and Iraq were consequences of long-term popular struggle against British imperialism and the rise of the Arab national movement. That movement is not the fruit of the imagination of one man or another and it is certainly not the result of mere “incitement”.

On 14/11/52, during the struggle to expel the British from Egypt, there was a demonstration in Cairo in which a million people took part. After the nationalization of the Suez Canal, in opposition to Western pressure on Egypt, there was a general strike throughout the Arab world, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf. The strike of 16 August encompassed Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and Iraq. In all these states as well as Jordan, Algeria and Tunisia mass demonstrations were held in front of the Western embassies, in protest against their pressures and threats against Egypt; all economic activity ceased and the flow of oil was stopped.

No empty demagoguery and no “incitement” can mobilize millions of hands, brains, feet, hearts and mouths for strikes and demonstrations in various countries at the same time. The depth and the extent of these phenomena were played down and made light of by *Kol Israel* [Israeli national radio – trans.] and the daily newspapers, from *Herut* [on the right – trans.] to *Al Hamishmar* [on the left – trans.]; this disregard of the power of the political forces raging around the State of Israel is not only foolish, it is also disastrous.

The revolutions, which were crowned with success, were preceded by countless uprisings, large and small. They were popular in the full sense of the word. No single party could have succeeded in concentrating and organizing such a vast number of people holding different views; no orator or mastermind, no emotional or intellectual propaganda has the capacity to create such mass movements. Only harsh and prolonged suffering,

injustice that people feel in their flesh and witness with their own eyes, can engender such a mass movement. These were not transitory episodes like the palace coups in South America (whose time too has passed), but inevitable historical phenomena. The fruit that was plucked in Iraq in 1958 took forty years to ripen; since the British took control there have been uprisings at the rate of one every four or five years. In Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon too, the national movements were not born yesterday. The fact is that the revolution ripened until not only the unorganized masses, but also the army – the last prop of the corrupt regime – supported it and executed the seizure of power. That fact explains why the overthrow of the regime usually was not accompanied by a great deal of bloodshed, and it is instructive as to the depth of the hostility to the pro-imperialist regime. Even the regime's prop turned into a staff that struck those who clung to it.

“Flawed aspirations” and a “tragic distortion”

These phenomena do not characterize the Arab world alone.

It is important to understand that these liberation movements constitute part of the more general and comprehensive process of the deterioration of the colonial system. In the Middle East – as in other regions that are liberating themselves – the national movement is directed first and foremost against the overlords of yesterday; it is tied with an unbreakable bond to the tendencies of neutrality and refusal to take part in the strategic plans of the subjugating Powers. But Israel's politicians refuse to acknowledge facts that are not convenient to them. On 30/1/52, in a discussion with English and American journalists in Paris, Abba Eban announced that “Israel relates positively to aspirations for national independence, but the national aspirations of many of the Arab and Muslim countries are flawed in various ways and in general it is the unwillingness to integrate into the network of international interests, including security arrangements.” Does he think that there could be a substantial national movement in an Arab or Muslim country that would support a military alliance established by the colonial powers? In what light do those who are liberating themselves see the State of Israel?

The Arabs see our Return with fear and hatred, and not only the Arab nations, but also some of the other nations of Asia. The nations of the East, who for hundreds of years were subjugated to Europe, see us as agents of subjugation and exploitation for the leaders of Europe – Europe which ejected us from its midst and nearly destroyed us without a trace – we are supposedly its emissaries, emissaries of the subjugators and the oppressors, and the Arab nations too have adopted that distorted view, it is a distortion which is tragic and fraught with dangers and we must not make light of it. (D. Ben-Gurion, *Knesset Records*, Vol. 2, p. 1230, 2/8/49)

Already in 1949, therefore, the Prime Minister admitted that Israel is seen in the eyes of the East as agents of imperialism (the expression “subjugation and exploitation for the leaders of Europe” is misleading and imprecise. Not all the countries of Europe are colonial powers, not all of them subject Arab nations; and not only in Europe are there colonial powers), but according to Ben-Gurion, that outlook is founded on error; it is a “distortion”.

Let us look at what Israel is doing in the political sphere to refute this “tragic distortion fraught with danger.”

About half a year before he made the comments quoted above, Ben-Gurion polemicized in the Knesset with those who accused him of conspiring with British imperialism – by means of the “British puppet” Abdullah – at the expense of the Arabs of Palestine:

What difference does it make to me if some state is or is not a puppet? ... I shall use an extreme example that will play into the hands of my opponent: the war on imperialism. It is not the business of the State of Israel to fight imperialism. Its business is to fight for its independence and growth, but it is not a leader in the fight for imperialism or against it. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 1, p. 308, 4/3/1949)

Theoretically, every state in our region is faced with three options: to fight against imperialism, to fight for it or to stand on the sidelines. Ben-Gurion declares here that he

chooses the third option. It should be taken into account that in a region such as ours in which the struggle against imperialism is the main subject of the history of our time – those who are struggling will see those who stand on the sidelines as collaborating with their adversaries, and therefore those who go against the stream will have difficulty coming to an understanding with their neighbours.

In any case, if Israel were truly and in good faith standing on the sidelines in the struggle against imperialism, then perhaps one might have grounds to complain about the distorted perception of Israel as an agent of the West. All that remains is to verify whether or not Israel really stood on the sidelines in that struggle.

“Bad Middle Easterners”

Asians and Africans appeared as a mighty force on the political stage for the first time in the history of modern times at the historical conference that was held at Bandung in April 1955, with the participation of 29 states from Asia and Africa.

Most newspapers in Israel tried to play down the importance of the conference and moreover they attacked it harshly for not having invited Israel to participate in it and because of the resolution that was passed at it regarding Palestine. (That resolution, which was drafted by Nasser, will be discussed in another chapter).

On that occasion, the organ of the Progressive Party (which had been a perennial participant in all the governments that were formed in Israel) drafted a self-criticism of the Israeli political attitude to the aspirations of the Asians.

In view of the importance of these comments, which shed light on the direction foreign policy has taken since Ben-Gurion declared neutrality in the struggle against colonialism, we will quote from them extensively:

It is no secret that in the clash between the two schools of thought living in close proximity within the walls of our Foreign Ministry – the Western school and the Eastern one (in the sense of basic geopolitical orientation) – the Western school prevailed. Hence the outlook was formed according to which we are permitted,

despite our being part of the Middle East, to be “bad Middle Easterners” as long as we can be no less “Western” than the West itself, and appear in the eyes of the Western Powers as a natural ally in this region. That school emerged from the view that it would be easier for us to compete with the states of Asia in “Westernness” than in “Easternness” and that our advantages in that competition would naturally destine us to the role of vanguard of Western influence [it would be more correct to say: *rearguard* of Western influence] in the region where we live. Two consequences came from that school’s victory over the “Middle Eastern” school. In the sphere of policy the emphasis was placed on nurturing ties with the Western world while the encouragement of relations with the Asians was nothing but a purely formal geographic fact, because the aspiration to integrate organically into this continent need not take the central place among our foreign-policy aspirations and because consolidating ties with the West is what will determine in any case the strength of our position on the map of the East. Even after that school went politically bankrupt because of the West’s tilt in favour of the Arabs, there was no inclination to accept its competitor – the “Middle Eastern” school – to guide Israel’s foreign policy. Certain measures that were taken to attempt to forge closer diplomatic and economic ties with countries of the East (among them many that failed and a few that succeeded) were taken only due to lack of alternatives, and were not accompanied by any sign of a change of our fundamental orientation. The indifference with which the non-invitation of Israel to the Bandung Conference as received in political circles signaled in a most characteristic way the lack of importance accorded to the Asian front by makers of Israeli foreign policy. But also the leaders in the Israeli Foreign Ministry who so far have not thought much about the importance of that front for our future, or who have thought about it with a certain scornfulness and see it as secondary in importance – were surely shocked at the performance of the Bandung Conference, because the anti-Israeli bloc in Bandung [the reference is to those who supported a resolution that was not pleasing to the government of Israel] was not composed only of Arab states.

... The lesson for us from the first days of the Bandung Conference must not take the form only of disappointment at the position of Turkey, the friendship of which

we had heretofore been so confident and the friendship of which we had heretofore made so little effort to develop beyond commercial ties. The lesson that we must learn from the joint anti-Israeli position of the people of Asia should be comprehensive and profound and should manifest itself with three goals. First, our foreign policy must get on new political and psychological tracks of orientation towards the people of Asia. Second, fostering ties with the Near and Far East ... Third, we should not endeavour to see ourselves as an isolated island of righteousness in a sea of iniquity. Now that we have been given abundant proof that the Arab refugee problem continues to constitute one of the main factors affecting our relations with the states of Asia, let us demonstrate our honest desire to contribute to the solution of that painful problem in a humane and constructive way, without harming our security and social interests ... The first days of the Bandung Conference served as a grim illustration of the extent of our political and spiritual isolation in the world. We must not ignore that grim lesson and we must not make light of it. Breaching the walls of isolation that have been erected around us is an imperative condition for the perpetuation of our existence in this region. (Editorial, *Zmanim*, 21/4/55)

Isolation and friendship

The spectacle of the Bandung Conference was repeated – more strongly – at the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference that was held in Cairo about three years afterwards and again in the Addis Ababa conference (June 1960) and at the Casablanca Conference (January 1961).

But the stewards of Israeli policy did not pay heed to the words of warning and did not learn the “grim lesson”. Instead of striving to break out of the dangerous isolation, there came a strange idealization of that isolation as a continuation of the history of “a people that dwelleth alone”.

We were the only nation in the Middle East that charted for itself a separate and independent course in its religious and spiritual approach and we stood in constant

ideological and political struggle with our neighbours until the destruction of the Second Temple. Afterwards we were the only nation that did not submit to Christianity and Islam, when these two religions, which derived sustenance from the Israelite faith, conquered great and mighty nations in whose midst we lived. We are unique among the nations in our culture, race, language and religion. The nations that are closest to us geographically, racially and linguistically – the Arab nations –opposed with all their strength the rebirth of Israel and conspire to annihilate us. (D. Ben-Gurion, *Davar*, 1/6/56)

Thus is Jewish history “corrected”, the continuous cross-fertilization between the culture of Israel and the cultures of the nations concealed (one of the high points of which was the golden age of the Jews of Spain under the rule of the Muslim caliphs), thus are chauvinistic feelings appealed to – in order to sweeten the pill of political isolation. Thus they rely on “constant ideological and political struggle with our neighbours until the destruction of the Second Temple” in order to justify the policy of isolation that is likely to bring about the destruction of the Third Temple.

At the time of the Suez War and afterwards the policy of cautious isolation was modified a little bit. We are no longer isolated! For example – there is France. Israel-France friendship, so they say, goes above and beyond mere collaboration between two interests. How is that reconciled with “a people that dwelleth alone”? The theoretician of isolation replied to that as well in the same article:

Israel is a Mediterranean state and not only a Middle Eastern one, and its neighbours are not only Middle Easterners but all who live on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, in the east and in the west, in the south and in the north. (Ibid.)

Who said that it was a necessity of life for Israel to establish normal relations with the states that are in its immediate continental neighbourhood? Are not all the states of the Mediterranean Sea its neighbours? It is hard to understand why this conception, which is as surprisingly simplistic as Columbus’ egg, stops at seeing Israel as just another “Mediterranean state” – after all, we all know that the Mediterranean Sea is connected to

the Atlantic Ocean, and the Strait of Gibraltar surely certainly cannot be an impediment to the definition of Israel as an “Atlantic state”; moreover, that definition would more faithfully reflect the desires of the government of Israel.

“The nations of the East ... are foreign to the Biblical tradition”

If before the Suez War Ben-Gurion saw the attitude of most of the states of Asia and Africa to his policy as being the result of misunderstanding or being led astray, then after the war he found a new explanation:

... let us not become disproportionately angry over the hostile and unjust foreign policy that some Asian nations have towards Israel. We should know that the peoples of the Far East from India to Japan are foreign to the Biblical tradition, and they have no idea about Israel, of its past in its ancient land, of its great spiritual heritage, which are more or less known to the Christian population. And this too let us not forget: these nations only a few years ago emerged from subjugation to freedom, for hundreds of years they were subjugated to European countries and every white nation is suspect in their eyes. This is a childhood disease of youthful independence that will pass over the course of time, and we must constantly persevere in establishing personal relations and contacts with representatives of these nations— and as much as possible – in cooperation with them, and this task will not be in vain, although it will not be easy. These comments also apply to the newly-independent nations of Africa and those who are about to become independent. (D. Ben-Gurion at the opening of the 70th Histadrut Council, *Davar*, 6/12/56)

The tolerance that Ben-Gurion exhibits towards the colonial subjects “who suspect every white nation” is not well-placed: in most cases the Afro-Asians know very well how to distinguish between their oppressors and people who are merely members of the white race; and these words sound particularly absurd coming from the lips of a prime minister

most of whose citizens do not differ in the colour of their skins and their facial features from the residents of the other states of western Asia and northern Africa.

It is not easy to undertake a mass distribution of the Bible among the millions of Asia and Africa. So we now occupy ourselves with “establishing personal relations and contacts” and “cooperation”.

As for the “personal contacts” – unfortunately they must be limited in most cases to those who lead at the pleasure of the West, to “designated” ministers in French colonies, and in the best of cases, to members of the most conservative branches of nationalist movements.

“Cooperation” is expressed mainly by extending Israeli aid of various types. (It is interesting to note that this aid does not appear in the budget of expenditures of the government of Israel). For the most part this aid is nothing but a kind of new camouflage for Western economic influence.

But even if the aid is offered with complete altruism, it cannot not buy the confidence of the people who were liberating themselves as long as Israel consistently sides with the colonial powers in all political matters. When in 1959 the representative of Guinea at the UN General Assembly hosted a party, all delegations were invited except the Israeli delegation. Israelis were perhaps astonished to hear this news, having heard so often, as they did, of Israel’s excellent contacts in Africa; but if one has taken note of the fact that at that same session Israel voted in favour of the French atomic explosion in the Sahara, Israel’s non-invitation to such parties is hardly to be wondered at.

The performances of the delegations of Israel at the UN, and their votes there, reflect very clearly the idea that Israeli spokesmen have expressed more than once, to the effect that “Israel should be seen not as the western edge of Asia, but as the eastern edge of Europe.”

“Consistency and loyalty”

In 1949, about half an hour after Israel was accepted as a member of the international organization, Israel abstained on a motion to postpone the discussion on the question of Indonesia to the next session. It was passive support for the position of Holland against

Indonesia, which was then struggling for its freedom. The Foreign Minister justified Israel's abstention on the grounds that only states of the Eastern bloc voted against the motion, and Israel's joining them would anger the West without affecting the outcome of the vote.

At the end of August 1961, at the special session of the UN, Israel was among the states that did not vote in favour of a proposed motion of the states of Asia and Africa that called on France to enter into negotiations with Tunisia regarding the evacuation of the French base at Bizerte. The motion was supported by most states – among them some members of NATO.

Between these two extremities a straight and consistent line can be discerned in Israel's performance at the UN.

In 1952, during the Tunisian war of independence, Israel voted in the political committee against the Tunisians, together with France and South Africa. In 1953 Israel voted against an amendment motion that called for negotiations between France and Tunisia "in order to ensure the realization of the right of self-determination for the Tunisian people". In 1953 and again in 1954, Israel voted against a resolution that called on the UN committee on racial discrimination in South Africa to continue to remain apprised of the racial situation there. As a consequence of that vote, the committee was dismantled.

In 1956 Israel voted with France and against the Africans on a substantial number of motions on Algeria.

In 1957, during a complex procedural struggle regarding the Portuguese colonies in Africa, Israel supported a number of African motions, but on the decisive procedural vote Israel voted against the African states. The forces were so evenly divided that it was the Israeli vote that tipped the scales.

In 1958 Israel abstained on a vote regarding the granting of independence to Tanganyika and Rwanda-Urundi, and voted, along with France and South Africa, against Africa on the question of Algeria. In that vote too, only one vote would have converted the African defeat into a victory.

In 1959, in a discussion on the future of Cameroon, not only did Israel raise its hand against African interests, it also came out against them during the deliberations. On 19

November of the same year the Afro-Asian bloc initiated in the UN a campaign that concluded with a great victory: the General Assembly decided with a majority of two thirds to bar France from conducting atomic tests in the Sahara. Israel voted together with the minority, despite the fact that the French company Renault had submitted to the Arab boycott a short time before this, and despite the French vote *against* Israel regarding the Reconciliation Committee. Moreover, Agriculture Minister M. Dayan sent a congratulatory telegram to the fascist General Challe on the occasion of the atomic explosion in the Sahara.

This is just a small sample of the Israeli performance against Africa at the UN. In a special expanded commemorative edition of *Le Figaro*, published in French and in Hebrew and distributed in France and Israel to celebrate the friendship between the two governments, Roger Massip summarizes under the heading “consistency and loyalty”:

Israel has always been on the side of France in the important votes in the UN, and especially regarding Algeria. In 1955 [a year before the Suez war!] Israel voted against the request to put the Algeria problem on the agenda. Again in 1956, Israel took its place [!] in the camp of nations that did not want that discussion. In 1957, in a debate that was very difficult for France, Israel voted against a proposal that sought to recognize Algeria’s right to self-determination. Israel then voted in favour of a more moderate formulation, which stopped at expressing the hope for a democratic and peaceful solution. During that same debate Israel opposed a motion calling for negotiations between France and the rebels. In total it occurred 10 times that the representatives of Israel in the UN supported the French position. This is a fine example of consistency and loyalty that is worthy of special notice. (*Le Figaro*, Special Edition, May 1960)

There is no doubt that this is a fine example of unusual consistency and loyalty to French imperialism (but not to France, most of whose citizens support the right of the Algerians to self-determination!), but it is not such a fine example of “cooperation” with Asia and Africa that Ben-Gurion spoke of.

It was not only against Africa that Israel took a stand, and not only for French imperialism that Israel exhibited such heart-warming loyalty. In the UN session that was convened at the end of 1954, Israel voted against Indonesia on the matter of West Irian. M. Sharett made appearances in the UN to oppose the struggle of the Persian people for the cancellation of the foreign oil concessions, and against the struggle of the Egyptian people for the evacuation of the British from the base in Suez.

Indeed Israel won recognition from Holland, when the latter proposed to give to Abba Eban and Moshe Tov a citation “for their work in the UN General Assembly for Holland and against the claims of Indonesia” (*Maariv*, 27/6/58), but it is clear that Indonesians will not give any citation to Mr. Eban, apart from the “mark of Cain” of one who does the bidding of the colonialists.

“More Catholic than the Pope”

Israel’s performance at the UN aroused criticism in Israel itself more than once. On 30/11/53 Knesset Member Riftin (Mapam), said:

Israel did not vote in favour of inviting China to the General Assembly, even after states like Sweden, India and Yugoslavia – and I am deliberately not counting socialist states – voted in favour of invitation. The government of Israel corrected the “mistake” of abstaining on the proposal to include India in the Korea Committee by voting against a revision of that disastrous resolution, even though Indonesia, Burma and Sweden all voted in favour of the revision and many states abstained ... how to understand the failure of the government of Israel at that time to support a resolution stating that a government that first deploys means of mass destruction against some country, will thereby by committing a criminal act against humanity and will be considered a war criminal? (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 15, p. 271)

And on another occasion he declared:

I want to underline a fact, which the Knesset needs to know: because of the exclusive orientation towards America, not only is there not a common language, a language of comprehension, between the Israeli Foreign Ministry and the socialist Asian states, but it is lacking even – and it is a myth if they tell us that there is comprehension – between the Foreign Ministry and non-socialist and anti-socialist Asian states. Moreover I want to add a point that I view with further gravity: when somebody examines objectively the record of votes at the UN, he surely must come to the conclusion that the votes of the Arab states are an expression of policies that are more independent than the votes of the government of Israel at the United Nations General Assembly. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 14, p. 1586, 15/6/53)

Later his factional colleague, Knesset Member Barzilai, commented:

... I do not want to count the votes of our representative at the UN, but our delegation is sometimes more Catholic than the Pope, it is more devoutly pro-Western than states that are members of in the Atlantic alliance itself. (*Knesset Records*, Vol. 19, p. 100, 18/10/55)

These words are true, and they did not lose their truth when Mapam joined the government and took upon itself responsibility for the perpetuation of the same policy. Opposition member Barzilai's critique applied equally well to Minister Barzilai.

“A classic performance”

In 1958 Knesset Member Ben-Aharon, in the session of the Central Committee of the Labour Party, criticized Israel's position at the UN.

This time he is appearing as a member of the government coalition:

The two issues that I wish to discuss are in my eyes *very classical* regarding the problems that we face. Precisely because I am not coming out against the two positive votes, neither regarding Algeria nor regarding disarmament ... I will now

speak of Najjar's [Israel's representative in the UN] speech. That speech is a classic example of how we defeat ourselves unnecessarily. I did not argue for not supporting France [God forbid anyone should accuse Ben-Aharon of supporting the aspirations for liberation of French colonies?], but I posit that there are limits. What did the representative of Israel do in his long speech? He exceeded the limits. I closely read the speech of Pinot [the French representative] and the speech of Najjar. I think it will be easier for us to identify with the speech of Pinot than the speech of Najjar. Pinot does not delve into the basis of the "philosophy" that because they have been in Algeria for 150 years, Algeria is surely theirs. He did not base the colonial regime of France and the right of France on that philosophy.

My friends, if we delve into such matters, which is definitely not required of us, then we will encounter a large number of arguments disputing our right to this land. I suggest that the Members examine that speech. I maintain that clearly it would not have been difficult for the representative of Israel to support France in this matter and it would have been advantageous to both sides for a number of salient and reasonable political, current, practical reasons, without getting us into a quarrel with the Algerians [happy is he who believes that!].

The second issue is disarmament. What is the objection about? Not the vote in favour of the motion of the 24 states. It is a good proposal, just and correct. But why was there a need to vote against the Japanese proposal? I fail to see the political wisdom in voting against. Realistic political behaviour would have been to abstain, because it would be morally impossible to oppose it in principle politically impossible to accept it. It was not a political proposal. It was a statement, in my opinion an emotional one, by a nation that was the first victim of the atomic bomb. The same applies to the dozens of proposals that were made for amendments to the motion of the 24 states, which means that they accepted the motion of the 24 states as a basis and the Indians proposed dozens of amendments. I will not enter into the details of every amendment. *The salient point is that we voted against all of these dozens of amendments.* I am not of the view – based on an examination of the issue itself – that there was no place for amendments within the American motion and the motion of the 24 states ... There is an Asian-African world and it rallied around

India regarding the proposals for amendments by voting in favour – the great majority adhered to the motion of the 24 states. Nothing required us to vote against all the amendments and to leave that motion of the 24 states untouched.

These things do not enhance the status of Israel and do not facilitate its efforts to reach out to these unfriendly states that supply arms to the Arabs and thereby needlessly help them to fight against us. I think that political wisdom, after we had decided to vote in favour of the motion of the 24 states, would have dictated that we select certain elements from the proposed amendments, so as not to appear before the world as adhering to everything that comes from the West. (*Yedi'ot*, bulletin of the Central Committee of Unity of Labour, 21/4/58)

This testimony is of great importance and interest, not only because it came from a leader of a Coalition party (who later became Minister of Transport), a man located at the sources of credible information, but mainly because the man supports Israel's pro-Western position at the UN *in principle*, whether regarding the question of Algeria or disarmament, and he demurs only from a *tactical* standpoint regarding lack of flexibility, regarding the lack of *camouflage* of that position. Ben-Aharon agrees that it is necessary to support France against the Algerians and to support the Western motions regarding disarmament – and even to reject the Indian amendments. All he asks is that Israel vote (for the purpose of camouflage and embellishment) in favour of a few of these amendment proposals.

The “philosophy” that the representative of Israel provides to France to justify its colonial regime, a “philosophy” that no representative of France itself relied on, is defined here as a “classic” position. The Israeli representation is in the habit of frequently providing ideological justifications to the West. Israel willingly took upon itself the role of supplying a philosophy to justify the demands of the West. Indeed – “out of Zion shall go forth the law.” (Isaiah 2:3)

Ben-Aharon's comments offer a glimpse into Israel's performance at the UN. This was only a small taste of the speeches that were delivered by representatives of the government (of which Mr. Ben-Aharon is a member) in dozens of committees of the international organization.

The American Carnegie Foundation invested a great deal of money in order to determine the opinion of the Israeli public regarding the position of the government in the UN; respected professors and important public and government figures in Israel conducted an in-depth study on that question. The study was published in English for use in the USA and its main conclusion was that the public agrees, for the most part, with the delegation's position.

The truth is that the great majority of citizens of Israel have no idea what their delegation is doing at the UN (apart from important speeches at the General Assembly) and how it votes. The more the representatives of Israel distance themselves from the public stages in Israel and draw nearer to the Western capitals, the different committees in the UN, to the "European Common Market", to important international gatherings, the more they express clear pro-Western positions in a way that is more Catholic than the Pope.

It is no wonder that the African "summit conference" in which the leaders of Morocco, Ghana, the United Arab Commonwealth, Libya, Guinea, Mali and Algeria participated, adopted, among others, the following resolution:

The Conference notes with dismay that Israel has always stood on the side of the imperialists on every occasion when there was a need to adopt an important resolution on vital problems relating to the African countries and especially regarding Algeria, Congo, and the nuclear tests, and therefore the Conference condemns Israel as an instrument in the service of colonialism, not only in the Middle East, but also in Africa and Asia. (UP agency, from Casablanca, 7/1/61)

Not only Nasser, but also Nkrumah, whom Israeli foreign policy courts so assiduously, signed that scathing document. The allegation that only representatives of a small part of the nations of Africa signed that document are not valid, as that small part represents the anti-colonialist tendency in Africa, and there is no doubt that it expresses the opinion of most of the residents of the Dark Continent. Nor are the claims to the effect that Nasser influenced Nkrumah and Modibu Keita valid, for the resolution states the facts. Did not Israel vote in the UN together with France and against Algeria in favour of the explosion

in the Sahara, and together with the Belgians against the policy of Lumumba? Is there no substance to these facts? Do they not suffice to convince even close friends of Israel that Israel's policy is pro-colonialist? Indeed, official foreign and security policy has drawn Israel into very distant battles and conflicts with nations we have not yet even heard of.

Sometimes Israel finds itself in a strange situation. In October 1952 Israel voted *against* putting the question of Tunisia and Morocco on the UN General Assembly's agenda, which was in keeping with the request of the American Secretary of State, Acheson. But at the last minute the US delegation changed its position and voted *in favour* of the discussion. With that tactic the USA was trying to acquire prestige and at the same time to prevent the discussion from taking place. Israel was tricked.

Who gives orders to the delegation?

Sometimes it happens that the vote of the Israeli delegation in the UN surprises even the Foreign Ministry itself. A good example of that is one vote on the question of China's acceptance in the UN. Up to 1953 Israel supported China's membership in the UN instead of Formosa [Taiwan], but in 1953 Israel voted against discussing the matter. In 1954, before the discussion on that matter in the General Assembly, *Davar* wrote (16/9/54) wrote that "In the present General Assembly Israel will apparently support the acceptance of the People's Republic of China without delay". In fact Israel voted *against* a discussion of the matter. In response to that, the Unity of Labour faction in the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Security Committee sent the following telegram to the chairman of the committee:

To the chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee M. Argov. We were astonished by the vote of the delegation of Israel against debate on the membership of the People's Republic of China in the UN; that position contradicts the declarations that we heard in the Committee and sabotages Israel's struggle to advance its vital interests on the international stage. We demand an urgent session of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

In other words, the delegation of Israel voted in a way opposite to what the leaders of Mapai had officially promised.

In reply to the telegram, the Foreign Ministry published an official announcement on 23/9/54:

The Israeli delegation was in possession of a briefing on how to deal with that problem, the main point of which was not to vote against accepting the People's Republic of China into the UN. The parliamentary situation that was in fact created did not exactly fit the assumptions regarding the expected evolution of matters on which the briefing was based. Under the new circumstances that were created the government came to the conclusion [independently?!] that it was to vote as it voted, which was not in conformity with the basic trend that had been established. It was not possible for the delegation to request new instructions before the vote. It should be added that the Foreign Ministry did in fact cast much doubt on the wisdom of the initiative of raising at this time the question of changing the representation of China in the UN, in view of the certainty that it would fail, but it did not intend at the outset to give expression to that doubt by means of a negative vote.

What was the “parliamentary situation that was created”? What were the “new circumstances” and how did the delegation “come to a conclusion”? We can find an answer to this question in an article in *Maariv* that deals with a different, much later vote, submitted by Israel at the UN:

It was well known in advance that there are in the UN about 20 countries that endeavour to vote, as much as possible, along the lines of the USA's vote. It is an open secret that, while these countries are not particularly interested in voting like the USA, American diplomacy has sufficient means to persuade them. (*Maariv*, 17/8/59)

Evidently the representatives of Israel in the UN had not on this occasion given sufficient notice to the Foreign Ministry of the American *diktat*. Nor do the isolated incidents in

which Israel did not vote together with the imperialist powers (and especially with the USA) attest to an independent foreign policy, for America occasionally gives its satellites a certain freedom, especially on issues that are not of primary importance.

According to America's "system" such "permission" is not to be withheld from independent states in the existing global regime. (M. A., *Davar*, 14/3/52)

"A rampart against Asia"

We have detailed here in brief the story of the noble political struggle of the government of Israel that was intended to refute the "tragically distorted" view of Israel as an agent of the West, as an emissary of enslavers and oppressors. Thus do wise leaders consolidate the position of a small state at the crossroads of two great continents that are liberating themselves from the foreign yoke.

The essence of their outlook can be expressed in the following comments, taken from an article in *Haaretz* about M. Dayan:

In his [Dayan's] opinion, the Jewish nation – and especially the Israeli branch of it – has a mission: it must be a rock in this part of the world, an extension of the Western world, on which the waves of Nasserite Arab nationalism will be smashed. (Schweitzer, "Moshe Dayan – between leadership and isolation", *Haaretz*, 12/12/58)

Incidentally, Dayan is not the first who envisioned that idea. Back in 1896 the father of political Zionism wrote in the draft of his program:

Palestine is our ever-memorable historic home. The very name of Palestine would attract our people with a force of marvellous potency. If His Majesty the Sultan were to give us Palestine, we could in return undertake to regulate the whole finances of Turkey. We should there form *a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism*. We should as a neutral

State remain in contact with all Europe, which would have to *guarantee our existence*. (Theodore Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 1896. Translated from the German by Sylvie D'Avigdor. Translation published by the American Zionist Emergency Council, 1946. Emphasis ours)¹⁴

The “rampart” that Herzl spoke of is reminiscent of the walls of Jericho. The Asians and Africans – the “barbarians” – have already blown the trumpets and most of the wall has already fallen. It will be noted that the previous attempt to create an “extension of the Western world”, an “outpost of civilization in the face of the barbarians” in the Holy Land, ended badly, as we know, with the fall of Frankish Acre on 19/5/1291. Only archeological traces of it remain.

¹⁴ English text accessed online – trans. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/25282/25282-h/25282-h.htm>

Chapter 5

Reprisal Actions

“A little more”

The ceasefire lines that separate Israel from its neighbours were never completely quiet. Illegal crossing of the lines, damage to property and spilling of blood are everyday occurrences.

There is no doubt that some of the incidents on both sides of the lines were not the result of planning or direct initiative from above, but rather the consequence of the general instability of the situation. The fact that the ceasefire lines are 591 kilometres long in total speaks for itself. Along the length of these 591 kilometres, on both sides, soldiers have been stationed since 1949 in positions and fortifications, with their fingers on the triggers of their rifles; every night patrols cover both sides of the line and penetrate (either intentionally or not) to the other side.

These incidents became so routine that no one in Israel saw it as particularly extraordinary when a military entertainment troupe turned H. Hefer's song “The Patrols” into a popular anthem. The song includes the words: “*We mark our borders / with our feet / and sometimes surreptitiously / our feet cross a little more*”. No one in Israel saw anything remarkable in these lines.

Sometimes a soldier opens fire deliberately or by mistake, with or without an order; and in consequence, volleys are exchanged or a local battle breaks out that may last several hours and cause fatalities and injuries on both sides.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees are situated along the length of the ceasefire lines; their houses, fields, property and sometimes even part of their families are located inside Israeli territory. There is therefore an unending wave of infiltration, and it is nearly impossible to stop it.

In the first years after the end of the 1948 war, Arab refugees would return every night to harvest their crops and pick the fruits and vegetables that they had planted before the outbreak of hostilities. To this very day many of them cross from one side to the other in order to visit their families, thereby endangering their lives from either one side or the

other: it must be assumed that in the dark of night the patrols do not hesitate to open fire on any suspicious figure.

More than once, Israeli youths have risked their lives with adventurous trips across the border, and the Israeli authorities seem unable to stop them. In addition, there is a continuous flow of smuggling from Israel to neighbouring countries and vice-versa, as well as smuggling between Arab states through Israeli territory. There is also infiltration for the purpose of robbery, theft of agricultural equipment, livestock and crops. Hardly a night passes without shooting, but most of the time these incidents do not reach the press and they do not merit headlines and frightful photographs.

The focus of tensions shifts from place to place

Border incidents occur with varying frequency. There were years that were quieter and years that were less quiet, and from time to time the centre of gravity of the tensions shifts from place to place: from the ceasefire line with Jordan to the Gaza Strip area, from the Gaza Strip to the Syrian border and so on.

In his speech in the Knesset on 2 January 1956 Ben-Gurion gave the following numbers on victims of infiltration:

In 1951 137 citizens of Israel became casualties, killed or wounded by these groups of murderers, and of them, only 111 by groups from Jordan. In 1952 the number of casualties rose to 147, of which 114 were inflicted just by groups from Jordan. In 1953 the number of casualties reached 162. Of these, 124 were inflicted by groups from Jordan alone. In 1954 Egypt began to compete with Jordan in these acts of murder and the total number of casualties rose to 180, of which 117 were inflicted by Jordanians, 50 by Egyptians (in the previous year there had been only 26 Egyptian attacks). In 1955 Egypt took the lead. Of the 258 casualties inflicted by bands of murderers, only 37 were caused by attacks by people coming from Jordan and 192 were caused by Egyptian groups that were especially organized by the Egyptian tyrant, under the name of "*Fedayeen*," the role of which at the beginning had been to fight the English during the conflict at the Suez Canal and when that

conflict ended, the gangs of killers were transferred to the Gaza Strip. (*Knesset Records 19/672*)

These numbers, despite their one-sidedness (they do not include the casualties on the other side), give an idea about the movement of the focus of tensions in various locations. Clearly such movement can be only the result of initiative and planning, and its causes are mainly political. Border incidents resulting from political planning are a very widespread phenomenon in many parts of the world.

It sometimes transpires that state A is interested in initiating incidents on its border with state B in order to apply pressure on B through a show of force, or in order to acquire a pretext for war, or with the purpose of diverting public opinion among its own citizenry (or that of B) from other matters, and so on. For that purpose, A has no need to actually send military personnel into the territory of B. It can concentrate large forces inside its own territory, and the tensions will grow immediately. Sometimes even much less will suffice: if two or three of A's tanks patrol back and forth in the proximity of the border with their guns pointed at B's military positions, the latter will be put on a state of alert and then even the sound of a falling leaf could produce a rain of shots and even a real battle.

The causes of the incidents

The accepted opinion in Israel is that it is the leaders of the Arab states who are inflaming the tension, which they need in order to divert their subjects' attention.

... the Arab states, which still live under Medieval conditions, in which health and wealth are the inheritance of only a few, are not dependent on economic development, their farmers, from whose labour the public lives, do not go into the army, and their masses, due to the fanaticism that burns in their hearts, are liable to welcome the brandishing of swords. We need peace and security for the rebirth of our nation, but their leaders preferred external adventures to dissuade the oppressed

from rising up against the regime. (M. Katan, *Toledot ha-yehudim* [History of the Jews], p. 229. Hebrew)

Thus instructs a school history textbook for the upper grades. According to that analysis, Israeli action on the border constitutes simple self-defence and vigilance.

In the words of Ben-Gurion:

The government of Israel is prepared as before to adhere faithfully to the ceasefire agreements in all their details, in their language and spirit; but that duty also applies to the other side. No agreement that is breached by the other side will be binding on us. If the ceasefire lines are opened on the other side to terrorists and killers, they will no longer be closed to defenders and guardians. If our rights are affected by acts of violence on land or sea, we will maintain our freedom of action to defend our rights in the most effective way. (*Knesset Records*, 2/11/55)

An official formulation of the “activist line” can be discerned in these words. The prominent active manifestation of that line (apart from “Operation Sinai”) was the military actions that were initiated by the Israeli side: mostly raids that were conducted under the cover of darkness – but sometimes also shelling – on targets on the other side of the border.

“Watchdog”

According to the official version (and that is the version that is accepted by a substantial part of the residents of Israel) these actions were always a response to acts by the other side and hence were known as “*reprisal actions*”. The “reprisal actions” were numerous in the period from the beginning of 1955 up to the Suez war, but there were also actions in previous years and one action was carried out in 1960.

Even if we accept the official version and agree that the reprisal actions were acts of self-defence (albeit active defence), we should still examine their political aspect. When a

military force of company-strength or more, with the backing of armour, artillery and sometimes even aircraft, goes into action across the border; it means that the action was planned well in advance. The one who decided on it was not the local commander, nor even the Chief of Staff, but higher authority: the political echelon. But no politician in our era can give the “green light” to military action on such a scale without thoroughly considering the political ramifications that it is likely to create. That is all the more true of a small state, that is not economically self-sufficient and that is dependent on loans and grants from abroad. In chapter 3 we saw how the Western powers sometimes intervened in order to stop Israeli activities that they did not approve of. Therefore, when they decide on a reprisal action, even if its goal is purely militarily defensive, it is necessary to pay attention to the timing and the choice of target, so that they are politically appropriate. In the language of partisans of the activist line: it is necessary to choose the *opportune moment*. Such an “opportune moment” can come when one of the Powers, or some of them, are interested in applying pressure on one of the Arab states neighbouring Israel and for that reason are willing to turn a blind eye to Israeli actions or to content themselves with a mere verbal denunciation.

But does this adequately summarize the political aspect of the reprisal actions? In an article under the heading “The whore from cities by the sea and we – thoughts on the eve of Rosh ha-Shana¹⁵ 1951 (5712)”, the editor of *Haaretz*, Gershom Schocken, wrote:

... The second motivation of the West in providing us with financial support is the fact that the West is not particularly happy about its relations with the other states in the Middle East. The feudal regimes in these states are so compelled to take into consideration nationalist movements (secular and religious) that sometimes they have a definite leftist social tint, to the degree that these states are no longer willing to place their natural resources at the disposal of Britain and America or to permit them to use their countries as military bases in the event of war. Indeed the governing circles in the countries of the Middle East know that in the event of a social revolution or Soviet occupation their fate will be liquidation, but the immediate fear of the assassin’s bullet overcomes for the moment a fear that is not

¹⁵ Jewish new year – trans.

tangible, of annexation to the Communist world. All these states are militarily weak; Israel proved its military strength in the War of Independence against the Arab states and for that reason a certain strengthening of Israel is convenient for the Western powers in order to maintain the political balance of power in the Middle East. According to this analysis, *Israel is destined to play the role of a kind of watchdog. It is not to be feared that it will implement an aggressive policy towards the Arab states if it is in clear opposition to the will of America and Britain. But if on some occasion the Western powers prefer, for whatever reason, to look the other way, you can depend on it that Israel will be prepared suitably to punish one or more of its neighbouring states, the lack of courtesy of which towards the West has transgressed the boundaries of what is permissible.* (Haaretz, 30/9/51. Emphasis ours)

These loaded words were written long before the major reprisal actions took place, and more than three years before the start of the large-scale chain of military raids that culminated in “Operation Sinai”. They signal the possibility that in certain cases, political considerations (such as applying pressure on an Arab country to prevent it from transgressing the boundaries of “courtesy” towards the West) were not purely *secondary* considerations.

This possibility is not implausible, especially in light of the fact that Israel’s leaders do not see a contradiction between Western interests in the Middle East and those of Israel. We already know that they place their hopes on the perpetuation of Western influence in this region, because in their eyes Israel is the “eastern edge of Europe,” an “outpost of the West”. We know as well that in their political declarations (especially from the UN podium) they placed themselves on the side of the Western powers and against those who are liberating themselves from the Western yoke. We must, therefore, examine to what extent the thesis that Mr. Schocken raised was true: to what extent the “reprisal actions” contained an expression of the proimperialist political position of the government of Israel.

“French bombings”

The first major reprisal action was carried out on 5/4/51 against Syria. An IDF spokesman announced the next day:

Yesterday the Israeli air force carried out forceful reprisal action in Syria by bombing positions of the Syrian army and armed local armed Arabs in the demilitarized zone, who yesterday murdered 7 Israeli policemen in cold blood. The operation was successful.

Israel claimed that the Syrians had penetrated into its territory, whereas the Syrians claimed the opposite and lodged a complaint with the Security Council. An Israeli journalist telegraphed from New York, regarding the impression that this action created abroad:

Israeli representatives here find themselves being asked more and more frequently: what will the world come to if everyone uses planes and bombs in response to border incidents? The perception that Israel is more mature than its neighbours has been refuted by the childish and ostentatious deployment of a small number of airplanes. Israel's representatives themselves wonder if the brains back home thought about what would be the consequences of the bombing when in an incident like this we request airplanes and other weapons [hard to believe that they did not think of that!]. Mr. Ben-Gurion's speech caused anger in Washington, since Israel opposed the bombing of Manchuria even though it had voted with the majority in the UN, in favour of the proposal to declare China an aggressor; but for all that, Israel undertook a similar action when Israel decided that the Syrians were aggressors. These actions also violate the hope that Israel will one day be accepted into the family of nations of the Middle East, even if that day is far away, especially since this bombing was different from every other action it could have carried out, in that it was dramatic and will be remembered for a long time. This matter brings

to mind the consequences of similar French bombings in Arab countries. (A. Gelblum, Haaretz, 11/4/51)

It turns out that not everyone thought that bombing was an appropriate response to the Syrians' actions: even if we assume that a reprisal action was called for; clearly the specific *form* chosen for the action was particularly dramatic. Does that drama indicate that political motivations were also behind the action? Of course it is hard to answer that question with certainty. On the one hand, we have circumstantial evidence from the UP correspondent in Beirut, who reported that "it is clear that the border incident strengthened the government of Syria under the leadership of Khaled al-Azm, the position of which was very unstable since its establishment at the beginning of April, due to lack of support from the majority party." We have seen already that at that precise time (beginning of 1951), Israel abandoned the stance of "non-alignment" and switched over to overt support for the policies of the West. The government of Khaled al-Azm too was pro-American. On the other hand, it is known that the Americans responded negatively to the incident.

The incidents with Syria continued intermittently through April and May, at the same time that Ben Gurion visited the United States. Israel's reply at the time to Syria's complaint to the Security Council was not to lodge a counter-complaint (as was done afterwards, in order to avoid a one-sided discussion of the complaints of the other side); but an appeal to the foreign ministries of the Western powers that they remove the issue from the agenda and mediate between the combatants. Even though such mediation was in keeping with the principle laid down in the "Tripartite Declaration", the West rejected the proposal. Of course it cannot be known for certain if the negative reply in Washington was not mere lip-service; it can be assumed that the American politicians were secretly happy with the Israeli action, but condemned it verbally in order to prove to the opponents of the government in Syria that they could find protection from Israel's strength through rapprochement with the USA. It is indeed a cynical and hypocritical game, but not too cynical and hypocritical for politicians of the neo-colonialist school. And the fact that G. Schocken's article, from which we quoted above, was written a few months *after* the bombing throws a certain light on the affair.

“Our public does not hear”

The next action that we must consider is the attack on the “al-Bureij” refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, which was carried out on 28/8/53. *Haaretz* responded to it in an editorial:

The Egyptians alleged that 19 refugees were killed, among them 7 women and 4 children, and 18 were injured by Israelis in the refugee camp in the Gaza area. An IDF spokesman denied that the Israeli army had a hand in it. The ceasefire committee that dealt with the problem heard the claims of the two sides. It condemned Israel for violating the ceasefire agreement, but did not accuse the IDF; rather it spoke of “armed people who came from Israeli territory”. That is all that we know. The Israeli authorities have clammed up, and see no need at this time to publish the ceasefire committee’s decision. That decision became known to the Israeli public, to the extent that it became known, from Arab sources. Most newspapers did not publish it, and if they published at all, they contented themselves with a few lines in the inside pages. We are still contending with the impact of the murder of the five on Jordanian territory [the reference is to five Israeli hikers], whereas on the other side of the border – and all over the world, we fear – they will hear with shock that a Jewish hand killed miserable refugees, including many women and children. We speak of the Arab Legion’s barbaric treatment of youths who were innocently hiking; they cry out in anger over the Jewish cruelty. We base our claims on facts, and they do likewise. But the trouble is, our public hears nothing but flimsy rumours about the grave allegations that are made against Israel because of incidents of that kind, and they for their part do not know about our profound bitterness because of their actions. We weep over our youths who fell in an untimely way and we exhibit an alarming indifference to the Arab mothers who cry over the deaths of their children; they cry over their losses and rejoice over victims on our side. Each side has a one-sided and distorted picture. Every incident heightens the tensions. We harshly denounce the Legion and in the Gaza Strip the masses demonstrate and demand revenge on Israel. Under

such circumstances, how can peace ever come to our divided region? Is this not an appalling and terrifying situation? Whatever happened in the Gaza Strip, whatever the reasons were; to the degree that we act as the Arabs do, the mounting atmosphere of hatred is liable to increase ever more and to incite nation against nation. But the allegation that the Arabs too act as we do does nothing to justify our behaviour. For after all, we take pride in a vastly higher level of culture than our backward neighbours, and it is incumbent upon us, for our own sake and for the sake of our consciences, to learn that injustice done by us is still injustice and that the death of her children hurts the heart of an Arab mother just as it hurts the heart of a Jewish mother. It is true that we are fighting to defend our lives and our existence in the face of threats and destruction, and such circumstances are not conducive to the fulfillment of humane commandments, but our status as a civilized nation compels us: we want to build our State on the bases of honesty and justice. (*Haaretz*, 2/9/53)

From this unusual excerpt we see that the Israeli press systematically suppresses every incident likely to lead to the conclusion that Israelis too shares responsibility for the creation of tensions along the ceasefire lines, and that Israeli actions do not always constitute “reprisal”. *Haaretz* reports here on mass demonstrations in the Gaza Strip demanding revenge on Israel, whereas Ben-Gurion announced (as quoted at the beginning of this chapter) that in 1954 the number of Israeli victims at the hands of Egypt rose, both in fatalities and injuries to 50 as against 26 in 1953. What will we say if the Egyptians claim that these crimes constitute reprisal and revenge for the Israeli attack? In our view there can be no justification for the crimes of the Egyptians – but what justification is there for the Israeli attack?

“A foolish and fantastical account”

The following action by Israel is much better-known to the public than the attack on al-Bureij. We refer to the massacre that was carried out on 14 October 1953 in Kfar Qibya in Jordan [in the West Bank – trans.]. About 50 civilians (including women and children)

were killed and many were wounded in that action. In his speech of 19/10/53 on “*Kol Israel*” [radio] Ben-Gurion set out to justify the action and to attribute the responsibility for the spilt blood to the government of Jordan:

The settlements of the border zone in Israel have shown much restraint for years while they have been targets for these murderous attacks. They justly demanded that their government protect their lives, and the government of Israel distributed weapons to them and trained them to defend themselves. But the armed forces on the other side of the Jordan River did not stop their criminal attacks, until the patience of some of the border zone settlements ran out after the murder of a mother and her two daughters in Kfar Yahud, and last week they attacked Kfar Qibya on the other side of the border, which had been one of the main centres of the bands of murderers.

... every one of us regrets and is sorry about the blood that was spilt, in whatever place, and none is more sorry than the government of Israel if the blood of innocents was shed in the reprisal action in Qibya. But all the responsibility lies with the government of Transjordan, which had tolerated, and thereby encouraged attacks of murder and plunder by armed groups from its country against the residents of Israel for years on end. *The government of Israel emphatically rejects the foolish and fantastical account according to which 600 men of the IDF participated in the action against Kfar Qibya. We conducted a careful accounting which definitely established that not a single military unit, however small, was missing from its base on the night of the attack on Qibya ...* (Emphasis ours)

In January 1960 the government published a pamphlet called “Upon your departure and your arrival”, on behalf of the Hasbara Administration of the government of Israel. The pamphlet was intended to serve as “a guide that includes succinct information about the State,” and in its opening words the Hasbara Administration expresses the hope that it will help citizens of the State who are going abroad “to represent Israel properly in the world”. But on page 20 of the pamphlet, we are surprised to read:

An entire series of IDF reprisal actions – in the north (Operation Kinneret), on the Jordanian border (Qibya and Husan) and on the Egyptian border (Gaza, Khan-Younis and Kuntilla) – struck at centres from which the Fedayeen were sent, or from which fire was opened on Israel. (Emphasis ours)

At least one of these two possibilities is true: either the government Hasbara Administration is distributing “foolish and fantastical accounts”, or the Prime Minister is knowingly lying.

Regarding Ben-Gurion’s speech, it should also be noted that it is not accurate to say that everyone was sorry about the blood that was spilled: when the Knesset Member Ariav (General Zionists) announced: “...the Foreign Minister correctly indicated that this is a distressing incident, that the entire government, and I am sure the entire public, are sorry about what happened and about the way it happened”, he was interrupted by Knesset Member Bader (Herut) with the cry: “Not me!” (see Knesset Records vol. 15 p. 272, 30/11/53).

No one with a shred of humanity will ask whether the revolting massacre at Qibya was indeed an appropriate act of “reprisal”, even for a terrible and shocking crime like the murder of a mother and her two children. To be sure, the action did not have much value: from the numbers that Ben-Gurion quoted in the speech that was cited at the beginning of the chapter; we see that in 1954 the number of Israeli casualties inflicted by Jordanian bands was only 5.6% smaller than the corresponding number from 1953. Statistically, that decline can be seen as merely coincidental. Another comparison is more instructive: according to an official UN publication (annex to the report of the chief of staff of the UN observers from 1/3/54) we discover that in the quarter from 25/11/53 to 24/2/54 (that is, one month to four months after the Qibya raid) Israel reported 12 victims (killed and wounded) as a consequence of Jordanian attacks, a number that is *precisely identical* to that for the preceding quarter. Moreover, in the quarter 25/11/53 to 24/2/54 Israel reported 315 Jordanian violations of the ceasefire accord, compared with 36 in the previous quarter.

Regarding the political background of the Qibya raid, we quote the opinion of an influential French newspaper:

... In every forum we are witness to the complaints of the Israeli nation that it has been left on its own, isolated from the rear by Arab “encirclement”, and is bitterly disappointed by a manifest change in the position of the United States towards Israel. And that change is the fruit of the famous tour of J. F. Dulles in the countries of the Middle East.

... It is unlikely that Israel will consent to wait passively for the moment in which the balance in the Middle East is tipped in favour of its neighbours. Hence the recent action (Qibya) the basis for which was evidently twofold: the aspiration to draw the attention of the Western world to the gravity of the situation, and to compel the United States again to change its position in the face of the danger of a renewed conflagration. (*Le Monde*, 21/10/53)

This explanation is equally fitting regarding the attack on al-Bureij that preceded the Qibya action by a few weeks. The two actions took place in a period after Dulles’ tour, during which relations between the USA and Israel noticeably worsened. If indeed *Le Monde* was correct in its assessment regarding the political motivations for the Qibya massacre, then the action failed to achieve its goals. American policy did not change, the Security Council condemned Israel most harshly (24/10/53), and representatives of the Western powers even added a separate condemnation of their own, rejecting Ben-Gurion’s allegations. Israel’s name was stained in the eyes of Asians and Africans, and Arab hatred grew.

Israeli policy had sustained a serious blow. A month after the raid Ben-Gurion, the representative of the activist approach, resigned from all his roles in the government and retired to Sde Boker. Even though the leaders of Mapai emphatically denied any link between his retirement and the Qibya action, it appears that *Kol Ha’am* was right when it wrote: “Ben-Gurion departed with the mark of Qibya on his forehead.”

Churchill's praise

The response of the West to the Qibya attack so angered the partisans of the pro-Western line in Israel, that in their fury they made interesting revelations during the Knesset deliberations on the affair. Y. Kesse (Mapai) said:

... thus we must say clearly to England: it is setting itself up again as the main perpetrator of a policy that is hostile to us, and in its way it is doing so with machinations and deceit [Mr. Kesse suddenly recalls the British role in the war of 1948!]. A few weeks ago, when the quarrel between Egypt and England reached its height, we heard the prime minister of Britain, Mr. Churchill, utter great praise for the State of Israel, the young heroine that had achieved independence. As he praised us, Mr. Churchill knew very well all the details on our relations with the Arab states and the manner in which we won our independence. And so, when the conflict with Egypt heats up they generously praise the State of Israel, and when they want to conquer the hearts of the Arab states they threaten them with Israel's military strength [!] and when they want to prop up their interests in Jordan, the British foreign minister, Mr. Anthony Eden, places himself at the head of the attack against the State of Israel.

Such words are fraught with meaning when they are spoken by a strongly pro-Western politician like Y. Kesse, who concludes with the following comments:

Despite the bitter struggle between us and England and the USA, we will not despair and we will not choose the path of acts of despair. It is incumbent on us to distinguish well between the uncompromising struggle for our fateful interests and hasty and reckless actions the purpose of which is to burn bridges. The advice that we are periodically given after this or that failure, to burn our bridges to the Western states and to turn our eyes towards other, unknown horizons [unknown to Mr. Kesse!] – that advice we will not accept. (*Knesset Records* 15/300, 1/12/53)

About five months after the Qibya raid, the country was shocked by a cruel murder. On 17 March 1954 an Israeli bus was attacked at Maaleh Akrabim and 12 of its passengers were killed. At the time, it was reported that the tracks of the attackers led to the ceasefire lines with Jordan. The identity of those who sent them remains shrouded in heavy fog to this day. Twelve days later, the IDF attacked the Jordanian village Nahalin and caused the deaths of 10 Arabs. After another ten days, the Arab village Hussam was attacked.

The situation in Jordan

It can be stated with absolute certainty that from 1951 to the end of 1954 the ceasefire line between Israel and Jordan was the focus of tensions and border incidents. It is not redundant, therefore, to recall briefly the events that took place within Jordan itself during that period.

Despite the government's efforts to appoint people from the West Bank to senior positions in the administrative apparatus and the diplomatic service, complaints of discrimination against residents of the occupied area (the West Bank), and of neglect of their interests, did not cease. At the end of May 1952 20 deputies in the legislature – 16 of them from the West Bank – submitted a strongly-worded memorandum to the Prime Minister in which they protested about the widespread use of emergency regulations, restrictions on the operations of parties, the imposition of severe censorship on the press, restriction of freedom of association and assembly, and so on. In July of the same year, 15 of 20 deputies from the West Bank convened in Nablus and sent a new memorandum to the Prime Minister protesting against the locating of most of the development projects and "Section 4" works east of the Jordan River, against favouritism towards natives of Transjordan in appointments to government jobs, against discrimination in the recruitment of Palestinians, and especially refugees, in the army and the police, against pervasive bribery and protectionism, etc. The tensions did not let up even when governments were changed. On 30/9/52 Abu al-Hoda set up his second government, and after 7 months (6/5/53) Fawzi al-Mulki. Anger over the country's dependence on Britain

was such that demands were heard for the dismissal of Glubb Pasha and for the cancellation of the treaty with Britain. Faced with this pressure from public opinion, the rulers emphasized the country's high degree of dependence on Britain, the "provider of sustenance" to the Arab Legion and the guarantor of the security of the country (and its economy); but at the same time they claimed that they could weigh other options – if the Arab states would themselves assume the expenses of the Kingdom's defence. With that conjecture, the first repercussion of the weakening of Britain's position in Jordan was heard. In the middle of June 1954, King Saud visited the Kingdom of Jordan. His plans to support the government with some of the dollars that American oil companies channelled into his coffers, and his efforts (despite the traditional tensions between the Hashemite and the Saudi dynasties) to distance it from Iraq and to strengthen its ties to the Egyptian-Saudi bloc marked a new stage in Jordan's history. These pressures from various quarters were reflected as well in the frequent changes of Jordanian governments. From April 1950 (date of the annexation of the West Bank) to the spring of 1954, seven governments rose and fell: the government of Saud al-Mufti (formed on 12/4/50), the second government of al-Mufti (14/10/50), of Samir al-Rifa'i (4/12/50), of Tawfiq Abu al-Hoda (30/9/52), of Fawzi al-Mulki (6/5/53) and the second government of Abu al-Hoda (3/5/54). On 22 June 1954 King Hussein dissolved the legislature, in order to avoid a defeat by the government of Abu al-Hoda, which was about to ask for a confidence vote. New elections were announced with the hope of finding some way to ensure "stability and order" in the Kingdom of Jordan. (A. Cohen, *Temurot politiyot ba-'olam ha-'aravi* [Political changes in the Arab world], p. 138. Hebrew)

We will see that not only the Israeli-Jordanian border, but also the political situation in Jordan itself was stormy in the years 1951-1954.

Who is interested, and in what

The correlation between the internal situation in the Arab states on the one hand, and the border tensions and reprisal actions on the other, is well-known. To many people, the explanation for this phenomenon is simple: the Arab rulers, in their desire to divert the anger of the masses in their countries, provoke Israel, create tensions along the cease-fire lines and channel the struggle from within to the exterior. This explanation was undoubtedly partly true in certain cases. But is it the *whole* truth? Has the government of Israel been indifferent towards the internal changes in the Arab countries? Was it all the same to Israel what government emerged in Jordan? Did it not have an interest in supporting certain factions and thwarting others within every Arab country, and especially Jordan? Was it indifferent to the question of the evacuation of Britain's armies from the Near East? Indeed the very existence of the *status quo* is to an overwhelming extent dependent both on the internal situation in Jordan (and especially on its sovereignty over the West Bank) and on Western influence in the region (the declaration of the three Powers). It was not on a whim that the government of Israel expressed its dissatisfaction with Britain's evacuation from Jordan and the bases along the Suez Canal.

The IDF actions against Jordan since the annexation of the West Bank to the present day have consistently elicited the following responses:

1. The King and the Arab Legion appear as the leaders of the residents of the West Bank (who lack an independent army of their own) and prove to them with words and deeds the importance of their finally reconciling themselves to the annexation. The raids have therefore had the effect of enhancing the cohesiveness of the rickety kingdom, something that the government of Israel had an interest in, for it meant the stabilization of the *status quo*.
2. Britain declares its willingness to defend Jordan from Israel (in accordance with the existing treaties between the two kingdoms) in the event of need, and the West's clients in Jordan are thereby supplied with "proof" of the vital nature of the British presence, against the claims of anti-imperialist circles.

3. Iraq, whose king was connected to the king of Jordan by family and political ties, would express willingness to deploy its army in Jordan in order to “defend” it from Israel, and incidentally from the popular and anti-British forces that were on the rise, especially in the West Bank. That kind of “emergency substitute” for British “help” was detested and rejected by the residents of Jordan even in the most challenging times. Unlike the first two responses, the threat to deploy the Iraqi army in Jordan was not usually the preference of the government of Jordan, especially as Iraq had not signed a cease-fire agreement with Israel and therefore did not recognize the *status quo* even in the most provisional-technical way.

Those who are naïve may think that the desire for revenge served as the sole or main pretext in the meetings at which the IDF raids were decided on; but policies are usually not determined by the desire for blood-revenge, but from political considerations. It is no exaggeration to say that Ben-Gurion and the Hashemite house essentially were natural allies, “friendly enemies”, who, despite all the belligerent rumblings, were linked by a shared interest in maintaining the *status quo* that was created after the 1948 war; and that the Israeli reprisal actions usually came as “manna from heaven” to Hussein.

There is a British base – but there is no passage

An episode different in its nature than the reprisal actions, but similar to them in political background, was the episode of the ship “Bat-Galim”.

Since the War of Independence, Egypt had prevented Israeli ships from crossing the Suez Canal, despite the fact that on 1 September 1951 the Security Council ordered Egypt to lift the closure. Regarding cargo transported to and from Israel in ships flying non-Israeli flags, the situation was sometimes different.

At that time the Canal was under British control. The Suez Canal Company was under British-French ownership and a large British force was deployed in bases along the Canal. Britain for its part made no effort to ensure free maritime passage. For many years

the Egyptian people waged a bitter and prolonged struggle to eject the British army from Egypt in general and from the Canal Zone in particular. Special suicide squadrons (*Fedayeen*) were established in order to wage guerrilla war against the British army, and they fulfilled that role with notable success. The struggle to remove British troops was a popular one, which included nearly all sectors of Egyptian society. A demonstration by a *million* residents of Cairo on 14/11/51 demanded immediate and unconditional British withdrawal. The struggle for evacuation, during which thousands of Egyptians were killed, was one of the main factors that engendered the Egyptian Revolution (23/7/52).

Israeli policy was to oppose the evacuation of British forces from the Suez Canal Zone, but many in the country (including even staunch partisans of the West) cast doubt on the wisdom of that position. George Flash (General Zionists) warned in the Knesset on 4/2/52:

I am sure that the transformations that took place in Egypt during those days also came as a surprise to many who were responsible for our foreign policy [the reference is to the bloody confrontations between the British army and the Egyptian police in the struggle for the evacuation of the Canal bases - authors]. Otherwise I could not understand why none other than the Foreign Minister himself and other personages in our midst saw fit, during this interim period, when relations between Egypt and England got much worse, to come out with frequent declarations against Egypt. I am of the view that we did not have constantly to be expressing opinions, that it is better to leave the declarations to others; because these same actors who had an interest in what we said being said [Britain?] will find a way to resolve matters, even without us, if that is convenient for them. (*Knesset Records* 11/1180)

What Mr. Flash has difficulty understanding is one of the characteristic features of Israeli policy: the tendency always to come out in defence of lost Western causes. Over a year later George Flash said again:

A few words about the Suez Canal: there has been a tendency to confuse to problems, which in my opinion should be distinguished from each other: the

question of free passage through the Canal and the question of the base in the Canal Zone. In recent months we have issued announcements and declarations on the subject that perhaps we would have done better not to have made, for we do not know at the moment how anything will turn out and what will be the results of the negotiations that are taking place, nor do we know to what extent the question of the bases is linked to the question of passage, which is of primary interest to us. We see today that there is a base, but there is still no free passage [for Israeli ships through the Suez Canal – trans.]. (*Knesset Records* 15/6/53, 14/1592)

The Egyptian struggle for the evacuation of the Canal Zone reached a new stage after the revolution. On 27/7/54 an agreement on evacuation was initialled. The final signing was contingent on ratification by the legislatures of the two countries. In Britain the ratification met with intense opposition, especially from the Conservative backbenchers. It was at that very time that a small Israeli-flagged ship named “Bat Galim” was sent to the Suez Canal. It can be surmised that those who sent the “Bat Galim” assumed at the outset that the ship would not be permitted to pass through the Canal. The intention, therefore, was to use the expected detention of the ship to arouse public opinion and to make it more difficult to ratify the agreement. And indeed, many journalists in Britain eagerly seized on the ship’s detention (26/9/54). They covered the story extensively and used it to prove that control of the Canal should not be transferred to Egypt, since that would likely harm freedom of navigation. There was a great deal of hypocrisy in that position, because there was no freedom of navigation for Israel throughout all the years the British controlled the Canal. Of course that “powerful” pretext was of no use at all. Britain was no longer able to delay the evacuation. The agreement was signed less than three weeks after the detention of the ship and the final date of the evacuation was set for 1956. During that same period, tensions began to increase along the ceasefire line with Egypt (though it had not yet reached the dimensions of subsequent years)

Pursuit of an Israeli patrol

In the view of most international observers, a fateful turning point in the evolution of tensions on the Israel-Egypt ceasefire line, and in Israel-Arab relations in general, was the famous IDF raid on an Egyptian army camp in the Gaza Strip (28/2/55). The British experts G. Wint and P. Calvocoressi write in their book *Middle East Crisis* (Penguin, 1957) that:

... the raid, which took place in February 1955, is one of the most fateful dates in the history of the Middle East. For until that moment Egypt was less active against Israel than the other Arab countries; (until then) there were fewer incidents between Israel and Egypt than there were between Israel and Syria or Jordan. (p. 57)

And indeed, the action, in which 38 Egyptians and 8 Israelis were killed, was the first important link in the chain of events that led to "Operation Sinai". It is therefore worth examining in some detail. After the raid an IDF spokesman announced:

On Monday evening (28/2) a unit of the IDF was attacked near the Israeli-Egyptian ceasefire line facing Gaza City. A fierce battle broke out between the attacking Egyptian force and the Israeli unit, which took place on Israeli territory and extended into the territory of the Gaza Strip. The enemy force was repelled. After contact was broken our unit returned to its base. The unit sustained several casualties. (*Davar*, 2/3/55)

The Israeli delegation at the UN also issued a statement:

In an effort to divert the attention of the Egyptian and Arab public from its internal and external problems, the military dictatorship in Egypt recently escalated its aggressive policy against Israel. The penetration into Israeli territory by Egyptian units and armed bands for the purpose of murder and sabotage continued even yesterday, when an Egyptian unit crossed the Israeli border near the Gaza Strip. It encountered the resistance of a strong Israeli defence patrol and in the confrontation

that erupted the Egyptian soldiers were expelled across the border, pursued by an Israeli patrol. Egyptian forces sustained losses and the Israeli patrol also sustained casualties. (*Davar*, 2/3/55)

On 55/3/4 Israel lodged a complaint over the incident to the Security Council. At that time few Israeli citizens doubted the truth of the official version. But over four and a half years later the military correspondent of *Maariv* wrote the “first detailed story about the major reprisal action against the Egyptian *Fedayeen* base”, with pictures and diagrams. The article appeared (in two instalments: 2 and 11 October 1959) under the heading “a black arrow to the heart of the Gaza Strip” and describes the action of the night of 28 February 1955 in great detail, including names, exact times and command of the operation. A reading of this description establishes beyond a shadow of a doubt that no Egyptian penetration into the territory of Israel took place; rather, the opposite is the case. Before the beginning of the action – thus we read in the article – the paratroops commander A. said to his men:

We are going to attack [!] the Egyptian enemy. I am sure that we will carry out this action with success, just as we have carried out others. [Which others? Maybe those actions in which the army denied its participation?] There will be a battle [an Egyptian patrol had penetrated into the territory of Israel ...] but I believe that we will eliminate the Egyptian camp without many problems [the battle passed into the territory of Egypt ...]. Everyone will obey orders and will do what he has been charged with, etc., etc. (*Maariv*, 11/10/59)

When at dawn the unit returned to the kibbutz near to the Strip, it was greeted by the Chief of Staff, who apparently had been waiting to receive a detailed report on the “penetration into Israeli territory by Egyptian units”.

During an inspection that was conducted after the battle, the Chief of Staff read a letter from the Minister of Defence, in which the latter praised the paratroopers “for the wonderful skill in combat, planning and execution that were exhibited in this battle”

(*Maariv*, 11/10/59). The praises for the skill in combat and execution are understandable, but what are we to make of “planning” in an unexpected confrontation of an Israeli patrol with an “Egyptian force that penetrated into Israeli territory for the purpose of murder and sabotage”?

The article in *Maariv* was not denied by any source; no one tried to explain the contradiction between it and the official announcement of 1955. Everyone was relying on the same thing: *the public's short memory*. The action of 28 February was described in *Maariv* (2/10/59) as “The large-scale reprisal action against the Egyptian Fedayeen centre” and the military correspondent even speaks of “murderous incursions by his [Nasser's] *Fedayeen* into Israeli territory in the years that preceded our military action in Gaza”; but Ben-Gurion, in a speech that was quoted at the beginning of this chapter, claims that the *Fedayeen* crossed over into the Gaza Strip upon the conclusion of the Suez conflict, that is to say, only a few months before 28 February 1955. The truth of the matter is that even the term “*Fedayeen*” was not known to the vast majority of citizens of Israel when the raids were conducted against Gaza, as the first large-scale penetration of these units of killers into Israeli territory occurred *at the end of August* 1955, that is to say, half a year *after* the Gaza raid.

Gaza-Baghdad

We must now examine the political background of the raid of 28 February. On 17/2/55 Ben-Gurion returned to the government and took over the Defence portfolio. *Davar* then prominently published a news story from the *Daily Express*: “*Ben-Gurion forsakes the ploughshare to take up the sword*”. One may disagree about the first part of this claim, for after all Ben-Gurion never did much ploughing at Sde Boker, but rather pulled political strings; but it is beyond any doubt that the second part was a faithful reflection of reality.

On 24/2/55 the Baghdad Pact was signed. It was the first (and last) military alliance that the West succeeded in establishing with the participation of any Arab state in the framework of its global plans. Egypt declared that it was firm in its decision not to join the new bloc and even attacked it strongly.

On 28/2/55 the Israeli raid on Gaza took place. The dates 17, 24 and 28 February turned out to be highly significant: in that sequence can be traced the outline of the policy of “reprisal”.

The proximity between the Egyptian declaration against the Baghdad Pact and the raid of 28 February is consistent with the view that the editor of *Haaretz* had already expressed in 1951, according to which “Israel is destined to play the role of a kind of watchdog ... you can depend on it that Israel will be prepared suitably to punish one or more of its neighbouring states, the lack of courtesy of which towards the West has transgressed the bounds of what is permissible.” From the founding of the Baghdad Pact until its last day, the attitude of Arab states to that alliance was a reliable indicator of the degree of “their courtesy towards the West”.

The West did not delay in explaining to Egypt the lesson of the raid. In *Maariv* of 4/3/55 we read, in a report by the newspaper’s correspondent in Turkey, that “Turkey is trying to take advantage of the Gaza incident in order to prove to the Arabs that the time has come to unite under its leadership. The incidents have enhanced the Turks’ hopes of expanding the Turkish-Iraqi framework [the Baghdad Bloc] and for the weakening of Egypt’s position the matter”. And indeed, the raid produced much alarm in Egypt, the government of which hastened to turn to the Powers with a request for arms supplies. On 9/3/55 the government of the USA announced that it had stopped the delivery of arms to Egypt and to Israel, but it would be prepared to supply arms to Egypt for free *on the condition that the latter join a regional defence pact*. And on 13/3/55 the UP news agency announced from Cairo:

On 12/3/55, US ambassador in Cairo Henry Byroade met with Nasser and promised to provide him with weapons and to support Egypt “against Israel” on the condition that it change its attitude to the Turkey-Iraq alliance. On that condition the USA is prepared to promise a regular supply of weapons to Egypt on the basis of a permanent accord. The ambassador also promised the prime minister of Egypt that Israel would not be attached to a regional alliance.

The last promise is most typical of American policy. Equally typical is the fact that the Western powers joined in a unanimous condemnation of Israel in the Security Council. Thus are they able to take advantage of the snarling of the “watchdog” in order to threaten and pressure Egypt, and at the same time to throw a small stone at it and to look like “defenders of victims of aggression”. There is nothing new in this; and indeed we have already seen Y. Kesse complain that “when they want to conquer the hearts of the Arab states they threaten them with the military strength of the State of Israel and when they want to prop up their interests in Jordan, the British foreign Minister Mr. Anthony Eden takes his place at the head of the attack against the State of Israel.”

To be sure, to say that the policy of “reprisal” was in the service of the Western interests is not to say that the reprisal actions were executed at the specific request of the USA or another foreign state; but that they generally served in the hands of the West as an instrument of pressure on the neighbouring states. Israeli politicians were not ignorant of that fact; on the contrary, it played an important part in their calculations.

“Means of pressure”

After 28 February 1955 the tensions between Egypt and Israel still had not abated. The two sides complained nearly unceasingly of ceasefire violations; every day shots were fired, mines were laid and blood was spilt. The ceasefire committee would condemn the Egyptians and then the Israelis, but the situation continued to deteriorate.

Further deterioration in the situation along the Israeli-Egyptian ceasefire lines took place in August. Talks between the local commanders on the two sides conducted under the aegis of the Armistice Committee were stopped on 22/8/55 in the wake of a serious border incident in which exchanges of fire took place with small arms and mortars, Israeli settlements near the Gaza Strip were shelled and an Egyptian position was occupied by IDF forces. A few days after that, units of the “*Fedayeen*” penetrated deep into the territory of Israel and appalling acts of murder and sabotage were carried out. On 31 August, another large Israeli raid was carried out, this time on the Khan-Younis police, which claimed many victims. On 22 September Israeli forces moved into the demilitarized zone of Nitzana.

In the political arena at that time, American pressure on the Arab states, and especially on Egypt, to join the Baghdad Pact continued. One of the means of pressure was to strengthen the impression that the USA was about to sign a mutual defence treaty with Israel. News of ongoing negotiations on that matter kept coming in quick succession, along with openly-expressed explanations to the effect that:

Indirectly, if not directly, the Israeli-American negotiations are serving as an instrument of pressure in America's effort to persuade Arab states to join the Western bloc. Israel, which is asking to join the Western camp day and night, is providing leverage against the Arabs for the USA, without Israel itself deriving any benefit from its role in the whole diplomatic game. (*Haaretz*, 20/6/55, by its correspondent in New York)

Washington-Gaza, Cairo-Prague

Based on historical precedents and other considerations, the economic, political and military pressure on Egypt should have borne fruit; but this time the strap was pulled too tightly.

Politicians of the imperialist school (and their pupils in Israel) made a mistake that was very characteristic: they did not take into sufficient consideration the intense opposition of the Arab peoples to the Baghdad Pact, which embodied all that was hated about colonial control. Even if the government had wanted to submit to the pressure, it could not have done so, for it would immediately have lost all its prestige, which was derived overwhelmingly from the anti-imperialist policy that it conducted. For a leader like Nasser, all of whose strength came from the Arab nationalist movement, joining the Baghdad Pact would have been akin to political suicide. Western politicians believed that by strengthening Iraq and brandishing the military power of Israel they could force Egypt to change course, but the consequence was the opposite: Egypt turned to a different source for help: the Soviet Union and its ally Czechoslovakia.

On the other side, the establishment of the Baghdad Pact completed the Western encirclement of the Soviet Union and its allies, thus compelling them to seek to break out

of that encirclement by supporting the states located at the rear of the “northern tier” of the encirclement that oppose it. Encouraging states that are subject to Western influence to cross over to the neutral camp is one of the fundamental goals of Soviet foreign policy, but the Baghdad Pact imparted a special urgency to that goal regarding the states of the Middle East, Egypt first and foremost. Thus was born the Czech-Egyptian arms deal, which was signed and publicized at the end of September 1955.

There can be no doubt that the fateful raid of 28 February played a not insignificant role in motivating Egypt to seek arms from Czechoslovakia, as Nasser himself declared:

... it was Israel’s 1955 Gaza Strip raid, in which 38 of his soldiers were killed, that Nasser called “the turning point.” “Until that moment,” said Nasser later, “I felt the possibility of real peace was near.” He counterpunched. He had to have more arms, he said. (*Time*, 27 August 1956. “Egypt: the counterpuncher.”¹⁶)

As has been mentioned, after 28 February, Egypt immediately appealed for arms supplies not only from Czechoslovakia but from other countries as well. But as could have been foreseen, the government of the USA, in its reply (that was given on 9/3/55, and also at a meeting between Byroade and Nasser 12/3/55) conditioned its acquiescence to this request on Egypt’s joining the Baghdad Pact.

On 27 September 1955 Nasser announced on Radio Cairo the signing of the Czech-Egyptian deal, and he said, among other things:

We have read frequently in the American, British and French press that the Jewish army will be able to defeat the armies of all the Arab states. Then we said to the Western powers: if that is how you really feel, why do you prevent us from getting arms? But they always reverted to their old ways and to their conditions and the business about arms was always a sword held over our heads. The West kept threatening us that they would supply arms to Israel and prevent their supply to Egypt. Under such circumstances we decided to request from all the countries of the world to provide us with arms without restrictions. We promised that we would

¹⁶ Available on line: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,864098,00.html#ixzz1Z6htMucv>

not use these arms for aggressive purposes but for self-defence. We turned to the USA, France, Britain, the USSR, Czechoslovakia and others. From some countries we received answers that were wrapped in conditions, and we did not accept them, for we do not want to equip the army at the expense of our independence and freedom. We waited until we got word from Czechoslovakia that the latter was willing to supply arms to us in accordance with the needs of the Egyptian army and on a commercial basis. We immediately agreed to that proposal and last week we signed a commercial agreement for arms to be supplied to the Egyptian army. That accord permits Egypt to pay for these arms with Egyptian products like cotton. I am now aware of the agitation that has emerged in Washington because we succeeded in getting weapons without conditions. That agitation stems from the desire to continue to exercise their control and influence, which we are struggling to do away with.

...when I hear voices saying that this accord is the beginning of the penetration of Russian and foreign influence into the Middle East, I reply that this agreement, which is not wrapped in conditions and restrictions, is not the beginning of Russian penetration but of the end of the influence that controlled us for a long time.

Indeed, the Czech deal was a severe blow to Western policy in the Middle East. Significantly, the *New York Herald Tribune* (29 September 1955) wrote that “US Middle East strategy has sustained a serious setback”.

Following Nasser’s speech, George Allen, Deputy US Secretary of State for Middle East Affairs, was dispatched to Cairo, and after a time Henry Byroade was transferred from his post as US ambassador in Egypt. The shock was great.

The blow was not only in the fact that the pressure on Egypt had failed, but in the fact that in the Middle East, a region that was thought of as an exclusive Western sphere of interest, a new actor appeared on the scene and a precedent was set: from now on other Arab states would also be able to turn to that actor when needed.

The “Defence Fund” (defence stamp)

The uproar and the alarm that arose in Israel with the unveiling of the Czech deal are utterly indescribable. From the tone in the newspapers and the radio it seemed as though within a few days Egypt would attack Israel with its profusion of Czech arms and try “to throw the Jews into the sea”. Party spokesmen, and especially those of Herut and Unity of Labour, issued calls for war against Egypt before its army was able to take possession of the new weapons. Already on 4/10/55 *The New York Times* was quoting a senior American in Cairo who talked to the correspondent Kenneth Love and requested to that his name not be mentioned, to the effect that:

The USA understands Israel’s misgivings about an American-Soviet race to supply arms to Arab states. Washington believes that there is a possibility of “*preventive war*” by Israel to destroy the Egyptian army that is stationed in the Sinai area before the Arabs attain military superiority. The declared intention of the State of Israel to break the Egyptian blockade of the Eilat Gulf *next year* is likely to lead to such a development. (As reported in *The Jerusalem Post*. Emphasis ours)

An atmosphere of disaster and impending war prevailed in Israel. A “Defence Fund” was announced, and ordinary citizens contributed their last pennies towards the purchase of arms (afterwards, when the excitement passed, the government converted the Fund into a regular tax). “Arms for Israel” became the slogan of the period. They were ready to tear the Communists to shreds because they said that the Czech arms were not intended against Israel but rather would help to remove imperialism from the Middle East, which was consistent with Israel’s interests. The Prime Minister said of Czechoslovakia:

[Czechoslovakia] knows that the rulers of Egypt are buying these arms with one single purpose: to eradicate the State of Israel and its people. (*Knesset Records* 19/232, 2/11/55)

It must be pointed out that that feeling was shared by many in the public. But in the Knesset, among the emotional and somewhat hysterical speeches, it some details that shed a different light on the matter could also be heard:

I must say it openly: there is a degree of hypocrisy in the outcry that is heard from Washington and London over the shipments of communist arms to the effect that they will upset the balance of power between Israel and the Arab states. *Because the balance of power was upset the day that Britain sent the first Centurion (tank) to Egypt and on the day America began to send shipments of arms to Iraq worth a hundred million dollars. ... and if America began to send 100 million dollars' worth of equipment and arms to Iraq, it means that America declared in effect: I don't care if, with the help of these arms, the Arabs attack the State of Israel in order to erase it from beneath God's heaven ...*

The value of the arms that is flowing to Egypt from Czechoslovakia is about 70 million dollars, and the Western powers have decided to compensate Israel for the consignment of Soviet arms to Egypt, that is, to give more arms – to Iraq. (*Knesset Records 19/89 18/10/55. Emphasis ours*)

Surely these words were spoken by a left-wing Member of the Knesset? Wrong! They were uttered by Menachem Begin, the leader of the extreme right-wing party.

At first we said that arms should not be given either to us or to the Arabs. Afterwards we claimed: if you're already giving arms to the Arabs, then you should give arms to both sides, and now in the third stage we requested a treaty to guarantee our borders to compensate us for having violated the balance of power by giving arms to Iraq and then to other Arab states as well. As has been stated, the reply of the West was: you are strong enough. (*Knesset Records 19/92, 18/10/55*)

Thus did Knesset Member Rimalt (General Zionists) characterize the evolution of relations between Israel and the USA. The chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defence

Committee M. Argov (Party of the Workers of the Land of Israel – Mapai) declared for his part:

Regarding the arming of the Arab states by the Americans and the British, we must point out in all frankness that even before the Czech-Egyptian transaction, American arms in the hands of the Arab states, regardless of restrictions placed on them, do not ensure more peace and security and protection to Israel than Czech or Russian arms. American tanks or British jet planes in the hands of Arab rulers are for the same purpose as the Czech arms. The original sin is the sin of those who authorized the arming of the Arabs despite their aggressive intentions, despite the spirit of hostility and war towards Israel that they have declared. And what is happening now is, perhaps, but a mere continuation. (*Knesset Records* 19/92, 18/10/55)

In a later debate Knesset Member M. Sneh (Communist Party – Maki) asked:

How can you denounce the sending of arms from Czechoslovakia to Egypt, *you who sent the special memorandum to the State Department, asking it to kindly give arms to the Arab states and also to Israel for defence against the “Communist danger”*? Do not pretend, Mr. Ben-Gurion, that you do not know about that memorandum! Indeed, a question was raised in the Zionist Executive by Yosef Bankover of Unity of Labour on that matter. Why are arms for an Arab state legitimate when they are tied to an anti-Soviet program and all of a sudden they are illegitimate, unkosher, if they come on a background of opposition to an anti-Soviet alliance? ... The artificial noise that you have raised around the Czech arms to Egypt, was unrelated to the fact of arms shipments to Egypt – an Arab country. That is a falsehood and a lie! For after all as long as the arms were flowing from the West, and they are still flowing to Iraq and other Arab countries – you were reconciled to it and remained silent. Don’t be sanctimonious! You suddenly objected *because the arms did not come from the West*. (*Knesset Records* 19/255, 3/11/55. Emphasis ours)

Indeed, why did the consignment of Czech arms to Egypt elicit a hysterical response, whereas Western arms shipments to Arab countries elicit “astonishment”, “concern”, “worry” in public speeches, and agreement – along with a request that they be supplied to Israel as well – in secret discussions and in memoranda prepared in Washington? After all, even the transfer of the Suez base to Egypt did not did not produce such a stormy response in this country, although the value of that base was estimated at 500 million pounds sterling and according to the estimate of experts “more than 50,000 tons of ammunition, 200 thousand tons of engineering equipment and mines and 2,000 armoured vehicles” were kept there. (*Davar*, 4/10/55)

Moreover, the claim that the Czech arms were of exceptional quality is not correct: from Britain Egypt has also received modern jet planes, electronic equipment and tanks. The declarations that the Czech arms violated the arms balance in Israel’s disfavour are also hypocritical, for after all:

There has never been any equality in that balance, it was always in our disfavour, to the extent that that balance is determined by amount of arms and the potential to acquire them. (*Ibid.*)

The arms deal and the Tripartite Declaration

The fear that gripped Israeli politicians was not rooted in hypocrisy. The Czech-Egyptian deal truly was a hard blow; not a military blow, but a *political* blow.

Israeli policy was based on the assumption that the West would remain the decisive actor in our region for the next ten years at least.

For the Israeli leadership, the most important fact was that the three Western powers accorded a kind of recognition to the “*status quo*” in the declaration of May 1950. And preserving the “*status quo*” is the cornerstone of Israeli policy.

All the calculations were based on the assumption that with the passage of time the Arabs of Palestine would forget their homeland and out of despair or pressure from the West, would reconcile themselves to the facts that Ben-Gurion and Abdullah had created.

But the Soviet Union never recognized the “*status quo*”; in that regard its position is, as Mr. Sharett has said, a principled one. In 1948 its representative in the UN expressed that position, which recognizes the right of *the two peoples* in Palestine to self-determination, and the Soviets have never withdrawn from that position up to now, and it should not be assumed that they will withdraw from it in the future. That approach aroused the anger of the British and the puppet rulers of the Arab states in 1948, and that of the government of Israel in 1955.

The fact that the Soviet Union and its allies *again* made an appearance in the Middle East (the first “Czech deal” was in 1948 with Israel!) undermined both formally and fundamentally the authority of the three Western powers in the region. When suddenly the possibility that states seeking to cast off the yoke of imperialism could receive help from a powerful foreign camp was realized, they ceased to be the authorized, decisive powers.

The Czech deal was also a death-blow to the “Tripartite Declaration”, which was essentially an accord between the three Western powers to divide up influence in the Middle East by *arrangements for the supply of arms to the states of the region* according to Western political-strategic considerations. With the appearance of a different actor, supplying arms based on opposing considerations, *the Declaration became an insignificant piece of paper*.

The UN Resolution of 1947 again became the only document with an international seal of approval regarding Palestine; and this meant that Israeli policy was returned to the point where it had been six years previously.

The way out? A preventative war

The only way to revive the Tripartite Declaration was to crush Egypt, which had set a dangerous precedent by daring to circumvent it. “Preventative war” became the most popular idea in “activist” political circles in Israel. Those who espoused that idea spread the view that Egypt was planning a war of destruction against Israel, and for that purpose it had been given the Czech arms. Menachem Begin declared:

We say openly and simply: we must conduct operations to prevent the war of destruction. (*Knesset Records* 19/89, 18/10/55)

And later Ben-Gurion stated:

These arms – both Soviet and the British – are intended purely for an attack on Israel. No normal person could think that Nasser would use the Soviet arms for war against the West, and the British arms for war against the East. (*Knesset Records*, 19/672, 6/1/56)

Indeed, Ben-Gurion ignored one possibility in that speech – and perhaps not coincidentally. Could a normal person not think that the West and its friends might make war on Egypt and that the Czech arms would facilitate resistance to such a war? After all, Egypt had indeed refused to join Western alliances, struggled energetically against the Baghdad Pact and thwarted the West's plans in the region. It is not superfluous to point out that that very possibility is what later came true.

At that time, the plan for a “preventive war” did not meet with general support among Western leaders. American leaders – especially J. F. Dulles – were of the view that such a desperate action could only cause harm. The United States still had considerable influence and interests in the Middle East, and instead of jeopardizing them with a frontal attack on an Arab state, it chose to continue with the political line that was set after Dulles' visit to the Middle East. It meant applying pressure on Egypt on the one hand, and attempts to seduce it on the other. The Czech deal therefore did not impel the USA to support Israel but on the contrary, it enhanced the American tendency to move closer to Egypt and to sacrifice Israel.

The French deal

On 12/10/55 the UP agency reported that Dulles had announced to representatives of Jewish organizations in the USA that his government would not sign a “security treaty”

with Israel. On 18/10/55 Y. Barzilai (United Workers' Party – Mapam) spoke bluntly in the Knesset:

Read in the serious American, English and French press – here *The Times* writes: “The Arab rulers, even though they are dishonest, unstable, lacking in capacity to act and are not to be relied upon, still they dominate sources of oil, and territories for air bases that are sufficiently dispersed for that role. *The use of the Israeli army and the existence of a military base in Israel would not be adequate compensation for all of the above.* As long as the tensions between the Anglo-American bloc and the Soviet bloc continue, Britain and the United States should give preference to the problem of the defence of the Middle East and therefore give more consideration to the Arabs”.

Le Monde published an article a few days ago, saying that “the United States will sacrifice Israel for the sake of recruiting Arab states to a Middle Eastern alliance.” (*Knesset Records*, 19/100. Emphasis ours)

Most British politicians at the time also held a position similar to that of the Americans. Only afterwards, when the nationalization of the Suez dealt a decisive blow to British interests in the Middle East, did Britain choose the path of military adventurism.

In France the situation was different. France already had much to lose and it hoped that striking at Egypt would improve its chances of suppressing the Algerian rebellion. France began to supply arms to Israel. It is interesting to note that for all that, Egypt too was still receiving French arms:

A member of the National Assembly, Mr. Arthur Conte, expressed his astonishment at the position that France had adopted in the Middle East and expressed his sorrow over the fact that France had *renewed the supply of arms to Egypt*. ... Mr. Pinay replied to him that the supply of arms to Israel had not been stopped and that France was continuing to supply arms to both sides. (*Davar*, 28/11/55. Emphasis ours)

Meanwhile France resumed consignments of cannons, light tanks and other military supplies to Egypt. (Ibid.)

“I am prepared to meet with the prime minister of Egypt ... as soon as possible”

In the last months of 1955 the “reprisal actions” became more frequent. On 28 October a raid was conducted on Kuntilla in the Sinai desert.

On 2 November Ben-Gurion presented his new government to the Knesset – a “government of renewal” – with the participation of the United Workers’ Party (Mapam) and Unity of Labour.

In his speech he said, among other things:

... in order to contain the dangers with which the current situation of unrest is fraught, I am prepared to meet with the prime minister of Egypt and with every one of the Arab leaders, as soon as possible, in order to arrive at a mutual settlement without preconditions. The government of Israel is prepared for a lasting and strong peace settlement and long-term political, economic and cultural cooperation between Israel and its neighbours. (*Knesset Records* 19/233, 2/11/55)

Ben-Gurion’s comments were widely published and broadcast in Egypt. *Al-Ahram* headlined Ben-Gurion’s proposals in red; but in the closing section appeared a news story about the IDF attack on al-Sabha. At the beginning of the night Ben-Gurion proposed to Nasser a meeting for peace talks, but a few hours later the large-scale battle in the Nitzana area broke out, in which 50 Egyptian soldiers were killed and 49 were captured! During the hours of the battle Nasser said to the manager of the “Arab News Agency”, Tom Little:

The battle of al-Sabha is still going on. This battle constitutes decisive proof that Ben-Gurion was not honest in his proposal for peace. Ten hours after his announcement in the Knesset, Ben-Gurion himself ordered his forces to mount a powerful attack on an Egyptian position ... this Israeli attack is the second one

within seven days ... Ben-Gurion apparently hopes to impose a peace and his declaration of yesterday was intended only to mislead world public opinion. (Radio Cairo, 3/11/55)

We can assume that at the time when Ben-Gurion called for peace talks with Nasser, the order for the operation to attack al-Sabha was already on his desk.

“Small headlines”

On 11 December 1955 the IDF conducted a raid on Syrian positions on the northeastern shore of Lake Kinneret. 56 Syrians were killed, 9 wounded and 30 captured. That operation came as a complete surprise to the residents of Israel, as it had not been preceded by reports of any particular provocations from the Syrian side.

Jews, many Jews, are reproaching Ben-Gurion in various ways: “staytsh” [“how can this be?” in Yiddish – trans.], and again “staytsh”, and yet again “staytsh” – why and on what basis did he do what he did to Syria ... in Mapai they are furious (even if they are keeping it quiet and within the party), members of Mapai’s coalition partners are expressing their anger at him rather more loudly, and what is more astonishing – even the factions that usually demand “action” are alarmed this time: the “timing”, the “timing” was incorrect, they claim ... and a great outcry is heard from important Jewish newspapers that are publishing vocal accusations against B-G, and also, of course, Jews in cafes on the streets are saying that in their political judgement, it was not a good time for B-G to have done what he did in the north ... (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 18/12/55)

The author of these words, H. R., does not agree with all the objections, and he sides with Ben-Gurion, but the above excerpt reflects the trend in Israeli public opinion after the raid on the Kinneret. Another newspaper published in lead editorial:

... the question is asked whether the attack on Syrian positions that was carried out on Monday night was necessary and justified. The Syrian actions that hinder Israeli fishermen are not a new phenomenon, but heretofore we did not see a need to respond to them using military means. The fishery in the Kinneret has indeed been hindered, but *reports of renewed Syrian provocations appeared in the newspapers under small headings and did not cause anger or excessive concern among the public*. The importance of these disturbances was not of the first order and did not justify a retaliatory action on the scale that was carried out. The news stories about the Syrian harassment of the fishery in the Kinneret certainly did not reach the international press. On the other hand, the story about the Israeli retaliatory action appeared on the front pages of the local newspapers and the number of losses that the Syrians suffered is indeed high enough to put the story on the front pages of the international press. All this happened in a time when Israel was *preparing for bitter struggle over the acquisition of arms for self-defence*. The danger of an Arab attack is a tangible and immediate one in the light of the rapid arming of Egypt by the Soviet bloc and the possible arming of Syria as well by the same source, as well as the arming of Iraq by the Western powers. But even as we are fully aware of that danger and endeavour with all our strength to explain our fears to the Western powers, our enemies are alleging that we are provoking them and that we want to start a war against them. All Israel knows that these claims have no substance [!] but whether they are true or not, they influence the positions of the Powers, and at the very least give them a pretext for rejecting our just demands or to deal with them with pronounced coolness.

... how can we explain to the world that Israel takes up arms only on occasions in which its security and its integrity are in danger, when we have carried out a military action on a large scale as reprisal for acts of harassment to which *no Israeli newspaper attributed any importance* only two days ago. (*Haaretz*, 13/12/55, editorial. Emphasis ours)

Haaretz is not here expressing opposition to “reprisal actions” in principle, but is surprised that *in this case* public opinion (Israeli and international) had not been prepared

by giant headlines in the newspapers. Hence we find out indirectly about the important role that was played on *other* occasions by the propaganda mouthpieces and the “guided” press in “preparing the ground” for reprisal actions.

“They gave us arms because we fought”

On another matter the honourable newspaper was surely mistaken. In its opinion, as stated in the article, the raid was likely to damage Israel’s efforts to acquire arms; which was not the case. It is evident that French arms were provided precisely *because* Israel was prepared to execute “reprisals” of that kind. We may trust in the comments of Moshe Dayan, who was then the Chief of General Staff, who said, three years after that raid:

We received arms from France for the very purpose of reprisal actions of the severest kind – *after Operation Kinneret*. The French sought partners in their struggle [i.e. in the colonial war against the Algerian people] and did not want Abd al-Nasser’s expansionist tendency to succeed. *They gave us arms because we fought.* (*Davar*, 16/11/58. Emphasis ours)

Still, it noteworthy that France voted in the Security Council (19/12/55) *in favour of condemning Israel for the raid*.

Ben-Gurion decided on Operation Kinneret on his own account, without consulting with members of the government, who learned about it in the newspapers:

... it is well-known that Mr. Ben-Gurion, who is serving as Prime Minister and as Defence Minister, and currently also acting as Foreign Minister, did not ask members of the government regarding Operation “Kinneret” ... Operation Kinneret and what preceded it, or more correctly: what did not precede it, has brought us dangerously close to a Prime Ministerial dictatorship... (*Haaretz*, 16/12/55, editorial)

Kinneret-Baghdad

The political background of the raid is elucidated by A. Ginai, the political commentator of the evening newspaper *Yedioth Aharonoth*:

The military action at Kinneret was carried out at a time when the diplomatic struggle over the signing of treaties in the Middle East was developing. Even if the goal of the action was to ensure the security of Israeli fishermen on Lake Kinneret, *there is no doubt that the IDF operation was intended to produce widespread diplomatic reverberations. First, the military operation put to the test the treaty that was signed [three weeks before] between Syria and Egypt. Secondly, the action was intended to strengthen the hands of those in Lebanon who opposed the signing of a military treaty with Syria, and third, it was inevitable that the action of the IDF would have some influence on the outcome of the struggle between those who support joining the Baghdad Pact and those who oppose them, a struggle that reached its height with the resignations of 4 ministers from the government of Jordan. Syria indeed has a military treaty with Egypt, but it would be a mistake to think that those who support Syria's accession to the Baghdad Pact have given up their mission. Turkey, Iraq, Britain and to a certain degree even the United States are applying strong pressure on Syria. ... within Syria there are quite strong pro-Iraqi actors, and they are not sitting with their arms folded; day and night they tirelessly invoke the advantages that would accrue to Syria from a tie to Turkey and Iraq, which are nearby and strong, as opposed to the dubious benefit that Syria would get from ties to Egypt, which is far away and weak. It is a near certainty that the military action on the shores of the Kinneret will yet have the effect of strengthening the hands of those who point to the futility of a treaty with Egypt...*

In conclusion: although the bold action at the Kinneret *was intended for a different purpose it is likely make a contribution to the struggle over treaties that is going on in the region.* (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 14/12/55. Emphasis ours)

Indeed – wonder of wonders – an action the only purpose of which was “to ensure the security of the Israeli fishermen on Lake Kinneret” incidentally helps to strengthen the hands of those who support the Baghdad Pact in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and to weaken the hands of those who support a treaty with Egypt. A. Ginai successfully conveys the truth of the famous statement that:

... Israel is destined to play the role of a kind of watchdog. It is not to be feared that it will implement an aggressive policy towards the Arab states if it is in clear opposition to the will of America and Britain. But if on some occasion the Western powers prefer, for whatever reason, to look the other way, you can depend on it that Israel will be prepared suitably to punish one or more of its neighbouring states, the lack of courtesy of which towards the West has transgressed the boundaries of what is permissible. (Haaretz 30/9/51)

Mr. Schocken, the editor of *Haaretz*, had prophesied in 1951 and *knew* what he was prophesying. Further ratification of this analysis is provided by another expert as he surveys the events in Syria at the beginning of the same year:

In the first half of February 1955 the al-Khouri government fell and a new coalition government headed by Sabri al-Asali was set up. The latter tried to adopt a compromise position between the policies of Egypt and Iraq, but upon its establishment it adopted a pro-Egyptian line and opposed the participation of any Arab state in the Turkey/Iraq alliance. The internal struggle in Syria did not end. Foreign states and internal pro-Western circles – even within the government – did not let up the pressure. The Iraqis mobilized their supporters in Syria. *The incidents on the Syria-Israel border [around the Kinneret and in the Hula area] produced heightened tensions on that border as well. Turkey concentrated an army on the border of Syria and its aircraft flew over its territory, the Turkish press launched an attack against the government in Damascus and the Syrians were asked “to remove the obstacle that prevents friendship with Turkey.”* The USA and Britain explained to the government of Syria that they placed great importance on the Baghdad Pact,

and saw in Syria's position towards it as an indication of its feelings of friendship toward the free world. (A. Cohen, *Temurot politiyot ba-'olam ha-'aravi* [Political changes in the Arab world], p. 170. Hebrew)

What a strange coincidence! The need "to ensure the security of the Israeli fishermen" arises precisely at the moment when Turkey is concentrating its army on the Syrian border and its aircraft are flying over its territory, at a time when the West has an interest in the application of political pressure on Syria.

Whoever wants to go ahead and believe that because of a fishing dispute and acts of harassment "that no Israeli newspaper took seriously," the IDF crossed the border, destroyed military posts, killed 56 Syrians, wounded 6, captured 30 and sacrificed 6 of its own soldiers, can go ahead and believe it. But even they will have to admit that that action and all those that preceded it and followed it did not put an end to the fishing disputes in the Kinneret. The main source of that conflict stems from the fact that on the north-eastern shore of Lake Kinneret the ceasefire line runs precisely on the shore of the lake, such that the entire lake belongs to Israel but the north-east shore belongs to Syria. The Arab residents of that shore, which is particularly rich in fish, have made their living for generations from fishing. For hundreds of years they were doing their work and it never occurred to them that one day another state would appropriate the water for itself, leaving them to stand on the shore and watch as foreign fishermen took their fish right from under their noses. It is no wonder that there are unending conflicts there. The wonder is that many in Israel believe that it will be possible to solve such a typical local conflict by force of arms.

The balance of blood

The year 1955 came to its bloody end.

Summary of the year:

Casualties in incidents between Israelis and Egyptians

	Killed		Wounded		Captured	
	Soldiers	Civilians	Soldiers	Civilians	Soldiers	Civilians
Israelis	32	15	108	10	3	--
Egyptians	196	20	166	22	80	--

Casualties in incidents between Israelis and Syrians

	Killed		Wounded		Captured	
	Soldiers	Civilians	Soldiers	Civilians	Soldiers	Civilians
Israelis	6	--	12	3	--	--
Syrians	45	17	20	6	36	4

The numbers are taken from the official report of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, UNTSO, which was submitted on 19/1/56 and published in the Security Council Official Records, SCOR, no. S/3685 (Appendices X-XII p. 95). These numbers should not be considered completely accurate, but they are very close to the truth.

Shelling the market square

In 1956 the IDF carried out no major raids across the cease-fire line with Egypt. Nevertheless, on 5 April another kind of action was carried out, of which the Israeli public had only heard only little. We are referring to the shelling of the refugee camp in the Gaza Strip and the market square in Gaza City.

The American journalist I. F. Stone reported on this action in an article that was reprinted in the Coalition newspaper *Al-Hamishmar*:

The bombardment of Gaza by Israeli artillery provoked a great deal of questioning behind the scenes in Israel. So many different explanations were given as to make one suspect the truth has yet to be told.

Local Israeli commanders have orders which permit them, naturally, to shoot back if fired upon. But orders can be interpreted in various ways. One shrewd Israeli with long military experience said the situation reminded him of the Yiddish writer who published a volume of Shakespeare “as translated and improved” by himself. This man said local commanders along the Gaza Strip may have been similarly “translating and improving” Ben-Gurion’s orders.

[...]

The Gaza bombardment was the climax of a week in which several Israeli soldiers had been killed while on patrol. ... These killings followed several weeks of shootings from the Egyptian side. The killings merited a military reprisal; there is no reason why the Egyptians should be allowed to shoot up the border with impunity.

But what stirred a great deal of criticism in Israel was the nature of the bombardment next day, which was Thursday. *This is the chief market day of the Arabs*, since it precedes their Sabbath, which is Friday. Israeli shells struck the Gaza marketplace, killing some 40 persons and wounding 100 others, mostly civilians, including women and children of the Arab refugees. [The UN source quoted above stated that 66 were killed and 127 wounded – all of them civilians – AO and MM] The number of shells which fell on the marketplace make it unlikely that this was accidental. According to one source, Ben-Gurion ordered the firing stopped as soon as he heard of it.

The Gaza bombardment has two political aspects. From the standpoint of world public opinion, it is bad enough to have Arab refugees across the border without having them shelled by Israeli artillery. *Luckily* the atrocities committed by the *fedayeen* sent across in retaliation after the shelling were so horrifying as to work in Israel’s favour. [!]

The other political aspect is not so obvious. The shelling of the Gaza marketplace had the effect of calling Nasser’s bluff and hurting him with the refugees. Here he was talking so big and wielding those new Soviet planes and yet he was unable to protect them. *The Jerusalem Post* of April 18 reported that there were demonstrations against the Nasser regime during the mass funeral of the

civilians killed. The *fedayeen* and the exaggerated reports of the Cairo radio about the amount of damage they did in Israel were intended to satisfy protest of this kind.

Additional light on this political aspect of the Gaza shelling was provided by an article in the April 17 issue of *Die Welt* ... a staff correspondent of *Die Welt* said that the Arabs were deeply disappointed that Nasser had not been able to retaliate more effectively for the Gaza affair. This correspondent said a delegation of Arab refugees had made an excited protest to the Egyptian Ambassador in Amman.

The correspondent added, "But in leading circles of the Arab capitals they know only too well that despite Russian weapon deliveries open war could lead to catastrophe. Thus the shelling hurt Nasser's prestige.

But if these circumstances provide the clue to the Gaza affair, one may well ask whether it was worth the price. The shelling of Arab refugee encampments or markets is a cynical and murderous business.

The Israeli Parliament ought to demand a full investigation and not rest content with conflicting explanations. There is no more important business in a democratic country than to make sure that the military does not make political decisions of its own, especially the kind which could precipitate war. (*Al Hamishmar*, 4/6/56, citing *I. F. Stone's Weekly*, Washington.¹⁷ Emphasis ours)

It is well-known that in Israel the army does not make political decisions that are inconsistent with the opinion of Ben-Gurion ... it is equally known that the United Workers' Party (Mapam), the organ of which published that article was then a participant in the government and thus was responsible for every political measure taken by Israel, even if it criticized it. But not every Israeli citizen knows that on the main market day in Gaza, the Israeli mortar barrage was launched as a "reprisal".

A special innovation was the description of the atrocious actions of the *Fedayeen* as "fortunate" because they somewhat mitigated the abominable Israeli act. All who have

¹⁷ Rather than provide a translation back into English from *Al Hamishmar's* Hebrew translation of I. F. Stone's words, the quote here is directly from I. F. Stone's article, "The Truth About The Bombardment of Gaza", *I. F. Stone's Weekly*, Washington, D. C., 30 April 1956, p. 4. Available online at <http://www.ifstone.org/weekly/IFStonesWeekly-1956apr30.pdf> - trans.

not lost their humanity are horrified at the base murders that the *Fedayeen* committed in their second infiltration into Israel in April 1956 (as has been mentioned, the previous penetration had been in August 1955); but neither is anyone entitled to justify the act of wholesale murder that was committed against the refugees in the Strip before that penetration.

Why was that crime passed by in silence? Why did the country not get angry?

Where was S. Yizhar, the author of *Khirbet Khizeh*?

Why did the intellectuals not rise up in protest against the terrible slaughter?

The nationalization of the Canal

On 26 July 1956 the West was shocked once again: Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal. It was the hardest blow that the West had ever sustained in the Middle East, and it was not prepared to accept it easily.

All means of pressure were employed against Egypt. The Western powers refused to pay fees to the Egyptian authority for passing through the canal, called on foreign pilots to leave their jobs, tried to boycott the Canal and to send ships on long indirect routes, implemented political and economic pressure on Egypt, and carried out demonstrations of naval power in the Mediterranean – but all these means failed utterly.

By 1956 the global balance of power was much different from that of 1952, when Mossadegh failed to nationalize the oil works at Abadan. During those few years the disintegration of the colonial system became an accomplished fact, and the Eastern bloc became so strong that it was able to offer help to any state that sought it, to frustrate Western pressure.

Suez as opposed to Abadan; Cuba as opposed to Guatemala; the first Sputnik as opposed to the first atom bomb at Hiroshima – these are the signposts of our era. The West was faced with the choice of accepting the nationalization of the Suez Canal or trying to intervene by force of arms. England and France chose the latter. War plans

began to be devised in secret, and in the meantime the two countries contrived to divert international and Arab public opinion to other matters.

It is therefore no coincidence that, during that period, tensions on the Israeli-Egyptian ceasefire line abated relatively, and passed to the Israeli-Jordanian ceasefire line.

“An opportune moment”

In September and October of 1956 four Israeli raids (“reprisal actions”) were carried out in Jordan: at Rahawa, Jarandal, Husan and Qalqilya. Four large actions within just two months. Jordan was undergoing major internal transformations of fundamental importance at the time.

On 6/12/55 the British Imperial Chief of Staff, Templer, arrived in Jordan for discussions on defence matters. As was reported in the Jordanian press, the British government proposed, in return for Jordan’s joining the Baghdad Pact, to augment the forces of the Jordanian Legion by 65%, to provide it with heavy arms worth 6.3 million pounds sterling, to set up an air force, to replace the existing Anglo-Jordanian Accord with a new treaty for 12 or for 4 years (whichever Jordan preferred) within the framework of the Baghdad Pact. Certain members of Said al-Mufti’s government displayed willingness to discuss Templer’s proposals and even prepared counterproposals: military aid of at least 14 million pounds sterling, to be paid to the Jordanian treasury (and not directly to the Legion command); no commitments would be imposed on Jordan outside its territory, and joining the Baghdad Pact would have no bearing on Jordan’s position regarding the final resolution of the Palestine problem. Four ministers (Palestinians) conditioned their agreement to negotiate on the counter proposals being approved by Egypt beforehand. When the majority in the government rejected that demand the four ministers resigned on 14/12, and the government fell. Templer departed for London.

The next day, a new government was set up under the leadership of Hazza’ al-Majali, with the policy of bringing the Kingdom of Jordan into the Baghdad Pact.

Unrest broke out in all parts of the country, in the Old City of Jerusalem the consulates of the Western powers and Turkey were attacked (the consuls of France and Turkey were injured) along with offices of the United Nations, there was a general strike in Amman, in the West Bank the demonstrators called for the territory west of the Jordan River to break away and join Syria or a Syrian-Egyptian treaty if Jordan joined the Baghdad Pact. Censorship was imposed on the press, demonstrations were banned, many were arrested by the police and the secondary schools were closed. In the face of the storm in public opinion five ministers in the al-Majali government published a declaration stating that they would not support Jordan's joining the Baghdad Pact. On 19 December King Hussein dissolved the parliament and declared that new elections would constitute a referendum on the matter under contention. The next day the al-Majali government resigned and a transitional government under the leadership of Ibrahim Hashim was established that committed itself not to deal with foreign affairs. The storm abated. The press was nearly unanimous in its reference to the victory of the people in their struggle against foreign alliances that were about to be imposed on them. Those arrested during the disturbances were released and committees were established to collect contributions for families of those injured and killed in the disturbances. The Jordanian Jerusalem municipality decided to name a street after the young woman Raja Gamash who was shot and killed as she was removing the flag from on top of the Turkish legation. This mood did not encourage the rulers to hold the promised elections. At the beginning of January 1956, the "Higher Council for Interpreting Laws" ruled that the dissolution of the parliament by the King was not legal ("the Minister of the Interior did not sign the order"). The transitional government resigned and on 9 January Samir al-Rifa'i set up a new government. Its platform spoke of "purging of the bureaucracy and the educational system of destructive elements" and also of "non-participation in new alliances". Thirty-five out of 40 deputies voted for the government. The annulment of the decision on the dissolution of the parliament and the holding of new elections led to demonstrations in most of the cities, and in the words of Radio Ramallah the demonstrations were accompanied by acts of destruction in Amman and the Old City of Jerusalem, and

curfews were imposed. The multi-party gathering that was supposed to be held in Amman to condemn the Baghdad Pact was banned. The army surrounded refugee camps, which were centres of ferment, and clashed with demonstrators, and the police sustained fatalities and injuries. Censorship was again imposed on the newspapers and in protest, the newspapers did not publish for a full week. The governments of Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia expressed their willingness to give Jordan financial assistance to replace the British subsidy (about 12-13 million pounds sterling a year). Many among the officers of the Jordanian Legion demanded that the British commander of the army of the Kingdom of Jordan be removed, and in response to their pressure he was removed from his command on 1/3/56 (and along with him several dozen of British officers, who were “on secondment” to Jordan) and was quickly flown to Cyprus, before he had a chance to communicate with his officers. All the central positions in the Legion were transferred to Arab officers. The British remained in the Legion solely in the capacities of experts and advisors, and the army was obliged to use the Arabic language only. The rulers of Jordan did indeed declare that the removal of Glubb did not mean the cancellation of the accord with Britain and the foregoing of the financial aid, but in the British House of Commons, the Prime Minister expressed “anger and sorrow” over Glubb’s dismissal. The prime minister of Jordan ordered the closure of the “Arab Broadcasting” station (headed by Younis al-Bahri, the Arabic newsreader of Radio Berlin during Hitler’s time), which had strongly attacked Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The British did all they could to mitigate their great failure in Jordan. The former British ambassador in Jordan, Sir Alec Kirkbride, made an urgent trip to Amman and returned there a second time bringing a message from Eden to Hussein. The kings of Jordan and Iraq, Hussein and Faisal, met at the borders of their countries, and as was reported in the Arabic press, “discussed the implementation of the treaty of friendship between the two states” but the officers of the Legion threatened to mutiny if Iraqi forces entered Jordan. On 21/5/56 the al-Rifa’i government fell, and at the request of the king, Said al-Mufti set up a new government. Western observers were unanimously of the opinion that this replacement of the government was an additional step in Jordan’s

departure from the British sphere of influence and its rapprochement with the Egyptian-led Arab camp. Al-Rifa'i opposed the deposing of Glubb and the convening of the popular assembly in Jerusalem (on 9 May 1956) at which King Hussein made an appearance. The assembly adopted resolutions against the Baghdad Pact, support for the war of liberation in Algeria, and a demand to accept the aid that was offered from Arab states to the Jordanian Legion in place of the British aid. The shrivelling of British influence in Jordan was a hard blow to the pro-Western regime in Iraq and encouraged the neutralist opposition circles there. On 26/6/56 the parliament was dissolved in Jordan and new elections were announced. (A. Cohen, *Temurot politiyot ba-'olam ha-'aravi* [Political changes in the Arab world], pp. 177-180. Hebrew)

Throughout that entire stormy period of unrest in Jordan, calls were made in Israel “to arms and to the flag”, especially from the Herut and Unity of Labour parties and from “activist” circles in other parties, with demands “to seize the opportune moment” and to “liberate the occupied territories of the Homeland” from the hands of “the artificial creation” called the Kingdom of Jordan. The government did not follow that advice and refrained from launching a “preventive war” with Jordan. But in those very months of September-October, during which the internal struggle was renewed, and as new elections approached (22 October), four major Israeli raids were carried out. An Israeli correspondent telegraphed to his newspaper from London:

On the face of things, it looks as if the Iraqi army will come to the aid of Jordan in the event of an Israeli attack, but in fact, observers believe, Britain wants to prevent a pro-Egyptian coup, since most believe that the elections will carry the pro-Egyptian party to power – if they take place, which appears to be in doubt in view of the crisis. It is likely that the elections will be cancelled at the last moment. The attack on Qalqilya appeared as a gift from heaven to all who seek Iraqi control over Jordan. After first refraining from commenting, the British foreign minister later said that Israel and Jordan had received notification that Britain would invoke the British-Jordanian treaty in the event that the need should occur.

... It is universally agreed here that the not only is the government of Jordan not responsible for infiltrations and acts of murder [against Israelis] but on the contrary, it struggles desperately to thwart and to punish the infiltrators. ... So far the reprisal actions are not thought of as “acts of aggression” that would justify British intervention in accordance with the treaty with Jordan, but this is likely to change if the crisis is prolonged. Evidently the criterion is the scale of the attacks. (R. Waltch, *Haaretz* 14/10/56)

The dispatch of the “Bat-Galim” is “a gift from heaven” to all who want Britain to remain in Suez; the raid on Gaza (28/2/55) ; “a gift from heaven” to those who are pressuring Egypt to join the Baghdad Pact; the Kinneret raid (19/12/55); “a gift from heaven” to all who want Syria to join the Baghdad Pact; the raid at Qalqilya; “a gift from heaven” to all who want Jordan to join the Baghdad Pact. The proliferation of these Israeli “gifts” to Western policy in the region merits a closer examination.

This proliferation of incidents similar in character points to a deliberate process. Even if we agree with the “activists” that the actions came only in the wake of murders of Jews, even if we agree that “reprisal” is the only appropriate response to these murders, the timing still demands closer examination. Because regardless of what the motive may be, the people of Asia and Africa will inevitably see these actions as a form of Western pressure, colonialist pressure, hated by those who have been struggling against their subjugators for generations now. Any state in Asia or Africa that coordinates its policy with Western policy in the region in its efforts to resolve its conflicts with its neighbours will necessarily be seen in the eyes of the population of these continents as an instrument that enables the hated colonialism to continue to pursue its policy of “divide and conquer”. The subjective intentions of a government that conducts such a policy cannot change the fact that in reality it facilitates the perpetuation of the colonial influence in Asia and Africa and cannot change the opinions of the residents of these continents towards it.

The Arab responses to the Israeli actions against Jordan are instructive. On 15/9/56 Radio Cairo broadcast an article from the Egyptian newspaper *al-Sha'ab*, of that day:

The Israeli attack on Jarandal is merely part of an elaborate plan that was prepared in London, Paris and Tel Aviv against all the Arabs.

In that regard the newspaper mentions the concentration of Turkish forces on the Syrian border, the reinforcement of British forces in Libya, the transfer of French forces to Cyprus and the concentration of forces on the southern border of Sudan. The newspaper asks: “Is all this being done because of the Suez crisis alone? Is it a coincidence that the Israeli attack on Jarandal came 24 hours after Eden’s statement? Is it a coincidence that Israel is mentioned dozens of times in connection with the Suez affair?”

The Syrian chief of staff, General Tawfiq Nizm al-Din, declared:

Imperialism is now pressing the Jews to provoke the Arabs in order to distract their attention from the Suez question. (Radio Ramallah 15/9/56)

After the raid on Husan, Radio Cairo commented (28/9/56):

What is Ben-Gurion’s goal? After all, Ben-Gurion declared some time ago that he would not pull the West’s chestnuts out of the fire, and what happened? Evidently B-G relented and became an instrument in the hands of the West and imperialism. ... We would like to emphasize that these actions do not alarm us and will not drag us into war at a time not of our choosing. They can strengthen our faith that Ben-Gurion serves the West and that the residents of Israel will not go along with his actions. ... We declare to the Jews that we want peace, but we want to solve the problems of the Middle East in accordance with the aspirations of the residents of the region.

... Britain is inciting Israel and is begging it to create confusion in the Arab ranks.

Sir Harold MacMichael in an old role, with a new rank

The Egyptian radio stations downplayed as much as possible the news of the Israeli raids, but the “Near East Broadcasting Station” (*Mahattat al-Sharq al-Adna*) from Cyprus, played them up and emphasized them as much as possible. That station, the name of which is Arab, and the broadcasting language Arabic, was the most extreme in its anti-Israeli broadcasts.

On 21/9/56 the station broadcast:

... The Arab world is faced with two problems: the Palestine problem and the Suez problem. There are differences of opinion as to which of them is the most pressing, but all agree that the two problems are important ... the Palestine problem is first of all a political problem, whereas regarding the second problem, at any rate it is important that force not be used to solve it, which is not the case regarding Palestine.

And later:

... Friends of the Arabs, and of Jordan in particular, hope that the Jordanians will examine the issue of their defence independently of the partisan tendencies and political aspirations that are likely to confuse public opinion and to undermine its moral strength and its power of resistance in the face of an influential enemy that is armed from head to foot [Israel]. Communist circles in the new parliament have an interest in the abrogation of the Anglo-Jordanian treaty, regardless of the fact that Jordan would thereby lose its independence. (Near East Radio 26/10/56)

These words were spoken five days after the elections in Jordan, three days before the beginning of Operation Sinai.

After the raids on Harawa and Jarandal, the station broadcast the following:

...Israel constitutes a danger to the Arab world, and more attention should be dedicated to it than to the Suez Crisis.

The nature of that station, and a hint about British colonial intrigues in the region, were revealed by the Voice of Cairo on 15/9/568 when it said:

The newspaper *al-Sha'ab* published a sensational story about a new British plot in the Arab countries. The newspaper writes that the Lebanese authorities revealed that British agents in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan are trying to incite against Israel in order to distract Arab opinion from the Suez crisis and to keep them preoccupied with Israel. The newspaper reports that that network of British agents is establishing organizations that will help it in its plotting. Among these organizations: "the British Broadcasting Station in the Near East", "the Arab News Agency", the "Arab World News Office", and more. These organizations are overtly inciting the Arabs against Israel and spreading harmful rumours in order to provoke a war in the Middle East between the Arabs and Israel.

Not only Radio Cairo, but also the president of the Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Congress, N. Goldman, on 4/10/56 in New York (according to the UP agency) accused the Near East broadcasting station in Cyprus, which was under British control, *and which incites the Arabs day and night against their real enemy – Israel, for the purpose of distracting their attention from the Suez crisis*". He mentioned that *Sir Harold MacMichael* was one of the managers of the station. To most residents of Israel that name does not mean anything, but veteran residents of this country will be surprised to hear that this is the same MacMichael who was the British High Commissioner in Palestine during the years of the Second World War. His descent to the rank of manager of a "private" radio station in Cyprus which incites the Arabs against the Jews, symbolizes the path taken by British imperialism in the region, its eviction, the decline of its influence, and the policy of "divide and rule" in which it has persisted to the end.

Few in Israel knew that *Mahattat al-Sharq al-Adna*, the Arab News Agency and the “Arab World News Office” were not Arab institutions, but camouflaged British ones, run by colonial functionaries without colonies, like MacMichael. Formally the station in Cyprus was “private”, so that it could not – Heaven forbid – be linked to Britain, but that camouflage was very flimsy.

The day after the nationalization of the Suez Canal, a “secret station” began to be active in the Near East; it called Nasser “Haim Jamalov” and accused him of being a Zionist (“Haim”) and a communist (“Jamalov”). In a typical broadcast it said:

The Zionist traitor Haim Jamalov is one of the Arab leaders who do not intend to avenge Palestine. He said that he would order to the Egyptian army to go to Palestine if the Zionists carried out an attack on any Arab state. Now his true face is exposed. He is content to send pointless telegrams that are far from being action. In a note to the president of Syria following the Israeli attack on Jordan he referred to Israel as a “state” while all Arabs call it a gang. (29/9/56)

It is not difficult to guess who has a budget to set up and maintain a new radio station that carries out acts of incitement of that kind. That station reached the heights of vulgar incitement against Israel.

On 2/10/56 Radio Cairo quoted *Al-Gumhuriya* (the official government newspaper) and *Al-Akhbar* of the same day:

British agents and pro-British agents are inciting Arabs everywhere against Israel and are urging the Arabs to rescue Palestine from the hands of the Zionist enemy. These agents are distributing money everywhere and are paying large sums to journalists and to others for that purpose. *Al-Akhbar* writes that Britain wants to restore its influence in the Middle East by acquiring the confidence of the Arabs in its friendship, and therefore Britain is now willing to help the Arabs against Israel so that the latter submits to Arab demands. Thus does Britain hope to renew its imperialism in the Middle East.

All this was *one* aspect of the British policy. In the wider world, the British government expressed its “concern” at the arming of Egypt by Czechoslovakia. Eden declared that “Nasser’s next step will be the elimination of Israel, and for that reason Britain is reconsidering providing arms to Israel”. The British government expressed its “surprise” that Egypt was not permitting Israeli ships to cross the Suez Canal.

Al-Gumuriya rightly asked:

The goal is clear, the British hope to isolate Egypt, but how can Britain’s concern for Israeli navigation in the Suez Canal, as expressed by Selwyn Lloyd in the Security Council, be reconciled with its incitement against Israel? (Radio Cairo, 7/10/56)

There is indeed a contradiction here, but it is purely formal. For Britain was not in fact “pro-Israeli” in the Security Council (as many in Israel believed) just as it was not “pro-Arab” in its broadcasts to “liberate Palestine from the Zionists” on Radio Near East (as certain Arabs believed). Its policy was and remains *colonial*.

Britain was then interested in achieving two goals. First: to shore up its shaky rule in Jordan. Second: to raise a smokescreen around its preparations for war against Egypt by channelling Arab attention and anger towards Israel. Britain was helped in its effort to achieve these goals by Israel’s reprisal actions against Jordan.

Water and blood

The reprisal actions were not the only way of applying Western pressure by means of Israel. An additional example: the issue of the exploitation of the waters of the Jordan River.

At the end of 1955 the American film magnate Eric Johnston conducted one of his tours in the Middle East on behalf of President Eisenhower. About ten days after the “Czech deal” became known, the Egyptian broadcasting

station reported:

Johnston threatened in his recent discussions that the Jews would divert the waters of the Jordan River if the Arabs rejected his plan; and the USA would not intervene to prevent Israel from doing so. The Arab states saw Johnston's threat as exceeding the bounds of his role. (*Sawt al-'Arab*, 6/10/55)

It was no transgression! It was *the point* of Johnston's mission. On 6/8/56 MacMichael's station reported from Cyprus (in Arabic):

Radio Israel reported that within a few days Israel will begin building a dam at the approaches to the Jordan River, in order to divert the waters of the river into the eastern canal in the Huleh valley...

An Israeli project to divert the waters of the Jordan River in the Huleh area has been a ground of contention with Syria for several years now. The work was stopped in 1953 at the request of the UN. Syria announced that its forces would open fire if Israel resumed work.

Two days after this broadcast, the Syrian foreign minister Salah al-Bitar published a statement, which said among other things:

These news reports, in which we take a great interest, are part of a campaign of pressure that the West is implementing against the Arab states. I personally do not believe that Israel will make such an attempt, which would constitute an overt violation of the Security Council Resolution.

All this occurred about a month after the Egyptians nationalized the Suez Canal and gained Syria's support for that measure. The proximity of the dates is very instructive.

Nobody can deny that Israel has the right to exploit part of the waters of the Jordan River for irrigation and development. But the river also crosses Jordan and Syria, where its sources are located.

Any use of the waters of the Jordan River must necessarily be carried out with agreement of all the states through which it crosses. The Arab states rejected the various Western plans to arrange the division of the waters of the Jordan River; for they saw them – with justice! – as intervention by colonial powers that sought to ensure for themselves control over one of the main pressure-points of the Middle East – the sources of water. As well, the Arabs refused to discuss directly with Israel the issue of exploitation of water, since in their view a solution to the question of the Jordan River before a solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict in general would lead to the stabilization of the *status quo*. Nevertheless, Israel for its part recognized the West's authority to determine the division of water and only bargained with it over the amount that was "allocated" to it. When the Arabs rejected these plans, Israel went to work with the goal of presenting the Arabs with *faits accomplis*. Every such measure necessarily heightens tensions. So far the main part of the work has taken place within Israeli territory and the river has not yet been diverted. This situation creates a convenient opening for the West to apply pressure on Syria and Jordan and to threaten them as Johnston did. *In the water conflict – as also in the conflicts over the Kinneret fisheries and freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal – Israel is coordinating its moves with Western policy in the region, and is trying to realize its goals by relying on the West's power, in the hope that the West will impose on the Arabs the solution that Israel wants.*

This coordination not only sets up Israel against the inevitable development of Asia and Africa; it is unjustified even in terms of the short-sighted calculations of momentary advantage. The West's power in the Middle East is undergoing a constant decline and it is no longer omnipotent; but even if the West were *able* to impose any solution there is no doubt that it would sacrifice the interest of Israel in order to restore its influence in the Arab world. For example: on the day the Algerian conflict ends and the Algerian people win their independence at last (and that day is not far off) France will be interested normalizing relations with the Arabs and will stop supporting Israel. *Whoever thinks otherwise is seriously deluding himself.*

*** *** ***

We may well ask whether the policy of “reprisal” justified itself: was the desired security achieved along the borders? Were Israel’s relations with its neighbours improved? Did peace with the Arab people come closer?

Or was it nothing but an unfortunate policy that was rife with disaster?

Chapter 6

“The Third Kingdom of Israel” (29/11/56 – 7/3/57)

“Pulling their chestnuts from the fire”

Tensions between Israel and Jordan peaked in the months of September and October 1956. Four times during that period the IDF crossed the ceasefire lines and carried out major raids on Rahawa, Jarandal, Husan and Qalqilya. In Jordan a bitter internal struggle was raging. Britain hoped to preserve Hussein’s regime and hinted at the possibility that it would “defend” his kingdom from the Israeli raids, on the pretext of its commitments under the treaty between the two countries.

The possibility that an Iraqi army would enter Jordan was also raised. In his speech to the Knesset two weeks before the Suez war, the Prime Minister responded to Aden’s “statement”, in which the latter proposed a compromise between the Partition Plan of 1947 and the *status quo*. Among other things, Ben-Gurion said:

... This proposal has perhaps no purpose other than to divert the Arab world’s attention from the worsening Suez problem and to channel its attention towards Israel. There are perhaps also grounds to suspect that Jordan’s worsening provocations on the borders of Israel have no purpose other than to enable the entry of Iraq or Egypt into Jordan. (*Knesset Records* 21/63, 15/10/56)

A few months before that, the following appeared in the official newspaper of the coalition party Unity of Labour:

The Kingdom of Jordan is an artificial and arbitrary creation that is lacking in economic potential and viability; it is entirely the product of the needs and machinations of the British Colonial Office. It was that veteran imperialist Churchill who tore the East bank from the living body of Palestine in order to compensate the Hashemite dynasty with booty stolen from the Jewish people [!] and to hitch it to the chariot of imperial rule. Added to that theft was the crime of

annexing large and vital areas of the western Land of Israel to the Kingdom of Jordan after the War of Independence.

... All this indicates the approach of a decisive moment in the fate of this country. Of course Israel cannot and should not remain indifferent in the face of these developments and in the face of the possibility of far-reaching territorial transformations on its eastern border as a consequence of the inter-bloc struggle in the region. (*Lamerhav*, 9/7/56, editorial)

And for its part, *Davar* quoted the Foreign Minister on 21/10/56, a few days before Operation Sinai:

Israel is convinced that the entry of Iraqi armies into Jordan would constitute a new and grave danger to the security of the State. It would change the status quo and undermine the existing ceasefire accord between us and Jordan ... We consider ourselves free to act in accordance with our security needs.

Thus, when at the end of October a general mobilization of reserve soldiers began, the Israeli citizenry, the reserves and the army were convinced that a large-scale conflict was about to erupt with *Jordan*. It was widely believed among the public on the eve of the Suez War was that an Iraqi army would enter Jordan, thereby violating the *status quo* (Iraq was not a signatory to the aforementioned ceasefire accord). Israel, they believed, would not be able to remain silent and the IDF would occupy (“liberate” in the language of Herut and Unity of Labour) the West Bank.

The renewed Israeli conflict with Egypt did not take first place in the press and in public opinion, all the more so because relative calm prevailed on the Egyptian border. Few were willing to believe that Israel intervene in a conflict between Egypt and France and England over the nationalization of the Suez Canal. In that regard it was widely believed in Israel that Israel should not “pull the West’s chestnuts out of the fire”. At the beginning of August Radio Cairo replied:

Yesterday the newspaper *Davar*, which is Ben-Gurion's mouthpiece, published an article signed by "HY" in which it was said that Israel is not a mercenary, it will not harness itself to the West's chariot and it will not use the current conflict between Egypt and the West as an opportunity to serve the West against the Arab world. The author of the article says: "we must beware of one thing, and that is: not to become an instrument to pull foreign chestnuts out of the fire. The West can remove its own chestnuts. We did not come here in order to serve foreign interests and we will not do that in the future". We do not know if the author of the article was speaking in the name of the government of Israel or in his own name as a socialist. But we do know that these are good words, which are now appearing for the first time from the pen of an Israeli thinker writing in the Mapai newspaper. This is the sole indication of the existence of people from whom imperialism cannot remove the just socialist spirit. Yesterday we broadcast that Israel should always remember that it is a part of the Middle East and it is not in America or Europe. Israel will be mistaken if it stands against the peoples of Asia who are awakening and if it permits the West to use it as a whip against the Arabs. If it does that, it will arouse the hatred of many peoples. There is no doubt that this article, which was published in Mapai's *Davar*, attests that there are those in Israel who have begun to evaluate Israel's interests and to understand that the West's campaign is doomed to fail, because it is directed against the rights of the peoples. Israel will do itself an injustice if it ties its fate to the West. We welcome these words in *Davar* and see them as a positive step towards correcting the bad name that Israel has earned for itself. So far it has been suspected of being a pawn that the hands of the West have moved at will; it has become a foreign colony within a world that is rebelling against foreign conquerors. (Radio Cairo, 3/8/56)

"Madness"

During that period, proposals were indeed raised (by the General Zionists, Herut and Unity of Labour) to launch a "preventive war", but they were emphatically rejected by the Prime Minister:

In my speech of 2 November in the Knesset I announced: *we have never initiated and we never will initiate a war against anyone, and I add: this is the clear policy of the government, on which we will stand or fall. ... A preventive war is madness.* (*Knesset Records* 20/2067, 19/6/56. Emphasis ours)

If the “Sinai War” was not a “war for the liberation of territories of the Homeland that had been occupied” but rather a preventive war – and that is what those who initiated it claimed after the withdrawal – then the meaning of these words is:

1. To Ben-Gurion, “never” means only four months.
2. The government does not hold to its most firm commitments and does not fall when they are violated.
3. The initiators of “Operation Qadesh” should be confined to an insane asylum.

In the middle of October, Herut, Unity of Labour and the General Zionists again proposed to launch a preventive war. Ben-Gurion replied:

My comrades in the government and I *do not accept that view*. We believe in self-defence, and *if we are attacked*, we will fight with all our strength to the end, that is to say until victory. But we know all the horrors of war and its destructiveness to human lives and property, and we do not believe that wars solve historical problems in general, at least not in a way that is lasting, and so we take no satisfaction in battle. (*Knesset Records*, 21/57, 15/10/56. Emphasis ours)

Evidently a very clear meaning is expressed by the words “we do not accept the view” that Israel should launch a preventive war, and “if we are attacked, we will fight.” But Ben-Gurion, much like the Delphic Oracle, prepares himself for every possibility. In his latest articles he quotes from this speech in the Knesset – not the part we have quoted here, but another, quite different sentence (“We are perhaps standing in the face of

decisive and fateful events”) and explains that with these words he was hinting at Operation Qadesh.

That the Prime Minister and Defence Minister knew in advance about the attack on Egypt is nothing new; the “trick” was in the fact that that same speech was also intended to throw sand in the faces of the naïve and also to provide convenient quotations for the future.

Two days later Ben-Gurion summed up the political discussion in the Knesset and said, among other things:

... and I am sure that not only the decisive majority in the Knesset both in the coalition and the opposition but also *the decisive majority of the nation absolutely and emphatically rejects the mad advice* that is proffered from the columns of certain newspapers and in public meetings – that every time is an opportune one for war and conquest. Abdullah is assassinated – war, Nasser against Naguib – war, Glubb Pasha is deposed – war, conflict over the Suez – war. (*Knesset Records* 21/113, 17/10/56. Emphasis ours)

Again in the words of the Oracle: they reassure the Left by calling the idea of a preventive war “mad advice”; and the Right, by emphasizing the word “*every*”: “not “*every* time is an opportune time for war and conquest”, but evidently there *are* such times.

It remains for us to conclude with another quote from Ben-Gurion:

... There is no limit to the machinations and intrigues that certain politicians use to cover their plots. (*Knesset Records* 21/199, 7/11/56)

“An effective instrument”

The naivety of Israeli public opinion, which did not expect the IDF attack on Egypt, was not shared by journalists and politicians in the outside world.

An American Jew named I. F. Stone, who publishes an important political weekly

in Washington, wrote a few weeks *before* the nationalization of the Suez Canal:

Britain is playing a double game in the Middle East. I know from talks in Israel that even Britishers who are anti-Israel and pro-Arab have swung around to the view that *Israel might be a handy instrument for inflicting a serious loss of face on Nasser, perhaps even for overthrowing him*. The British hate Nasser. But this does not mean that Israel can count on Britain's firm friendship.

Should Israel Fight for Nuri Said?¹⁸

On the contrary what Britain would like *would be to use Israel to overthrow Nasser* and then to make a statement at the expense of a weakened Israel which would enhance the prestige of Nasser's rival and Britain's long-time puppet, Nuri Said, Pasha of Iraq. Britain would like to prove to the Arabs that the Baghdad Pact under Iraqi leadership and with British help can serve their aspirations better than Nasser. This is why the last Baghdad Pact meeting, much to the anger of Paris, was allowed to discuss both the Palestinian and the Algerian questions. France regards Algeria as an internal affair and Britain's actions as disloyal to its French ally.

All this is no doubt well understood by the Russians. Their policies have been consistent. They supported the Jews in 1947 on partition and helped them with arms in 1948 because this was a way to help push the British out of Palestine. Today the Russians have been supporting Nasser for the same reason, and there is reason to fear that they would intervene *if Israel – with the tacit support of Britain – attacked Egypt*. (Quoted in *Al Hamishmar* 1/6/56. Emphasis ours)¹⁹

Mr. Stone saw with a keen eye what was emerging and correctly analyzed Britain's policy in the Middle East and he well understood Israel's place in the general picture.

¹⁸ This heading appeared in the original text of I.F. Stone's article – trans.

¹⁹ As above, rather than provide a translation back into English from *Al Hamishmar*'s Hebrew translation of I. F. Stone's words, the quote here is directly from I. F. Stone's article, "Israel's Hopes and Fears of Russian Intervention", *I. F. Stone's Weekly*, Washington, D. C., 30 April 1956, p. 1. Available online at <http://www.ifstone.org/weekly/IFStonesWeekly-1956apr30.pdf> - trans.

The first and only time

The IDF announcement of 29 October, meticulously formulated and authorized by Ben-Gurion, stated:

IDF forces entered and struck at Fedayeen units in Ras al-Naqab and in Kuntilla and captured positions west of the Nahal junction, near the Suez Canal. This action comes in the wake of Egyptian military attacks against Israeli transport on land and sea which produced destruction and disrupted the peaceful lives of Israeli citizens.

The strange part about “near the Suez Canal” clarified that this raid involved rather more than just “striking at *Fedayeen* units”.

The next day, 30 October, the Security Council convened. The US representative proposed to condemn Israel as an aggressor and to resolve that the members of the UN were obliged to refrain from intervening in the conflict. And then, for the first time in the history of the UN, Britain and France exercised their veto rights against that very proposal. That unique measure clarified beyond any doubt the developments that would soon take place. For the veto was intended not against the condemnation of Israel – a thing that never worried France and certainly not Britain – but rather against the clause that sought to prevent intervention by UN member-states in the conflict.

And indeed, the day after the imposition of that veto, the governments of Britain and France presented an ultimatum to Egypt and Israel. The two sides were requested to move 10 miles from the banks of the Suez Canal and to cease firing. The Prime Minister of Britain, Anthony Eden, announced in Parliament:

In order to separate the combatants and to ensure freedom of passage through the Suez Canal for vessels of all nations, we have asked the government of Egypt to agree to the temporary entry of British and French forces to key positions in Port-Said, Ismailia and Suez. The governments of Egypt and Israel have been asked to reply to this request within 12 hours.

Egypt rejected the ultimatum. Israel accepted it readily, as IDF forces had not yet then reached 10 miles from the Canal; regarding Israel the ultimatum was no less than an invitation to continue advancing.

Oil was flowing in the pipeline

On 1 November British and French bombers took off from bases in Cyprus and from aircraft carriers that had been concentrated for several weeks in the Mediterranean. Prolonged and heavy bombing of Egypt began. After the bombing, British and French forces were to begin invading the Canal Zone. Eden explained the goals of the operation:

To put a stop to the hostilities as rapidly as possible and to prevent the spread of the conflagration on a large scale ... neither Britain nor France have the desire to see this action as anything more than a temporary one. Their intention is that this action will lead to an arrangement that will prevent the regular recurrence of a similar situation in the future ... by entering the Suez Canal Zone we are not only defending an international route that is vital – especially to us and to France – but we are also holding the only possible line of separation between the warring sides.

On 1 November Egypt declared war on France and Britain. Syria broke diplomatic relations with both powers and other Arab states followed in its wake; in some Arab states a general mobilization was declared.

On 2 November the Iraqi oil pipeline was blown up in Jordan and according to Syrian and Jordanian sources it had suddenly come out that oil was flowing through it to Haifa. The Tapline and Aramco oil companies were asked to stop the flow of oil to England and France and with the gigantic Syrian bombing of the Iraqi pipeline the cut-off of oil supplies to the ports of the Eastern Mediterranean was complete. The Egyptians blocked the Suez Canal with ships loaded with cement that were sunk in various spots. Nasser ordered the Egyptian army to withdraw from Sinai, to conduct battles only in key points in order to slow the Israeli advance, and to concentrate on the area around the Canal.

The Egyptian army withdrew (in most cases in a disorderly way). By 6 November the IDF already controlled the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip. The battles between Israel and Egypt stopped completely. Despite that, a bitter struggle took place between British/French forces and the Egyptians – both soldiers and civilians – in the Canal Zone. But by then it was clear that the Anglo-French invasion had failed. It collapsed not only because of the stubborn resistance of the Egyptians, but mainly in the wake of a vast wave of anger that the tripartite aggression produced all over the world and even in England itself.

“One thousand four hundred years ago”

On 6 November a celebratory military parade was carried out at the “Gulf of Solomon” that had up to then (and also as of 7/3/57) been called “Sharm al-Sheikh”. The Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan read to the soldiers the famous telegram that has been so rarely quoted and was so quickly forgotten. Its complete text read:

To the soldiers and commanders of the 9th Brigade.

Fate has given you a unique historical privilege. You have brought to a successful conclusion the greatest and most glorious military operation in the history of our people and one of the most magnificent operations in the history of all nations. In less than seven days the entire Sinai Peninsula, including the Gaza Strip, has been purged of enemy forces – from the straits of Eilat to Rafah, al-Arish and Qantara, and from Nitzana to the Red Sea in the south. And once again we can sing the ancient song of Moses and the Children of Israel “The people will hear and be afraid; sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling will take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. Fear and dread will fall on them; ay the greatness of Your arm they will be as still as a stone, till Your people pass over, O

LORD, till the people pass over whom You have purchased.”²⁰ With a mighty combined sweep of all the forces of the IDF you have extended a hand to King Solomon who developed Eilat as the first Israeli port three thousand years ago, and from there he sent the ships of Tarshish. Eilat will once again be the main Hebrew port in the south and the Red Sea straits will be opened to Israeli shipping, and Yotvat, called Tiran, that until one thousand four hundred years ago was an independent Hebrew state, *will once again become part of the Third Kingdom of Israel.*

To the victorious Israel Defence Forces, respectfully yours, David Ben-Gurion.
(*Davar* 7/11/56. Emphasis ours)

“The Third Kingdom of Israel”! This was not the first “Third Kingdom” that failed in the twentieth century. Incidentally, why “*kingdom*”? After all, Israel is a republic! Or is it perhaps an allusion to the famous song “David, King of Israel, is alive and enduring”?

“Indeed, all the earth is Mine”

Until the end of the Israeli-Egyptian hostilities the Knesset did not sit in full session to discuss the Suez war. (On 29 October the discussion in the Knesset was revolving around “control of the prices of consumer necessities”). The first discussion took place on 7 November. The Prime Minister began by saying:

As you know, two days ago, after a lightning campaign of less than one week, our army completed the clearing of the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip of the enemy’s army— from Ras al-Naqab near Eilat to the Gulf of Solomon, that had heretofore been called Sharm al-Sheikh, on the southern shore of the Red Sea Straits, and from the Eilat-Rafah line in the north to the Suez Canal and its southern gulf, a territory of nearly sixty thousand square kilometres (nearly three times the territory of Israel). It was the greatest and most glorious military operation in the

²⁰ Exodus 15:14-16

history of our people and one of the most magnificent operations in the history of all nations.

Our army did not strike Egyptian territory and did not even try to strike it, and I hope that neither in the future will we be forced by the tyrant of Egypt to violate the order we were commanded when we left Egypt 3,000 years ago – not to return to it. Our action has been restricted only to the territory of the Sinai Peninsula ...

It was at the Red Sea where the seaborne commerce of Israel began 3,000 years ago at the time of King Solomon, and the port of Eilat was the first Hebrew port. At the time of the Kings of Judea to the middle of the sixth century of the Common Era, that is, 1,400 years ago, Hebrew independence existed in the island of Iotabe, south of the Eilat strait, which *was liberated* the day before yesterday by the IDF. That island, which today is called Tiran, guards the passage from the Red Sea south of Eilat.

Procopius, the Greek historian from the sixth century, a native of Ceasarea in Palestine [“Eretz Yisra’el” – “the Land of Israel” – trans.], in his book on the Persian and Byzantine wars, described the island of Iotabe²¹ (now called Tiran) and says: “There since ancient times the Hebrews have been living on their own authority, and only with the kingship of Justinian in our times have they become subject to the Romans” – that is to say to the Byzantines. Because of their historical importance I have quoted Procopius in the original,²² because some scholars in our time who have got the words from a secondary or a tertiary source have distorted this very important historical testimony. (Emphasis ours)

And here too, for the sake of its historical importance, we have quoted Ben-Gurion’s original words (*Knesset Records*, Volume 21, p. 197, 7/11/56) because some scholars of our day who received these words (not necessarily from secondary or tertiary sources) have distorted this very important historical testimony.

²¹ This is the same island Ben-Gurion called “Yotvat” in his letter to the troops quoted above. Others quoted below in this book also call it Yotvat, as do the authors. “Iotabe” is the most common Latin transliteration of Procopius’ Greek rendering of the Island’s name – trans.

²² Ben-Gurion quoted the words of Procopius in the original Greek before saying them in Hebrew – trans.

One of the strangest things in this whole line of argument is that, even as the IDF was standing on the banks of the Suez Canal, Ben-Gurion claimed that “Our army did not strike Egyptian territory and did not even try to strike it”. That was not a slip of the tongue; on the contrary, later in the same speech Ben-Gurion said again:

As I said before, our army received a strict order not to cross the Suez Canal and not to strike at the territory of the land of Egypt and to remain only on the territory of the Sinai Peninsula.

Evidently, according to Ben-Gurion, the Sinai Peninsula and the land of Egypt are two different and separate things. This raises the question: if the Sinai Peninsula does *not* belong to Egypt, *to whom* does it belong? Ben-Gurion passes over that question in silence; Procopius certainly did not make a finding on the matter.

In that context Ben-Gurion quoted a very meaningful passage from the Bible. Addressing the soldiers of the IDF, he said:

You have done a great and mighty thing, that perhaps transcends all political and military meaning; you have brought us closer to exalted and decisive moment in our ancient history, to the place of the giving of the Torah, in which our people was urged to become a treasured nation. The eternal words of our Torah stand before us once again, as real as life, as they tell of the exodus from Egypt and the coming of our fathers to the Sinai desert: “And when they set out from Reph'idim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain. And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine.”²³ (*Knesset Records* 21/199, 7/11/56. Emphasis ours)

²³ Exodus 19:2-5

“They have breathed their last”

At the end of his speech Ben-Gurion declared:

At this time we must clarify our position on seven points and we must transmit it to world public opinion decisively and with moral authority:

1. *The ceasefire accord with Egypt is dead and buried and will not be revived...*
2. *Together with the accord, the ceasefire lines between us and Egypt have breathed their last.*
3. There is no conflict between Israel and the Egyptian people. King Farouk and after him the tyrant Abd al-Nasser imposed a heavy disaster on their people by inciting them into war with Israel. The flight of the officers of the Egyptian army and tens of thousands of its soldiers from Sinai attests like a hundred witnesses that they had no interest and no desire to fight Israel in a *foreign desert*.
4. We do not seek the perpetuation of anarchy in our relations with Egypt and we are ready for negotiations for a stable peace, cooperation and good neighbourly relations with Egypt, on the condition of direct negotiations, without preconditions and without coercion from any quarter. We hope that all the peace-loving nations will support this desire.
5. We are prepared for such negotiations with any of the other Arab states. But as long as they hold to the cease-fire accords, even if they are not ready for a permanent peace, for its part Israel too will adhere to these accords.
6. *Israel will not agree to any condition requiring the stationing of any foreign force, whatever it may be called, within its territory or in any of the territories held by Israel.*
7. Israel will not fight any Arab state or Egypt if it is not attacked by them.
(*Knesset Records* 21/199, 7/11/56. Emphasis ours)

Long live peace! Who dares to besmirch Israel by alleging that it is aggressive? From the banks of the Suez Canal Israel extends its hand for peace towards the Egyptian people,

proposes “*direct negotiations, without preconditions and without coercion*”, and declares that it will not fight Egypt if it is not attacked by it ... Egypt does not agree? – Well there’s your decisive proof of who really is interested in peace and who is not! It would be interesting to know how Ben-Gurion would respond if an Egyptian army stood on the banks of the Yarkon River,²⁴ and Egypt extended its hand for peace with Israel. Ben-Gurion’s appeal is like his previous appeal, on 2 November 1955, which was followed a few hours later by the large-scale Israeli attack on the Nitzana area.

In the words of the prophet:

Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets
 who lead my people astray,
 who cry "Peace"
 when they have something to eat,
 but declare war against him
 who puts nothing into their mouths.
 Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision,
 and darkness to you, without divination.
 The sun shall go down upon the prophets,
 and the day shall be black over them;
 The seers shall be disgraced,
 and the diviners put to shame;
 they shall all cover their lips,
 for there is no answer from God.
 But as for me, I am filled with power,
 with the Spirit of the LORD,
 and with justice and might,
 to declare to Jacob his transgression
 and to Israel his sin.
 Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob
 and rulers of the house of Israel,
 who abhor justice
 and pervert all equity,
 Who build Zion with blood
 and Jerusalem with wrong.
 Its heads give judgment for a bribe,
 its priests teach for hire,
 its prophets divine for money;
 yet they lean upon the LORD and say,
 "Is not the LORD in the midst of us?"

²⁴ The Yarkon River enters the Mediterranean at Tel Aviv – trans.

No evil shall come upon us."
 Therefore because of you
 Zion shall be plowed as a field;
 Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,
 and the mountain of the house a wooded height.
 (Micah 3:5-12)

Along with the ceasefire accord – so Ben-Gurion informs us – “the ceasefire lines between us and Egypt have breathed their last”. But what will take the place of the deceased? *Another* line? *Which* line? *Where* will the new line run? *North* of the ceasefire line? Not likely! Will the State of Israel be shrunk in the wake of “the greatest and most glorious military operation in the history of our people”? So will the new line run *south* of the ceasefire line, towards the “foreign desert”? Will Israel’s territory grow a little at the expense of the peninsula that is not included within the territory of Egypt? But how can we raise such insolent thoughts when every child knows that “we did not fight this war for the sake of conquering Sinai or in order to impose peace on Nasser” – thus, at any rate, the propaganda pamphlet, “What we fought for, why we withdrew, what we achieved”, which was published by Mapai in March 1957, *after the withdrawal*. In that pamphlet you will not find a single word about the Third Kingdom of Israel or Procopius or the resolute stance that “Israel will not agree to any condition requiring the stationing of any foreign force, whatever it may be called, within its territory or in any of the territories held by Israel”. And that is strange, for the author of the pamphlet is known to be very fond of quoting Ben-Gurion. The author’s name: Ben-Gurion.

“City of our fathers”

The short shining era of Third Kingdom of Israel was a period during which every day was a festival for disciples of Jabotinsky.

In his speech at the Knesset on 7 November the leader of Herut, MK Menachem Begin, said:

... the main conclusion is: “*there remains yet very much land yet to be possessed*”.²⁵ Mr. Chairman, Members of the Knesset, how relieved were our hearts when we heard the announcement of the Army of Israel about the liberated Gaza Strip. Our army said: territory of the Homeland, that had been torn away from it, has returned to its embrace. It is with praise and gratitude that we hear these words, *but if Gaza was a city of our fathers that had been torn away from the Homeland, then what is Jerusalem, what is Hebron, what is Bethlehem?*

No more will it be said in Israel, when we demand an operation to liberate the lands of our fathers: “aggression”, “expansion”; an eternal border was set at the Rhodes Accord and thus it will remain. The entire nation will draw the conclusion from the liberation of the occupied territory in the south. Land of the Homeland that is under foreign occupation does not cease to be a part of the Homeland. *Foreign conquest does not negate our eternal right to the land of our fathers and our sons.* (*Knesset Records 21/202, 7/11/56. Emphasis ours*)

The last pretext could be used much more effectively by Arabs of Palestine against Mr. Begin and his friends.

The term “city of our fathers” applied to Gaza, the city of the ancient Philistines, is indeed most entertaining. Maybe Mr. Begin wants to hint to us that he is of Philistine origin?

After Begin delivered his speech, the leader of the General Zionists, Mr. Bernstein, said among other things:

For the moment we must take great satisfaction that important territories, whence came threats to our security every day, have been *returned to the Homeland*, only steps away from our settlements, and the territories from which the Egyptian army has been expelled surely will serve as a guarantor for the security of the State. (*Knesset Records 21/203, 7/11/56. Emphasis ours*)

²⁵ Joshua 13:1

It can legitimately be asked: what is the basis for the claims that the Gaza Strip is “liberated territory of the Homeland?” After all, in ancient times it was not the ancient Hebrews who lived there, but other ethnic groups; in our period it was permanently inhabited by Palestinian Arabs and according to the UN Partition Plan it was supposed to be part of their independent state; Egypt never declared its annexation and even emphasized that the Egyptian administration there was temporary, until the Palestine problem was finally solved. Appetite increases with eating, but it does not always bring with it the best pretexts to *justify* the eating. Israel *has no moral, political, historical or other right* to annex the Gaza Strip. That is not what the president of the Israeli “peace movement”, the Secretary of the United Workers’ Party (Mapam), Meir Yaari, thought. In the same debate the Mapam leader said:

Honourable Chairman, honourable Knesset, we are indeed concluding a small chapter in the State of Israel’s struggle for its existence and its future. We are indeed concluding a dazzling military operation the likes of which will be hard to find in the entire world. We have the right first and foremost to take pride in the fact that with the *liberation of the Gaza Strip* we have removed a stinging thorn from the side of the State of Israel. Since we removed it, I hope that apart from one faction in this House [the reference is to the Communist list] no faction will advise us to reinsert that stinging thorn with our own hands...

I have no doubt that *the conquest of territories and areas that are not ours has no appeal to us*. We have liberated our southern border from the provocations of the Egyptians and the Fedayeen with the *liberation of the Gaza Strip from Egypt, which invaded it in 1948*. (Emphasis ours)

It clear beyond any doubt that the left-wing socialist Yaari believes that what the IDF did in the Strip was not “conquest of territories and areas that do not belong to us”, but “the liberation of the Gaza Strip from Egypt”. As is his wont, he speaks in condemnation of conquest and at the same time justifies the annexation of the Strip to Israel.

“Brotherhood of peoples”

But a man like Yaari will not forget to concern himself with “the brotherhood of peoples”, and he adds:

For us there is only one way to break this siege [the reference is to hatred of the neighbouring nations] and that is the way of the brotherhood of peoples ... with the attachment of Gaza to the Homeland, *the Arab minority in this country has grown, and it approaches half a million people.* From here on we must measure this minority in our country, in which after all we are the masters of our own destiny, according to the standard by which we want other nations to measure us. Only if we can make members of the Arab minority in this country feel secure in their future and their human and civil sovereignty, only then can we hope to pave a path also into the hearts of the neighbouring Arab nations and thereby to *bring closer the longed-for peace.* (Emphasis ours)

In Yaari’s view, acts of war and conquests will not set back the cause of the longed-for peace, as long as the Arabs of the occupied territories are given equal rights! It would be interesting to know what the citizens of the Strip themselves thought about that humane proposal. Yaari continues:

... more than any danger that is likely to threaten us from outside, I truly fear the dangers that are likely to threaten us if we fail to break by our own efforts the belt of hatred and isolation around us. After thousands of years of exile we return to great continent, the cradle of humanity and civilizations – to Asia. This continent is now subject to a great struggle over human liberty and the independence of nations. It would be an immeasurable tragedy if over the course of time the nations of this continent continue to see us as a foreign body, *just as it will be a great victory for us if in the years ahead we succeed in integrating our war for national and social liberation into the national and social war of liberation of the peoples of this mighty and ancient continent.* (Emphasis ours)

He feared for the fate of Israel and the attitude of the peoples of the Asian continent towards it, but by no means does he believe that “Operation Sinai” is inconsistent with the “national and social war for liberation of the peoples of this ancient continent”. In his opinion there was no collaboration between Israel and Britain and France; on that matter, he declared:

To the best of my understanding, we did not make any treaty with France and Britain. They have their own goals in this armed conflict with Egypt. What more authoritative testimony than that of the Prime Minister of Britain. He has already dissociated himself from us, and even as he was bombing the Canal he hastened to declare that the Israel’s penetration into the Sinai Peninsula was unjustified. (Knesset Records Vol. 21, p. 207 and onwards, 7/11/56. Emphasis ours)

Most entertaining. The peace-loving socialist Yaari relies on the warmongering imperialist Eden to prove that there is no connection between the Israeli invasion and the British-French one. Did Yaari think that Eden would admit to the existence of a conspiracy with Israel?

About one month before the Suez War it was none other than he who endeavoured to prove that *it made no difference* if Israel entered into an *overt* alliance for war with the West or “only” launched a war at the same moment as the West:

It is hard to understand why an overt military alliance with the West over Suez would be likely to “end Israel’s chances of being integrated among the awakening peoples of Asia” but launching an act of war on our part at the same time as the West’s war against Egypt would serve in some way as evidence of our “independence” and not “hinder the recognition of Israel by the nations of Asia”, and even act “to accelerate the process of its integration” into this continent. Does this mean that we should forego realizing our rights in Suez, in Eilat as well as the Jordan Canal? Absolutely not! We will continue in the struggle resolutely and tirelessly. But we must conduct the struggle while adhering to two conditions:

1. We must take care not to find ourselves *niether de jure nor de facto* on the front-lines with those whose goal is not equality of opportunity and rights for all peoples but freedom of conquest and exploitation for imperialists. We will fight for freedom of navigation ... but we will not set ourselves up against the just national aspirations of the Egyptian people.
2. We will strive to realize our rights in Suez, in Eilat and above all in the Jordan Canal while seeking out all possibilities for peace. (Emphasis ours)

Which newspaper published these words in its edition of 28/9/56? *Al Hamishmar*, the newspaper of the party that Meir Yaari leads; it was *he* who wrote them in his debate with Yigal Allon!

We will now quote from the speeches of others who took part in the debate in the Knesset on 7 November.

“The hand of Supreme oversight”

The religious parties were not absent from the debate. Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Levin (Agudat Israel and Poalei Agudat Israel) said:

... And now to the main point: the hour of the nation’s awakening has come. We all have seen that the Lord is God. Even the blind felt, even if they did not also understand, *the wonders of the Lord*. We have seen how the Lord hardened Nasser’s heart, so that he *got entangled with the French in Algeria to his disadvantage, so that he got entangled with the British in Suez*, which made the whole Western world stand against him. *If not for that, would these events have transpired?* Why did our enemies act precipitously such that they fell into the trap? All this shows that the capital has a leader and all the political and military constellations are in His hands. It is likely that the British got themselves into a war with our enemies against their own will.

The hand of Supreme oversight was involved.

And the old promise was fulfilled: “The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”²⁶ Today, would we be able by ourselves – and I do not want to minimize the value of the Israel Defence Forces, the strength of which also comes to it with the help of the Lord who dwells in Zion – to smash the army of Egypt, to destroy most of their weapons of air, land and sea? Let us please open our eyes and recognize that “This was the LORD’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.”²⁷ (*Knesset Records*, 21/209, 7/11/56. Emphasis ours)

If there were those who thought that a conspiracy had been elaborated between Israel and Britain and France – well, here come the spokesmen for God Almighty who inform us that what happened here was none other than “*the hand of Supreme oversight*”. The British did not want to go to war against Egypt at all but “This was the Lord’s doing”.

And where was God during the *withdrawal* from Sinai? Are we to assume that “all the political and military constellations” slipped out of His hands or that the Supreme overseer made a political mistake? Or maybe those who invoke Supreme oversight are nothing but false prophets?

Regarding all that quoting from the Bible, which went on extensively until midnight on 8 November, the official newspaper of the French Communist Party, *L’Humanité*, wrote at the time that it is certainly possible to find passages in the Bible to justify and to condemn any action at all, but it is doubtful if passages can be found to justify the invasion of Egypt, as the oil interests, the Suez Canal Company etc. did not exist when the Bible was written.

“An interesting political lesson”

A spokesman of the Progressive Party, Idov Cohen, said, among other things:

²⁶ Exodus 14:14

²⁷ Pslams 118:23

... And the government was right when it declared to the UN that the ceasefire treaty with Egypt does not exist for us any more than the treaty for keeping technicians in Suez exists for England. *There is a ceasefire line – the line at which fire has ceased today...*

We have spoken a great deal about activism, and how many among us saw in the timing of Operation Sinai a “tragic delay”. It seems to me that a more fortuitous configuration of circumstances and operative conditions could not have been dreamt of. And that too should be recalled. And my friends, permit me to say a word in praise of policy that is moderate, cautious, *lacking in emotional pathos and lacking in extremism*. Nasser is an object lesson for every state and every politician. The stages of the world were open to him for personal success, to develop his country, to enhance the prestige of his people, for social reforms and economic progress, for prestige and potential. And he wasted all that and immersed himself and his country in a deep mire of blood, shame and failure. That too *is an interesting political lesson*. (*Knesset Records 21/213, 7/14/56*. Emphasis ours)

Perhaps not all will agree to see in “Operation Sinai” an example of “*policy that is moderate, cautions and lacking in extremism*”; maybe not everyone who reads Ben-Gurion’s famous telegram (about “the Third Kingdom of Israel”) and the speeches that were heard in the Knesset on 7 November will discern in them a lack of emotional pathos; but all will agree on one thing: *an interesting political lesson emerges from the Suez War*. But it seems that Mr. Cohen was too quick to specify just what that lesson *was*. He should have waited a little – maybe thirty hours, or even better, three months. Mr. Cohen’s haste does not bespeak “moderation or “caution”; and *there too* is an “interesting political lesson”.

A two-edged sword

A different voice was also heard at that dramatic session, redolent of ancient glory and the brilliance of days gone by – that of the Israeli Communist Party. Shmuel Mikunis, the Secretary of that party, said:

... The war that the government launched against Egypt on 29 October does not serve any Israeli national interest, but endangers Israel. *This is an unjustified war for which Herut has been calling. As will be recalled, that appeal by Herut was condemned and rejected only about three weeks ago, during a political discussion in the Knesset, by representatives of nearly all the factions. The Prime Minister himself promised in that discussion that Israel would not launch a war on its own initiative.*

... only a few days after the beginning of the war, after the government of Israel gave the imperialists a pretext to intervene militarily in Suez, it had already become clear with the announcement of the British Foreign Ministry that it would forcefully compel Israel to withdraw behind the ceasefire lines, in the famous formulation: “the Moor has done his duty, the Moor can go.” Tomorrow or the next day the French imperialists, Israel’s new patrons, will say similar things ...

It is not territory that Israel is lacking but understanding and peace with the Arab peoples and those who are liberating themselves from imperialism. A policy of territorial conquest is a two-edged sword, for it is likely to create the precedent and the basis for territorial conquests in the other direction, by neighbouring countries against Israel. The slogan of “whoever is the strongest, prevails” cannot be the basis for peaceful Israeli-Arab coexistence...

No reasonable person will accept the government’s claims that the attack on Egypt was an act of “defence”. For all their seriousness, the murders of innocent Israelis by the Fedayeen, which were condemned by all Israeli public figures, by no means justify aggressive war. *If the government espouses such a system, then logically it is creating the dangerous precedent also for the governments of neighbouring countries to undertake a counter-war against Israel in response, for example, to raids of the type that happened at Qalqilya...*

Whoever truly wants peace must know that it is not by means of attacks, raids, conquests and annexations that peace is achieved. By such means peace is only set back and our security and our existence are endangered. The only path to peace is to eschew the policy of force, to take into consideration the just national rights of

the other nation and willingness for compromise on the various issues under contention.

In order to repair the great damage that has been caused to Israel by the invasion of Egypt, in order to prevent dangerous developments for our people and our homeland, the government of Israel must, in our opinion, obey the UN resolution on the return of the IDF to within Israel's borders ...

On the evening hours of 29 October, with the news of the attack on Egypt on the orders of the Ben-Gurion government, our Communist faction in the Knesset submitted a motion of non-confidence in the government. We now hereby renew our motion: for the sake of the security of Israel, for the sake of the future of Israel, for the sake of peace and national independence the Knesset shall express non-confidence in the war government under the leadership of Ben-Gurion. (*Knesset Records* 21/210, 7/11/56. Emphasis ours)

The Communists were called “traitors”, “agents of a foreign power” etc., this time also by members of moderate factions like the Progressives. In the Knesset the famous Sinai Coalition came together “from wall to wall” – from Mapam to Herut, including the Arab factions linked to Mapai.

Knesset vote: 88:3

The debate in the Knesset on 7/11/56 concluded with a vote on two motions. The motion of the Israeli Communist Party (Maki) was read by MK Moshe Sneh:

In the name of the Israeli Communist Party list in the Knesset I have the honour of proposing the following motion: for the military attack on Egypt; for service to French and British enslaving colonialism; for the setting-back of peace with the Arab peoples – the heart's desire of all Israel; for isolating Israel among the nations of the world; for endangering the security and the future of Israel, the Knesset expresses non-confidence in the war government under the leadership of Ben-Gurion.

Three voted in favour of the motion; against – 88.

The second motion was submitted by Akiva Guvrin (Mapai):

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Knesset. In the name of all the factions of the Knesset except Maki, and they are: the Coalition factions (the Party of the Workers of the Land of Israel [Mapai], Unity of Labour – Workers of Zion, the United Workers' Party, ha-Poel ha-Mizrahi – ha-Mizrahi and the Progressive Party) and the factions of the Herut Party, the General Zionists, Agudat Israel and Poalei Agudat Israel, the Democratic List for Israeli Arabs, Progress and Labour, Agriculture and Development, I hereby submit to the Knesset the following motions:

1. The Knesset welcomes the announcement of the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of 7 November 1956, on the military and political campaign.
2. The Knesset and the nation send our warmest blessings to the Israel Defence Forces, *from Dan to Yotvat*, that has been victorious in the Sinai war, and which, through its preparedness, capability and the spirit of sacrifice that imbues it, struck the Egyptian enemy, drove him away and destroyed him. Blessed be the Israel Defence Forces, the rock of Israel is its fortress.
3. The Knesset bows its head before the fallen of the Israel Defence Forces who gave their souls to death for the life and existence of the State of Israel, and expresses its condolences to the families that have been bereft of their beloved, who are dear to all of the House of Israel.
4. The Knesset wishes the wounded a rapid and complete recovery. (Emphasis ours)

The motion passed by a majority of 88 to 3 Maki votes, with no abstentions. The session ended in a festive atmosphere with members of the Knesset rising to their feet and singing the national anthem, for the first time in the history of the Knesset.

With a quavering voice

The celebratory ambience and the high spirits “from Dan to Yotvat” continued for about another thirty hours. On the evening of 8 November the Voice of Israel asked its listeners to stand by for an important announcement. The delivery of the announcement was postponed several times until, at the end – after midnight – the broken and quavering voice of the Prime Minister was heard. He told his audience of the political pressure that had been brought to bear on Israel and which forced him to agree to the principle of withdrawal from Sinai. But near the end of his speech, which is still remembered by many due to the dramatic circumstances, Ben-Gurion said:²⁸

We set three principal aims for ourselves in Operation Sinai:

1. The destruction of the forces that had been always lying in wait to overpower us.
2. The liberation of territory of the Homeland that had been seized by the invader.
3. Ensuring freedom of navigation in the Eilat Strait and also in the Suez Canal.

And even if, at the moment, only the first and main clause has been executed – *we are confident that the latter two goals too will be fully realized.* (Emphasis ours)

The importance of this declaration is of the highest order. Ben-Gurion is declaring here in detail that the annexation of the Gaza Strip (“territory of the Homeland that had been seized by the invader”) and the ensuring of freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal were among the primary aims of the war. Moreover; it is clear that even though he had been forced to agree to withdraw from Sinai, he was still sure that these goals could be realized.

²⁸ On 14/11/56 Ben-Gurion repeated the speech in the Knesset. The segment quoted here is from the *Knesset Records*, 21/260.

Ben-Gurion's capitulation came a short time after the lofty talk about "the Third Kingdom of Israel" and with no advance preparation of the ground in public opinion. The astonishment was so great that the next day's newspapers did not manage to adjust themselves to the new line. The morning after the speech the newspaper *Davar* appeared without an editorial and in its place was printed a poem by Nathan Alterman.

One of the verses of the poem was:

We do not covet land, but
 Possession of that lofty mountain
 Is written in the chronicles of the Hebrew people
 Who in their childhood saw it smoldering²⁹

Who said that Israel aspired for conquest? This is simply a theoretical discussion over the question of "possession of Mount Sinai", and the answer is of course: the Hebrews. Everything is so simple, clear and understood that it is hard to grasp how anybody (for example: all the member-states of the UN, apart from Israel) could cast any doubt upon it.

"Put a final end to the adventure"

After 8 November the government feared resentment among the army and the people, who had been stuffed full of talk about the "Third Kingdom of Israel" and about how "Israel will not agree to any condition requiring the stationing of any foreign force, whatever it may be called, within its territory or in any of the territories held by Israel." The upshot was: the rise in the popularity of Herut, which sought to resist international public opinion and to defy the UN. For that reason the holding of a political debate in the Knesset was postponed until feelings subsided and anger abated.

²⁹ The last three lines are from: Laor, Dan and Moshe Tlamim: "The Last Chapter: Nathan Alterman and the Six-Day War." *Israel Studies*, Volume 4, Number 2, Fall 1999, pp. 178-194. Indiana University Press. Trans.

On the week after 8 November two contradictory motions were placed on the agenda. One was proposed by MK Moshe Sneh who said, among other things:

The government's action in launching a military attack on Egypt on 29 October of this year caused immeasurable damage to the State of Israel, its international position and its security:

1. The attack presented Israel in the eyes of the entire world, in both the east and the west, as an aggressor, and propagandistic fervor will be of no avail here, since Israeli military forces invaded the territory of Egypt.
2. The attack presented Israel in the eyes of the peoples of Asia and Africa, in the eyes of all the nations that are struggling for liberation from the foreign colonial yoke, as a vanguard of colonialism in the Near and Middle East, a vanguard in the simplest sense, that supplied the pretext and paved the way for the French and British leaders' imperialist aggression against Egypt, for their malicious, ignominious and failed attempt to occupy the Suez Canal by force.
3. The act of aggression placed additional stumbling-blocks on the path to the longed-for peace with the Arab nations, for on the basis of Israel's act of conquest and collaboration with colonialist aggression, and on the basis of facts accomplished by the stronger side, no one will conduct negotiations for peace as anything except empty words and lip-service.

In addition to being laden with conditions, Ben-Gurion's consent to withdrawal was incomplete: it did not include the Gaza Strip. The Maki motion was intended to bring about a Knesset resolution that would call for the *immediate and complete evacuation of all the occupied territories*:

... We believe that for the sake of cleansing Israel's name of the stain of aggression and the stain of service to Anglo-French colonialism, for the sake of opening the path to Israeli-Arab peace and for the security of our country, it is necessary to execute *in full* the evacuation of the territories occupied by the IDF, it is necessary to *completely* eliminate this accursed military adventure, to abandon the policy of "might makes right". *We need to implement the UN General Assembly resolution without delay or demur*, because it is first and foremost the supreme national

interest of the State of Israel, its security, its future in this region of the world.
(*Knesset Records* 21/256 14/11/56. Emphasis ours)

MK Argov (Mapai) replied to that motion:

Without getting into Knesset Member Sneh's accusations and distortions, I propose to remove the motion from the agenda.

The motion was removed by a vote of 76 to 3.

A parliamentary claim

The second motion was brought by MK Ben-Eliezer of the Herut list:

Mr. Chairman, members of the Knesset. Last Wednesday the song "Hatikva" broke out spontaneously from the Knesset floor, signaling the nation's pride in the army's victory crowned with heroism, and its unity behind its fighting sons and their great achievement, which was about to set it on the path to peace. At that session the Prime Minister made an important political announcement and stressed among other things, that "Israel will not agree to any condition requiring the stationing of any foreign force, whatever it may be called, within its territory or in any of the territories held by Israel". And the Prime Minister added that "the ceasefire accord with Egypt is dead and buried and will not be revived". These declarations, which were part of the Prime Minister's comprehensive statement, were ratified by the Knesset and became resolutions.

A night passed, a day passed, and in the middle of a sleepless night there came to the ears of the people, that had made a heroic stand in battle, an announcement that struck them dumb. The government announced a completely different policy, an unexpected turn of events, and on the basis of that decision the Prime Minister announced to the President of the United States: "In view of the resolutions of the UN regarding the withdrawal of foreign forces from Egypt and the establishment of

an international force, we hereby voluntarily withdraw our forces when the necessary arrangements are made with the UN in the Suez Canal Zone". Thus the Knesset's resolution was completely annulled, without its consultation. (*Knesset Records* 21/257, 14/11/56)

In the opinion of MK Ben-Eliezer, the meaning of Ben-Gurion's announcement on the Voice of Israel was that "the army was victorious on the field of battle – the government retreated in the war of nerves."

The Prime Minister, who had the floor after him, refrained from replying to MK Sneh, which he characterized as "a repeat with additional nonsense of the letter of His Highness the Chief of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, Gospodin Bulganin."

And to MK Ben-Eliezer he said:

First of all I will reply to his parliamentary claim regarding why the government did not seek the advice of the Knesset on how to reply to the President of the United States. He should have asked *why did the government not consult the Knesset before it launched the campaign in Sinai; that was a much more serious matter and he knew about that before the launching of the campaign.* And the parliamentary question he raised is not honest and fair. (Emphasis ours)

After that evasive but meaning-laden reply, David Ben-Gurion quoted word-for-word the what Ben-Gurion said on the Voice of Israel, and with the claim that "it would not be politically wise and not to the benefit of the State to discuss these matters now," he proposed "not to accept the advice of the honourable Knesset Member from the Herut list, Mr. Ben-Eliezer". The vote was 66 in favour of the Prime Minister's resolution, 13 against.

65:1

Since the next political debate in the Knesset did not take place until more than two months later, we can now turn to a survey of what transpired at the UN during the first days after the invasion.

After the British-French veto paralyzed the Security Council, an emergency session of the General Assembly was convened, and on 2 November it passed a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and for the continuation of the session of the General Assembly until the implementation of the resolution. 65 states voted in favour of the resolution, 7 abstained and only Britain and France voted against it. On 4 November another, similar resolution was passed. On 7 November the General Assembly convened for an additional session and passed a resolution (with no opposition and with the abstentions of 12 states) to activate a UN emergency force in the war zone. After that, a resolution was passed, *with a majority of 65 against the sole vote of Israel* (and with the abstention of 10 states), which called for the immediate evacuation of the invading forces from Egyptian territory.

There had never been such a dramatic vote in the history of the UN, in which one member-state was in such an isolated position. Not even Britain and France dared to vote against the resolution and were compelled to abstain. There is much symbolism in the fact that that vote took place on exactly the same day on which the Knesset rejected the resolution calling for withdrawal, by a majority of 87 to 3. The comparison between the international balance of power and Israel's internal balance of power is very significant.

“Before the whole world”

In his recollections about those days, the then representative of Israel at the UN and the ambassador to the United States writes:

Never in the seven years since the birth of the State had our international position been as difficult as on that Tuesday when the newspapers reported with attention-grabbing headlines about “war in the Middle East”. It looked as if all we had

achieved in the cultivation of public opinion, in fostering closer relations with the American government and in forging ties to other states – went down the drain that day ... The Arabs together with the United States, the Soviet Union and the Afro-Asian states mobilized enough votes to compel the convening of an emergency session of the UN General Assembly ... In the UN there was an atmosphere of great tension and a sense that we were in fateful times. There was a great deal of public participation and all the television lights were concentrated on the same area – mainly on the Israeli table. And when the General Assembly opened I realized that we were standing isolated as never before since the birth of Israel. Representatives of the delegations rose one by one and demanded Israel's withdrawal from Sinai and the cessation of the Anglo-French actions. The Arabs, the Afro-Asians and the states of the Soviet Bloc voiced the demand furiously and with the threat of sanctions. More friendly states – like the USA and Canada – spoke with flattery and politeness, acknowledging the Egyptian provocations that had preceded the Israeli attack. But the conclusion was a single one: immediate withdrawal – and without a parallel effort to deal with the issue of the blockade and infiltration until after the evacuation.

... At the beginning of November our situation got worse at a single stroke. The British and the French suddenly decided to withdraw unconditionally and announced that they were evacuating Port-Said. We found ourselves isolated before the whole world, and we had completely isolated ourselves by one fateful decision. (Abba Eban, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 25/9/59)

Clearly the atmosphere in the UN reflected the mood in the whole world. Israeli newspapers have not written much about the reaction to the tripartite invasion all over the world, but even the little that has been published is sufficient to create a very negative impression. The formerly colonized nations saw the Anglo-French adventure as a direct threat to their independence and sovereignty. It was seen as an effort by the colonialist powers to turn back the clock and restore their lost influence, by force of arms if necessary. Israel appeared in their eyes as a foreign body in Asia, as a dangerous bridgehead of imperialism, as a puppet-state the role of which is to provide colonialists

with convenient pretexts for armed intervention. Is it any wonder, then, that a powerful wave of friendship and solidarity with the Egyptians swept through the states of Asia and Africa? Is it any wonder that even in Rangoon, the capital of Burma, which is not usually known for its hostility to Israel, a stormy demonstration was held (10/11/56) in front of the building of the Israeli embassy? Is it any wonder that many people in other countries expressed their desire to volunteer as soldiers in international brigades to fight alongside Egypt? Heartfelt concerns were expressed, such as in the telegram of the Indian Prime Minister to the Prime Minister of the Soviet Union (published on 8/11/56). *We are deeply worried – writes J. Nehru – in the face of the Israeli attack on Egypt and in the face of the aggression committed by the United Kingdom and France against Egypt. ... To us, the residents of Asia, this turn of events was a terrible shock.*”

In *Davar* of 14/11/56, H. Isaac, the newspaper’s correspondent in the USA, relates:

The suspicion that the attack on Egypt was based on a “tripartite conspiracy”, which was enhanced by the Anglo-French veto against the Security Council ceasefire resolution, weakened Israel’s moral position at the UN. It is true that there was not much enthusiasm among the peoples of Asia and Africa, not to speak of his nearby Arab neighbours, for Nasser and his growing aspirations. But when Britain and France launched a holy war against him, they all rallied to the cry of alarm over colonial aggression. For many of these countries it was not just an empty verbal demonstration. From this it is clear that the feelings of resentment and protest were genuine to a great extent.

It was not only the colonial peoples who were deeply shocked. The shock was felt in *all the nations of the world*. In our era, the era of weapons of mass destruction, all humans fear war and hate it. They know that a local conflict – especially if it breaks out in a sensitive place like the Middle East – could easily spread to being the biggest, and maybe the last conflagration in the history of humanity. Therefore all who launch a war are condemned as adventurers who are playing an irresponsible game with the fate of humanity. Hence the fact that even states that are usually not hostile to Israel spoke out in

condemnation. Thus in the statement of the prime minister of Sweden (published on 2/11/56) we read:

We know well the hardships that Israel has faced since its birth, and the Arab view that it does not have the right to exist, and we also know about the border incidents. *But Israel's response to these incidents was characterized by excessive harshness, and weakened Israel's position. The attack on Egypt cannot be explained at all. Israel's aggression – and no milder word is possible –* forced the Security Council to discuss the matter. (Emphasis ours)

In its editorial of 1/11/56 the *Morgontidning*, the official Swedish social-democratic newspaper, wrote:

In his speech in the Lower House, Foreign Minister Uden described Israel's aggressive war of as dreadful madness and strongly condemned the positions of France and Britain.

And on the same day the leader of the British opposition said in Parliament:

... It is hard for me to believe that the reconquest of the Canal Zone is in Israel's true interest. If Israel is seen as a hireling of Britain and France – as a kind of vanguard force of Western imperialism, then the chances of a peace settlement have been seriously jeopardized ...

[the above was translated from the original Hebrew text of this book, and the quotation was unreferenced. What follows is the relevant quote from Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell, dated 31 October 1956, retrieved from an Internet website that preserves British parliamentary debates in digital form – trans.]

I cannot believe that it is in the true interests of Israel to be associated with the reoccupation of the Canal Zone. After all, in the long run the people of Israel, somehow or other, have got to live with the Arab States. They are entitled to ask for proper security and again and again from these benches we have asked for that for

them. But, if they are looked upon as simply "stooges" of Britain and France, a kind of advance guard of Western imperialism, then any prospect of a peaceful settlement with the Arab States is gravely endangered.³⁰

In an article in the *Daily Mirror* on 9/11/56, Member of Parliament Richard Crossman (known as a Zionist) wrote: "Ben-Gurion is indeed a very inspiring war leader, but if Israel does not want to lose the peace, then it will require a completely different leadership".

Not only in the general political arena was the situation gloomy. Jewish communities throughout the world were also stunned:

When the Sinai campaign began much confusion prevailed among American Jewry, because no one knew about the issue and the *hasbara* that they had received beforehand said that Israel would never launch a war on its own initiative. The Jews are not puppets that can be pulled this way and that.

Thus said the Chairman of the World Jewish Congress and the President of the Zionist Organization at the opening of the session of the exclusive Zionist Executive Committee in Jerusalem (12/11/56).

On 14/11/56 L. Sulzberger, the main political commentator for *The New York Times*, concluded:

The Ben-Gurion government is now isolated. It has no allies and evidently does not have even one friend ... international pressure is now forcing Israel's small but proud army to withdraw back to its densely-populated country, giving up the positions it had conquered, and it looks like at the end of the day it will also be forced to give up the Gaza Strip.

³⁰ <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=1956-10-31a.1446.0&s=gaitskell+and+israel+and+imperialism#g1454.1>

“Seldom in history”

In only in one place in the angry and worried world did joy and intoxication with victory prevail.

Reality or dream? After a hiatus of 3,000 years and more, once again we are encamped in the heart of the Sinai desert ... Israel launched the fateful campaign *in a political climate and a configuration of international circumstances that constituted a unique historical chance*. But there were also difficult obstacles and even dangers. Therefore decisive importance should be attributed not only to the daring military and political operation itself, but also to the very daringness of the fateful decision to launch the campaign of defence on a scale that matched the scale of the danger. (Z. Yoeli, *Davar*, 2/11/56. Emphasis ours)

... we owe a debt of gratitude to the Prime Minister and Defence Minister who unexpectedly succeeded in creating *most convenient political conditions* for the military operation. Under *these ideal circumstances* we have nothing to fear from the announcement of the government of Syria ... (*Haaretz*, editorial, 4/11/56. Emphasis ours)

Seldom in history have politicians prepared the ground on such a scale for the soldiers, rarely has a nation's strategic leadership succeeded in making such a great contribution to the operative command as that contributed by our strategic leadership. That contribution included attracting [!] allies to our cause, even as the allies of the enemy were paralyzed. (*Davar*, 9/11/56. Emphasis ours)

The report of the beginning of the withdrawal appeared in exactly the same issue in which Ben-Gurion was praised for the political wisdom of his timing of the invasion. Apparently that announcement arrived at the editor's office at the very last minute, when the article of fervent praise was already ready for printing. Various changes were made at

the last minute in the same issue of *Davar*. Instead of the editorial, they published the poem of Nathan Alterman, one of the verses of which we have quoted above.

Indeed “seldom in history” have historians, strategists, journalists and poets encountered an obstacle like the one they all came up against (apart from the Communists who opposed the invasion from the beginning) on the morning of 9 November 1956. “From a high peak to a deep pit” within a few hours, with surprising and astonishing suddenness.

We will return below to the “unique historical chance”, the most convenient political conditions and “the wonderful circumstances”. For the moment we will continue to describe the sequence of events.

“We will not let them return”

Ben-Gurion’s announcement on 8 November, agreeing to the withdrawal, did not mean that the government agreed to a complete and unconditional withdrawal. On the contrary: the segment of the speech that we quoted above indicates that Ben-Gurion wanted to condition the completion of the evacuation of Sinai on a guarantee of freedom of passage for Israeli ships in the Suez Canal and that his agreeing to withdraw *absolutely did not apply* to the Gaza Strip.

For the next few weeks, government circles continued to declare that they did not want to evacuate the Gaza Strip. These declarations were characterized by unusual categoricalness and resolution:

The world should know the limit from which *we cannot withdraw*. In order to avoid misunderstandings and mistakes it is necessary to clarify that *the Gaza Strip is indeed a part of the State of Israel* and that there can be no concessions over it.
(Emphasis ours)

Thus declared the Minister of the Interior, Israel Bar-Yehuda, on 26/11/56.

In his reply to a question by MK Yigal Allon (who feared that Israel nevertheless was about to evacuate the Strip), Ben-Gurion declared:

No one has been authorized or permitted to declare anything in the name of the government of Israel regarding the Gaza Strip apart from the fact that *Israel will not agree by any means* to the return of the Egyptian invaders to that Strip. (*Knesset Records* 21/513, 19/12/56. Emphasis ours)

And on the same day, (19/12/56), Ben-Gurion said to Hanson Baldwin, the chief correspondent for *The New York Times*: “By no means are the Egyptians to be brought back to Gaza. We will not let them return.”

Mapam too categorically opposed the evacuation of the Strip. *Al Hamishmar* [the Mapam organ] reports in its issue of 21/12/56 on a discussion that took place in the party’s political committee on the subject of “the demand for the inclusion of the Gaza Strip in the State of Israel and to put an end to the various and contradictory announcements, that complicate the continuation of the struggle for the annexation [!] of aza to Israel”. Israel Barzilai opened the discussion and Y. Patish, Simha Flapan, P. Shneerson, Yaakov Hazan, A. Koblanov, D. Ben-Ephraim, S. Rosen and N. Peled participated in it. All of them spoke of the legitimacy of that demand and even added other demands. In addition, “astonishment was expressed” at the fact that Unity of Labour came out – following Herut – in opposition to the withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, even though “it had not previously raised its opposition on the matter”.

In his article “Aliya, Security and Economic Independence”, published in *Davar* on 11/1/57, Ben-Gurion writes:

And even though it is dangerous to be a prophet, it seems to me that I can say one thing with nearly complete certainty: the *status quo ante* will not return, even though powerful forces persevere in calling for its return.

Indeed, it is dangerous to be a prophet – especially a false one.

Britain voted in favour

On 19/1/57 the Afro-Asian bloc brought the following resolution to the UN General Assembly:

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 997 (ES-I) of 2 November 1956, 998 (ES-I) and 999 (ES-I) of 4 November 1956, 1002 (ES-I) of 7 November 1956 and 1120 (XI) of 24 November 1956, Noting the report of the Secretary-General of 15 January 1957,

1. Notes with regret and concern the failure of Israel to comply with the terms of the above-mentioned resolutions;
2. Requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts for securing the complete withdrawal of Israel in pursuance of the above-mentioned resolutions, and to report on such completion to the General assembly, within five days.³¹

A separate vote was conducted on every part of the resolution, and afterwards on the resolution in its entirety. The clause mentioning the previous four resolutions was passed by a majority of 68 to 2 (France and Israel), the clause on the Secretary-General's report was passed unanimously, clause 1 passed with a majority of 68 to 2, clause 2 passed with a majority of 75 with no opposition.

All the UN member-states voted in favour of the resolution in its entirety, apart from Israel and France, both of whom opposed it, and Costa Rica and Batista's Cuba, both of whom abstained. It is particularly noteworthy that Britain did not support Israel in that vote; it did not even abstain, but voted for the first time against Israel and in favour of the Afro-Asian resolution.

The day after these votes, Ben-Gurion responded to them at a session of the "Ihud ha-kibbutzim ve-ha-kevutzot" (Union of kibbutzim and collective farms) kibbutz movement:

³¹ The English text is from a UN Internet website:

<http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0080ef30efce525585256c38006eacae/eb02f38641ed92b1852560df00698b20!OpenDocument> - trans.

I must say clearly that we will not be able to agree to Sinai and the Gaza Strip turning again into bases for attack, or that we be denied freedom of navigation. We will not be able to content ourselves with UN resolutions if there are no clear guarantees according to our own understanding – we will not be able to be faithful to resolutions that run counter to our vital interests. (*Davar*, 21/1/57)

But on the following day (21/1/57), *Davar* wrote in an editorial:

The government of Israel announced that it would not modify its position even in the face of increased pressure from the UN, but the truth is that that pressure had already begun before the means of pressure were discussed and decided on at the UN General Assembly – that is, economic pressure from the US government, which did not at all wait for UN resolutions but rather, since the Sinai campaign, froze the grant to Israel and the sale of surplus food of a total value of 55 million dollars (and that is apart from the stopping of the negotiations that were about to be concluded for a loan for agricultural development and irrigation for an amount of 75 million dollars). Meanwhile, that freeze – which we hope is merely temporary – disrupts the foreign exchange and development budget...

“Israeli administration”

On 23 January there was a debate in the Knesset on foreign policy and defence. In the light of past experience was it was clear that Israel would not be able to withstand (international) political pressure and (American) economic pressure; on the other hand, Ben-Gurion did not want to concede the Gaza Strip, the annexation to Israel of which he had declared (including in the withdrawal speech of the night of 8 November) as one of the three aims of “Operation Sinai”. So he came up with a quite ingenious formulation to keep Gaza without apparently violating the UN resolution. That resolution (see above)

demanded the withdrawal of Israeli *forces*.³² Therefore when he opened the discussion in the Knesset the Prime Minister announced:

In keeping with the position of the General Assembly, Israel has no desire to maintain an army inside the Gaza Strip.

That is to say, we will remove Israeli *forces*. But he continues:

But the welfare of the residents of the Strip [!] and their neighbours outside the Strip require that the Strip remain in Israel's hands, on the basis of a suitable arrangement to be worked out between the Israeli administration and the UN. (*Knesset Records* 21/829, 23/1/57)

That is to say: the Strip will remain under an Israeli *civil* administration. Very great importance must be attributed to the fact that declarations of the annexation of the Strip to Israel (whether under a military government or a civil administration) were made in the *clear knowledge* that its three hundred thousand residents – most of them Palestinian refugees – would constitute a heavy economic burden. Ben-Gurion announced:

Israel does not ignore the refugee problem in Gaza, which is part of the general Arab refugee problem ... The government of Israel calls on the UN to prepare a programme for a permanent solution to the refugee problem, including the Gaza refugees, and the government of Israel will contribute to the solution of the problem to the best of its ability. The Gaza Strip under Egyptian rule was a weak point in the Middle East as regards security, *the economy of the residents of the Strip and the*

³² The Hebrew version of Resolution 1123 of 19 January 1957, which the authors quoted from the Israeli press in the original Hebrew version of this book, speaks of “the removal of forces by Israel” (*hotza'at ha-kohot 'al-yedei yisra'el*); unlike the English version quoted above (obtained from a United Nations website: <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf>), which as the reader will have noticed refers only to “the complete withdrawal of Israel” – the word “forces” does not appear. – trans.

refugee problem. An Israeli administration with the help of the UN can solve all three of these problems. (Ibid. Emphasis ours)

Less than two months later, when there was a need to rationalize the *need and the utility* of evacuating the *entire* Strip, the same man invoked the presence of the refugees in the Strip as an argument *against* Israel's remaining there. In a special *hasbara pamphlet* that Mapai published after 5/3/57 to justify its policy on the of the Suez war he explained:

From the first moment I was among those who opposed the annexation of the Strip, even had it been possible to do so. Because it is not in Israel's power to "digest" this Gaza along with its refugees.

(D. Ben-Gurion, "What we fought for, why we withdrew, what we achieved", published by the Hasbara Department of Mapai, March 1957)

Gaza and Nazareth

We return to the political discussion in the Knesset (23/1/57). Mapai people were then on the defensive against attacks from other factions, especially Herut. MK Begin said:

For the mighty military campaign has concluded with a political defeat – it is not we alone who claim that. The Central Committee of the Unity of Labour party convened a few weeks ago and it stated that the last withdrawal line is the al-Arish-Abu-Ageila-Kusseima line. Ten days ago the government in which that faction is a participant abandoned that line. Is this not a defeat? Knesset Member Hillel, whom, despite all the rivalry between us, I like and respect – who is a member of the governing faction, requested in an open letter not only that we should not abandon al-Arish, but also that we should not leave a-Tur. A few days ago we left a-Tur and al-Arish. Has the military campaign concluded with failure, or not?

As to Ben-Gurion's claim that Israel never aspired to annex the Sinai Desert, Begin made a very meaningful reference:

The Prime Minister tried a week ago, in his reply to our motion to express nonconfidence in his government and its policy, to justify it by relying on a conversation that he had with the leaders of the opposition on the eve of Operation Sinai. I will request of the government Members that they transmit to its leader that I recommend that he not make another attempt to rely on secret conversations from the Knesset podium. As a member of the loyal opposition, I remain bound by national responsibility even when the Prime Minister disregards it. I will not even hint at the contents of the conversations that were held at that time between us and the Prime Minister. But he knows: *we had conversations not only on the eve of Operation Sinai, and not only on the night of the withdrawal debacle; we also had other conversations. He knows, and we remember, what he said to us about the future of the Sinai Peninsula. I will not report what we heard in these conversations because they are secret in nature.* (*Knesset Records*, 21/830, 23/1/57. Emphasis ours)

Of course, the content of the above-mentioned conversations has not been published to this very day; but whoever wants to *guess*, should take into consideration BG's telegram to the soldiers of the 9th Brigade and his speech in the Knesset on 7/11/56, which we have quoted above. To that should be added what Moshe Dayan wrote in his personal diary on 21/10/56; that is, a week and more before the invasion, (published in *Davar*, 29/10/59): "We convened in session at 18:45 in Shimon's [Peres] office, during the session the old man searched in the Bible to prove to us the ancientness of our right to the approaches to Eilat and so on."

Those who do not want to annex do not have to search in the Torah and the writings of Procopius in order to prove their right to what they does *not* want to annex. Begin saw Ben-Gurion's announcement of the withdrawal of army forces from the Gaza Strip as "most dangerous":

On 8 November you said, the liberation of territory of the Homeland; the Minister of Justice knows the meaning of these words in international law. And if today you have committed to remove the army of Israel from territory that even the government of Israel has declared to be “liberated”, what can still be considered to be liberated territory of the Homeland? Do you not see the danger? What is the difference between Nazareth and Gaza? ...Arabs live in Nazareth, in Gaza too Arabs live. We liberated Nazareth in contravention of a United Nations resolution. If we commit ourselves to remove the army of Israel from liberated territory of the Homeland, liberated even in your own words, are you sure that tomorrow, on the basis of this announcement, the government of Israel will not be required to remove the army from Nazareth? Gaza was liberated months ago, Nazareth years ago – that is the only difference. (*Knesset Records* 21/832, 23/1/57)

“The last line of defence”

MK Bernstein (General Zionists), pondered the question of economic sanctions that were likely to be imposed on Israel if it refused to comply with the UN resolutions:

... It is not a question of eating less or wearing less clothes, but something that could cause complete paralysis, far-reaching paralysis of our entire economy. Nevertheless, with clear recognition that such dangers threaten us, I say and affirm that today we must say: we must not withdraw any more. (*Knesset Records*, 21/835, 23/1/57)

In the name of the Unity of Labour-Workers of Zion, MK Ben-Aharon urged:

...to defy every institution, every force and international power that holds the renewed threat of three hundred thousand innocent Arabs over our heads, and their conversion into Fedayeen, murderers and terrorists...

He appealed to the nation not to see only “the gleaming of victorious arms” but

also to see the real urgency of digging into *the last line of defence behind which there is no more withdrawal*. (*Knesset Records* 21/841, 23/1/57. Emphasis ours)

After emphasizing the seriousness of the situation, he demanded, of course, no withdrawal from the Strip, despite all the danger implied in that position.

The religious, as is their wont, joined in the torrent. MK Yitzhak Raphael (ha-Mizrahi/ha-Poel ha-Mizrahi) said:

If with the mercy of heaven we have won the liberation of the Strip from the enemy that was there illegally and it has been returned to the State, then surely it will never be detached from it again. Just as we will not cede any part of the Galilee, thus will we make no more concessions in that region of the country. (*Knesset Records* 21/834, 23/1/57. Emphasis ours)

For his part, the representative of the Progressives added:

We must emphasize that our decision to keep Gaza in contravention of the UN decision of 2 November was made with full and sober recognition of the great responsibility, of incalculable hardships and dangers – I say explicitly: with not inconsiderable dangers involved in this very major change, a change that will leave its mark in our economic, national-ethnic and political life. (*Knesset Records* 21/849, 23/1/57)

MK Riftin, the representative of the party's left wing, spoke in the name of the United Workers' Party (Mapam):

The State of Israel is not cannot accept that the Gaza Strip will again become a base for terrorist aggression against peaceable citizens. *As you know, our party proposed a programme based on the inclusion of the Strip within the State of Israel with the rehabilitation within the State of Israel of the Arab refugees who are located within the Strip*. (*Knesset Records* 21/843, 23/1/57. Emphasis ours)

But Mr. Riftin is a socialist and a member of the peace movement, so in the Knesset he also raised the matter of peace, while appealing to the socialist countries:

As a workers' party, we appeal from this high stage of the Knesset of Israel, first of all to the governments of the socialist states with a request that they openly and courageously support a proposal for direct peace negotiations without preconditions between the Arab states and Israel. (Ibid.)

Mr. Riftin is a unique peace-lover. The Israeli army is sent, with his agreement and the responsibility of his party, to invade Egypt and is parked deep within Egyptian territory – but our generous peace-lover proposes to the Egyptians direct negotiations “*without preconditions*”; the annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel is, to him, beyond any debate.

“Who imagined?”

Uncharacteristically, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Meir Argov, adopted an apologetic tone this time:

Honourable Members of the Knesset, let us please be honest with ourselves. Two other countries, for their own reasons, participated in the action of 30 October, Operation Sinai and the Suez affair, and that is clear to the entire world. What happened that caused them to withdraw? Do they not have mighty armies? Do they not have mighty fleets? Are their economies less strong than the economy of Israel? Are they smaller nations than Israel? What happened?

Haim Landau (Herut): There is no comparison, Knesset Member Argov, there is no comparison.

Meir Argov: It is true that there is no comparison; I too think that there is no comparison.

Haim Landau: Regarding them, for them there was no state of war...

Meir Argov: I am now speaking not about desires, but about political facts as they were and as they are. Can anyone in this house tell me that he had imagined global intervention like this in the course of events as happened afterwards?

Meir Vilner (Communist Party of Israel – Maki): Yes. (*Knesset Records* 21/835, 23/1/57)

If the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee really and honestly assumed that it would be impossible to envision in advance the international intervention in the course of events, then the known adage: “Foolishness is worse than a crime” applies to him. The calling of “yes!” by MK Vilner was well-founded: it is a fact that the Communist Party, even at the beginning of the invasion, warned of a severe international response.

On 23/1/57, as on 7 November 1956, the Communists were isolated in their demand for an immediate evacuation of the occupied territories:

The Prime Minister claims that keeping the IDF in the Gaza Strip and in the vicinity of the Eilat Straits³³ will ensure freedom of navigation, will enhance the security of Israel. If that is not political blindness, then it is a deception ... Just a few days ago, in reply to a motion for from Herut on the matter of delaying the withdrawal, the Prime Minister said of Knesset Member Begin that his proposals not to leave al-Arish were mad proposals. That was a correct characterization, members of this House and the nation agreed with it. But, the question is raised: if keeping an occupying force in al-Arish is madness, why is keeping Israeli forces in Sharm al-Sheikh and the Gaza Strip not madness from the point of view of Israel’s interest in peace?

³³ The Straits of Tiran – trans.

... There is no justification ... for delaying the evacuation of our forces and their withdrawal to the ceasefire lines. You seek guarantees for Israel, and again – for the thousandth time – from the imperialist actors who have abandoned you more than once.

... The disaster is that you continue to rely on reactionary forces, the only interest of whom in the Middle East is to plunder the oil and establish aggressive alliances, to subjugate the peoples and to restore the colonial arrangements. And that is a lost cause and a thin reed! The tragedy is that you have set up Israel against the course of all political developments in the region, against the course of the struggle of all the peoples of the region for complete liberation from the yoke of imperialism, against the historical path of all the peoples of Asia and Africa who are struggling for their freedom, for their independence and for their happy future. Instead of integrating Israel in this welcome process, instead of moving Israel forward, together with all these peoples, and thereby ensuring Israel's place as a state with equal rights in the Middle East – you continue to harness Israel to the chariot of the colonialists who are hated by the peoples and whose position is crumbling before our very eyes. (Shmuel Mikunis, *Knesset Records* 21/846, 23/1/57)

“The essence of our security”

Upon the conclusion of the political discussion the Maki proposal to return the IDF to the ceasefire lines was rejected. Also rejected was the Herut proposal to stop the evacuation and to censure the government for the evacuation that had *already* taken place. Instead, a Coalition motion was passed, which was also supported by the General Zionists, Agudat Israel and Poalei Agudat Israel, and the Mapai Arabs. That resolution attacked the UN General Assembly resolution of 19 January, demanded the demilitarization of the Sinai Peninsula, called upon the UN “to implement a programme for the permanent solution of the refugee problem, including the refugees who live in the Gaza Strip”, promised that Israel would contribute to that solution, and insisted that “Israeli navigation be guaranteed, without any discrimination, in any resolution of the problem of the Suez

Canal”. The two most important clauses in the Knesset resolution relate to the question of the evacuation of Gaza and the coast of the Straits of Tiran:

1. ***Israel will keep the Gaza Strip and will itself be responsible for the internal and external security of the Strip;*** continue establish and develop an autonomous administration for the residents in every city and village in the Strip; help UNRWA [The United Nations agency that aids Palestinian refugees – trans.] continue its activities for the refugees and continue to ensure public services for the residents.
2. The Israel Defence Forces will not evacuate the coast of the Eilat Straits [Straits of Tiran – trans.] before Israeli and international freedom of navigation is ensured in the Eilat Straits and in the Red Sea to and from Eilat, ***with substantial guarantees that will be made in agreement with Israel.***

(*Knesset Records* 21/851, 23/1/57. Emphasis ours)

The next day the newspapers ran the following headlines on the Knesset session and its resolution:

Al Hamishmar: “The struggle for the principle”

Lamerhav: “The essence of our security”

Davar: “Vital for the peace of the region and the peace of the world”

Haboker: “Vital goals that Israel must achieve”

In order to impart more authority to the words, some time later the government organized mass demonstrations all over the country against further withdrawals. According to *Davar*’s estimate, about 150,000 people participated in the demonstration in Tel Aviv alone (9/2/57).

There cannot be a shadow of a doubt that the resolution of 23 January was taken with all seriousness by its supporters and that the Zionist parties believed with all their hearts that Israel would overcome all obstacles to remain in the Gaza Strip, just as we believed at the beginning of November that the “Third Kingdom of Israel” had indeed arisen.

The difference between the government’s position and that of Herut was merely a matter of consistency. Herut had always demanded the “liberation of the occupied parts

of the Homeland” and by that it referred not only to the Gaza Strip, but also, in its interpretation, to Hebron, the Old City of Jerusalem, Nablus and even the eastern side of the Jordan River. What Herut demanded clearly and consistently, the “Coalition of the three workers’ parties” realized in half-measures, inconsistently and unsuccessfully. But that inconsistency did not stem from a subjective lack of will but from objective lack of capacity. If Herut is right when it accuses Mapai of inconsistency, then Mapai is right when it accuses Herut of demagoguery. If in reality, under a Mapai regime, the “Third Kingdom of Israel” ended in a fiasco, then the “Third Kingdom of Israel” under a Herut regime would have ended with *the destruction of the Third Temple*.

“Dependant to a great extent”

On 3 February 1957, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution that had been submitted by the USA and India. Among other things the resolution said:

The General Assembly:

1. Expresses its regret at Israel’s non-compliance in implementing the withdrawal to the ceasefire lines, despite the repeated requests of the General Assembly.
2. Calls upon Israel to implement the withdrawal to the ceasefire demarcation line without further delay.
3. Calls on the governments of Egypt and Israel thoroughly to implement the provisions of the 1949 ceasefire accords.

Seventy-four states (including Britain) voted for the resolution; against it – Israel and France (the latter was repaying Israel for its support of the French position on the Algerian question at the same session); Luxembourg and Holland abstained.

In order to hurry Israel along, the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles announced that “Israel’s *very existence is dependent to a great extent on the good will of many nations.*” The wise know how to take a hint. The President of the USA also spoke in that spirit.

It was not easy to swallow the bitter pill. The Secretary-General of Mapai, Yonah Kesse, permitted himself (as a person who was not in a government role) to speak harshly against the USA:

I think that we have grounds to say, after we heard the important speech of the President of the United States, that it is permitted to us to reject from this podium the moral authority of the President of the United States to judge us for our nonwithdrawal. In his speech the President of the United States appeared as one concerned about world peace and the authority of the United Nations. But he did not say even one word about the interests of the United States in the complex affairs of the Eastern Mediterranean, and in the conflict between us and the Arab states. It is permitted to us to expose the meanings of these platitudes; are they not a price, is it not a payment to the Arab states and Saud? *Is it not basically oil-interest politics under the cover of great and lofty platitudes about concern for world peace and the high authority of the institution called the United Nations?* (Knesset Records 21/1144, 22/2/57. Emphasis ours)

Without a doubt, these words are correct and on the mark. It certainly was not “concern for world peace” that motivated the government of the United States to come out against the Suez War. It is well known that that government itself has not hesitated to use force – directly or by means of small states that are subordinate to it – when it sees a benefit in so doing, for example in Guatemala, Laos, and Cuba.

But in 1956 the leaders of the United States clearly understood that a military adventure in the Canal Zone was not likely to bear fruit, but on the contrary, would elicit resentment and rage among the peoples of the Middle East and completely alienate them from the West. The nationalization of the Suez Canal did not in fact affect American economic interests, and Dulles hoped that, by means of political and economic pressure on Egypt, it would be possible to come to an arrangement that would also be to the benefit of the US. The episode of the nationalization of the oil installations in Iran by Mosaddegh was foremost in his mind. A shrewd approach to that matter brought about a conclusion satisfactory the American oil companies, which had won out in most of the

states that had been taken from the British. Therefore Dulles played his hand not for armed intervention, but for pressure and enticement by means of the “Suez Canal Users’ Association” and suchlike things.

The British and the French could not rely on their American allies to join in the adventure. Worse than that – it was clear that if the conspiracy became known to Dulles he would frustrate it and even try to take advantage of his allies’ loss. Therefore the intervention plan was devised without bringing it to the knowledge of the Americans, taking advantage of the paralysis of American policy due to the electoral campaign at the time. There is much evidence to that effect, but no further proof seems necessary. As could have been anticipated, this secrecy produced an outcome in which the deceived and angry Americans were happy to exploit their friends’ failure in order to derive benefit from it and to appear as “defenders of victims of aggression”. It was an excellent opportunity to “prove” that not only the Soviet Union, but also the United States could serve as a support to colonial peoples in times of hardship.

“The outer limit”

Of course, not only Mapai, but also its partners in the Coalition sought to reject American pressure, even more emphatically. Knesset Member Yigal Allon (Unity of Labour-Workers of Zion) made this emotional appeal:

Members of the Knesset, better to be killed than to transgress!³⁴ The Gaza Strip must not revert to being a base for Egyptian invasion and acts of terror ... When the choice is between remaining in the Strip, with all the responsibility that involves, and ceding it due to the problem of the population, the solution that confers on Israel the ability to guarantee its own security is definitely preferable from every possible angle.

³⁴ The speaker is metaphorically using a phrase (Heb. *yehareg velo ya'avur*) that in Jewish religious writings expresses the principle that it is better for Jews to choose death rather than violate certain religious prohibitions – trans.

The Unity of Labour-Workers of Zion faction will not be able to support a government in decisions for further withdrawals. (Knesset Records 21/1148, 22/2/57. Emphasis ours)

Evidently from delicacy, MK Allon here related to the question of whether his party could *support* the government in decisions on additional withdrawals, but refrained from saying whether it would *remain in the government* after such decisions.

After MK Yigal Allon, Yaakov Hazan, a representative of the United Workers' Party (Mapam) got the floor. He declared:

The government of Israel announced its willingness to remove its army from Gaza and to establish there a civil administration that would act in close coordination with representatives of the UN. *That is the outer limit of our concessions*, and I am sorry that our government did not at the outset of this struggle declare its willingness to find a solution to the problem of the refugees in Gaza within the borders of our State, with the help of the UN after Gaza again becomes an inseparable part of the Land of Israel. I do not ignore the fact that the problem is very difficult and complex, but this is just. (*Knesset Records 21/1149, 22/2/57. Emphasis ours*)

MK Meir Vilner (Communist Party – Maki), who had a different idea about justice in this matter, said:

Yesterday the Prime Minister spoke a great deal about freedom of navigation, as if for that he had launched the war. There is no doubt that Israel has the right to freedom of navigation just as it has the right to independent existence and recognition by the Arab states. But in Palestine both Israel and the Palestinian Arab people have legitimate national rights. And there are explicit resolutions of the Security Council and the UN General Assembly that have not been implemented. Whoever thinks that it is possible in our time to achieve recognition of the national rights of one people without ensuring the national rights of the other people is

deluding himself dangerously. To insist on our legitimate rights while denying the legitimate rights of the other people will not bring peace. It is liable to endanger the future of Israel. A new approach is needed. We must return to the ceasefire accords and proceed from there to a peace settlement. (*Knesset Records* 21/1151, 22/2/57)

The debate ended with a summary by the Prime Minister. Ben-Gurion declared:

The problem of security in the Strip, which is a serious one in its own right, for reasons understood to all, are liable to get many times worse if Egyptian rule, the Egyptian army or Egyptian administration return to the Strip; *and therefore we cannot by any means – if we want to live – permit Egypt to return to the place they invaded nine years ago, in violation of the UN Charter.* (*Knesset Records* 21/1186, 25/2/57. Emphasis ours)

That resolute declaration too endured for a very long time – exactly two weeks.

As usual, the Coalition majority in the Knesset rejected the Herut motion condemning the withdrawal and opposing any further withdrawals; the General Zionists' motion to reaffirm the Knesset resolutions of 23 January, and also the Maki proposal calling for adherence to the UN resolutions and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Sharm al-Sheikh and the Gaza Strip.

In the name of the government coalition, a resolution was proposed and passed, affirming that the Knesset had taken note of the Prime Minister's announcement of 21 February and referred the matter to the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee for discussion "*in the spirit of the Knesset resolution of 23 January 1957*".

“We worked collaboratively ... on the text of the speech”

Once again the government of the USA had no desire or need to continue to indulge the government of Israel. The Israeli refusal to withdraw from Sharm al-Sheikh and the Gaza Strip greatly enhanced American policy. The overt, loud and highlypublicized pressure

on Israel was intended to create in Arab eyes the impression that the USA was their saviour, and it was the one that was truly looking out for their interests.

From that perspective Israel's refusal to withdraw suited American policy in the region, and helped it to fill the "vacuum" that was created with the fall of Britain and France. Moreover, the willingness of the USA to give guarantees for Israeli shipping in the Red Sea straits was intended to facilitate direct and indirect penetration of American forces into the region. But at the beginning of March, the Arabs' patience ran out, and they made that clear to Dulles. Then the US government applied heavy pressure on Israel for the purpose of completing the withdrawal from all the territories beyond the 1949 ceasefire lines.

Abba Eban describes the state of affairs at that time:

All our international relations were under a cloud. Relations with America, Europe, Asia and Africa, our foreign commerce, plans for shipping, and the very process of Israel's existence and consolidation. With Asia and Africa in particular relations worsened from day to day. And in the Eilat Straits, while they might have been in our hands and liberated from the Egyptian blockade, there was "freedom of navigation", but there was no navigation at all.

... It was decided [by whom?] that I would return to Israel in order to explain the situation and to bring the points of view closer together. (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 15/9/59)

Such a trip was indeed required, because for all their pessimism, political circles in Israel were much too optimistic regarding the fruits of the triumphant march to Suez. Immediately upon his return to Washington Eban met with Dulles and gave him the Israeli government's reply.

The talks continued, and in the words of Mr. Eban himself:

... We worked, therefore, collaboratively with the Americans, on the text of the speech that the Foreign Minister was about to deliver at the UN – which had to have their approval. (*Davar*, 29/10/59)

A very characteristic meaning lurks behind the innocent-sounding words “We worked, therefore, collaboratively”. *Haaretz* of 13/3/57 reported through its Washington correspondent that the Foreign Minister submitted a draft of the withdrawal speech that she was about to deliver at the UN General Assembly to Mr. Dulles for his approval, and the latter rejected it. The Minister took her speech, inserted corrections into it and returned to Mr. Dulles with the corrected text. The latter wasted no time in rejecting it again. Golda modified it a third time. Dulles rejected that version too. *Four times* Golda submitted the draft of her speech to Dulles, before he deigned to approve it. This “collaborative work” on the State of Israel’s declaration at the UN General Assembly is illustrative not only of the degree of the State’s independence, but also of the political wisdom of its leaders.

“The words of the American representative lacked the needed clarity”

After Mr. Dulles’ meticulous revision, the Foreign Minister apparently had solid grounds to assume that harmony would prevail in Israel-US relations from then on. At an AFL-CIO banquet on 28/2/57 she said to the gathered participants:

This seems to be a big day. I wanted this banquet to take place tomorrow or the next day [after her speech at the General Assembly] because then I would be able to tell you some secrets that I cannot divulge tonight. But it seems to me that we are approaching a successful conclusion of the crisis... (*Davar*, 1/3/57)

In reality the Foreign Minister only *thought* that some of these secrets were known to her. In fact by then some secrets that were *unknown* to her had been devised, which were disclosed a few days afterwards and surprised her completely.

After his discussions with the Foreign Minister and the “collaborative work” on the text of her speech at the General Assembly, Dulles invited the representatives of 9 Arab states and gave them information. After the meeting the American Department of State issued the following announcement:

The American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles yesterday told the representatives of Arab states that the US gave no guarantees and made no concessions in order to procure Israel's agreement to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and from the Gulf of Aqaba,³⁵ and that the evacuation would be complete and unconditional.³⁶

Additional facts were quoted in *Davar* of 4/3/57 from *Al-Ahram* of Cairo:

Twenty-four hours before [US Ambassador to the UN] Lodge spoke at the General Assembly, the Egyptian Foreign Minister Muhammad Fawzi met with him and warned him that if the USA did not force Israel to withdraw unconditionally, the two countries' [Syria's and Egypt's] relations with the USA would be put in jeopardy.

Damascus announced that Eisenhower's representative, Mr. Robert Richard, who was to travel to the region at the beginning of March, would not be able to visit Syria and Egypt in order to hold talks on the Eisenhower Plan if Israel did not withdraw from Gaza and Sharm al-Sheikh.

That pressure produced changes in the position of the USA, which evidently did not bother to inform the Israeli Foreign Minister. Mrs. Meir rose to speak at the UN General Assembly on 3/3/57, and, in complete confidence that the US representative would support her, read the text that had been approved by Dulles after so much work, including the following:

³⁵ The Hebrew version of this announcement, which the authors acquired from the contemporary Israeli press, referred to the Gulf of Aqaba as the "Gulf of Eilat" (*Mifratz Eilat*) – trans.

³⁶ The minutes of that Dulles' meeting with the Arab ambassadors is now available online through the Office of the Historian of the US Department of State. From the minutes: "The Secretary said that absolutely nothing whatsoever had been offered by the United States to Israel which was not a matter of public record. There was not one iota of truth in the rumor. There had been no agreement or understanding, expressed or implied, to induce Israel to withdraw." <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v17/d177> - trans.

The government of Israel declares that it is about to evacuate the Gaza Strip in accordance with the General Assembly's resolution of 2 February 1957. This declaration is based on the following assumptions:

Immediately upon the evacuation of Israeli forces, UN forces are to make arrangements in the Gaza Strip such that the military and civil administration will be transferred from Israel exclusively to the UN Emergency Force.

President Eisenhower declared in a public speech on 20 February that it is not to be understood that after the evacuation of Israeli forces Egypt will continue to prevent Israeli ships from using the *Suez Canal* and the Gulf of Eilat; my government placed great weight on that declaration when it decided on its course of action ... (*Davar*, 29/10/59. Emphasis ours)

After Mrs. Meir concluded her speech the US representative rose and said:

... Israel announces that it is carrying out a full and rapid evacuation behind the ceasefire lines, in accordance with the first Resolution of 2/2/57. The USA welcomes this decision. In the view of the United States this declaration means that the withdrawal will take place *immediately* ... this is how the government of the USA understands the declarations that have been announced by the representative of Israel. *We are not of the view that Israel's declaration is contingent on any conditions.* For the most part the declarations, as we understand them, constitute a return to what has been said here by this Assembly, or by its Secretary-General, whether they be expressions of hope or expectations that do not appear to be unacceptable in view of previous actions of this Assembly. (*Davar*, 3/3/57. Emphasis ours)

It is hard to describe the shock of the Israel's foreign policy leaders when it became clear to them that Lodge had changed the text of his speech and the USA was demanding a full

and immediate and *unconditional* withdrawal without any guarantees whatsoever from the US. About four years after that incident Mr. Ben-Gurion wrote:

... The declaration of the representative of the United States, Mr. Henry Cabot Lodge, diverged at several points from the agreement that had been previously reached ... That speech caused alarm in the hearts of the audience, not only of the Israeli delegation, but also of our friends in the UN, and the government did not conceal that concern from the American government. (Foreword to *Shenaton ha-Memshalah* [Government Yearbook] 5720 [1959-1960], p. 31. Hebrew)

And Mr. Eban wrote:

... We worked, therefore, collaboratively with the Americans, on the text of the speech that the Foreign Minister was about to deliver at the UN – which had to have their approval. And indeed the Foreign Minister expressed Israel's view to the General Assembly and Cabot Lodge, the US representative approved of the speech, but as far as Gaza was concerned he added a few sentences that once again undermined the agreement. In his comments he mentioned the ceasefire agreement, and thereby omitted the basis for the prolonged presence of UN forces in the Gaza Strip. Another crisis nearly erupted. (*Davar*, 29/10/59)

In its editorial the day after the speech (3/3/57), *Davar* ingenuously wrote:

The American representative, Mr. Henry Cabot Lodge, spoke without the necessary clarity ... only after that clarity is achieved can the government of Israel decide whether or not there is American agreement on the theses that were outlined by the Foreign Minister to the General Assembly, and only then can it be decided whether there is cause to summon the Chief of Staff and the commander of the UN forces for the purpose of working out the evacuation arrangements.

Strange, because the column next to the editorial appears under the heading:

“Dulles to the Arabs: The USA gave Israel no promises”. That is a message that is absolutely clear and lucid to all. Just to be sure there was no misunderstanding, Dulles met with Eban and gave him additional clarifications to Lodge’s speech. According to *The New York Times* Dulles told Eban on 7/3/57 that:

In light of the ceasefire accord Israel will not have the legal right to evict the Egyptians if they return to the Gaza Strip. To Eban’s question about what would happen if the Egyptians returned to the Strip and once again endangered the peace with Fedayeen raids and other acts of war, he replied: “Even then the US cannot endorse the proposition that Israel has the right to go to war.” (Quoted in *Davar*, 9/3/57)

That was the fate of the policy of “assumptions and expectations”.

“The public knew all along that the withdrawal would come”

Without taking into account the request of the editor of *Davar* for additional clarifications and regardless of the internal difficulties of the government of Israel in implementing the resolution for complete and unconditional withdrawal, the USA applied heavy pressure on Israel to carry out the final evacuation. 3-7 March 1957 were, with near certainty, the hardest days for all the parties in Israel (apart from the Israeli Communist Party – Maki). Their central committees convened for prolonged emergency sessions; Herut and the General Zionists struggled with the problem of how to organize actions to prevent the withdrawal, the United Workers’ Party (Mapam) and Unity of Labour had difficulty deciding whether they should leave the government because of their opposition to the withdrawal or to remain within it for other reasons. A debate raged within Mapai itself, for and against the withdrawal. *Davar* wrote in its editorial:

... There are parties that knowingly and demagogically take exploit the words “withdrawal of forces” in order to speak endlessly about “withdrawal”, the

“withdrawal accord”, etc. with the intention of producing in the audience an association with political withdrawal. *The truth is that the public knew all along that the withdrawal would come. Because Israel has no intention of annexing to itself either the coastal strip of the Sinai desert or the Gaza Strip.* [!] The question has always been merely, under what conditions the withdrawal would take place. (*Davar*, 4/3/57. Emphasis ours)

Mr. Shimon Peres, the Director of the Ministry of Defence and one of the architects of the Suez War, continued in the same vein as above-mentioned article in his speech to the War Invalids’ Committee, when he said:

If we kept everything after the Sinai campaign – that would have been good for the Arabs. And indeed they hoped that we would not move and thereby isolate ourselves from sources of economic aid, and channels for receiving arms would be reduced for us. (*Davar*, 19/3/57)

We thought of annexations?

We wanted to annex the Sinai Desert?

We wanted to annex the Yotvat Straits?

We wanted to annex the Gaza Strip?

We spoke of the Third Kingdom of Israel?

Indeed we *all* knew *all along* that at the end of the day we would withdraw from it all. Moreover, it was the *Arabs* who wanted us not to withdraw. Those who oppose the withdrawal are effectively aiding the Arabs. In addition:

The annexation of the Strip to Israel was fraught with grave dangers to the State and the danger of constant insurrection.

Thus Agriculture Minister Kadish Luz explained the matter, in an apologetic speech before a convention of the settlements of the Gaza Strip (*Davar*, 10/3/57)

“This is not the first time that someone has been resurrected”

To Ben-Gurion fell the unpleasant task of announcing the withdrawal in the Knesset. He read the text of a speech that was interrupted by shouting no less than a hundred times – most of them from the benches of Herut, which opposed the withdrawal. He took care not to reply to these calls and did not get dragged into a polemic in which he could not stand his ground. Here is a typical selection from the speech, with the catcalls:

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion: After we evacuated the entire Sinai Desert apart from the Straits coastal strip and the Gaza Strip – the argument intensified between us and the UN, and first and foremost between us and the government of the United States. As I delivered a political overview to the Knesset on 23 January of this year, I said the following about these two strips: regarding the coastal strip I said: “we have no interest in keeping that strip and it is our desire to evacuate it as soon as possible, upon reception of effective guarantees against any attack on Israeli and international freedom of navigation that now exists in that international waterway”, and regarding the Gaza Strip I said: “... in conformity with the position of the General Assembly, Israel has no intention of keeping an army in the Gaza Strip”.

Haim Cohen (Herut): We’ve already heard that twenty times.

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion: “But the welfare of the residents of the Strip and their neighbours outside it require that the Strip remain in Israel’s hands with an appropriate relationship that must be established between the Israeli administration and the UN”.

Haim Landau (Herut): Where is Israel’s administration in Gaza, Mr. Prime Minister?

Haim Cohen-Maguri (Herut): There is no contradiction between what was said on 7 November, 8 November, 23 January and 5 March.

The Chairman, Joseph Shprinzak: I demand that you respect this House.

Shimshon Unichman (Herut): The government does not respect the House’s resolutions.

Chairman Joseph Shprinzak: Knesset Member Unichman, I call you to order.

Shmuel Mikunis (Israeli Communist Party – Maki): Why are you playing at opposition? He did what you wanted, why are you playing at opposition now?

Chairman Joseph Shprinzak: Were you waiting for Knesset Member Mikunis' help?

Haim Cohen-Maguri (Herut): No, the government helped him.

Haim Landau (Herut): First they were defeated, afterwards they call on the Knesset. First they sell Gaza and hand it over, afterwards they call on the Knesset. [Etc., etc.]

(*Knesset Records 22/1235, 5/3/57*)

Herut representative Yohanan Bader spoke after the Prime Minister:

... Mrs. Meir said on 6 November that Gaza and the Strip are part of the liberated Homeland. Mr. Ben-Gurion said in his letter to the soldiers at Sharm al-Sheikh that Tiran is not Tiran but Yotvat, which was a Jewish state 1,400 years ago and had now returned to the Third Kingdom of Israel. On 7 November it was decided in the Knesset that the ceasefire accord was dead and buried and would not be resurrected. In this country miracles occur. And evidently this is not the first time that someone has been resurrected. They also said that the ceasefire lines are gone and will not return. Today too we hear again about a ceasefire line. It was decided that Israel would not agree to any condition that a foreign force, whatever it is called, including a force of the UN, be stationed within the State or in any of the territories held by the State. Now come the adjustments. There will be no territories held by us. That was the decision of the Knesset, it is still extant and never was annulled. We have come to where we are. And Mr. Ben-Gurion said an additional thing: that we had conquests, but we had not struck at the land of Egypt and that the soldiers of Egypt were fighting in a foreign desert and not in Egypt, and again we heard that Tiran is Yotvat. We also heard a new name, "Solomon's Gulf" but in Mrs. Meir's speech [in the UN] Solomon's Gulf was not mentioned, nor was the Eilat Gulf, but the Gulf of Aqaba. There is evidently one language for the Knesset and for the nation for propaganda purposes and a different language there at the

UN. When we all sang Hatikva, every one could ask himself: will it ever be possible to efface what has been decided on this occasion? And lo, 24 hours have passed and on 8 November it has all been effaced, without a decision by the Knesset, without singing Hatikva, without an occasion, in opposition to the decision of the Knesset, Mr. Ben-Gurion announced that we are withdrawing according to the UN Resolution of 2 November. And the foreign force called the “UN Emergency Force” has entered the territories that were held by us.

... Just two weeks ago the Coalition organized demonstrations under the slogan “No withdrawal from Gaza”. Yes, my friends. And yesterday Israeli policemen beat students as they called out shouted the same slogan: no withdrawal. And now the withdrawal is about to be completed ... (*Knesset Records 22/1243, 5/3/57*)

The Herut party’s critique was aimed primarily against the withdrawal itself, and secondly against the Prime Minister’s way of presenting the legislature with *faits accomplis*. If the criticism of the second point was justified, the odour of an effort to score cheap political points from the failure of others wafted off the critique on the first point. It is hard to believe that the leaders of Herut honestly believe that if they were in power the invasion of Sinai would have ended differently; and if they believe it, then they are afflicted with utter blindness.

The consequences of the Suez War were determined not based on Israel’s actions, but as a consequence of external global power relations, regardless of Israel. These new power relations, the existence of which Herut refuses to recognize because they do not like them, and which that the leaders of Mapai revealed gradually after every UN resolution and every incidence of renewed pressure from the USA, already existed long before this, but all who acknowledged them were accused of being Communists.

Tragicomedy

MK Bernstein continued to scratch at the government’s wounds:

Madame Chairwoman, Honourable Knesset, it seems to me that no one who heard the Prime Minister's speech yesterday can ignore the tragic nature of the facts disclosed by that speech. The Prime Minister mentioned that Operation Sinai and the victory won by the IDF in that operation were perhaps unprecedented in history. And perhaps there is no other example in history of such a great victory and such a complete political defeat.

One more thing is perhaps worthy of mention. There was a series of declarations that we that we have heard since Operation Sinai. I admit that it is not at all easy to speak without a certain degree of sarcasm about the changes that occurred in these declarations, and also regarding the linguistic aspect of how things were described. The Prime Minister's first declaration upon the conclusion of the campaign, that he made not without pride, not to say boastfulness – the first declaration said that no foreign force would be permitted in the territory of Israel or in territory held by Israeli forces until such time as there is some kind of arrangement, and then 24 hours after that, the Prime Minister himself is forced to declare that we will return our forces from Egyptian territory. That withdrawal was not declared in the face of a threat of sanctions but rather in the face of the threat of Russian cannons, and the withdrawal was carried out. But we remained in the territory of the Straits of Eilat [Straits of Tiran – trans.] and in the Gaza area, and then the second act of the tragedy began.

Yohanan Bader (Herut): It is a little comedic in fact.

Peretz Bernstein (General Zionists): What previously had been Yotvat or Yotfat, a former Jewish kingdom, receded to the territory of the western shore of the Sinai Peninsula. What in November was liberated territory of the Homeland – devolved into a fiasco. But the government declared that it would evacuate neither the territory of Sharm al-Sheikh nor the Gaza region, unless Israel's agreement was accompanied by substantial guarantees and promises for freedom of navigation in the Eilat Gulf [Gulf of Aqaba – trans.]. Not only did the Knesset confirm and accept the decision and the declaration, but the government itself or Mapai with the agreement of the government or at the initiative of the government – I don't know – staged large-scale demonstrations, mass rallies, at which the speakers declared that

that was the last line of withdrawal, where we would make our stand and not move from it. Even though they explicitly threatened us with sanctions, all the speakers said: it is true that sanctions are a bad thing, but we will endure them, we will tighten our belts and we will not withdraw from this line, whatever the sanctions may be. (*Knesset Records*, 22/1248, 6/3/57)

All the criticism levelled here at the government applies equally, of course, to MK Bernstein and his party. It was only by chance that the General Zionists were not then sitting in the [governing] Coalition. And if they had been sitting there, they would have acted just as Mapai did.

The representative of the General Zionists concluded by saying:

... and although I fully recognize that the situation is not an easy one, we propose to the Knesset that it demand the government stop the withdrawal now. (*Ibid.*, p. 1250)

Regarding that party, just as with Herut, it can be asked whether Mr. Bernstein *really* believes that it is possible to withstand political, economic, diplomatic and maybe even military pressure from most of the world, the USA and the USSR, Asia and Africa, and to refuse to withdraw from the Gaza Strip? If he really believed that, then his understanding of politics is quite limited, and if not, then we are witness to a transparent effort to take advantage of the failure of Mapai's foreign policies, policies that the General Zionists, despite their reservations, generally supported.

Who is responsible?

At that same historical session of the Knesset, the Unity of Labour party took a somewhat odd position. It abstained from voting within the government on the evacuation; despite its strong opposition to the evacuation it did not dare vote against it, and did not even dare to leave the government. MK Galili said in the Knesset:

... I must differ explicitly with what the Prime Minister said yesterday, not only on the matter of the withdrawal itself, but also regarding the responsibility for the evacuation decision. Responsibility for that decision lies with those same members of the Government who voted in favour of it and it should not fall on members of the Government who did not vote in favour of it or opposed it.

Shimshon Unichman (Herut): Where is the collective responsibility?

Chaim Ariav (General Zionists): Where is the Coalition?

(Knesset Records 22/1259, 6/3/57)

It is doubtful if there is another government in the world in which such a practice could exist. A party, the spokesman of which opposed the withdrawal with the words “it is better to be killed than to transgress”, continues to sit in the government that decided on the withdrawal, abstained from voting against the evacuation resolution, and also claims that it has no responsibility for the evacuation. But Unity of Labour’s record in “adherence” to declared principles was broken by the United Workers’ Party (Mapam), the most left-wing of the Zionist parties. The Secretary-General of that party [Meir Yaari], who is also the president of the “Israeli Peace Committee”, opened by saying:

Honourable Knesset, I want to say that Mapam is sorry to signal that it has serious reservations about the vote by the majority in the government to withdraw from Sharm al-Sheikh and the Gaza Strip before the minimal guarantees the Knesset demanded on 23/1/57 were ensured ... Honourable Knesset, we did not conceal that we did not support Operation Sinai at the time the decision was made by the government. Despite the provocation from neighbouring states and a war of threats of aggression that increased in the recent period – a consequence of the arms-race policy of both the East and the West – we were convinced that it was still possible to strengthen our security and to continue to absorb immigration and develop the country and to fight for stable peace without the need to resort to desperate measures. In truth that was the majority belief within the parties that participated in

the government until the last days before Operation Sinai. I will not conceal the fact that the decisive change did not occur because our enemies imposed the zero hour upon us near the days of the decision. Rather, it was because we were tempted by the illusion of a historical opportunity that would not return. As is known, Operation Sinai did not last more than a few days. The day after victory, optimism grew, as if the Messianic times were in sight, and then a day later we were caught up in a cruel reality. Overnight we faced a hostile world, and nearly all of it was united against the operation. We were confronted with the surprising reality that England and France had abandoned their campaign in flight and panic, faced with the pressure and threats of the two dominant world powers. And the IDF too withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula even if not in panic and flight. As is known, we took on upon ourselves full responsibility for the military campaign after the decision was made. Our very identity as a pioneering Zionist party demanded of us that we stand with the nation at a time of a fateful time of trial. We knew that we could not fail in that military campaign lest we thereby endanger our very existence. As long as we took upon ourselves the responsibility for the campaign, while having reservations about the decision that preceded it, after the withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula unity was restored in the ranks of the government in all its parts, in its struggle for the securing of our borders, for the guarantee of freedom of navigation and for the restoration of peace between us and the neighbouring states. Full unity was restored to the government, because these demands were just and legitimate before Operation Sinai, as they are also, after it. They are demands that condition our very existence and future.

And after all, what are we demanding for ourselves?

Are we demanding for ourselves territories that do not belong to us?

Are we demanding for ourselves any privileges whatsoever?

Tawfiq Toubi (Israeli Communist Party): Is Gaza yours?

(*Knesset Records* 22/1261, 6/3/57)

If Unity of Labour found itself in an awkward position at the time of the withdrawal, Mapam was in that position at the beginning of the invasion as well. Here is the conclusion of Yaari's speech, which is typical of Mapam:

... the United Workers' Party will continue to participate in this partnership [in the Coalition], as long as it believes that this Government is truly willing to realize the great mission that has been assigned to it. Enemies of the working class and enemies of progress must not be permitted to exploit the mistake embodied in this hasty withdrawal.

Except for the Communists

In the first days of the invasion, the phrase "all the parties apart from Maki [the Israeli Communist Party] was very widespread. The radio, the press and the public speeches never tired of emphasizing that a "wall-to-wall coalition" had been created, that all the parties "from Mapam to Herut" were united in their position on the principal issues, (namely, the *faits accomplis* that Mr. Ben-Gurion presented them with). Many saw that as "a marvellous manifestation of the unity of the nation". That meant, of course, that on the day on which Mr. Ben-Gurion presented that "wall-to-wall coalition" with the fact of the withdrawal, they all found themselves in a most embarrassing position; some of them – like Unity of Labour and Mapam – because their adherence to their principles was revealed as dubious, and others– like Herut and the General Zionists – because their policy of military activism had undergone a setback. The Secretary of Maki [Shmuel Mikunis] began his speech in the Knesset by saying:

... Your Honour Mr. Chairman, Honourable Knesset: If there is a faction in the Knesset that has the full moral-political right today to express non-confidence in the Ben-Gurion government it is certainly our Communist list. And it is thus, because we were the only faction in the Knesset that rejected the adventure of the war against Egypt for the triumph of the British and French colonialists and the partnership with them; because we were the only ones who warned of the dangers

involved in that adventure, we prophesied its certain failure, we warned of its devastating consequences for Israel's political position and economic situation, and out of national responsibility and loyalty to the interest of peace, Israel's security and its future, we demanded the return of the IDF from all the occupied territories to the ceasefire lines Reality has in fact borne out all our warnings and our political theses: Israel's honour in the world has been diminished in the wake of the war, its political position has been gravely undermined, its economic situation has been aggravated, Israeli-Arab relations and Israel's relations with countries of the socialist camp have been aggravated, Israel has been forced to withdraw from all the occupied territories and the victims were sacrificed in vain.

... The non-confidence motion that was submitted by the Herut movement and the General Zionists cannot be defined as anything other than hypocrisy and demagoguery, because the government in which they are expressing non-confidence acted in conformity with the counsel of the Herut movement and the General Zionists and executed precisely the disaster-fraught and nationally irresponsible war program of the Herut movement.

Haim Cohen Meguri (Herut): We express non-confidence in it, and that goes together with you.

Shmuel Mikunis (Maki): You will see how it goes together with us.

The Herut movement and the General Zionists bear full responsibility together with the Ben-Gurion government for the Sinai adventure and its destructive consequences or Israel. Together with the government the Herut movement and the General Zionists advanced the adventurous plans of Anthony Eden and Guy Mollet to take control over the Suez Canal and recover the colonial outposts – a plan that failed, that had to fail due to the profound change in the global balance of forces in favour of the camp of peace and socialism and in disfavour of the imperialist war-camp. Together with Mr. Ben-Gurion, Knesset Members Begin and Bernstein swore not to withdraw, even though it was clear to all rational people, and we had predicted it, that the withdraw would come. We said on 7 November that the withdrawal would come. And if the Herut movement and its two satellites seek to raise hell today, while putting on a patriotic face, against the withdrawal, then that

is a vain effort to obscure the basic fundamental fact that *it is not the withdrawal from all of the occupied territories that is the disaster, but the launching of the war and the adventurous conquests.*

... The great crime of the Ben-Gurion government is not only in that it got Israel into the Sinai adventure as a vanguard for the Anglo-French aggressors. But also in that, with the withdrawal from Sharm al-Sheikh and the Gaza Strip it positions Israel to serve imperialism – this time mainly American. According to a secret agreement, which today is no longer so secret, with the rulers of the United States.

... in its implementation of the withdrawal from Sharm al-Sheikh and the Gaza Strip in collusion with the United States for the good of the Eisenhower Doctrine the government of Israel lost an opportunity to convert the withdrawal from the occupied territories into a political act to ease the tensions in Israeli-Arab relations and create the preconditions for a just peace settlement of the issues under contention between Israel and the neighbouring countries.

... the Prime Minister's speech yesterday emphasized the promises that he had received from Eisenhower. That was the most pathetic part of the speech. Ben-Gurion wanted us to believe that it is possible to build on these promises, while it is known to all who wants to know that Eisenhower himself is barely able to hold his own in the Middle East, and that every day that passes brings the United States all the closer to the same situation in which France and Britain find themselves in the Middle East today. It is not a coincidence that to this very day, after eight years of the State's existence, the government of Israel has not succeeded in securing Israel's most vital national interests: recognition by the Arab countries and making peace with them, security and calm on the borders, freedom of navigation, etc.

The government could not secure all that because it has relied on imperialism and viewed the Arab East through the sights of a gun. Because the policy of military government over the Arabs of Israel, because the policy of Qibya and Kfar Qasim make it out of the question to secure the interests of our people in our land. Only outside and in opposition to imperialism and its aggressive alliances, only by means of peace and concord, only by means of the recognition of the just national rights of the Palestinian Arab people, only by means of annulling the military

government and giving rights to the Arab population in Israel, only thus will it be possible to secure for our country the position of a recognized country with equal rights in the Middle East. Only thus will it be possible to secure our peace, security and future in this part of the world. (*Knesset Records* 22/1264, 6/3/57. Emphasis ours)

“All the facts that have been created should be brought into consideration”

The last speaker in the debate was Knesset Member Sharett, who had returned from the congress of socialist parties in Asia, which had taken place during the very days of the invasion of Egypt. The former Foreign Minister, who had been relieved of his political duties “in order to create more coordination between the Defence Ministry and the Foreign Ministry”, in the words of Mr. Ben-Gurion, endorsed everything that had been done by the Prime Minister, but he did not abstain from criticism. Regarding Ben-Gurion’s words to the effect that the war aim had been freedom of navigation to Eilat he observed:

... what is the advantage to us of our holding that coastal strip in order to guarantee free navigation to these countries in Asia, if the ports of these countries are going to be closed to ships coming from Eilat. (*Knesset Records* 22/1273, 6/3/57)

Regarding the entire operation, he observed:

... The gulf that was created between us and the United Nations, that was expressed by its majority in resolutions – so far no other method has yet been invented – the gulf between us and those who make policy in the United States and who have the power to make take decisive measures, the gulf between us and various states in Asia and other parts of the world – these are fraught with serious danger for the future, development, and for all we know even for *the very existence of the State of Israel*.

Heckler: Bulganin.

(Ibid., p. 1273. Emphasis ours)

The last heckler's call requires clarification. Marshal Bulganin's telegram to Israel on 5/11/56 included among other things the following passage:

... The government of Israel is playing in a criminal and irresponsible way with the fate of the world, with the fate of its own people. It is sowing such hostility to the State of Israel among the peoples of the East that it is impossible that its mark not be left on the future of Israel, and it puts into question *the very existence of Israel as a state*.³⁷ (Emphasis ours)

To this day that passage is understood by all the parties of the "Sinai Coalition" as a Soviet threat to destroy Israel. These politicians interpreted the term "peoples of the East", the meaning of which in Soviet terminology is "the peoples of the Near and Middle East", as "the nations of the Eastern bloc". Sharett, the text of whose speech was reminiscent of the phrasing of the Prime Minister of the Soviet Union, justly elicited the catcall "Bulganin".

Sharett could not conclude his speech without a critique of Ben-Gurion's "security" approach, as opposed to his own "diplomatic" approach. He continued:

... Security is the first condition for the existence of the State. That is the first consideration. But to focus narrowly on the problem of security in the short term while diverting attention from other considerations is likely to have grave consequences for security itself ...

Regarding Ben-Gurion's way of presenting the Knesset, the nation and the world with *faits accomplis*, he said:

³⁷ The English translation is from the website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign+Relations/Israels+Foreign+Relations+since+1947/1947-1974/7+Exchange+of+Letters+Bulganin+Ben-Gurion+5+and.htm> – trans.

... the creation of facts is an important tactic, one that is necessary for the most part. It is sometimes effective. But all the created facts should be taken into consideration, not only those that we succeed in creating for our benefit, but also those that others succeed in creating to our disadvantage. Sometimes negative facts are created of their own accord while we are creating positive facts. In my opinion, to ignore certain facts that have been created to our disadvantage is no less serious an offence than refraining from creating facts to our advantage. (Knesset Records 22/1272, 6/3/57)

Coming from a cautious and experienced politician like Sharett, who is known as an artisan of diplomatic formulation, this is a very serious critique of his party comrade.

An indecisive conclusion

In his reply, the Prime Minister mocked the Herut members and claimed that they were only talking whereas he was acting.

“They initiated and executed the Gaza, Khan Yunis and Qalqilya operations”, he reminded them with irony, while forgetting that at the time he had claimed that the raid on Gaza (on 28/5/55) was not an Israeli-initiated operation but rather the result of the pursuit after an Egyptian patrol that had penetrated into Israeli territory. “They envisioned the idea of the Sinai Campaign, they initiated that campaign, planned that campaign, and Major-General Bader³⁸ stood at its head,” ... “Who can compare with you, and who am I, callow youngster that I am, to argue with you?” In reality the Prime Minister is saying here: I am the knight of military action, of activism, of raids; and your strength is only in words.

Of course, these words do not at all prevent him from representing himself on other occasions as the hero of Israeli-Arab peace, and from quoting on these occasions *other* passages from his articles and speeches, that are convenient to him at that moment.

In his reply to Knesset Member Bernstein he said:

³⁸ The reference is apparently to Yohanan Bader, an editor of the Herut newspaper and subsequently a Member of the Knesset. –trans.

... Certainly various words were said during those months, that various events occurred during those months, do you think that politics is a religious or mathematical model, that it is not given to changes and exchanges over the course of changing situations? (*Knesset Records* 22/1277, 6/3/57)

Certainly politics is not a model, and various events call for various formulations. But a politician should envision developments in advance, at least along general lines, and act accordingly. Can that self-justification explain the following words:

“and Yotvat, called Tiran, that until one thousand four hundred years ago was an independent Hebrew state, will once again become part of the Third Kingdom of Israel”?

That day the debate in the Knesset concluded in a very strange and unique way. The Communists’ motion to express non-confidence in the government for launching the Suez War and for service to American imperialism during the withdrawal was rejected by 104 votes to 6.

The General Zionists’ resolution for non-confidence in the government because of the withdrawal from Gaza was rejected by 85 votes to 25. The Herut proposal on the same issue was also rejected by the same vote.

The session concluded with calls of: “*What has been decided?*”

For the first and only time in its history the Knesset was dissolved without the passage of any resolution after a stormy discussion of foreign policy problems. The reason apparently was the impossibility of formulating a resolution that would satisfy all the factions in the Coalition. Mapam and Unity of Labour were not willing to vote in favour of a formulation that explicitly supported withdrawal, and Ben-Gurion knew that if he demanded that, he would put them in an uncomfortable position, increase their internal difficulties, and probably cause them to resign from the Government, and in such a situation he would have difficulty finding other partners. Therefore he contented himself

with the Coalition's defeating all the opposition's non-confidence motions, but refrained from adopting an explicit resolution in favour of the withdrawal.

“Not a passing dream”

Thus the episode of the Suez War was nearly concluded. *Nearly*, because promises from the US government remained, as did remnants of various previous illusions.

... According to the Foreign Minister's declaration at the United Nations General Assembly, Israel reserves for itself freedom of action in the event that the Egyptians return to the Strip, which never was theirs and which they used only for the purpose of attacking or threatening Israel. If an opportune moment comes when there is a need to act, the government of Israel of course will not declare its action prematurely. (*Knesset Records* 22/1343, 13/3/57)

One day after the announcement of that resolute reply, the Egyptian governor returned to Gaza, and that same day the USA announced the resumption of economic aid to Israel. The Foreign Minister immediately left for Washington and there declared (on 17/3/57):

“We will wait a day or two, it is very likely that we will be forced to take action in self-defence”;

“The situation in the Gaza Strip is very serious and grave”;

“*With the return of the Egyptians to Gaza, we have returned, more or less, to the situation that prevailed in the region before 29 October*” (*Davar*, 18/3/57)

Even before Mrs. Meir's plane landed in the USA, the Israeli delegation at the UN published three questions for Dulles:

1. President Eisenhower promised to ensure that, after the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and from the Eilat Gulf, more calm would prevail than before. *But the opposite has happened*. How do the President and the government propose to fulfill what they promised?
2. The President declared that after the Israeli withdrawal there would be no more restrictions against Israel in the Suez Canal and in the Eilat Gulf and if

such restrictions were imposed the Nations would take strong action. What action does the United States have in mind?

3. The Secretary of State, when he convinced Israel to withdraw from Gaza on 1 March, confirmed the propositions made by Golda Meir and carefully checked their formulation. The first proposition was: UN control, both military and civilian. How does the United States intend to advance that mission? (*Davar*, 18/3/57. Emphasis ours)

Dulles' reply to Mrs. Meir was short and clear.

The policy of the United States in the Middle East continues to be that which was declared publicly, especially in the speech of Henry Cabot Lodge at the UN General Assembly on 1/3 and in a letter that the President sent to Ben-Gurion on 2/3. (*Davar*, 19/3/57)

That letter from the President was nothing but a nebulous and non-committal rehash of Lodge's speech. In summary: the military and civil administration of Egypt returned to the Gaza Strip, the promises of the USA were revealed to be a tranquilizing opiate only, and Israel, of course, did not take any "self-defensive action", even though "we have returned, more or less, to the situation that prevailed in the region before 29 October" and even though it had "reserved for itself freedom of action", and had not "announced its action prematurely". In effect all of Ben-Gurion's threats were empty ones. International public opinion, fearful of a third world war in consequence of the Suez war, took great care to ensure that fighting would not resume in the Middle East, and was in no mood to permit a smaller version of the invasion of 29 October. Moreover, the UN Emergency Force was parked in the Gaza Strip, and confrontation with it would have far-reaching international implications. Every child knew these political facts.

In terms of foreign policy, the government's threats were devoid of importance, but Mapai had a vital need of them for them for reasons of internal politics. Mapai feared discontent within the army; they feared as well that public opinion would lean towards Herut. Either way, if at the beginning of February the Coalition parties organized massive

demonstrations against the withdrawal from Gaza, and declared from every podium that regardless of the threats and hardship involved in annexing the Strip, they would not agree to surrender it, what will the public say at the beginning of March when those same parties, led by Mapai, come to them and explain how it is necessary, crucial, useful and patriotic to quickly evacuate the Strip? Of course the Israeli public could not digest such a rapid turnaround, so naturally it inclined somewhat towards Herut, which had consistently adhered to the nationalist approach all along. The Coalition, with justice, feared the demagoguery of the Right, and that forced Ben-Gurion to utter his threats to Egypt. Of course the Right was consistent only in its language; the enormous international pressure would have crushed any government that dared to refuse to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. The USA would only have had to block the pipeline through which hard currency flowed in order to paralyze Israel's economy within a few weeks and to bring down any government it did not like (and that was also unwilling to turn to the USSR for help).

The conclusion of that adventure was, as the Foreign Minister put it: "*we have returned, more or less, to the situation that prevailed in the region before 29 October.*" At the beginning of November 1956 the whole country sang enthusiastically:

It is not a legend, my friends,
Or a passing dream
Lo, before Mount Sinai
The bush, the bush is burning
It flames in song
Sung by brigades of boys
And the gates of the city
Are in the hands of the Samsonites.

But at the beginning of March 1957 that song became unpopular, for it had finally become clear that:

It *was* a legend, my friends,
It *was* a passing dream.

Chapter 7

Sinai War: Post-Mortem

Even before the smoke had dispersed over the Sinai Peninsula and the Suez Canal, politicians and journalists, theoreticians and people of action, began to analyze the war and its consequences. From the end of the invasion to this very day many books and articles have been published that try to explain *how* the events occurred and *why* they occurred as they did.

“Two separate operations?”

One key question that has preoccupied many analysts since 29 November 1956 was the question of Israel’s collusion with France and Britain. Were Operation Sinai and the Anglo-French action in Suez two separate campaigns, which happened to converge in time only by chance and not by advance planning? Or were those two actions two sides of the same campaign, the result of advance planning and timing? In short: *was there* or *was there not* a *joint* operation?

Needless to say, this is a most delicate question for the spokesmen of the Israeli governing Coalition, and especially for members of Unity of Labour and Mapam. They had no desire to appear before the world as partners in an overtly colonialist venture. The very day after the invasion *Lamerhav* wrote: “*We have not served and we will not serve foreigners, our goals are Israeli*” (editorial, 31/11/56). And on 7 November 1956 that newspaper concluded its editorial (that was dedicated to the 39th anniversary of the October Revolution) with these words: “*It is slander to say that we are proponents of colonialism.*” That same day the leader of Mapam declared from the Knesset podium: “*To the best of our knowledge we did not enter into any alliance with France and Britain*”. (Meir Yaari, *Records of the Knesset* 21/208, 7/11/56).

Ben-Gurion’s people (Dayan, Peres and others) preferred to ignore the question, or to answer it in vague terms. When the journalist Y. Ben-Porath pressed Deputy Defence Minister Shimon Peres on the matter, the latter replied: *“All I can say is that there were two separate operations”*. (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 12/2/60)

Ben-Gurion himself avoided that question like the plague and refrained from touching on it in any form, for obvious reasons.

“Too fantastical to appear in print?”

But since November 1956 much material that sheds light on this affair has been published, especially in England and France. The primary suspicion of the existence of a covert connection between Israel and France and Britain was aroused when these powers imposed the famous veto in the Security Council, less than 24 hours after the launching of the Israeli invasion. Is it conceivable that the representatives of Britain and France would have dared to take that extreme measure, which involved the fullest exercise of their political power, and against none other than the United States, without advance instructions from their governments?! After all, this was the first time since the establishment of the UN that Britain and France used their right of veto; is it conceivable that in the course of one day the prime ministers managed to consult with each other, to adopt a joint line of action and to instruct their representatives in the UN to oppose the resolution calling on members of the organization to refrain from intervening in the conflict?

When France and Britain issued their ultimatum, which demanded that Egypt (and Israel ...) agree to their military intervention, most observers were convinced that there was indeed a connection that had been well planned in advance. On 31 October, before the launching of the Anglo-French actions in the Canal Zone, Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell read in Parliament the following lines from the Washington *Evening News*:

As of now there is no doubt among American officials that Britain and France were engaged from the beginning in a conspiracy with the Israelis and announced the invasion of Egypt as a pretext for the re-occupation of the Canal Zone. The emphatic denials of French and British diplomats failed to shake Washington's conviction that this was the case. And the American view is shared by all the delegations at the UN.

Two weeks later the Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker put the following ten questions to the British government:

First, the Foreign Secretary flew back from the Security Council through the night of the 15th October, two days after the Prime Minister had told the Tory Conference that force was not excluded. He landed on the morning of the 16th and went straight to a Cabinet meeting at which the C.I.G.S. was present. He flew on within an hour to Paris with the Prime Minister. They were closeted there for five hours with French Ministers with no advisers present. What happened then?

Second, did the Government know that French troops were massing around Marseilles after that meeting on the 16th October?

Third, were our Valiant bombers moved to Malta after that meeting?

Fourth, what is their answer to the American accusation that the British and French Military Attachés in Tel Aviv and Cairo shut up like oysters and refused to exchange information and opinions for some time before the Israeli coup?

Fifth, why did our Ambassador in Tel Aviv, when he asked for assurances that Jordan would not be attacked, say nothing about an attack on Egypt, an attack which, say the Government, would imperil the Canal?

Sixth, did the Government know that Israeli officers were in consultation with the French General Staff in Paris from 26th October onwards?

Seventh, how do they explain the fact that the *Jewish Observer*, which is particularly well-informed on these affairs, wrote on the 26th October these pregnant words: “France will back Israel unequivocally should the need for it arise. The French might go as far as using their veto power.”

Eighth, how do they explain the fact that a journalist – I have the original of his dispatch – reported from Tel Aviv on 26th October: “This is a tense weekend, potentially the most explosive since 1948. Here is the pattern of things to come as nearly as can be pieced together from this end: Franco-British military action against Nasser; simultaneously Iraqi troops are expected to move into Jordan to provide one more and pretty big headache for the Egyptian dictator.” Then he speaks in guarded terms of what Israel would do and says: “One cannot help feeling

that the Sabbath peace is likely to be rudely disrupted.” That was on 26th October, straight from Tel Aviv. That message was never published, for the London editor of his paper thought it too fantastical to appear in print.

Ninth, the Government must know of the uncontradicted reports in M. Mendès-France’s paper, *L’Express*, that French troops had been issued with occupation currency, Egyptian currency, that French officers were warned for active service at an unknown destination, that French tanks and vehicles were camouflaged with desert colours.

Tenth, the Israeli action – and this is a point which I hope the Lord Privy Seal will take into account, for in my view it is decisive – started from Elath, a few yards from Aqaba where the 10th Hussars are stationed. The Government must have been warned by the 10th Hussars days before that the Israelis were preparing for an attack. If the Government knew nothing about the Israeli plan, they must prove it. Unless they answer the questions which we have put, they are self-condemned, and the world will judge them by the standards which they applied to the squalid plots by which Hitler and Mussolini ushered in their aggressions in the ‘thirties. (*House of Commons Hansard*, Volume 560, pp. 868-870, 13 November 1956)

The British government *did not answer* the questions.

On 19 November 1956 the most important newspaper in the USA, *The New York Times*, published the following leak from the American Department of State:

State Department officials have information that indicates a certain degree of military coordination. There is an accusation that the attack on Egypt had been planned for weeks as a joint operation, that the Israeli offensive in the Sinai Peninsula was known long in advance both to Sir Anthony Eden and to Mr. Mollet, and that the decision to use that attack as a motivation for their action had been taken on a joint basis at a meeting of the two prime ministers in Paris on 16 October.

On the same day the influential British newspaper *Manchester Guardian* published an article according to which the Israeli operation had been planned in collaboration with Britain and France. The article also stated that French pilots participated in the Sinai battles. Of course the foreign ministries of France and Israel emphatically denied that story and claimed that it was “completely baseless”.

“Better that it should be against Egypt”

So far up to now we have quoted words that were said at the height of the conflict. Of the dozens of revelations that have come to light since then, we will now quote a small handful that represents the consensus, which were published in the Israeli press. Most prominent among them is perhaps the speech of Guy Mollet to activists of his Socialist Party at the beginning of 1960 in the town of Marquise in northern France.

Mollet did not know that his words were being recorded by a journalist who was sitting in the audience. At the beginning of March 1960, the newspaper *Paris Presse* published the stenogram of the speech, in which the man who was the prime minister of France during the Suez war admitted that on the eve of the war he met in France “in a place and a time that the journalists changed a great deal” with Mr. Ben-Gurion who was accompanied by two of his ministers. Excerpts from the speech (including this admission) were quoted in *Yedioth Aharonoth* of 9 March 1960.

Mollet’s British partner, Sir Anthony Eden, was forced to resign from all political functions (for “health reasons”) after the failure of the intervention in Suez. He occupied himself with the less dramatic (and less harmful) task of writing his personal memoirs. The memoirs were written in a thoroughly apologetic tone and they were clearly nothing but the attempt of a man who had gambled with fate to absolve himself of guilt for his great failure. He passed over in silence the “delicate” questions related to the episode, concealing more than he revealed.

My colleagues and I – writes Eden in his memoirs – were acutely aware of the consequence of action by Israel against *Jordan*, which we had to do all in our power to avert. Our relations with Israel were not close or intimate, there were constant arguments about the supply of arms. Therefore, at this meeting in Paris

[the famous meeting of 16 October!], we asked the French Ministers to do everything they could to make clear to Israel that an attack in Jordan would have to be resisted by us. This they undertook to do. It was not only our own treaty engagements [with Jordan] which concerned us, but the effect upon Iraq of events in Jordan. To fail to carry out our engagement would be the end of our position in the Middle East, to have to carry it out would be disastrous to Western Unity [in view of the fact that France was committed to support Israel]. No dilemma could be more difficult. *If Israel were to break out against Egypt and not against Jordan, this dilemma would not arise. For this reason, if there were to be a break-out it was better from our point of view that it should be against Egypt. On the other hand, if the break-out were against Egypt, then there would be other worries, for example the safety of the Canal.*" (Anthony Eden: *The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden: Full Circle*. London: 1960. Cassell. Pp. 512-513. Emphasis ours)

The formulation, of course, is very cautious. Eden says that he asked his French colleagues to make clear to Israel his opposition to an attack on Jordan. He also admits that an Israeli attack on Egypt was not undesirable to him, but he does not say if he also asked the French to make *that* clear to Israel.

Eden is known as a disciple and relative of the elderly Sir Winston Churchill. He was also a friend of Sir Winston's son, the journalist Randolph Churchill, to whom all the doors in the Western world were open because of his name and his connections, and who possessed most reliable information about what was going on in British government circles. In Randolph Churchill's book *The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden*, we read that when the London Conference convened a second time (between 19 and 21 September):

... Britain and France were no nearer obtaining a redress of their grievances than they had been at the beginning. [...] ... Experts in international law had been laboriously explaining in the columns of *The Times* that it was really no more peccant for Nasser to nationalize the Canal than it was for Mr. Attlee to nationalize the steel industry. And Nasser's improvised team of pilots had proved that Egypt

could be relied upon to operate the Canal, and so fulfil her obligations under the 1888 Convention. As the Presidential election approached, the Americans were showing day by day less enthusiasm for the cause of the western allies. The nearer they got to the elections, the less likely it was that the State Department would brand Nasser as an aggressor. For President Eisenhower's campaign managers were fighting for his reelection on the basis that he was the Prince of Peace. It is fantastical that the British Government failed to apprehend this elementary fact about the American domestic scene. [...]

It was in these circumstances that Sir Anthony overruled his French partners and the decision was made to take the problem to the Security Council of the United Nations. What was the Government's motive in going to the United Nations? It may be that Eden felt he ought to exhaust all possibilities before resorting to the use of force, so that going to the United Nations was merely postponing an unpleasant decision. Perhaps, realizing that he would get no support from the United States for intervention in Egypt outside United Nations approval, he hoped he would gain American support within the Security Council. But that was a considerable risk to take. Even assuming – though it was surely unlikely – that the United States would countenance in the Security Council the intervention that they had discouraged outside, was it not a gamble to expect Russia, with her power of veto, to agree? And when, as always seemed probable, Britain and France received no satisfaction from the United Nations, *what conceivable pretext would be left to them to intervene in Egypt? What pretext could there be, save an attack by Israel upon Egypt?* (Randolph S. Churchill: *The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden*. London: 1959. MacGibbon & Kee. Pp. 256-258. Emphasis ours)

If so, the Israeli attack on Egypt was not only the “lesser of two evils” but a quite vital need for Mr. Eden. Eden's words that such an attack would raise “other concerns, for example: the security of the Canal” are not to be interpreted in the negative sense that is implied by the word “concerns”. On the contrary, Eden had an interest in the raising of “concerns” over the security of the Suez Canal, so that he, as the primary “concerned” party, would be able to send the British army back into the Canal Zone. There can be no

doubt that that state of affairs was well known to Ben-Gurion. It was the fact that Eden and Mollet were in need of a pretext in order to take the Suez Canal that created the “opportune moment” for “Operation Sinai”.

More than that: we can be certain that had that “opportune moment” not existed and if Ben-Gurion was not confident of support from Powers like France and Britain, he would not have launched the war. These days, states like Israel – and states that are bigger and stronger than it – cannot launch “local wars” without being sure of support, in one form or another, from one of the Great Powers.

That alone suffices to show that the Sinai War was not only an isolated phenomenon but part of the general campaign over the Suez Canal. In that regard it makes no difference whether or not Ben-Gurion had his own goals, which he hoped to realize by means of the war.

“An uproarious party at the Dan Hotel”

Nevertheless, a certain importance should be attributed to the question: did Ben-Gurion use the “opportune moment” in order to launch the invasion and thus only *after the fact* provide an “opportune moment” for the Anglo-French intervention, or was there also joint planning? In other words: did the Suez War become of a tripartite attack on Egypt only *after the fact*, or was it planned as such *from the beginning*?

Here is what Randolph Churchill writes on the matter:

It was against this background that Sir Anthony Eden and Mr. Selwyn Lloyd flew to Paris on October 16. The exceptional secrecy of their discussions at the Hôtel Matignon with M. Mollet and M. Pineau was underlined by the fact that the four Ministers talked alone. It is very rare on such occasions that Ministers are not accompanied by diplomatic and military advisers, personal assistants and interpreters. The clandestine nature of this conclave, which lasted five hours, was noticed at the time and served to lend excitement to an already alarmed state of public opinion. Meanwhile, in addition to all the military preparations that had been

jointly undertaken by Britain and France, the French Government had already been making arrangements of its own with Israel. *On September 20, nearly a month before the Paris meeting described above, two representatives of the French Defence Ministry went to Israel to propose to the Israeli Government and staffs that France should aid an Israeli attack upon Egypt.* This aid would not be confined to the supply of arms and to diplomatic encouragement. The French emissaries brought with them an altogether more far-reaching plan. This was that the French Air Force could give active support to such an operation, and with the French Navy protect Israel from attack by Nasser's superior bombers. *It could also, they suggested, be accompanied by direct Anglo-French intervention, in the form of air attack and troop landings on Egypt.* A date early in November was suggested for the enterprise. (Randolph Churchill, op. cit. pp. 263- 264. Emphasis ours)³⁹

The date that Randolph Churchill indicates for the first French-Israeli meeting, at which the possibility of war was discussed in a substantive and practical way, is of interest.

The confidential "eight eyes" Anglo-French meeting took place on 16 October; according to Randolph Churchill two representatives of the French Foreign Ministry went to Israel about a month before that: *in mid-September*. That date of course has not been officially confirmed; but it is to be noted, that in an open letter published by the ministers Bar-Yehuda and Carmel, both of them members of Unity of Labour, in *Lamerhav* (29/5/59), they claimed that Ben-Gurion reported to them on "the broad outlines of the Sinai Campaign" as early as *25 September 1956*. Randolph Churchill goes on to say:

The idea of joint Israeli-French action in this theatre was not new. There had been contacts and secret talks on many levels directed towards action against Egypt. It is

³⁹ The quote from Churchill as it appears in the Hebrew version of this book, which the authors quoted from a Hebrew text that was quoted in the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Aharonoth* from 2/12/58, goes on to say: "About two days later the French announced to Mr. Ben-Gurion that Israel must launch the attack at the end of October, when the Americans would not be able to respond because of the elections. Ben-Gurion expressed reservations about the early date and the French representative said: 'The attack must be executed now or never.' 'Is that an ultimatum?' asked Ben-Gurion – 'you can take it as an ultimatum,' was the reply." I could not find those words in the original English text of Churchill's book, published by MacGibbon & Kee in London in 1959, nor in the New York edition published by G.P. Putnam's Sons the same year – trans.

understandable that the governing mind of France should have inclined to such action. For several years France's progressively deteriorating hold on North Africa had been loosened by arms, money and propaganda spouted out from Cairo. For some months, while Britain had shown herself increasingly reluctant to supply Israel with arms, France was ever more willing to do so. In particular, large numbers of tanks were delivered during the summer.

The military staffs of France and Israel began work on their joint project on October 1. The representatives of M. Bourgès-Manoury, the French Minister of Defence, paid several personal visits to Israel. General Moshe Dayan, Chief of Staff of the Israeli Army, came to Paris twice during October. These facts, and facts they are, will have to be borne in mind a little later, when it will be our unpleasant duty to form a view on the vexed question of 'collusion'. (Churchill, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-265)

These facts were not denied in Israel; in Britain they aroused a storm of protest. And in France?

... The reply of the French spokesman [of the Defence Ministry] was surprisingly frank, however, when he responded to Churchill's allegations of a French-Israeli conspiracy. *He did not deny that the French paratroopers were strolling on the streets of Tel Aviv long before the beginning of Operation Suez* and emphasized that one of France's main goals was "to force Nasser to cease aiding the Algerian rebels". "We would not, of course, attack Egypt for that reason alone" said the spokesman, "but when Nasser nationalized the Canal, he could not have expected anything else. It was these two reasons together that motivated us." (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 2/12/58. Emphasis ours)⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Although this quote was purportedly from an excerpt from Randolph Churchill's book *The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden* translated into Hebrew and published in the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Aharonoth* on 2 December 1958, I could find no text corresponding to it in the original English editions of Churchill's book. See note 38 – trans.

Randolph Churchill writes not only what he hears but also what he sees. On 7 November 1956, he went to Israel together with the American television journalist Ed Murrow, in order to observe the facts from up close.

He relates:

During the last week in October two squadrons of the Escadron Dijon were flown to Israel and stationed at Lydda airport, thirteen miles from Tel Aviv. These two squadrons, comprising thirty-six aircraft, were manned by French pilots, and were additional to the thirty-six *Mystères* which had earlier been supplied to the Israeli Air Force. The French-manned fighters played an important part in the war. During the first two days of the Israeli offensive they did not themselves attack Egyptian ground forces, but they did supply the air cover above the ground forces; and more important still they provided the protection that was necessary for the Israeli towns left open against Egyptian air attack. Mr. Robert Henriques, in his excellent account of the Israeli campaign [*100 Hours to Suez*, Collins, 1957], written at the request of the Israeli authorities and passed for publication by the Israeli censor, is at great pains to prove that there was no collusion between Israel and France. But he makes an interesting comment on the task allotted to the Israeli Air Force when they received their orders for the campaign early in the hours of Thursday, October 25. On this occasion, it was 'to support the ground forces, and to be prepared to counter enemy interference'. Mr. Henriques comments: 'This was a role for which [the Israeli Air Force] had never planned. All previous planning had been based upon the appreciation that it would take six days to reduce the Egyptian Air Force, of which the first three days would be critical.'

Colonel Henriques correctly assesses the situation. But from an excessive discretion he fails to explain that the reason that the Israeli-manned *Mystères* were able to dedicate themselves to the front-line battle was that the two French-manned 'Dijon' squadrons had been detailed for this collusive task. Indeed, when it seemed that there was no likelihood of Israeli towns being attacked by Egyptian bombers, the French-manned *Mystères* themselves joined in the main land battle, and with

considerable effect. The author arrived in Tel Aviv on the evening of Monday, November 5, hotwing from New York and London to find an uproarious party proceeding in the Dan Hotel, at which some twenty French pilots were being fêted by all the pretty girls in Tel Aviv for the aid which they had given to Israel with their *Mystère* fighters. Everyone seemed highly collusive. And why not? It looked like a splendid victory. (Churchill, op. cit., pp. 272-273)⁴¹

Randolph Churchill uses the word “collusion” to describe the connection between Israel and France. *And why not?* ... That definition is most definitely on the mark. It should be emphasized that Randolph Churchill does not condemn the Suez War in itself. Rather, he praises Israel and accuses Eden, whose hesitancy and lack of aggressiveness he believed caused the attack to fail.

“The shelling was carried out according to plan”

For his part, that same Colonel Henriques, who was mentioned by Randolph Churchill (and who is considered to be a warm friend of Israel), also revealed an interesting fact:

In his response to Childers’ article that was published in the *Spectator* ... Henriques writes that in September 1956, only a short time before he left London on his way to Israel, he dined with a Cabinet Minister who transmitted to him the following, to report to Ben-Gurion: “*At all costs you must avoid war with Jordan, but Britain will welcome an Israeli attack on Egypt, at the same time as British forces enter Suez. Britain will condemn the aggression, but in any negotiations for peace Britain will*

⁴¹ It is interesting to note that in the original Hebrew text of this book, this excerpt from Randolph Churchill’s book, purportedly published in Hebrew translation in the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Aharonoth* in December 1958, in the paragraph beginning with: “Colonel Henriques correctly assesses the situation”, the following words appeared in the itemisation of reasons why “the Israeli-manned *Mystères* were able to dedicate themselves to the front-line battle”. In addition to the fact that “the two French-manned ‘Dijon’ squadrons had been detailed for [the] collusive task” of “provid[ing] the protection that was necessary for the Israeli towns left open against Egyptian air attack” – “the Israelis knew that bombers of the Royal Air Force would ‘take care of’ the Egyptian airfields” (*ha-yisra’elim yad’u, ki maftzitzei heyl ha-avir ha-malkhuti ‘yitaplu’ bi-sedot ha-te’ufa ha-mitzriyim*). That assertion – that the Israelis were confident that British aircraft would bomb Egyptian airfields, does not appear in the original English editions of Randolph Churchill’s book. See note 38. – trans.

aid Israel”. Henriques writes that when he passed that message to Ben-Gurion the Prime Minister of Israel only responded with a smile, as if to say “We have heard promises like that more than once.” (*Yedioth Aharonoth* 6/11/59. Emphasis ours)

A more authoritative British revelation came at the beginning of 1959:

Stormy scenes took place yesterday in Parliament, when Labour leaders raised that accusation [about the collusion]. They asked the British Aviation Minister Mr. Ward about “*the use of Israeli air force markings on aircraft of the British Air Force.*” The question about the Israeli air force markings was put by the Labour MP Mr. de Freitas. *Mr. Ward replied – to vocal protests from the opposition benches –that these markings were needed because it was a combined operation.* (*Maariv*, 22/1/59. Emphasis ours)

Official French sources also gave details similar to those that Randolph Churchill revealed about the combined operation:

“The French army is also a partner in your victory in Sinai” – that is all, Admiral Barjot is not willing to say more than that.

Thus writes the journalist S. Segev in *Maariv* of 31 October 1958. And this should be known: Admiral Barjot took an active part in the Sinai-Suez war, one could even say, a not important part. He was the general commander of the French forces and the deputy commander of the entire Anglo-French operation.

The journalist continues:

I have in my possession an *official pamphlet of the French fleet* that was published on the occasion of a procession that took place in Toulon on 14 July [1958]. The pamphlet is about the French destroyer, the Kersaint, and it says the following: on the night of 31 October, after a patrol off Haifa, the Kersaint was able by its

accurate shooting to disable the enemy destroyer the Ibrahim al-Awwal and after its crew became dispirited they surrendered to the Israeli navy. (*Maariv* 31/10/58. Emphasis ours)

And S. Segev goes on:

... on 29 October, in the afternoon hours, shortly after the IDF paratroopers dropped on Mitla, the Israeli military attaché in Paris, Colonel Emmanuel Nishri, called Admiral Barjot, the general commander of the French task force, and transmitted to him an urgent message: the IDF Chief-of-Staff asked him to confirm that there would be artillery support from French ships patrolling the coasts of Israel, by shelling Rafah on the night of 30-31 October, and Al Arish the next night. A similar request was also made to the commander of the French destroyer *Surcouf*, one of the three destroyers that were patrolling the shores of Israel ... Barjot easily procured the agreement of the commander of the French navy, but he was in a delicate position from another perspective: the ship *Georges Leygues* was at that time at anchor at Limassol in Cyprus and it was part of the joint Anglo-French expeditionary force. It was impossible to separate it from that force without British consent and at that time the French and the British were preoccupied with planning the bombing of Port-Said, that had first been decided upon at the request of General Stockwell for 8 November and was moved up under French pressure to 6 November. Admiral Barjot immediately called the Supreme Commander, the British General Keightley. The latter heard the Frenchman's explanations and afterwards said: "All right, but you did not ask me and I promised you nothing, do what you want."

... The shelling was to start at 0300 hours, but at the beginning of the evening an order was received from the Chief-of-Staff, Major-General Moshe Dayan, to move up the shelling by a full hour.

The *Georges Leygues* fired up its engines and sailed at a speed of 25 knots per hour to the Rafah coast. At 0200 hours, the designated hour for the beginning of the shelling, all was ready, the communications with the coast were in order, the

shelling was carried out according to the plan – within two hours, until 0400 hours, the Georges Leygues fired 350 shells at the Rafah positions. (*Maariv*, 31/10/58)

Interesting – very interesting. The Israeli invasion started on 29 October and the matter became known to the world during the night hours; on 30 October the Security Council convened; the Anglo-French ultimatum was given on 31 October; Egypt rejected it on 1 November. And now they tell us the Anglo-French task force was assembled and ready *before 29 October*, that French destroyers were already then patrolling along the coasts of Israel, that the British and the French were busy at that time with planning the bombing of Port-Said. And we also hear that it was not urgent for the French admiral that he get the agreement of *his government* to activate naval forces to help one of the warring parties (*before the ultimatum was given*) but only the agreement of the commander of the French navy, and that agreement was given easily. It means that the French government had already decided *before then* to launch a military operation, and the French shelling of Rafah did not require a fundamental political decision but only a change in the details of the plan. On the other hand, Barjot did require the agreement of the British general, who was his superior in the framework of the “task force.” How did the British and the French know that on 29 October the Israeli invasion was about to begin? How did they know that they needed to plan for the noble role of “separating the warring parties”? How did they know that they would have to bomb Port-Said on 6 or 8 November? How did it happen that while the Americans were surprised on 29 October, the governments of Britain and France and their “task force” were ready?

And another interesting and alarming question: how did Colonel Emanuel Nishri know that he did not have to request of the *government of France* for active assistance in the conquest of Rafah? How did he guess the existence of the “task force”? How did he know that it was none other than *Admiral Barjot* who was the chief commander of the French task force? How did it happen that the Americans were surprised by the Anglo-French veto on 30 October and the ultimatum of 31 October and the Israeli attaché when the facts were clear to the Israeli attaché already on 29 October? Wonder of wonders!

The words that we have quoted above (and others in addition to them, that we do not have enough time to include here) suffice to prove a fact that is known in any case to all,

to wit: that Operation Suez-Sinai was a joint and combined operation, both from the aspect of initiative and the planning and also in the execution; that the Anglo-French pretext regarding “separation of the warring parties” was a transparent ruse that had been prepared in advance; that when Ben-Gurion gave the order for the Israeli attack he already knew what his partners’ next moves were going to be.

When *Pravda* published a report from the of the Tass news agency (6/12/56) that Anglo-French armed forces and military supplies had arrived at the port of Haifa, a spokesman of the Foreign Ministry denied it, saying:

This report is the fruit of a malicious imagination. There never were British, French or other armed forces in Israel.

Since then to to this very day the Israeli government has evaded acknowledging the facts. Many writers persist in their efforts to convince all who want to be convinced that the Suez War and “Operation Sinai” were two different things, distinct and separate, that their coming together in time was a matter of coincidence – a successful coincidence or an unsuccessful one, depending on whether the desire is to praise Ben-Gurion for his wonderful timing, or to blame England and France for the political failure of the episode.

“A historical chance”

The fact that the Sinai Campaign was part of a more general rivalry is very important. Without taking that into consideration, it is impossible to correctly understand the campaign, the goals that it was supposed to achieve and its consequences. Did the Sinai Campaign end in success or failure? The answer to that question depends to a great degree on the goals that its initiators had set. We are therefore obliged to determine which outcomes Ben-Gurion and his confidants intended to achieve when they decided to embark on the path to war. But as we conduct such a determination we would do well to ignore for the moment the developments that happened afterwards (for after all that was not known in advance to those who made the decision) and also the declarations that the conspirators made *after* their plans had been subject to the test of reality.

Among all the means at the disposal of a politician, war is the most drastic and extreme. One does not launch a war in order to achieve something inconsequential. On the contrary: the politician who brandishes the drastic and extreme instrument of war intends (usually) to achieve drastic and extreme ends. And moreover, whoever launches an *initiated* war certainly believes and assumes that he is destined to be victorious. His *principal* concern is the question of what he will gain, what is he *likely* to gain in the event that his venture is crowned with *victory*; not what he will lose in the event that he meets with *defeat* (although he cannot entirely ignore the latter question).

Therefore, when we ask ourselves what Ben-Gurion and his supporters intended to achieve as a consequence of the war, the only correct answer is: they intended the far-reaching consequences that would have been likely to occur if the war had concluded in victory. And here we must emphasize: *since Operation Sinai was part of a comprehensive attack, a tripartite attack, his calculations were based on the assumption that not only the Israeli part of the attack but the tripartite attack in its entirety would be crowned with success, with victory.* That latter conclusion flows not only from the logical rigour and honest thinking, but is confirmed as well by the confession of an interested party. We quote once again the words of the *Chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee Meir Argov*:

Honourable Members of the Knesset, let us please be honest with ourselves. Two other countries, for their own reasons, participated in *the action of 30 October, Operation Sinai and the Suez affair, and that is clear to the entire world.* What happened that caused them to withdraw? Do they not have mighty armies? Do they not have mighty fleets? Are their economies less strong than the economy of Israel? Are they smaller nations than Israel? What happened? ... I am now speaking not about desires, but about political facts as they were and as they are. *Can anyone in this house tell me that he had imagined global intervention like this in the course of events as happened afterwards?* (*Knesset Records*, 21/835, 23/1/57. Emphasis ours)

To ask that rhetorical question is to answer it: the planners of Sinai did *not* foresee the international intervention that forced their partners to withdraw; they had put their hopes

on “a political climate and a configuration of international circumstances that constituted a unique historical chance.” (*Davar*, 2/11/56), on “the most convenient political conditions” and on “the wonderful circumstances” (*Haaretz*, 4/11/56); they were happy to “attract... allies to our cause, even as the allies of the enemy were paralyzed.” (*Davar* 9/11/56). Ben-Gurion as well as Eden and Mollet were confident that under these “convenient political circumstances”, when “the Soviet Union was preoccupied with Hungary”, when the United States was busy with the Presidential elections, when international public opinion was not focused on events in the Middle East, England and France would be able to successfully carry out the invasion, to seize and to hold the Suez Canal *if not more than that*.

“Cheating history”

It is not our role to analyze the factors that caused Eden and Mollet to make such a grave error in their calculations. But it is not hard to understand what caused Ben-Gurion to make a historical error; for that error was not by any means coincidental or unique. On the contrary – the entire political path of the State of Israel and of the “State-in-Waiting” was based on the assumption – more than that: on the *conviction* – that the rule of the West in the Middle East would last for many more years, that the Arab nationalist movement did not represent serious substantial power and was not the embodiment of historical necessity, that its leaders were nothing but arrogant blowhards who would be unable to stand up in the face of substantial power. The leaders of the State of Israel never fully understood the decisive fact of our age: that the international balance of power has changed completely, that the colonialist powers and the economic-political system that they represent are in decline and in consequence of that, the colonial system is undergoing a process of collapse – not only in terms of its superficial meaning (the achievement acquisition of independence by countries that had heretofore been subject to foreign rule) but also in a deeper sense (loss of the economic, strategic and ideological position of the imperialist powers).

They have not been able to understand this historical process. The tripartite attack on Egypt was a kind of attempt to cheat history and the attempt failed, despite the

“configuration of international circumstances that constituted a unique historical chance”, and despite “the most convenient political conditions”.

There can be no doubt that the goal of the tripartite attack was not only to grab the Suez Canal but also to bring about the fall of the existing regime in Egypt. On 8 November Robert Weltsch, the *Haaretz* correspondent in London, reported to his newspaper:

The British and the French did not realize *the main objective they had set for themselves – deposing Gamal Abd al-Nasser*; even worse, it is likely that his prestige has been enhanced in consequence of his standing up to the two great Powers. (Emphasis ours)

And on exactly the same day the *Haaretz* correspondent in the USA, Amos Elon, wrote:

[US government circles] saw the accord for a ceasefire one day after the landing of forces as an admission of defeat. *The most important goal – bringing down the regime of Abd al-Nasser and the seizure of the Canal – were not realized.* (Emphasis ours)

An important American weekly wrote simply:

Why did Britain and France go to war in Egypt? In order to depose Nasser, for peace in Suez, to rescue their oil. (*U.S. News and World Report*, 9/11/56, p. 29)

This does not necessarily mean that there was an intention to send an Anglo-French army to Cairo; It is nearly certain that the two Powers believed that their taking over the Canal would be enough to bring about an internal collapse in Egypt, to cause the rise of subversive forces, which with outside assistance would set up a regime that would be “convenient” for Britain and France. If these goals had been realized then more farreaching consequences would have ensued.

First, the Arab nationalist movement (and also the entire international anticolonialist movement) would have sustained a heavy blow. The world would have come to the conclusion that the peoples who are struggling to liberate themselves no longer have the power to take “extreme” measures that would be likely to provoke the West too much.

Second, Anglo-French rule in our region would have recovered many of its lost strongholds and strengthened its position a great deal.

These two goals were *shared* by the governments of Britain, France and Israel. But each one of the attacking states individually wanted to realize other special goals. *Britain and France* wanted to recover the profits of the Suez Canal Company. *Britain* wanted to retrieve to its military base in the Canal Zone and to renew its political, economic and military influence over Egypt.

France believed that deposing of the regime of Abd al-Nasser would deal a fatal blow to the rebels in Algeria (whom the government in Cairo was aiding a great deal) and would ensure French victory in North Africa.

The Israeli partners believed that the new regime that would rise in Egypt would be amenable to an imposed peace not only without Israeli concessions, but on the contrary – one that would include Israeli territorial expansion.

A unitary operation

It is clear that Ben-Gurion’s hopes of annexing the Sinai Desert or part of it (see Menahem Begin’s speech in the Knesset of 23/1/57, quoted above) and imposing a “convenient” peace on Egypt, had not yet dissipated in the first week of November 1956. In his telegram to the soldiers of the 9th Brigade he speaks of the “*Third Kingdom of Israel*” and in his speech in the Knesset on 7 November he explicitly declared that “*the ceasefire accord with Egypt is dead and buried and will not be revived*”, and that “*together with the accord the armistice lines between us and Egypt have breathed their last*”. He also proposed to Egypt “*direct negotiations, without preconditions and without coercion from any quarter*”. From this that we can see that he still believed that they would agree to enter into negotiations with him without his first being compelled to withdraw his army from the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip.

From the part about the ceasefire lines we can see that Ben-Gurion thought that in his proposed peace agreement, territories *beyond* these lines would be annexed to Israel, but he does not state exactly *which* territories.

On that matter, a well-informed US weekly wrote:

Eden and Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion from Israel reportedly reached an agreement that *Israel would keep, and eventually annex, the Sinai Desert, which is now held by Egypt*. That would stabilize an Israeli border at the Suez Canal and would make it easier to convert the Canal into an international waterway, in reality and not just in theory. (*U.S. News and World Report*, 9/11/56, p. 18. Emphasis ours)

It is very plausible to suppose that Ben-Gurion was willing to “forego” Israeli sovereignty over *some* of the occupied territories and to content himself with their *demilitarization* – as can be understood from his words that “*Israel will not agree to any condition requiring the stationing of any foreign force, whatever it may be called, within its territory or in any of the territories held by Israel*”.

But in those very same days, events occurred that put the possibility of arriving at the accord Ben-Gurion wanted under increasing doubt.

First, on 6 November Britain and France announced their acceptance of a ceasefire, and on 7 November (that is, on the very evening on which Ben-Gurion made his speech in the Knesset) the two Powers *abstained* in the vote on the resolution calling for the withdrawal of British, French and Israeli forces from Egypt. At that moment it was clear that the Anglo-French invasion *had become a complete failure*, (see the report of the *Haaretz* correspondents in Britain and the USA quoted above).

Second, at the beginning of November, and especially after Britain’s and France’s announcement of their agreement to cease firing, the international pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories increased greatly. The pressure reached its height on 8 November, the day of the vote in the UN at which Israel was isolated, and on which Israel received President Eisenhower’s letter.

On the night of 8 November Ben-Gurion gave his first withdrawal speech on the

Voice of Israel.

If we take into account the fact that “Operation Sinai” was merely a part (and objectively speaking, the least important part) of the tripartite attack, it becomes easier to understand that at the moment when it finally became clear that the effort to seize the Suez Canal and to depose the government of Egypt would fail, the political fate of Operation Sinai was sealed. *The Suez-Sinai campaign was a unitary operation and its political fate was determined as such.*

On 8 November the idea of the “Third Kingdom of Israel” was taken off the agenda.

If we were to measure the success of Operation Sinai *only* according to the degree that the *maximal hopes* placed on it by its initiators were realized, then we could determine with certainty that the operation was a failure.

The marksman and the target – from November to March

But we are not excused from investigating whether Operation Sinai achieved any goals *apart* from the maximal goal.

Even on 8 November, when the need for withdrawal was clear, Ben-Gurion had not yet abandoned all his hopes. He struggled for four months over every step of the withdrawal, over every concession; and he hoped that every concession would be the last. We know of at least two occasions on which the Prime Minister explained to the nation the objectives for which he had purportedly launched the war.

Needless to say, the declared goals differed a great deal from the *true* goals, as we have seen above; but it is interesting to note that even the *declared* goals themselves changed from time to time. In the words of a certain astute politician, Ben-Gurion looked like a marksman who was drawing the circles of the target *after* he fired the shot; such a marksman never misses.

The “list of objectives” of 8 November (B-G’s speech on The Voice of Israel) was:

1. The destruction of the forces that had been lying in wait to subdue us.
2. Liberation of territory of the Homeland that was being held by the invader.

3. Ensuring freedom of navigation in the Eilat Straits and also in the Suez Canal.

(*Knesset Records*, 21/260, 14/11/56)

You will not see the establishment of the “Third Kingdom of Israel” in that list, but it still includes the annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel (the second goal) and the guaranteeing of freedom of navigation in the Eilat Straits *and in the Suez Canal* (the third goal). In his declaration of these goals Ben-Gurion added: “Even though at the moment only the first and main clause has been carried out – we are confident that also the other two goals will be fully implemented.”

We learn how the other two objectives were “fully implemented” from Ben-Gurion’s pamphlet that was published in March 1957 (“What we fought for, why we withdrew, what we achieved”, published by the Mapai Central Committee). On page 6 of the pamphlet we read a somewhat different “list of objectives”:

The objectives of the Sinai Campaign, as we have said, were not to impose peace on Nasser and not territorial conquests, but the defeat of the forces of the Egyptian army in Sinai and Gaza, the diminishing of Nasser’s stature, and opening the passage by way of the Straits of Tiran.

Was the annexation of the Gaza Strip among the war aims? In November Ben-Gurion answered that question positively (“liberation of territory of the Homeland”); by March the answer was negative – (“not territorial conquests”).

Was ensuring freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal among the war aims? In November Ben-Gurion answered that question in the positive; in March – don’t mention it! Whom should we believe? The Ben-Gurion of November or the Ben-Gurion of March? Only one answer is likely: *both the annexation of the Strip and the ensuring of freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal were among the war aims*; on 8 November Ben-Gurion was still sure that he would be able to realize them and by March he knew that he had failed. Ben-Gurion himself tries to convince us that there is no contradiction between his conjectures on the eve of the “Sinai Campaign” and his differing declarations after the

operation, and between these two and reality. On the very first page of the aforementioned pamphlet – facing the smiling image of the author – we find in black and white:

When I presented the plan for Operation Sinai to the government on 28 October 1956, I told the government what we intended to do, how far we would go and what would be likely to occur after the campaign, I spoke about Sinai, about the Gaza Strip, about the shores of the straits and about freedom of navigation, and I said what I thought would be likely to occur in all these territories. *And events developed exactly as I had foreseen and told the government.* (Emphasis ours)

Blessed is the nation whose leaders are prophets; they herald all and see in advance, and they think of the result before they begin.

The invasion began on 29 October –I “exactly as I had foreseen and told.”

The “Third Kingdom of Israel” came into being – “exactly as I had foreseen and told.”

The ceasefire lines gave up the ghost (7 November) – “exactly as I had foreseen and told.”

The Third Kingdom of Israel was called off and the withdrawal began (8 November) – “exactly as I had foreseen and told.”

The “liberation of territory of the Homeland that was held by the invader” was declared – “exactly as I had foreseen and told.”

It was declared that the *status quo ante* would not return (11/1/57) – “exactly as I had foreseen and told.”

An Israeli administration was declared in the Gaza Strip – “exactly as I had foreseen and told.”

It was declared that the Egyptians would not return to Gaza – “exactly as I had foreseen and told.”

The Gaza Strip was evacuated and the Egyptians returned to it – “exactly as I had foreseen and told.”

All, all, all – “exactly as I had foreseen and told.”

Ever since the destruction of the Temple, prophecy has been given to Prime Ministers.

Freedom of navigation

The third item in the “list of objectives” of 8 November included two secondary objectives: freedom of navigation in the *Straits of Eilat* and also in the *Suez Canal*. We are excused from discussing the question of the extent to which freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal was achieved; the failure to realize that objective is so clear that Ben-Gurion was forced to omit it entirely from the second “list of objectives”. Despite that, the apologetics for the Sinai Campaign often point to the freedom of navigation in the Eilat Gulf as if it were a major substantial achievement of the war. It is enough to subject that claim to the most superficial test to prove that it is greatly exaggerated. The truth is that the situation after Sinai is not much different from the situation that preceded the war. *Before* Operation Sinai the closure to Israeli shipping was not sustained and complete, and now freedom of navigation is not complete. Control over the Western shore and the islands of the straits have returned for all practical purposes to the Egyptians, and control over the eastern shore is (as it was before) in the hands of Saudi Arabia; Israel even now has no substantial guarantee that will ensure freedom of navigation. The government of the USA indeed announced (in a memorandum by the Secretary of State that was delivered to the Embassy of Israel on 11 February 1957) that in its opinion the Eilat Gulf is an international waterway, and on that point it was relying on the promise that was given by the government of Egypt in 1950 (!) but that declaration, which President Eisenhower reiterated in his message to Ben-Gurion (20 February) was put in a most strange light when the US representative in the UN referred to it explicitly among all the promises that were given at the time of the “collaborative work” on Golda Meir’s speech. Moreover, even before Henry Cabot Lodge with his speech demolished the Israeli government’s “policy of assumptions and expectations” Ben-Gurion himself understood that:

... recognizing freedom of navigation alone does not ensure freedom of navigation to Israel as well, as was the case regarding the Suez Canal; *and therefore there is a need to station a UN force until there is a peace agreement.* (*Knesset Records 22/1236, 5/3/57. Emphasis ours*)

If Israeli freedom of navigation in the Eilat Gulf is dependent on keeping the UN force in the Straits area, “until a peace agreement”, then it is dependent on less than nothing. Anyone who believes that the UN force will remain until there is a “peace agreement” and not until it is asked by Egypt to leave, is strangely deluded. But in fact it became clear that even the presence of the UN force was not a guarantor of complete freedom of navigation. About two years after the Suez War, Israel sold to Ceylon two frigates that were anchored in the Gulf, since there was no possibility of removing them, on account of the closure. For that there was no need to launch the “greatest and most glorious military operation in the history of our people”.

Was *that* accomplishment equal in value to the victims who fell for it?

Numerical superiority

We have already seen that the second clause of the “list of objectives” of 8 November, that is, the annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel, does not appear in the “list of objectives” of March 1957. In its place appears a different objective – *lowering the stature of Nasser*. Ben-Gurion’s words on that matter provide a valuable example of the thinking of politicians of the Government of Israel, and they are worthy of being quoted here in full:

Another objective of the Sinai Campaign was to lower the stature of the Egyptian tyrant, and its importance is not to be scoffed at. As the person responsible for security even before the founding of the State, one serious concern abided in my heart. We know the degraded state and the corruption of the Arab leaders, that that is one of the primary causes of their military weakness. But I always feared that a unique man might emerge, as emerged among the tribes of Arabia in the 7th century

or as arose to Turkey after its failure in the First World War, Mustafa Kemal, who raised the spirit of the nation, strengthened its faith in itself and made it into a fighting nation. That danger continues to exist, and it looked as if Nasser was that man. It is no small thing that in various Arabic-speaking countries children hold his picture. This lowering of Nasser's stature is a great political act. His stature was also lowered in his country, also in other Arab countries, also in the Islamic countries and in the entire world. Even the Soviet Union, which passionately embraces Nasser as the leader of the Arab peoples, did not ignore the lesson of the Sinai Campaign, even if it does not disclose that. I know that the Kremlin people are realistic and it is impossible that they do not understand that their hero is nothing but a puppet. (David Ben-Gurion, "What we fought for, why we withdrew, what we achieved", Mapai Central Committee. P. 4)

In the opinion of the apologetics for Sinai, the stature of Nasser was lowered after the withdrawal of his forces before the IDF advance. Was the successful conquest of the Sinai Peninsula by the IDF able to strike a blow against Egyptian prestige?

We will first examine the military side of that question. According to the testimony of Ben-Gurion the Egyptian force in the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip numbered 30 thousand men (including support personnel). According to Ben-Gurion, that force was reinforced by two regiments which numbered ten thousand men. (See *Knesset Records* 21/198). Maybe Ben-Gurion is exaggerating these numbers and maybe not; in any case it is quite clear that the entire Egyptian force, in Gaza and Sinai, did not *exceed* 40 thousand men. Of course Ben-Gurion does not provide any numbers on the strength of the Israeli forces that took part in the conquest of Sinai. If we want to arrive at any estimate we must rely on the accepted assessment about the size of the armies in the Middle East. Let us recall that as far back as the beginning of 1953, when in his speech at the Independence Loan Conference Mr. Henry Morgenthau estimated the manpower of the IDF at 200,000 soldiers, Abba Eban answered him that he "did not adequately estimate Israel's mobilizing capacity" (*Haaretz*, 9/3/53). In his speech at the Economic Conference for Israel (September 1953), Morgenthau estimated Israel's manpower at 250,000 soldiers. In a telegram of the UP agency from Jerusalem (28/9/55) he again gave the estimate of

200,000; (similarly the following estimates are given regarding the Arab armies: Egypt – 100,000, Iraq – 30,000, Jordan – 15,000, Syria – 10,000, Lebanon – 5,000, Saudi Arabia – 10,000). The *Almanac Information Please* for 1958 (MacMillan: New York) estimates the numerical strength of the IDF in 1956 at 250,000 men – of whom 200,000 were reservists (p. 665); (the same source's estimates for the Arab armies: Egypt – 160,000 Iraq – 60,000, Jordan – 20,000, Syria 65,000 – [!?!], Lebanon – 8,500).

No single one of these estimates should be considered authoritative or completely accurate. But even we consider them to be exaggerated to some extent, even if we assume that the mobilization of the reserves in advance of the Sinai War was not complete and even if we subtract from the total the Israeli forces that were assigned to guard Israel's *other* borders and which did not take part in the military actions, even then, the conclusion is that Israel had *numerical superiority* in the Sinai battles. In addition, it also had the great advantage of surprise and the no less important advantage of air superiority – as the Egyptian air force had been completely removed from action (even though it was not destroyed, as was reported at the time) by France and Britain. These observations do not at all invalidate or change the fact that militarily, the invasion of Sinai was crowned with success; but they cast a more realistic light on that success. It would be a serious mistake to assume that the Egyptians' withdrawal in Sinai in the face of a sudden attack by superior forces constituted an enduring blow to Nasser's prestige.

What is the lesson?

In truth, the question whether or not Israel had numerical or other superiority over the Egyptian army in Sinai is merely a secondary question. The main point is that Operation Sinai was (both politically and militarily) part of the tripartite attack on Egypt; and objectively it was certainly the *least important part*. The decisive question was not whether the IDF would succeed in establishing control over the Sinai Desert, but whether the English and the French would succeed in seizing the Suez Canal. Today there is no doubt that the political fate of the campaign in its entirety was determined – to the extent that it was determined at all by military facts – not in Gaza, Abu-Geila, Nahal or Sharm al-Sheikh but in Port Said, Ismailia and Port Tawfiq. But that could have been known at

the outset, during the war. Immediately upon the launching of the invasion and especially with the publication of the Anglo-French ultimatum it was clear to every schoolchild that Egypt had no military or political interest in a desperate defence of the Sinai Desert. The *only* logical step that Nasser could take was to order his forces to withdraw from the Peninsula while conducting rearguard battles, and to concentrate on a defensive campaign around the Suez Canal. He had to do that even if he was convinced that his army would be able to successfully defend Sinai; for if he had continued to hold Sinai and lost the Suez Canal he would have lost the entire campaign.

The withdrawal of the Egyptian army from the Sinai Desert was not, therefore, a result of weakness or stupidity nor was it a result of strength or wisdom, but, simply, the only thing that any army in the world would have done.

Indeed, the withdrawal of the Egyptians was disorderly, and often even chaotic, and Israeli propaganda mouthpieces knew how to take advantage of that fact and exaggerate it a great deal; but this withdrawal was a *temporary* withdrawal. After a few months, the Israeli force was withdrawn from Sinai; it was a wonderfully orderly withdrawal in accordance with all the rules of military doctrine – but not a temporary withdrawal. The one who withdraws last remains withdrawn.

Only an incurably provincial mind could be of the view that Nasser's stock had declined as a consequence of the Suez-Sinai war. The opposite is true. When he nationalized the Suez Canal, it is doubtful whether Nasser himself dreamed that an Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt would be repulsed with such speed and decisiveness and with so few victims as happened in reality. It was maybe the first time in modern history when an attack by two Great Powers (helped by a third state) on a relatively underdeveloped and weak state met with such a complete failure.

It is true that it was not the military power of Egypt that repelled the attack; it was defeated due to the new balance of power in the world. It was a coalition of socialist and neutral states and international public opinion which forced other states to join it that brought the adventure to a rapid conclusion, without firing a single shot. The final result of the Suez-Sinai war was not therefore a victory of the Egyptian army. It was much more than that: it was a victory for Egypt's neutralist and anti-imperialist *policy*. The conclusion drawn by the nations of the world, especially the peoples of Asia and Africa,

was not that Egypt is militarily weak, but that its policy based on neutrality, nonalignment and nationalization of Western economic interests is a realistic one.

The lesson of the Suez-Sinai war is that in our age even a small state can stand up to political and economic pressure, even in the face of military intervention by the colonialist states, and that there exist today forces and combinations of forces that have the ability to prevent warlike adventures or to stop them while they are still young, and to prevent their becoming an international conflagration. The Arab national movement is still far from the completion of its development, and the struggle between its different tendencies is far from being resolved. Bearing in mind the example of national liberation movements in other parts of the world (such as the Far East and Latin America), we can assume with a great degree of confidence that the present leaders of the Arab movement are likely to be nudged aside to make room for other leaders who will express more socially radical trends. Such a process could bring about the “lowering of Nasser’s stature”. But that result would be brought about by the internal dynamic of the social and the national movement of the Arab peoples, and not external military intervention such as the Suez-Sinai adventure. The opposite is true: the consequences of that adventure are recorded redounded in favour of Nasser’s foreign policy.

“Weakened Israel’s position”

The apologists for Sinai spread the false supposition that “Operation Sinai lowered the stature of the Egyptian tyrant” so that they could declare that the stock of the State of Israel *rose* in the wake of that operation. The latter supposition is even more false than the former one. As a consequence of the adventure Israel’s prestige sustained at least three hard blows, in three different international spheres.

One sphere is that of Israel’s genuine sympathizers. A significant part of international public opinion harbours sympathy for the Jewish people in the wake of the terrible suffering they experienced in recent years under the scourge of the swastika. The State of Israel therefore has moral credit that is worth more than its weight in gold; it suffices to mention that that credit was one of the important factors that moved many nations to

support UN General Assembly Resolution of 29 November 1947 that brought about the creation of the State. Operation Sinai exhausted that moral credit to a great extent.

The Israeli government's official line has always been that the source of the Israeli-Arab conflict was Arab leaders' fanaticism and unwillingness to compromise. The government of Israel repeatedly accused the Arabs before the whole world of unwillingness to take the hand of Israel that was extended in peace, of exclusive responsibility for the border incidents and of waiting for an opportune moment to launch a new war against Israel.

Even the segment of international public opinion that genuinely accepted that line was not able to digest Israel's sudden attack on Egypt. We quote again an excerpt from the Swedish prime minister's memorandum that was published on 2 November 1956:

We know well the hardships that Israel has faced since its birth, and the Arab view that it does not have the right to exist, and we also know about the border incidents. But Israel's response to these incidents was characterized by excessive harshness, and weakened Israel's position. The attack on Egypt cannot be explained at all. Israel's aggression – and no milder word is possible – forced the Security Council to discuss the matter.

The party that launches an *actual* attack loses the right to accuse others over their *intention* to attack it.

The moral harm is grave, but graver still is the political harm that was caused to Israel in the second sphere – the sphere of the peoples of Asia and Africa. The initiators of Sinai tend to take pride in the fact that thanks to that operation, Israel's name became famous in the world and that its fame reached the most remote countries in Asia and Africa. That claim is not without basis. It can be said with certainty that Operation Sinai spread Israel's fame widely. But it can also be said with equal certainty that that very fame is one of the biggest harms inflicted by the war. For years Arab propaganda mouthpieces persevered in describing Israel as a foreign body in Asia, a bridgehead of imperialism in the Middle East, a servant of colonialism. Not only did Israeli fail to make any serious

effort to refute these accusations; often it appeared as if its aim was to strengthen and confirm them. As if Israel's votes in the UN and the "reprisal" actions were not enough, the invasion of Sinai is offered up as decisive proof.

Clearly it goes without saying that partnership with Western powers in blatantly colonialist adventures is the gravest stain with which a state can stain itself in the eyes of the peoples who are seeking to emancipate themselves.

If, for all that, we have still found it necessary to dwell on this fact that is known to all, it is because the apologists for Sinai habitually claim, with unsurpassed insolence, that Operation Sinai contributed to the enhancement of Israel's relations with Asia, and especially, with Africa. As proof of this they invoke the ties that have been forged in recent times between Israel and some governments in the Dark Continent. But that evidence proves the exact opposite of what the Israeli propaganda mouthpieces allege. For the African friends of the government of Israel are, in their overwhelming majority, known collaborators in infamy, and their friendship with the government of Israel does not enhance Israel's image in the eyes of the people of Asia and Africa; on the contrary, it casts still more suspicion upon it.

Sometimes apologists for Sinai make a different claim. If indeed Operation Sinai did not procure for Israel the friendship and sympathy of peoples seeking to liberate themselves, at least it led to their appreciation and respect for Israel's military might. That claim too is fundamentally flawed, for even sworn admirers of militarism must admit that Operation Sinai proved to all that military advantage is not substitute for wise policy.

Reductio ad absurdum

The third and maybe the most important sphere in which Israel's stature was lowered in the wake of Operation Sinai, is that of its relations with the Arab states.

On the seventh of November 1956 Ben-Gurion solemnly declared that:

The ceasefire accord with Egypt is dead and buried and will not be revived...Along with the accord, the ceasefire lines between us and Egypt have breathed their last.
(*Knesset Records* 21/199)

The truth of the matter is that Operation Sinai dealt a blow not to the ceasefire lines but to Israel's policy of force, of "activism".

The cornerstone of Israeli policy was not the UN resolution of 1947, but the status quo, the present situation that was created upon the conclusion of the battles of 1948. But that situation is politically unstable and lacks basic international approval.

There is no discernable chance that the Arabs will agree in the near future to accept the *status quo* as the basis for a final resolution of the Palestine question; on the contrary, the stronger the Arab national movement becomes and the more its internal and international strength increase, so grows the question-mark that casts its shadow over the *status quo*. It is this fact which motivated the Israeli policy to seek the protection of the Western Powers, which Israel saw as natural allies against the Arab national movement.

It quickly became clear that Israel's role in that "Holy Alliance" was that of "watchdog". In the unlikelihood that the existing situation would be stabilized through an accord, only one support remained: force of arms. But the reliance on force does not only mean willingness to defend the borders of the State of Israel against attackers. It also and *primarily* means the conduct of an *activist* policy of force; that is to say: demonstrations of force and the willingness to intervene with violence in order to prevent "undesirable" changes in the political and territorial *status quo* in the immediate neighbourhood of the State of Israel.

That is a summary of the essence of the "activist" policy of the group that was close to Ben-Gurion, a policy that found its explicit expression in the series of reprisal actions and that reached its climax with Operation Sinai.

War is not merely the conduct of policy by violent means. It is also the most overt essential expression of policy. All the factors that during times of peace operate covertly, irregularly and nebulously, appear clearly, prominently and brightly in time of war. That rule certainly applied to the war of 1956. All the basic elements of "activism" and the

policy of “reprisals”: collaboration and coordination with the colonialist powers, reliance on force of arms, the desire to prevent the strengthening of the Arab national movement and to reverse its successes – all these elements found their energetic expression in that war. In that regard, the assessment that “from a certain perspective operation ‘Qadesh’ was a reprisal action on a larger scale” (*Davar*, 29/10/59) was correct. Therefore the political nature of the “activist” policy – especially in the period after 28 February 1955 – cannot be understood without an analysis of the Suez-Sinai war. On the other hand, an analysis of the “reprisal” policy shines a powerful light on the war of 1956.

If the campaign for *Sinai* was the highest and most emphatic expression of the policy of activism, then the campaign for *withdrawal from Sinai* was no less than a complete refutation, *reductio ad absurdum* of that policy.

If the Sinai apologists’ claim is true, that “*Israel launched the fateful campaign in a political climate and a configuration of international circumstances that constituted a unique historical chance*” (Z. Yoeli, *Davar*, 2/11/56), then the only logical conclusion that emerges from this that follows from this is that *even under the most “convenient” circumstances, even with the collaboration of two global Powers, Israel’s policy of force cannot impose anything on its adversaries.*

In the years that preceded Operation Sinai – and especially since the beginning of 1955, during the period of the reprisal actions – the threat that, if they dared to be “discourteous” to the colonialist Powers, then “it can be depended upon that Israel will be prepared suitably to punish one or more of its neighbouring states, the lack of courtesy of which towards the west has transgressed the bounds of what is permissible.” (G. Schocken, “The whore from cities by the sea and we”, *Haaretz*, 30/9/51)

It can be stated with absolute confidence that those towards whom that threat was directed understood it and feared it. The Sinai campaign proved that behind the threat stood a willingness to put it into action. But on the other hand it was also proven clearly that even if they put it into action, this cannot turn back the wheels of history, or obstruct or divert their movement. The threat thereby lost much of its potency. This should be borne in mind by all who wonder at the fact that during the five years that have passed since Operation Sinai no more than one “reprisal action” was carried out, even though

there was no shortage of pretexts for those interested in finding one. If you have fired a cannon and missed, then there's no point in threatening someone with a pistol.

“Five Sinais”

How do the “activist” circles in Israel evaluate to this lesson? How is the matter reflected in their thoughts? A partial answer to that question is heard in the lecture of the then Chief of Staff at a gathering of officers of the Northern Command. At the gathering that was convened on 31 March 1957, that is, a few days after the completion of the withdrawal from all the occupied territories, Moshe Dayan said:

We must also ask ourselves what we achieved, if we achieved anything, in terms of our general relations with the Arabs. In my opinion that is a question the answer to which is found less in what we achieved in the Sinai Campaign itself and more in the answer to the question of how the State of Israel will behave in the future, in the period after the Sinai War ... *The question is who will learn the lesson from what.*

... *Will the lesson be to Egypt – the lesson of their setback in Sinai, or will the lesson be to the State of Israel – the lesson of the withdrawal, and we tell ourselves that it was impossible to hold Sinai because the entire world opposed it, we had to withdraw, and therefore that path was not the right one. The question is if the Egyptians know that even if Israel assumes that it will probably be forced to evacuate from what it has conquered, that in the future it will strike again if it is intolerably provoked. And most important – if the State of Israel says: we are ready, if we have to, to do a second, third, fifth round even if it ends in withdrawal.*

... *If we throw up our hands, then the Sinai campaign will become a negative asset, a failure. But if we do not despair, then the Sinai campaign is a first-class achievement, a layer in our security ... the Sinai campaign says that the State of Israel is prepared for any action for the sake of its vital needs – its capacity for life, security and protecting its rights. And if that means that Operation Sinai is necessary – then Sinai it is, even in the face of serious political hardships. And if*

tomorrow five Sinais are needed, then five Sinais it is. If we see matters in that light, then the Sinai campaign will be a warning to the Arab states, *evidence of the State of Israel's ability and willingness to intensify the struggle* and not to compromise on our interests. (*Davar*, 30/10/59. Emphasis ours)

A very interesting way of thinking. We must say – claims the Chief-of-Staff of Sinai – that “the Sinai campaign was a first-class achievement” not *because* it indeed was that, but *in order* to make it that. That is the strategy of a poker-player. But even in the game of poker there is not much value in bluffing *after* your hand has been tipped and it is clear that it is not very strong after all.

In truth, Dayan's words express the fact that the “activists” are not willing to admit the failure of their ways, that they are willing to “*intensify the struggle*”, to acquire more modern means of threatening and to get involved in further adventures – one, two, three, four and even five. But this willingness is subjective only. The conclusion that the world drew from Operation Sinai was not that the “activist” adventurers are willing to repeat their adventures even if they know that in the end they will be forced to retreat, but the opposite: the conclusion is that even if they *want* to repeat the adventure it is doubtful if they *will be able* to do it (a “historical chance” doesn't come along every day) and even if they *are able* – they will be forced to withdraw.

Dayan's words do not convert the failure into a victory; they only emphasize the blindness and the danger in not drawing the logical conclusions from the failure. And the first of these is that an adventure of conquest will end in withdrawal *at best*, and at worst – in national calamity.

Preventive war?

The last and most important rationale given by apologists for Sinai is that the war was necessary: that it was intended to and succeeded in preventing an attack on Israel by Arab states led by Egypt.

There were times, when even extreme “activists” (apart from Herut supporters) rejected in principle the idea of a preventive war. We refer here not only to Ben-Gurion's

declaration of 19/6/56 that “*preventive war is madness*”, but also to the declaration of another politician – who at the time shared Ben-Gurion’s opinion and is now his adversary.

When Ben-Gurion stepped down from the Government after the Qibya affair, he appointed Pinhas Lavon, who was known as one of the extreme followers of the “activist” line, as his heir in the office of Defence Minister. On 24 December 1954, that is, a few weeks before Lavon was forced to resign his position, in the wake of a shameful conspiracy that was elaborated against him (and the repercussions of which were again heard in 1960), he spoke in the Milo Club on Israel’s security problems. His main conclusion was in the spirit of “activism”: Israel must not expect peace soon; it must become a kind of modern Sparta.

Knesset Member Meir Vilner (Maki – Israeli Communist Party) proposed a motion of non-confidence in the Defence Minister after that speech. In the words of his reply to that proposal, Lavon said, among other things:

I worked with a basic premise: preventive war and democracy, and I tried to develop an idea – I consider it a healthy and correct idea that should be revived in the entire community – that there is a fundamental contradiction between democracy – real democracy, not fake, and the idea of preventive war; *that preventive war is an instrument, a means, only in the hands of dictatorial military regimes, that no democracy can take that path.* (*Knesset Records*, 17/502, 4/1/55. Emphasis ours)

At the end of 1960 that thesis was proven correct, in a way that Lavon himself had not anticipated. Ben-Gurion and Lavon both strongly condemned the idea of preventive war not necessarily because they thought that a preventive war would not be useful or necessary, but in *principle*, because they thought it was an act of antidemocratic madness.

Therefore, if we want to give any credence to the words of the Defence Ministers of Israel, if we believe them that the Sinai campaign was intended to and succeeded in preventing an attack on Israel, then we also must conclude from their words that Israeli

democracy is fake, that a military dictatorship is in fact ruling in this country and that the policy of the government is mad.

For all the truth of that conclusion, we still are not excused from verifying what, exactly, the Sinai War prevented.

The apologists for Sinai claim, even *today*, that the Arab states are still planning to attack Israel and try to wipe it off the face of the Earth. Therefore they cannot claim that the Sinai War succeeded in preventing an attack on Israel, but that at the most it *postponed* the danger. In other words, whoever justifies the Sinai campaign as a *preventive war* is compelled to posit that at the end of 1956 there was a substantial, and immediate threat of an Arab attack. Indeed, that is precisely what they allege:

The Sinai campaign was necessary, in my opinion, for these reasons: *we were faced with a grave and immediate danger* after the tripartite military alliance established by Egypt, Jordan and Syria, which placed the armies of these countries under Egyptian command. (Ben-Gurion, “What we fought for, why we withdrew, what we achieved”, p. 3. Emphasis ours)

Really?

Let us first put the question in a military-technical form: at the time of Operation Sinai was the power of the Egyptians and their allies sufficient to launch a war of destruction against Israel in the near future?

In an article parts of which were censored, *Davar* wrote:

It turns out that the armed forces of Egypt were not at their strongest, but rather were just beginning to absorb the Soviet arms, we learn first of all from a report from a British source in *The Economist*, which says that there were no more than fifty to sixty trained pilots at the disposal of the Egyptian air force to operate the Russian aircraft, the number of which was as high as 300. This fact is also evidenced by the complete admixture of types of light and heavy arms, of Western

and Eastern manufacture, that were discovered during the battles and influenced their outcomes to no small extent.

It looks like the large-scale plan of the Egyptian General Staff to set up 4 divisions of mobile infantry with auxiliary units of armour as well as an armoured division as an operative striking force composed of Soviet medium and heavy tanks was still at the very first stages of execution. And if, in the organizational preparations of the Egyptian army, there was a large gap between “vision” and reality, the same applies to the strategic preparations.

It is evident that at the moment, the main practical value of Egypt’s military treaties of Egypt with Syria, Saudi Arabia and Jordan is in that they have given Abd al-Nasser’s War Minister more ringing titles as the main commander of the forces of the various allies. But many more and protracted efforts are required both in the political and military domains before these treaties can go from being ties of paper to ties of steel. (*Davar*, 30/11/56)

It appears that it is not correct that at the end of 1956 Nasser was ready or nearly ready militarily for an attack on Israel. It can be said with certainty that today the military force concentrated in his hands is much superior to that of the time of the Sinai War.

A historical chance, indeed

In truth, the question regarding the military capacity of Egypt to attack Israel is merely of secondary importance. The principal and decisive question is whether such an attack was possible or desirable *politically* from Nasser’s point of view. The answer to that question is simple and clear: *no!* An attack on Israel would have been the most foolish and dangerous idea that could have occurred to the Prime Minister of Egypt after the nationalization of the Suez Canal. An attempt to implement such an idea would have been no less than political and military suicide. If there was one thing that Anthony Eden and Guy Mollet would have welcomed more than anything in the world, it was an Egyptian attack on Israel.

What would have happened if such an attack had actually occurred? There is no doubt that Britain and France would then have rushed to intervene in order to “separate the warring parties” (The government of the United States also could have joined in such an action – whether overtly or by giving encouragement). Such an opportunity was all that was needed by those who were gnashing their teeth over the nationalization of the Canal and Egyptian neutralism and wanted to turn back the clock with all the means at their disposal.

A formal pretext for intervention could have been found easily – for example the 1950 Declaration of the three Western Powers. In such a case, unlike the Suez-Sinai war as it actually occurred, the decisive majority of international public opinion would have refrained from supporting Egypt, and a substantial part of it would have lined up behind the Western intervention, as it would have been to “help” not the aggressor but the victim. Even those who understood very well the true motives of the West could easily have proved that the intervention was nothing but a cynical exercise to re-establish control over the Suez Canal. Under such circumstances, the intervention would have met with complete – or at least partial – success: not only would Nasser lose prestige, but he nearly certainly would have lost power.

These considerations are obvious to all who are willing to seriously consider the political situation that prevailed in the Middle East at that time. It is not “wisdom after the fact”. There are strong proofs that these matters were completely clear *to both sides* in the months that preceded the Suez-Sinai war.

In the middle of 1961 *Maariv* published an article by its correspondent in Malta, A. Dan, who had a conversation there with the leader of the local labour movement Mr. Dom Mintoff:

“It began in January 1956,” began Mintoff and said, “I was then on a private visit to Egypt, when I was still serving as the head of the government of Malta.” Nasser received Mintoff with great cordiality. “We exchanged opinions about many subjects and we also got to Israel,” continued Mintoff.

“Because I had invited him on a private visit to Malta, for a vacation, I said to him: ‘Why don’t you meet with Israeli representatives on that occasion, for secret talks, [with] representatives who will be there as if by chance?’

... He agreed with Nasser ... that the visit would take place in April 1956. “Still in Cairo”, Mintoff raised his voice, “I went to the British Ambassador and briefed him on Nasser’s planned visit, and what will interest you in particular, *I told him about Nasser’s agreement to meet in secret with Israeli representatives in Malta.*”

“At the next stage, upon my return to the island”, he continued his dramatic story, “I planned to call Israel in order to confirm the arrival of suitable representatives.”

But suddenly the British governor of Malta summoned the Prime Minister, Dom Mintoff, for an urgent discussion. The governor told him sharply and in no uncertain terms: “I have received orders from London that there is no place now for a visit by Nasser of any kind whatsoever.”

“I didn’t believe him”, continued Mintoff, “and I told him that I wanted to see the telegram with my own eyes.”

Now it was my turn [i.e. the turn of the Maariv correspondent] to tell Mintoff that the story seemed to me too fantastical. All the more so because Mintoff had tried to enlist Colonel Nasser’s help in his struggle against the British on the island.

Here Mintoff took the document from a drawer in the desk in his spacious office and handed it to me. It was a telegram on which “top secret” was printed several times. It came from the British Foreign Ministry and was addressed to the British governor of Malta.

“It is undesirable particularly now, nor is it convenient that Nasser visit Malta now,” opened the telegram and went on, “he must be told that his visit is not convenient at this time because of internal matters that are now being dealt with urgently. Ensure that the explanation in Mintoff’s letter to Nasser is like this. Nasser must not know that it is not our desire that he visit Malta. Take care to ensure that Mintoff understands that he is not a travel agent for peacemaking.”

Every word of negation in the telegram was emphasized with large letters ... “When I saw the telegram and its content”, related Mintoff, “I understood that I had no choice, and the visit of course did not take place.”

But that was not the end of the affair. Mintoff mentions and repeatedly speaks with appreciation about Moshe Sharett, whom he met many times abroad. And when he met him in 1958, in the context of the Socialist International, he told him about the affair and said: “And so, the British prevented a meeting between Nasser and you back in 1956”. “I delivered to Sharett a Photostat copy of the British telegram about a year and a half ago by hand through one of our people who visited [Israel].”

Mintoff gave Nasser another Photostat copy when he divulged to him, on his second visit to Egypt, the true reason for the cancellation of his visit to Malta. “Nasser read the telegram and smiled,” recalled Mintoff.

During your conversations in 1959 did you again make a “mediation offer”? I asked Mintoff.

He hesitated a bit and finally concluded:

“I spoke with Nasser and heard one thing from him: He does not believe that you will not attack him. You will agree with me, after all the meeting in 1956 to which Nasser agreed was to have taken place 10 months before the Suez war broke out...” (*Maariv*, 26/5/61. Emphasis ours)

In a previous chapter we saw that during that period Britain made many efforts to incite the Arabs to launch an attack on Israel. The main trumpet for that inciting propaganda was the *Middle East Broadcast Station (mahattat al-sharq al-awsat)* which operated in Cyprus under the management of the infamous Sir Harold MacMichael – formerly His Majesty’s High Commissioner in Palestine. The purpose of the campaign of incitement orchestrated by this modern Pontius Pilate who went out of retirement was clear to *both* sides.

On 4 October 1956 the United Press news agency reported:

Dr. Goldmann alleged yesterday that the British-controlled Middle East Broadcasting Station in Cyprus is inciting the Arabs day and night against “their

real enemy – Israel”, in an effort to distract their attention from the Suez crisis. He mentioned that Sir H. MacMichael is in charge of the station.

Two days previously, that is to say, on 2 October, the semi-official Egyptian newspaper *Al-Gumhuriya* wrote:

Britain is bribing and inciting Arab politicians for war against Israel, concentrating arms in hidden places, trying to distract Arab states from the Suez problem.

That declaration was not by any means unusual, but one of many – all of them in the same spirit.

There is no escaping the conclusion that the idea of a proximate attack on Israel was as far from the thoughts of Egyptian politicians and its allies at that time as the east is from the west. On the contrary: they understood very well that such an attack would be the worst service that they could do to themselves and the greatest service they could do to their enemies. In the period that preceded the Suez War no danger was expected of an Egyptian attack on Israel. The absolute opposite was correct: *It was the only period since the end of the battles of 1948 in which the leaders of the Arab national movement openly declared that incitement against Israel was counter to their wishes and the interest of their movement and could only serve its enemies.* That really was “a unique historical chance.”

Rules and exceptions to the rule

The most “natural” and logical way to solve conflicts between neighbouring states is the approach of “gradual rapprochement” between the positions of the two sides. Before they approach a direct solution of the central problem, they begin with an effort to solve through compromise the secondary problems – the side-conflicts that emerge from the main conflict. A more congenial environment, one of understanding and cooperation

between the sides, is thereby created, and eventually conditions are opportune for a comprehensive solution.

Unfortunately, the path of “gradual rapprochement” between the sides in the Israeli/Arab conflict is not at all easy. It is blocked by two obstacles: the refugee question and the rift in the Arab world.

As long as the refugee question remains an open wound in the body of the Middle East, as long as about a million destitute people, who hold Israel responsible for their calamity, are milling about around Israel’s borders, as long as they have the sympathy of the Arab peoples, every politician in the Arab world knows that to come out openly in favour of any concession in favour of Israel would greatly jeopardize his position as a politician. In the eyes of the majority of Arabs it would be seen as an act of betrayal.

The Arab division into hostile camps increases the danger still more, for if the leader of one camp openly calls for compromise with Israel, the other camp will take advantage of the opportunity to condemn him. Therefore it can be stated as a *basic rule*: any solution to the Palestine problem must *begin* with the question of the refugees.

This is, then, the basic problem in establishing Israel-Arab relations; the fact that the refugee problem constitutes one of the *primary* aspects of the conflict, one of the primary bones of contention. The need to begin with this fundamental bone of contention, without preparing the ground in advance with accords on issues that are more secondary, renders the Israel-Arab conflict a sensitive and complex problem. But to this basic rule there is also an exception.

A *special situation* can be created in which it will be possible first to arrive at a solution to one of the secondary questions:

- If the Arab national movement concentrates mostly (even if only temporarily) under one leadership.
- If it is threatened by a grave external danger, from its primary enemy – imperialism.
- If it becomes clear that a partial accord with Israel has the potential to neutralize that danger.

If such a configuration of circumstances is created, then an Arab leader will be able to come out in favour of certain partial concessions to Israel. It will not be worthwhile or even possible unless his action is seen by the Arab masses not as an act of betrayal, but as a necessary act of defence. Such a configuration of circumstances is a rare occurrence. *It existed in the years 1954-6.*

Indeed, in those years many feelers were put out for the purpose of mediating between Israel and Egypt. *Maariv* and *Yedioth Aharonoth* from 4/8/61 narrate that in 1955 the American Deputy Secretary of Defence, Robert Anderson, tried to mediate between Israel and Egypt.

[In 1954-6 there were] at least four attempts ... by four states that also tried to mediate, without success. These four included the leader of the Maltese Labour Party George [sic] Mintoff and the British Member of Parliament Maurice Orbach. There was also a bolder and more substantial mediation attempt – the result of a more direct Israeli initiative. It was in 1954 in Paris, when Israeli representatives the late Reuven Shiloah (who had been the head of the Middle East department at the Israeli Foreign Ministry) and Eliyahu Sasson, who is now Israel's ambassador in Berne, met with Arab representatives. (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 4/8/61)

As was known, representatives of the Egyptian leader, in the secret negotiations that were taking place in Europe, had exhibited willingness to reach at a secret accord with Israel on the coordination of relations between the two countries without a formal peace arrangement. In the course of the negotiations a number of proposals were made that were to have served as the foundation for that arrangement. The main points of these proposals were: to enforce quiet on the border; the establishment of a direct channel of communication in a European capital to discuss issues of disagreement or conflict, and Egypt's agreement to the transport of Israeli civilian shipments through the Suez Canal, not under the Israeli flag.

The representatives of the Egyptian leader explained at the time that their country had no bad intentions towards Israel, but due to Egypt's position in the

Arab world, it was not possible for the military junta, which was then at the beginning of its rule, overtly to normalize its relations with Israel.

Those same few at high levels in the Foreign Ministry – which was headed by Moshe Sharett at the time – who participated in the covert negotiations or who knew about them, placed great value on these negotiations with Egypt. There were even those who saw in it an opening for a quiet arrangement with the other Arab states, and the chance of breaking out of the siege of Arab hostility against Israel.

But then a certain incident occurred,⁴² which was carried out by a different branch of the government. Immediately after that incident, which provoked a great outcry at the time, all contact with Egyptian representatives was stopped. (*Maariv*, 4/8/61)

And *Yedioth Aharonoth* explains more simply: “The contacts were stopped because of the unfortunate affair.”

If the government of Israel had manifested a willingness to support Egypt’s struggle over the Suez Canal, if it had abandoned the line of strict loyalty to the Western camp, then there would have been a real possibility of making tangible progress on the way to peace. In return for supporting the evacuation of the Suez Canal and the nationalization, Israel could have demanded and received certain concessions from Egypt.

It is a near certainty that in that way, and with suitable mediation by prominent people from the Neutralist camp, it would have been possible to achieve, for example, freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and the Red Sea Straits, and maybe even more.

But the importance of the matter was not the achievement itself but the atmosphere it would have created, in opening the path to more important accords. It was a historical chance that was squandered because the initiators of Sinai thought that an “opportune moment” had come to bring down Nasser’s regime and to make “great achievements” by military means, all at once. They repeated their eternal mistake – confusing the possible with the desirable, that is, an overestimation of the strength of the West and scorn for the

⁴² The Lavon Affair – sometimes cryptically referred to as “the unfortunate affair”. See footnote 12, above. – trans.

strength of the Arab national movement. The mentality that was widespread then in Ben-Gurion's circle was expressed in an article by Z. Yoeli, which was published in *Davar* on 14 September 1956. Yoeli prophesied:

... And regarding the nationalization of the Canal, it is doubtful that this is a great day for the ruling junta. *It would be more realistic to see it as the beginning of its end.* We have gained active allies in the campaign against pan-Arab expansion. France now has nowhere to withdraw to and is now faced not with the dilemma of war or peace, but with continuing the cruel wars in Africa or dealing a blow to Egyptian fascism, which will benefit France as well as the Arab countries under France's protection: Tunisia and Morocco. France has returned to the Near East, its pilots can reach Cairo within about half an hour – the French landing on Cyprus changes the security and political situation for Egypt.

The British, as we have seen, have not changed their attitude towards Israel, but they have been compelled actively to struggle against Egypt's expansionist tendencies. Because it is not just the Canal that is at stake, but what remains of the power of the Empire. (Emphasis ours)

Also in balance was the question whether Israel would take advantage of Egypt's predicament in order to achieve by political means certain concessions in return for Israel's support of its position, or whether an attempt would be made to exploit that predicament with a military adventure.

The initiators of Sinai chose the second alternative. It looked to them "more realistic", because they thought that "the beginning of the end of the Egyptian ruling junta" had come. As usual, it was a fatal mistake; we are paying its price to this very day, and we will continue to pay in the future. The Sinai War was indeed a preventive war; but it was not an Egyptian attack on Israel that it prevented, but the possibility of negotiations with Egypt.

Suppression, concealment, distortion

Israel's politicians and their propaganda mouthpieces seek to prove that there was no such possibility. As proof of that they point to the strident anti-Israeli declarations that are regularly heard from the mouths of Arab politicians. Every child in Israel knows about the Arabs' declared intentions "to push us into the sea", about their unwillingness *in principle* to recognize Israel as an existing fact. It would appear to be a simple state of affairs – the Arabs do not want peace with Israel because they are infused with irrational hatred, because they refuse to be realistic. Therefore Israel has no choice but to embrace a policy of force.

Let us examine that position in more detail. Is it true that Arab leaders repeat strident and uncompromising anti-Israeli declarations? Yes, it is true. As we have seen, the existence of the refugee problem and the rift in the Arab world make more balanced statements difficult. Nearly every Arab politician, when he addresses his people, includes anti-Israel slogans in his words. Unfortunately it seems to be necessary, in order not to be accused of betraying Arab interests. But it is not equally necessary for all of them.

It is no coincidence that it is the most pro-Western politicians, such as King Hussein and Nuri Said who tend to employ anti-Israeli slogans more than the others. They do not do that out of simple hatred of Israel or some other irrational motive, but for a very simple reason: it is the *only* way a hireling of the West can "prove" his nationalism, without speaking out against his masters. The incitement against Israel is necessary for them for precisely for the same reason that incitement was necessary for MacMichael's broadcasting station: in order to divert their peoples' attention away from the struggle against colonialism.

A politician who conducts an anti-colonialist policy, on the other hand, is not in such need of anti-Israeli incitement. For he wants his people to see not Israel, but colonialism as the main enemy. Thus, for example, since Nasser began his resistance to the Baghdad Pact a new tone could be discerned in his words about Israel, a much more measured one. The more Egypt's struggle against the West intensified, the more frequently he made declarations in favour of a *peaceful solution* to the Palestine problem. Of course, these declarations do not prove that Nasser had become a peace-lover. In general, it is

excessively naïve to seek to explain political phenomena by means of the outlook of one politician or another.

Nasser's declarations stemmed from two main reasons:

1. He wanted to direct the greater part of his struggle against his primary adversaries the Western Powers, the Baghdad Pact and the Suez Canal Company.
2. He understood that a military conflict with Israel would be a direct invitation for the West to intervene militarily.

And to these causes must be added the influence of moderate politicians from the Neutralist camp, which Egypt had joined, and of the Soviet Union, which was not interested in a military conflagration near its borders. Most citizens of Israel do not know a thing about Nasser's more measured declarations; and that is not because such declarations did not exist – on the contrary, they were frequent and they were published in influential newspapers in various countries – but because the government of Israel was not interested in giving them publicity. The government of Israel takes care to publish and inflate every anti-Israeli declaration in order to justify the policy of “activism”, but more measured and moderate statements that are made in Egypt and other Arab states are given different treatment: suppression, concealment and distortion.

“A sanctimonious accusation”

In April 1955 a conference of Asian and African states convened in Bandung. At that historical conference, the peoples of the continents that were emancipating themselves appeared for the first time as a great force on the international stage. Israel was not invited to the conference. Regarding Palestine, the following resolution was passed at the Bandung Conference:

In view of the ongoing tension in the Middle East, which stems from the Palestinian problem, in view of the fact that this situation endangers the peace of the world, the

Conference of the States of Asia and Africa expresses its full support for the rights of the Arabs of Palestine and calls for the implementation of the UN resolutions on Palestine, which call for a peaceful solution to the problem.

All 29 of the states that participated in the conference, including the Arab delegations, voted in favour of that resolution, which was drafted by Nasser. It was received with fury in Israel. All the newspapers and all the political parties (except Maki) attacked it as an extreme anti-Israeli declaration. They saw that resolution, which called for *a peaceful solution on the basis of UN resolutions*, not as an encouraging change from the previous Arab calls for the destruction of Israel and refusal to recognize its existence, but simply as an anti-Israel resolution. In his speech on the seventh Independence Day, Ben-Gurion expressed his opinion on the matter:

Only a few days before Independence Day we heard the sanctimonious accusation at the Conference of the Nations of Asia and Africa in Bandung ... there is no basis for alarm in the face of the Gentiles' statements even when these statements are worrisome ... Many of the nations of Asia and Africa have been deceived this time in Bandung by the tyrants of the Arab nations and their oppressors – I am not of the view that we cannot call upon them to recognize the historical truth, that these leaders have no moral or judicial right to rely upon UN resolutions that were violated and nullified at their own hands. These resolutions no longer exist, and will not return to life, just as the nations of Asia and Africa will not return to life the thousands of our sons and daughters who lost their young lives because of the criminal aggression of the Arab rulers – which the UN could not prevent. (*Davar*, 28/4/55)

Why is Nasser not allowed to rely upon UN resolutions? Is he responsible for the policies of King Farouk in 1948? Since that allegation is raised anew from time to time, we must also ask: was Qasim responsible for the policies of Nuri Said? Was Karami responsible for the policies of Chamoun?

If there is an Arab leader today against whom that allegation could justly be made, then surely it is Hussein, King of Jordan. He continues on the path of his grandfather Abdullah. But he, like Ben-Gurion himself, *refrains* from relying on the UN resolutions, for obvious reasons that we have already discussed. The party most responsible for the violation of UN resolutions was Britain, in the hands of which Farouk, Nuri Said, Abdullah, Chamoun and others were nothing but tools. In any case, the one who nullified the Partition Plan in his secret talks with Abdullah, before and after 15 May 1948, has no “moral or judicial right” to accuse others of doing the same; *that* is a “sanctimonious accusation”. “*The UN resolutions no longer exist, and will not return to life*” – that is the basic premise of Israeli policy regarding the conflict with the Arabs, from 1949 to this very day. But today, after a similar prophesy by the same prophet (who announced the death and burial of the ceasefire lines with Egypt) was proven to be a false prophesy, we may be permitted to greet his eulogy over the body of UN resolutions dealing with the Palestine question with a certain degree of scepticism. The resurrection of the dead is apparently something that can happen even in the twentieth century.

“An improvement is possible”

Despite the angry response of most of the Israeli press, the Bandung resolution on the question of Palestine constitutes great progress in relation to the previous Arab position.

Nasser himself declared in a television interview with the Columbia Broadcasting System in January 1956:

I announced at the Bandung Conference, and the Arab states agreed with this for the first time, that we want to implement the UN resolutions of 1947 and 1948, the Partition Plan

This was the first time that the Arab states recognized and accepted the Partition Plan, and thus they effectively recognized the right of self-determination for the Jews of Palestine, that is, their right to establish an independent state.

Whoever believes and hopes that UN resolutions are dead and buried, whoever believes that the Arabs of Palestine have no national rights in this country, certainly cannot rejoice in the face of the Asian and African nations' support for these resolutions and rights. But even they cannot deny that recognition and support for UN resolutions from 1947 signifies, among other things, recognition of the national rights of the Jews of Palestine, including the right to an independent state.

Has the Arab states' support for the Bandung resolution remained an isolated and exceptional phenomenon? The answer to that question is different for each state. Certainly the government of Nuri Said did not continue with the Bandung line. The British hirelings who ruled in Baghdad were indeed forced to adapt to the general atmosphere that prevailed at the conference – an atmosphere of tolerance, peace and coexistence. But upon their return home they reverted to their previous propaganda of incitement. Thus, for example, the Iraqi foreign minister Burhan al-Din Bashayan declared on 11/5/56 (about a year after the Bandung Conference):

The government of Iraq insists on the uprooting and removal of Israel from the Middle East and on compelling the invaders to return to where they came from.

But those Arab states – including Egypt – that remained faithful to the *general* Bandung line – the line of neutralism, neither did they withdraw from the resolution on the question of Palestine. On 22 May 1955, soon after his return from Bandung, Nasser spoke with a correspondent for the American weekly *Newsweek*. Among other things, he said:

I believe that an improvement (in Israeli-Arab relations) is possible on the condition that Israel exhibits an honest aspiration to arrive at a just peace. We do not demand peace on our own terms. But we insist that Israel prove its good will and honesty by ratifying the UN resolutions that it has rejected up to now.

... A just peace will be reached only through acceptance of the UN resolutions regarding the refugees, their right to compensation and on the internationalization of Jerusalem.

... We have no territorial aspirations whatsoever, and that is why we did not annex the Gaza Strip and we are not planning to do that. Our concern is only to defend the refugees.

In reply to the journalist's question whether Egypt had any aggressive intentions towards Israel, Nasser replied:

We certainly have no aggressive intentions towards Israel, or any other state. As a soldier I have seen what war means and I have learned to aspire honestly for peace. As the leader of my country I know how much work we have to do before we attain prosperity in our country. Prosperity and peace – they are connected to each other. There is no place for war in our constructive plans.

Even one who opposes the UN resolutions on the question of Palestine cannot fail to admit that this moderate tone showed a certain improvement in the Arab position and represented a continuation of the Bandung line. In Israel we sometimes hear the allegation that Nasser adopts a moderate tone in his conversations with foreign correspondents, but when he addresses his people, he abandons moderation and declares his aggressive intentions. In the present case that allegation has no basis, for the interview with the *Newsweek* writer was published the next day (23/5/55) in *Al-Jumhuriya*, the semi-official newspaper of the Egyptian government.

They did not accept U Nu's offer

At the same time, in the comfortable international atmosphere that was created after the Bandung Conference, more rumours were heard of mediation efforts between Egypt and Israel, which were carried out by certain personalities in the Neutralist bloc.

On 29 May 1955 the Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu, went to visit Israel. It quickly became clear that one of the purposes of the visit, if not the main purpose, was to try to mediate between Israel and Egypt. The day after he arrived, at a reception in his honour at the King David hotel, U Nu hinted in general terms:

Achievements such as the conquest of the wilderness are more meaningful and their influence is more lasting than military conquests which cannot but corrupt human life and property and all the values for which humanity exists.

U Nu described his country's policy in the following words:

The policy of Burma is for peace and friendship based on its firm belief that war, besides the fact that it cannot solve any problem, acts as a crucible for the proliferation of additional problems; the lesson of the two last world wars still stands before us in all its relevance.

It is interesting to note that *Davar* omitted that sentence in its article on the reception. On 4 June Mr. Thant, the advisor of U Nu, told the reporter for *Maariv*:

Mr. Nu is of the view that an accord or arrangement between Israel and Egypt is the primary condition for the relaxation for tensions in the Middle East and for the establishment of peace there.

... Nu is prepared to mediate between Israel and Egypt, if he is asked to do so by both sides.

The next day Nu appeared at a press conference and gently hinted to the government of Israel:

Burma does not belong to any military bloc or alliance. Lessons can be learned from us in that domain.

When he was asked whether Israel had requested his mediation for a peace arrangement with the Arab states, he replied: "no side has yet asked me for that". At the same time, Nasser proposed to create a demilitarized zone on the border of the Gaza Strip. He promised to remove his army to one kilometre from the armistice line if Israel would do

the same. The proposal was transmitted to the government of Israel through General Burns, the head of the UN observation team.

The government of Israel did not ask U Nu to begin efforts to mediate. They also rejected the proposal for demilitarization. Similarly the government of Israel did not heed U Nu's advice not to enter "any military bloc or alliance". On the contrary; exactly two days after the arrival of U Nu, the Foreign Minister saw fit to announce in the Knesset Israel's desire to enter into a military alliance with a "great power".

Instead of an attempt to get closer to the neutralist bloc and seek its mediation, an attempt was made to integrate still further into the strategic system of the West. That meant abandoning the only real chance that then existed for Israeli-Egyptian rapprochement, for the United States used Israel's desire to sign a "mutual defence treaty" as a threat against the Arab states.

On 6 July 1955 the United Press agency reported from Washington that "the American Department of State is now interested in the possibility of signing a defence treaty with Israel, after Egyptian opposition prevented the signing of a similar accord with the Arab states". The next day *Davar* responded in an article:

This is apparently the first time that such a report represents the very possibility of signing such a treaty with Israel as a threat against the Arab governments which are refusing to sign defence treaties with the USA.

In the following months the situation on the Israeli-Egyptian ceasefire lines began to deteriorate. Incident followed incident, exchanges of shots and shelling (22 August), a Feda'iyun attack (end of August), the blowing up of the Khan Younis police station (31 August).

On 2 September 1955 the UP agency reported from Cairo on a speech that Nasser gave to a class of officers at the Egyptian military academy. Among other things, he said:

We will continue to carry out our policies until we establish the army that we have aspired for from the beginning – a strong army to defend our borders, but not for any attack.

... I repeat: we have no intention of creating unrest in the Middle East. We do not want war; but a strong army to defend our borders, and we will have a strong army.

In the same speech Nasser announced:

Yesterday Egyptian military intelligence acquired a report by the British intelligence service in which it was stated that it was not plausible that Egypt would attack Israel, but it should be assumed that Israel will launch an attack on the Egyptian front. ... That secret report is now in my office and I am prepared to show it to the British ambassador in Cairo any time he wants.

The next day *Al-Jumhuriya* published a photograph of the report, which bore the heading “Military intelligence report, May 1955, volume 9, no. 5”. On every page of the document the word “secret” was stamped. There are probably those who will want to claim that that document is forgery, but it is impossible to deny that its contents proved to be completely true.

“A printing error”

The government of Israel was not pleased with Nasser’s new tone. It preferred uncompromising and overtly aggressive declarations from Arab leaders. For such aggressive declarations allow Israel to appear as a “sheep among wolves”. Arab acceptance of UN resolutions influence world public opinion against the government of Israel, which appears as a violator of those resolutions which Israel is obliged to implement.

This attitude on the part of official circles in Israel found prominent expression in a journalistic incident that occurred at the beginning of October 1955. On 6 October 1955 *Yedioth Aharonoth* ran a headline in huge letters: “Nasser: we must destroy Israel”. The next day that story was published in all the morning newspapers (except for *Kol Ha’am* –

the Communist newspaper), prominently on the front pages. *Haaretz*, for example, ran the following headline: “We must destroy Israel – declares Nasser”.

Those reports were based on an interview that Nasser gave to Kennett Love, a writer for *The New York Times*. In the interview itself Nasser stated:

No Arab state wants to destroy Israel. The Arabs only request that the refugees be given their natural right to life and their lost property, which was promised to them by UN resolutions seven years ago. We are not aggressive. The threat comes from the other side. I have already said many times that I want to improve my country. Now I am forced to give priority to defence over development. The situation was the opposite before Ben-Gurion’s attack on Gaza on 25 February [That is of course a mistake. He must mean 28 February], since 25 February I have been constantly expecting an Israeli attack, but that danger will diminish the more the Arab-Israeli balance of armaments is restored. (Emphasis ours)

Obviously the headlines in the Israeli press were in exact contradiction to the content of the interview.

Three days later, on Sunday, 9 October, the following “correction” appeared under a modest heading, in a remote spot and in small letters:

Israeli newspapers published a telegram from the Zionist News Agency on the content of an interview that Gamal Abd al-Nasser gave to *The New York Times* Cairo correspondent Kennett Love, which stated, in contradiction to the content of the entire interview, that “we must destroy Israel”. It emerged that in the first issue of the newspaper (upon which the telegram from the EITA⁴³ in New York was based) the first part of the sentence was omitted: “No Arab now says that we must destroy Israel”. In the other issues of the newspaper the error was corrected. (*Davar*, 9/10/55)

⁴³ EITA: Eretz Israel (lit. “Land of Israel”) Telegraphic Agency – a Zionist news agency. See note 11 above – trans.

Many Israeli citizens do not read the reports published in small letters, and content themselves with a scan of the headlines. A “correction” could not reverse the misleading impression that had been received.

But what is most characteristic of the whole affair is that not a single one of Israel’s politicians showed any interest in whether Nasser actually said the words that were attributed to him. In a debate in the Knesset a few days after the “journalistic incident”, the leader of the General Zionists said:

... We did not know if the intentions behind the Arab leaders’ words about a second round were serious. The turning-point and the revolution that have now occurred have revealed their position; whether or not Nasser denied his declaration that he is about to destroy Israel or not no longer interests us. (Peretz Bernstein, *Knesset Records*, 19/65, 12/10/55)

On 7 October *Davar* explained that:

The reports that have reached Israel on the mood in the Arab states attest that the slogan “throw Israel into the sea” is not merely a figure of speech or for the purposes of the leaders’ internal needs. It is an aspiration that has penetrated deeply into the Arab consciousness in all Arab states.

After it became clear that at least part of the “reports that have reached Israel” were based on “errors”, *Davar* did not consider it necessary to revisit that analysis. On the contrary, the famous Mapai Middle East academic Michael Assaf seized on an “argument” similar to that of Mr. Bernstein:

... And although the EITA was correct in practical terms to run a correction and an apology, *it seems to me that the mistake was actually correct regarding the true internal aspirations of Gamal Abd al-Nasser*. Although a friend of Israel like Richard Crossman, who thinks that he knows Gamal better than anyone living in

Israel does, has testified again in recent days in favour of Gamal, that he is just a good Egyptian patriot, etc., we ... cannot accept these views. Neither Crossman's testimony nor even the widespread use that they are now making of slogans like socialism, peace and even democracy, will convince us. (*Davar*, 14/10/55. Emphasis ours)

People like Assaf and Bernstein are not easily convinced by testimony, and not even by the facts themselves. If Nasser said that his intention was to destroy Israel – very good; and if he said the opposite, “that does not interest us” – “the mistake was actually correct”.

For the sake of the truth it should be said that while the newspaper editors in Israel were coordinating with the government line, their correspondents in the capitals of the world certainly appreciated the turnabout in the Egyptian line towards Israel.

Thus, for example, *Yedioth Aharonoth* on 7 October 1955 (the day after the publication of the falsified report) reported through its correspondent in the United States that “At this very moment the chances for peace between Israel and Egypt have increased” and that “Nasser will not attack Israel”.

That assessment was well-founded. Of course, declarations of peace from politicians must not always be believed. In October 1956 Ben-Gurion too declared his peaceful intentions even as he was preparing to invade Sinai. But the moderate declarations heard from Egyptian politicians inspired confidence all over the world not necessarily because those who made these declarations were known as fervent seekers of peace, but because it was clear to all rational people that the general political situation in Egypt, the struggle that it was conducting against the West, and its fears of foreign intervention do not permit it to initiate an attack against Israel.

That state of affairs found expression in the words of the Egyptian Foreign Minister at the United Nations on 29 October 1955 (the day after the Israeli raid on Kuntilla). Fawzi said:

Egypt has no intention of attacking Israel or any other state. Such an attack would be against Egypt's interests ... Likewise is clear that it would be possible immediately to

stop any attack of that kind, such that there is no reason for Egypt to decide to attack anyone.

Regarding the tense situation along the ceasefire lines, the Egyptian minister said:

We have increased and redoubled our efforts to reduce them to a minimum, even though it is barely humanly possible completely to eliminate the incidents around the ceasefire lines.

Three days afterwards, from the Knesset podium, Ben-Gurion announced his desire to meet with Nasser and to discuss the signing of a peace accord with him.

In one of the previous chapters we mentioned that Ben-Gurion's speech received a great deal of attention in the Egyptian press, and apparently certain circles in Egypt took the proposal seriously. But in the margins of these newspapers, in a section reserved for news that arrived as the issue was about to be printed, the first reports were already appearing about the large-scale Israeli attack at Sabha.

“Its eyes are red and blazing”

Space does not permit us to discuss in detail all the Egyptian declarations that called for a solution to the Palestine problem by peaceful means. But even if we take into consideration only these declarations the echoes of which reached the pages of the Israeli press one way or another, the list will be very long.

We must therefore be satisfied with pointing out the most important declarations, quoting selections from each one.

On 6/11/55 Nasser declared to a correspondent for the *Daily Herald* that “Egypt does not intend to attack Israel”.

On 7/11/55 Khairat Said, the Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister, declared that “Egypt wants to resolve the conflict with Israel by peaceful means”.

On 10/11/55 in an interview with the popular American weekly *Life*, Nasser said that “Egypt will not use the Czech arms to wage war on Israel”.

In the same interview he declared (in the words of the UP and Itim-Reuters agencies) that:

The widespread view in the world today is that Israel is thinking of a “preventive war” in consequence of the Czech-Egyptian arms deal. But I have been expecting that Israel would launch a war since it carried out the attack in the Gaza Strip on 28 February. Before that I believed that Israel was not looking for trouble. After the aforementioned attack I better understood their intentions. Otherwise I would not have bought the arms and saved the money.

On 5/11/12 United Press reported that in an exclusive interview with the correspondent of the *New York World Telegram and Sun*, Nasser declared that he was “ready to seek a compromise solution with Israel. The best mediator for talks that would reduce the differences between Egypt and Israel is the United Nations Organization, to the extent that it can succeed in imposing its decisions”. He added that in his opinion the latest Israeli raids on the border were intended to draw Egypt into war. On 25/11/55 the Zionist news agency [EITA – trans.] (which this time was more careful in reporting the facts than it had been seven weeks before) reported that in an interview with a correspondent for the famous Paris newspaper *Paris-Soir* the President of Egypt had declared that “he does not aspire for the destruction of Israel, but for a discussion that will bring about the implementation of the UN resolutions of 1947”.

He added:

Not all the Arab refugees will want to return; many will prefer to stay in Arab states and receive direct compensation ... In Israel there is room, since Ben-Gurion invited a million Jews to emigrate there.

On 30/11/55 the Itim-Reuters news agency reported that in an interview that was published the same day in the Paris newspaper *L'Express*, Nasser said:

We know very well that it is impossible to expel all the Jews from Palestine to make room for a million refugees. But at least the Israelis have to accept the refugees who want to return.

During that same period, the feeling of being on the “eve of war” reached new heights in Israel. *Haolam Hazeh* wrote:

War is looking at us, and its eyes are red and blazing ... Our task: the elimination, before it is too late, of the strongest combat army of an adversary state, Egypt.
(Issue 945, p. 3, 5/12/55)

A few weeks later, on 24/3/56, in a speech he gave before about 1,000 farmers from the Jordan Valley who were convened in his “tent”, the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, said that “there is a danger of war this coming summer, with the final British departure from Suez in July.”

“A rising crescendo”

One could claim that with these words, Dayan intended to say that with the departure of the British forces from the Suez Canal base, the Egyptians would consider themselves free to attack Israel without fear of British intervention.

It is not to be assumed that that fear would have been grounded, for it was clear to all that in the event of an attack Britain would have immediately intervened and recaptured the base that it had evacuated. Subsequent events proved that the evacuation of the Suez base permitted Nasser not to launch an attack but to nationalize the Suez Canal Company, and Britain and France tried to thwart even that measure by military means.

In any case, the fear of an attack was not unilateral. The Egyptians feared it too. On 2/4/56 the United Press reported from New York that Nasser said in an interview he gave to a *The New York Times* correspondent in Cairo:

Egypt does not intend to attack Israel. All our thoughts are given over to preparing for an Israeli attack ... We are stationing strong forces in the Sinai Desert, but I cannot be so stupid as to permit them to camp beside the Gaza Strip, a place where I could easily lose them.

United Press adds:

Alongside the interview, *The New York Times* published an article that pointed out among other things, that in the past Nasser indicated privately that he recognized Israel's rights as a nation and that on various occasions in the past he had given orders to tone down the criticism of Israel. Today many Arabs look to Nasser as a natural leader in their conflicts with Israel.

On the same day (2/4/56) the Zionist news agency (EITA) reported from New York that the Egyptian authorities in the Gaza Strip had announced that measures would be taken to stop infiltration from the Gaza Strip to Israel. The measures included the imposition of heavy fines and prison sentences on any resident of the Strip who crossed the border or possessed weapons and explosives illegally. EITA added: "Apparently the purpose of these orders was to reduce the tensions between Israel and Egypt."

But the tensions were not reduced. On 3 and 4 April it was learned that serious exchanges of fire took place near the ceasefire lines. Four Israeli soldiers were killed. A day later, on 5 April, the IDF shelled Khan Younis, Deir al-Balah and Abasan and the market square in Gaza. About fifty people were killed and over a hundred were wounded. War tensions rose in Israel until they reached the level of hysteria.

Criticism of the governmental encouragement of this hysteria appeared on the pages of *Haaretz*. In an article that appeared under the heading "*Hysteria or national security*", Eliezer Livneh wrote:

When a nation is facing a grave international situation and fear of war lurks on its horizons, various possibilities of response and behaviour are open to it. Such a nation may speak day and night about the dangers of war and all it entails and go on and on about the anticipated intentions of the enemy and its military capacity against the enemy. It could emphasize in big letters every series of shelters that have been constructed and accompany the solemn inauguration of every new stretch of wire fencing with fascinating photos. It could collect contributions for security needs with great fanfare and furiously punish those who do not give generously.

Its journalists may every day be full of anxious reports about the approaching “zero hour”. Its politicians can be full of angry condemnation of the hostile governments and their leaders, and the parties can compete with each other over which is the most nationalistic. Indeed it is possible to saturate the atmosphere with constant unquiet, with anxiety aggravated by ardent tension, and a rising crescendo can thereby be sustained for a long time. (*Haaretz*, 6/4/56)

The crescendo continued to rise. Two days after the shelling of the Gaza Strip Israel was struck by a large and murderous wave of Egyptian *Fedayeen* actions. In an effort to reduce the tensions, the Secretary-General of the UN came to the Middle East and began talks with Ben-Gurion and Nasser. His efforts met with a certain degree of success.

The tension diminished appreciably. On 12 April 1956 it was reported that the two governments committed themselves before Hammarskjöld not to launch hostile actions. Indeed, from then to the invasion of Sinai no serious border incidents occurred between Israel and Egypt. Hopes were aroused that war would not break out after all.

On 12/4/56 EITA reported from London the content of an article that had been published in the important English newspaper *News-Chronicle*.

News-Chronicle reports from Cairo:

“It has been learned that the Prime Minister of Egypt, Abd al-Nasser, is prepared to take two important steps towards a peace settlement:

1. *Nine Arab states will confer upon Israel de facto recognition within the borders of the existing ceasefire lines* [!!]
2. An effort will be made to convince the Arab refugees to agree to accept compensation in exchange for their abandoned homes and property. These proposals are now under discussion in the political committee of the Arab League, but it is not known whether the Prime Minister of Egypt has submitted them to Hammarskjöld.

“... The Prime Minister of Egypt is convinced that a general war, whether it concludes with victory or defeat, would bring political and economic disaster not only to Egypt, but to the entire Arab East.” (Emphasis ours)

The hopes for peace were strengthened even more when, on 17 April 1956, the Soviet Foreign Ministry issued a declaration on the situation in the Middle East. The declaration was considered very important, because it contained the most explicit and authoritative opinion of the government of the Soviet Union on Middle East affairs, and especially on the Israel-Arab conflict, since 1948. The importance of the declaration also stems from the fact that when it was published, the Soviet Union's relations with Egypt were very close, and the latter was influenced more than a little by the position of the former.

And this is the text of the declaration:

The developing situation now in the Middle East demands serious attention from all concerned parties. The government of the Soviet Union believes that the *main reason for the tensions in the Middle East is the establishment and ongoing preparedness to expand of the military blocs that serve colonialism and which are counter to the interests of all the peoples of the Middle East and the security of peace-loving states. The establishment of these military blocs is a source of conflicts and frictions in the Middle East, and a cause of the worsening of relations between the Arab states and Israel, Turkey and the Arab states, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.*

Instead of taking measures to establish peaceful and friendly relations between the independent countries in that region, based on the principles of coexistence and peace, which were affirmed at the Conference of the states of Asia and Africa at Bandung, a policy is being implemented of setting one state against its neighbour, which causes frictions between the states of the Middle East and which is bringing about a tense situation in the Middle East.

Pressure from certain states, the objective of which is to compel the independent Arab states to join the military alliance called the “Baghdad Pact”, is a violation of the principles of the UN and is counter to the interest of peace and security in the world.

One of the most dangerous aspects of the situation in the Middle East is the aggravation of the Arab-Israel conflict; whatever one’s view about the causes of that conflict, the intention of certain circles in certain countries is to exploit that conflict for their aggressive ends, to introduce their armies into that region and to undertake intervention in the affairs of the independent Arab states in order to create military entanglements in that region – which corresponds with the interests of the oil monopolists.

The accord between the three Western Powers of 1950 is a reflection of that desire. The situation in the Middle East embodies the danger of the creation of a war centred in that region, which must not be permitted.

The Soviet Union, which defends peace, and struggles to reduce international tensions for the sake of cooperation between nations, believes that the realization of independence and the strengthening of the sovereignty of several of the states in the region, which until recently were subject to foreign tutelage, are an achievement for the nations and for the guaranteeing of security and peace in the Middle East.

The Soviet Union has always taken the position of supporting efforts to serve and
to realize the independence of the states of the Middle and Near East regions.

The Soviet Union supported the establishment of the independence of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, Libya, Sudan, Iraq, Israel, and others, which had been colonial or mandatory countries.

The Soviet Union greeted the establishment of the independence of these countries with warm sympathy. The Soviet Union appreciated the actions of Britain and France, which recognized the independence of the aforementioned countries.

The principles of respect for national sovereignty and non-intervention in the internal affairs of all countries and the peaceful resolution of conflicts are principles that are included in the United Nations Charter. The Soviet Union, which is faithful to these principles, supports with all its power the aspirations of the Arab states to strengthen their independence and to improve their economic welfare.

The Soviet Union believes that the strengthening of the independence of the peoples of the Middle East, which was acquired not long ago, constitutes an important guarantee for the security of the region. Therefore it is receptive to the requests of the governments of the Arab countries, without incurring any substantial benefit for itself. It did this in order to establish its relations with these countries on the basis of the principles that were affirmed at the Conference of the Nations of Asia and Africa at Bandung.

The government of the Soviet Union, in its aspiration to strengthen peace and international cooperation in conformity with the just national interests of the peoples of all countries, stood against the violation of peace in the Middle East *and against all actions likely to bring about armed conflicts which could constitute a pretext for intervention.*

The government of the Soviet Union believes that it is possible and necessary to prevent the danger of armed conflict in the Near East. The interest of the states in the Middle East is not to allow themselves to be drawn into provocations and military actions.

The Soviet government believes that the Arab-Israel conflict should not be exploited for the purpose of intervention in the affairs of the independent Arab countries and the introduction of foreign armies into the Middle East region.

Therefore the government of the Soviet Union declares:

1. The Soviet Union supports all the measures taken by the UN to seek paths and means of strengthening the peace in the Palestine region and the Security Council resolutions on the matter.

2. The government of the Soviet Union believes that measures should be taken to reduce tensions in the Palestine region *without external intervention, which is against the interest of the Middle Eastern states and the principles of the UN. The government of the Soviet Union calls on the two sides to refrain from any actions that could bring about a heightening of tensions on the demarcation lines that were determined by the ceasefire accords between the Arab states and Israel. Measures should be taken ameliorate the difficult situation of the hundreds of thousands of Arab refugees who have been left without homes and means of subsistence.*

3. The government of the Soviet Union believes that in the interest of strengthening peace and security *it is necessary to bring about a stable peace settlement for the Palestinian problem, on a mutually accepted basis, taking into consideration the just national interests of the interested sides.* For its part, the Soviet Union expresses its willingness to participate, together with other states, in order to aid a peaceful solution to the issues that have not yet been resolved.

(Published in *Kol Ha'am*, 18/4/56. Emphasis ours)

“They will yet raise their eyes”

The statement received sympathetic headlines in the Israeli press.

Davar reported the words under the heading “Moscow: we will support the UN in the establishment of Israel-Arab peace”.

Haaretz gave it the heading: “Russia is prepared to help in the Israel-Arab conflict”, and a sub-heading: “Full support for the UN. Calls for ceasefire lines not to be contested”.

Ha-Tzofeh: “Russia will help the UN to strengthen peace in the Middle East”, with the sub-heading: “The surprising Soviet announcement hints at departure from the pro-Arab line”.

Ha-Tzofeh's estimation that the Soviet Union had "departed from the pro-Arab line" with this declaration was apparently based on the fact that Israel is mentioned in the declaration as one of the states whose independence the Soviet Union supports.

In reality that evaluation is based on a complete misunderstanding of the statement and of the Soviet Union's policy in the Middle East. That policy was never based on "pro-Arabness" or "anti-Israeliness" or "pro-Israeliness" or "anti-Arabness", but on certain *principles*: support for anti-colonialist movements, opposition to military alliances that threaten the peace of the Soviet Union, encouragement of neutralist tendencies etc. The degree of Soviet support that one state or another receives depends on the degree to which that state's policies are in conformity with these principles.

The Soviet support for Israel (in 1947-48) and Egypt (in 1955-56) are not an expression of a *change* in Soviet principles but of their very *stability*. Those who believed, like many in Israel, that in 1955 the Soviet Union supported the Arabs "against Israel", were repeating the inverse of the allegations of those Arabs accused the Soviets in 1947 of supporting the Jews "against the Arabs".

In this regard we would do well to recall one of the most important passages in the historical speech of Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, at the UN General Assembly on 26/11/47, during the Soviet Union's struggle for the creation of the State of Israel:

The proposal for partition into two independent states, as well as the decision of the committee that gave its approval to the resolution under discussion, are not aimed against the Arabs. That resolution was not intended to harm either of the peoples who inhabit Palestine. On the contrary: *in the opinion of the Soviet delegation, that resolution was intended for the benefit of the basic national interests of the two peoples, for the benefit of the interests of the Jewish people and of the Arab people.*

... The peoples of the Soviet Union had and continue to have sympathy for the aspirations of the peoples of the Arab East. The Soviet Union understands and sympathizes with the efforts to achieve liberation from the remaining shackles of colonial dependence. *For that reason we do not identify the inaccurate declarations about the foreign policy of the Soviet Union – which certain representatives of Arab*

states have made in relation to the debate over the future of Palestine – with the vital national interests of the Arabs. We distinguish between declarations that have apparently been influenced by momentary moods, and the fundamental interests of the Arab people. The delegation of the Soviet Union is convinced that the Arabs will yet look to Moscow, not only one time, with hope for the Soviet Union's aid in their struggle for legal interests, and in their attempt to liberate themselves from the residues of foreign dependence. (Emphasis ours)

The last sentence has the ring of prophecy about it in our day. But whoever tries to understand Soviet policy in the Middle East and other parts of the world knows that this is not prophecy, but foresight which stems from political reasoning well thought-out for the long term, and complete consistency.

As noted above, Israel's newspapers received the Soviet declaration of 14/4/56 sympathetically. But that sympathy was quite reserved. In *Davar*, for example, the following sub-heading appeared under the primary heading quoted above: "Western observers ask about the degree of honesty and objectivity and about the consignments of arms to the Middle East".

After ten days, on 28/4/56 – upon the conclusion of his visit to Britain – Khrushchev replied to the questions of the "Western observers":

I think that it would be inaccurate on our part to say that we will not sell arms to *states* that ask us to do that. The reason is that such consignments are also made by other states. But if there is a possibility of agreeing through the UN, or in another way, to stop these consignments, then we will welcome that and we will even be willing to take part in such commitments, which would be likely to help to bring about conditions of peace in that troubled part of the world. (Emphasis ours)

A businessman's prophecy

In Israel itself the storm abated. Indeed, May Day demonstrations were cancelled that year, and the workers of Israel spent 1/5/56 digging fortifications; but the danger of war

with Egypt appeared to be receding. A typical assessment was found in *Haaretz*, on 4/5/65: “The common enemy, against which the Soviet Union is sending tanks and aircraft to Egypt, is not Israel, but the Baghdad Pact.”

Also on the international stage, everyone thought that the situation had improved. On 3/5/56 Hammarskjöld appeared before the UN Security Council and reported on the success of his mission to the Middle East. He announced that Israel, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon had committed themselves to honouring the ceasefire accords unconditionally.

Additional declarations in a moderate spirit were heard from Egypt.

On 20/4/56 EITA reported that in an interview with the famous American political commentator Joseph Alsop, Nasser said: “Egypt will not attack Israel, unless Israel attacks first”.

On 13/6/56 Nasser declared, in an interview with a correspondent for the American weekly *Life*:

I never called for the destruction of Israel. ... A comprehensive solution must take into account the right of the refugees to return, the problem of the borders and the right of Israel to use the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba.

When he was asked when he thought such an accord would be possible, he replied: “I don’t know”.

On 7/7/56 he said in an interview with a UP correspondent:

Egypt will commit itself to accept the ruling of the international court in The Hague regarding the right of Israeli ships to use the Suez Canal, if Israel too will accept the court’s ruling as binding.

On 21/7/56 after talks that were held between Nehru, Tito and Nasser on the island of Brioni, a joint statement was published which said:

The situation in Palestine is particularly dangerous to the peace of the world. The heads of state express their agreement with the resolutions of the Bandung Conference on that subject.

On 5/8/56 the influential French newspaper *Le Monde* announced that at the session of the Chamber of Deputies that had taken place the previous day the Foreign Minister Christian Pineau presented a summary of talks he had held with the Egyptian president Gamal Abd al-Nasser:

The second part of my talks with Colonel Abd al-Nasser was dedicated to Israel, and I took note of the following declaration: "I can promise you that Egypt will not attack Israel. I am in favour of peaceful relations with it".

On 12/9/56 *Haaretz* reported through its Arab affairs correspondent:

"I fear that Israel will take advantage of the fact that we are preoccupied with the Suez Crisis to attack neighbouring Arab states. In any case, I would advise the Arabs to be patient in the event that such an attack comes before the Suez problem is solved" – said Emile Bustani, a Lebanese businessman and former minister who had close ties with Arab politicians, in a conversation with a correspondent for the Egyptian weekly *Rose al-Yusuf*. Bustani explained that if the Arabs respond to an attack by the Israeli side, the Western Powers are likely to see that as a conflict that requires their intervention, and to use that opportunity to realize their aspirations.

It had not occurred to the naive Mr. Bustani that the Western Powers would not wait to see if the Arabs would respond to the Israeli attack. The Anglo-French-Israeli action was planned with more efficiency than the Lebanese businessman could have anticipated.

No desire for half-measures

To conclude, in the period that preceded Operation Sinai, and especially after the nationalization of the Suez Canal, there was a real possibility of Israeli-Arab rapprochement.

That possibility was created when several Arab states – Egypt above all – were conducting an intense struggle against the remnants of colonial rule in the Middle East region. They were not interested in war which would have impeded their main struggle, and which would have constituted a pretext for direct Western military intervention.

The movement of Egypt and other Arab states towards the neutralist camp also had the effect of softening the Arab position on the question of Palestine. Various Arab leaders – especially Nasser – officially endorsed the call for a peaceful solution to the Palestine problem, and repeated that position on many occasions.

The government of the Soviet Union, the influence of which had increased a great deal in 1955-56, declared in no uncertain terms that it saw grave danger in the existence of a state of war in the region and proposed to cooperate with other members of the UN in the search for a peaceful solution that would be acceptable to both sides and which would take their interests into account.

Important people in the neutralist camp also offered their help in mediating between the two sides. It is very likely that if a serious attempt had been made by Israel to pay heed to these voices, to refrain from imposing its military weight against Arab countries in their struggle and to make a serious effort to arrive at a compromise solution with the Arabs – even then it is likely that the Israeli-Arab conflict would not have been *fully* resolved within a short time. It is also possible that even then it would have become clear that the positions of the two sides were still too distant from each other. But *it is clear beyond all doubt* that there was an opportune moment to solve *at least* some of the secondary issues related to the Israeli-Arab conflict such as conserving the peace along the ceasefire lines, Israeli freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, the question of family unification for refugees, the exploitation of the waters of the Jordan River, the Arab economic boycott, the demilitarized zones, etc. etc.

Thus was created a suitable environment for an attempt to solve the main and decisive problems as well – the Arab refugee problem and the problem of the political future of the Palestinian Arab people.

Those who decide on Israel's policy had no desire to take "half-measures". The "hard" path of exploiting the political situation in order to make progress – even if only by a thumb's breadth – towards an honourable compromise had no appeal for them. They chose the "easy" path of the "all at one stroke"; they wanted to exploit the political situation in order to enter into a dishonourable alliance with the Powers most hated by the peoples of the region, with the goal of restoring the colonial era in the Middle East in general, and of finally establishing a new Israeli-Arab *status quo* with certain changes to the disadvantage of the Arabs. When they tried to transfer those calculations from theory into practice, they suffered a grievous defeat and caused Israel incalculable damage.

This is the balance-sheet.

48 to 56

In the history of every nation there are –alternatingly – relatively prolonged periods of peaceful development, and shorter periods of crisis, of development that is rapid, harsh and extreme. In those short and stormy periods the political problems – and the forces that shape them – are in visible in their full brightness. That is the "moment of truth" in politics. All who want to research the history of a nation must consider those critical periods. The War of Independence and the Suez War have been the two most critical periods in the history of the State of Israel so far.

It is therefore fitting to investigate them and compare them to each other. For the sake of clarity and succinctness we will use tables.

The War of Independence (1948)	The Suez War (1956)
1. Israel: fought against an Arab army and against a camouflaged British army that invaded its territory.	1. Egypt: fought against Israeli, British and French armies that invaded its territory.

<p>2. The Arab governments: declare that the UN is unauthorized and unable to solve the problem of Palestine. They go to war with support and encouragement from Britain.</p> <p>3. Britain: endeavours to appear before the world as “preserving order in Palestine” after it covertly initiated the invasion by the Arab armies and supplied them with arms. It conducts a political and economic struggle against Israel (a hostile stance at the UN, removes it from the sterling bloc, freezes the sterling balances of Palestine Jews etc.).</p> <p>4. The USA: at first supports the liquidation of the Mandate and the Partition proposal. When it becomes clear that the British are about to leave, it proposes “trusteeship” instead of the Mandate. When that proposal is rejected – it imposes an embargo on arms shipments to Israel. After the declaration of the birth of the State, it hastens to recognize it and to penetrate it economically. Appoints itself as the guardian of the status quo.</p> <p>5. The Soviet Union: politically supports (in the UN and outside it) the Partition Plan that promises independence to the two peoples in Palestine. It stubbornly struggles against Britain, which refuses to evacuate the country, and against the USA, which is trying to fill the “vacuum”. It does not intervene in internal Israeli problems. It is the main political supporter of the creation of the State of Israel.</p>	<p>2. The government of Israel: declares that the UN is unable to halt Nasser’s expansionist ambitions and his provocations of Israel. Goes to war with the support and encouragement of Britain and France.</p> <p>3. Britain and France: endeavour to appear before the world as “keepers of the peace in the Middle East” and as “separating the two sides”, after they had covertly initiated the Israeli army’s invasion and supplied it with arms. They conduct a political and economic struggle against Egypt (a hostile stance at the UN, freezing Egypt’s sterling balances etc.).</p> <p>4. The USA: at first supports the removal of the British from the bases in Suez. After the nationalization of the Canal Company, it opposes the nationalization and proposes the creation of a “Canal Users’ Association” instead of the Anglo-French company. When that plan fails and the war begins, it dissociates itself from the military actions and applies pressure to end them. Refrains from supplying arms to Egypt. After the failure of the invasion it recognizes the nationalization and tries to penetrate Egypt by economic means.</p> <p>5. The Soviet Union: Politically supports (in the UN and outside it) the nationalization of the Canal. Emphatically opposes the invasion. Helps Egypt economically, without intervening in its internal problems. It is the main political factor for the removal of the invaders.</p>
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6. Czechoslovakia: supplies arms and aircraft to Israel with no political conditions. Trains Israeli pilots and paratroopers in its territory. freedom of navigation for Israel in the Straits of Tiran.	6. Czechoslovakia: supplies arms and aircraft to Egypt without political conditions. Trains Egyptian pilots and paratroopers in its territory.
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Only those who see everything that occurs in the world in terms of the Israeli-Arab conflict and use it as an absolute standard with which to measure all other political phenomena (and more than a few people in Israel are like that) – only they could claim that Israel conducted the same policy in 1948 and in 1956, whereas Britain or the Soviet Union were the ones who changed their positions: one time “against” Israel and another time “for” it. The truth is that all the Great Powers conducted *exactly the same policy* in 1948 and in 1956.

England tried, on two occasions, to preserve by force its positions which had been undermined in the wake of the struggle of the residents of the region for liberation from the yoke of the British Empire.

The United States supported that struggle – on both occasions – until the British were expelled. From then on they endeavoured to fill the vacuum and to inherit Britain’s position.

The Soviet Union supported the expulsion of British colonialism from the region and opposed its replacement by American neo-colonialism. It refrained from intervening in Israel’s internal affairs (in 1948) and those of Egypt (in 1956), even though it had no illusions about Ben-Gurion or Nasser.

The provision of Czech arms was not conditioned, in either case, on any overt or covert political commitment. In both cases, the arms were intended for self-defence against an invasion guided by the West, and in both cases they were used for precisely the purpose for which they were intended. Israel used them to repel the British-Arab attack. Egypt used them to defend itself against the British-French-Israeli attack.

The Great Powers persisted in their policies, Egypt and Israel exchanged roles; each one slid into the opposite position. In 1948 Egypt acted as a British instrument for war against Israel. In 1956 Israel acted as a British-French instrument for war against Egypt.

It makes no difference whether the instrument had its own distinct intentions, or whether it fulfilled its role *knowing* that it was nothing but an instrument. When a mosquito collaborates with an elephant, the difference in size is sufficient to determine who will be subject to whom. The private calculations of the mosquito play no important role.

History, as we know, repeats itself; but the repetition is never simple and mechanical. Sometimes the same scenario occurs twice, but the roles change somewhat.

Three bankruptcies

When the Suez-Sinai war broke out, most parties and political groupings in Israel took positions that conformed, more or less, to their platforms and their general approach to the problem of Israeli-Arab relations.

Ben-Gurion did not begin to be an “activist” on 29 October 1956. Operation Sinai was nothing but the climax of a chain of reprisal actions that he had initiated in the previous years, sometimes even without announcing them to his partners in the government. Indeed it is true that he announced a few days before the invasion that he was opposed to preventive war, but even that was nothing new. In the period that preceded Operation Sinai it occurred more than once that a large IDF raid followed a few hours after a declaration by Ben-Gurion that he was interested in meeting with Nasser at any time and in any place. That practice caused Nasser to comment on one occasion that when he hears Ben-Gurion talking about his desire for peace, he orders the Egyptian army to be on alert.

Herut always called for military actions against the Arab states. That party was never satisfied with Ben-Gurionist “activism”. Nearly every day since the birth of the State, representatives of that party have called for the launching of “liberation operations”. Therefore Herut fully supported the invasion of Sinai. Its opposition was aimed only at the *withdrawal*. No one was surprised by that and it occurred to no one that Herut would act differently.

The General Zionists adopted a position halfway between Ben-Gurion’s “activism” and the “super activism” of Herut.

The *Religious parties and the Progressive Party* never had independent political lines on foreign affairs and defence matters. At most they had different shades of the Ben-Gurionist line. Even during “Operation Sinai”, as in the period that preceded it, they went along with Ben-Gurion in everything related to foreign policy and defence.

The Unity of Labour party was always more “activist” than Ben-Gurion himself and on many occasions adopted a position very close to that of Herut. That party always viewed Israel-Arab problems “through the sights of a rifle”. Its support for Operation Sinai was taken for granted.

The Communist Party always strongly opposed the reprisal actions. It saw Operation Sinai as a national catastrophe; when it was launched, it demanded the immediate halt of the military actions and the return of the IDF behind the ceasefire lines. Nor were the Communists afraid to be the only ones to take that position.

An examination of the positions of these parties on the Sinai War therefore leads us to the following conclusions:

- Herut and the Israeli Communist Party were consistent in their (mutually contradictory) positions. The first was unconditionally in favour of the war and the second strongly opposed the invasion, just as it opposed the political line that led to it. The first unconditionally opposed the withdrawal, while the second had prophesied it from the first moment.
- Mapai tried to be consistent in its position. If Ben-Gurion was forced to give the order to withdraw, then it was not because that was what he wanted, but because he was forced to do so by powerful international forces.
- Instead of resigning after the failure – as nearly any self-respecting politician would have done – Ben-Gurion tried to represent the defeat as a great victory. But now we are no longer speaking of *consistency* but “merely” of elementary political honesty – a quality that is conspicuously lacking in Israeli political life.
- Regarding the General Zionists, the Progressives and the religious parties, it is impossible to pose the question “were they consistent?” For a person to be consistent or inconsistent in their principles, first they must have principles.
- Unity of Labour betrayed its principles on one occasion: when it remained in the government after the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, even though it had previously announced that it would not be able to support such a measure on the grounds of the religious principle of “better to be killed than to transgress”, even

though it had condemned Ben-Gurion for having succumbed to international public opinion,

That behaviour was dishonourable and worthy of condemnation. In the political realm, to betray one's principles – especially principles of such primary importance – is equivalent to moral bankruptcy. But that political bankruptcy looks moral, worthy and honourable next to the behaviour of the United Workers' Party (Mapam). For Mapam betrayed its principles *at least three times* over a period of four months.

Ahitophel's counsel

Did Mapam oppose Operation Sinai or support it? *There is no one who can give a full and unequivocal answer to that question.* We are compelled, therefore, to rely on the answer to a more modest question: *What was Mapam's position as the affair went through its various stages, from the days that preceded the nationalization of the Suez Canal to the completion of the withdrawal from Sinai?*

Let us start at the beginning.

In April 1956 the 24th Zionist Congress took place in Jerusalem. During that time tensions with Egypt were at their height, shortly after the shelling of the market square in Gaza and immediately after the big wave of murders by the *Fedayeen*.

The leader of Herut, Menahem Begin, ascended to the podium at the Congress, and categorically demanded a war. He appealed for this to be done before it was too late:

It is necessary to act before the enemy is strong and we are weak, and not at a time when we are weaker than he, but at a time when we are stronger than he. (Stenographic report of the 24th Zionist Congress, published by the management of the Zionist Organization, p. 67)

After Mr. Begin spoke, the floor was given to Number Two in Mapam, Yaakov Hazan:

Honourable Congress, we will not disregard Mr. Begin's speech. Whoever calls for war today is a criminal against the Jewish people (uproar on the floor) and that is the case as long as it is possible to rescue the peace. (Ibid., p. 71. Emphasis ours)

These words were widely publicized at the time, because they caused a tempest in a teapot in the boring Congress. Herut demanded that the Mapam leader take back his words, but the courageous Hazan stuck to his position. Thus in Mapam's view, it was possible to rescue the peace in April 1956. Whoever called for war then was, in its opinion, a criminal against the Jewish people.

On 26 July Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal Company. Was it then still possible, in the view of Mapam, to rescue the peace? An answer to that question is found in the organ of that party, *Al Hamishmar*, from 31/7/56. In an article with the heading "Israel must be neutral in the conflict between the West and Egypt", the organ of the United Workers' Party (Mapam) declared:

In political circles here a view is congealing, to the effect that Israel should manifest a stance of absolute neutrality in the conflict between Egypt and the Powers that have an interest in the ownership of the Canal Company. Nevertheless, Israel must seek ways to ensure its right of free passage in the Canal in accordance with the Constantinople Convention, the ceasefire accord and the Security Council resolutions. Moreover, political observers here do not discount the possibility that *in precisely these new circumstances, an opportunity for renewed [!] Israeli-Egyptian contacts can be created on this subject*. Let us recall in this context the period of the British-Egyptian conflict over the evacuation of the Suez area, *When there were Egyptian feelers [!] on that subject, but Israeli foreign policy preferred then to ask England to concern itself with ensuring Israeli freedom of navigation [!]* and England indeed played the Israel card in the negotiations, in order to slow them down. *But the only necessary consequence was to aggravate Israeli-Egyptian relations*, and England abandoned the Israel issue after it had extracted all possible benefit from it. It has already become widely recognized that *Israel must not be enticed into an operation to "pull the chestnuts out of the fire" that is perhaps*

being devised in certain Western circles which last year were the source of Ahitophel's counsel for preventive war. (Al Hamishmar, 31/7/56. Emphasis ours)

Thus, a few days after the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, Mapam already knew that “certain Western circles” were devising the plot to use Israel to “pull the West’s chestnuts out of the fire” under the guise of a “preventive war”. *Al Hamishmar* demanded not to be tempted by that plot, and in order to strengthen its argument, it drew a comparison (an accurate and instructive one, incidentally) between the situation that prevailed after the nationalization of the Canal and the situation that existed about two years previously. *Al Hamishmar* asserts that during the struggle between Britain and Egypt over the future of the military base in the Canal Zone there were feelers *from the Egyptian side* on the subject of freedom of navigation for Israel, and that these feelers were not taken up by Israel. *Al Hamishmar* understood very well that Israel’s support for Britain on that matter (the Bat-Galim affair!) did not serve the interests of Israel, but those of Britain, and that “the only necessary consequence was to aggravate Israeli-Egyptian relations.” Even after the nationalization of the Canal, therefore, Mapam believed that it was possible to rescue the peace.

“Full responsibility”

Two months passed, and Mapam continued to adhere to that view. On 28/9/56 *Al Hamishmar* published an article under the heading “*Why not armed conflict*”. The author, Eliezer Peri, one of the leaders of Mapam, debated the position of Unity of Labour and opposed a war initiated by Israel, whether such a war would be the result of an *overt* alliance with the West or not. He called for Israel to struggle for its rights in Suez, Eilat and the Jordan Canal “*while adhering to two conditions*”:

1. We must beware of finding ourselves – not only in theory, but also in practice – behind the same barricade with those whose objective is not equality of opportunity and rights for all peoples, but imperialistic freedom to control and exploit. We will fight for freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal for all peoples,

including Israel, which is ensured by international guarantees, but we will not take a stand against the just national aspirations of the Egyptian people.

2. We will strive to realize our rights in Suez, in Eilat, and above all in the Jordan Channel while taking advantage of every opportunity for peace. An action that is taken by peaceful means requires much more time, and an action in war can evidently be carried out in a short time. We choose the longer action. An action that prevents war, but which is much more expensive, and an action that appears cheaper but entails war – we prefer the more expensive action. At the end of the day, the longer path is the shorter one: the expensive one is cheaper.

We turn our faces towards peace and not war, and we choose that path with confidence that the international situation is more conducive today than ever before to the creation of a peace-front which will also help us in our struggle to realize our rights. (Eliezer Peri, *Al Hamishmar*, 28/9/56. Emphasis ours)

Thus even at the end of September it was still possible, in Mapam's opinion, to rescue the peace. More than that: Mapam was full of confidence that the possibility of Israel's achieving its just demands by peaceful means were greater "today than ever before". Exactly a month after the publication of that article, Ben-Gurion convened the government and announced the plan to invade Egyptian territory.

Ben-Gurion relates:

The discussion at that session was only a formality, because a day beforehand [that is, 27/10/56] the Prime Minister presented the proposal and the plan for the raid to all members of the government in all factions and only two members of the government opposed the proposal; *but they too announced that if a positive decision was taken, they would take full responsibility for the action, which was afterwards known as "Operation Sinai"*. (David Ben-Gurion, *Shenaton ha-*

Memshalah [Government Yearbook] 5720 (1959-60), p. 16. Hebrew. Emphasis ours)

The two ministers who opposed the proposal were the Mapam ministers *Israel Barzilai and Mordechai Bentov*. In Mapam's opinion, was it possible to rescue the peace on 27 October? Certainly! For the Mapam ministers *opposed* Ben-Gurion's proposal to launch a war. Therefore, according to Yaakov Hazan's declaration at the 24th Zionist Congress, Ben-Gurion, who had "called for war", turns out to be a criminal against the Jewish people, in Mapam's opinion. But Barzilai and Bentov declared that if "a positive decision was taken" they would take *full responsibility* for "Operation Sinai". And they were not alone. On 7 November the leader of Mapam declared:

We never renounced the opinion that we had always publicized, but when the die was cast *we took full responsibility for the government's actions and the campaign before us*. (Meir Yaari, *Knesset Records*, 21/207, 7/11/56. Emphasis ours)

Logic and morality both demand that if the *call to execute* a certain action is a crime, then *full responsibility for the execution* of that action is a far worse crime. *Meir Yaari, Israel Barzilai and Mordechai Bentov – they too, therefore, committed a crime against the Jewish people. And all of Mapam's leaders sit with them in the dock of history. One confession by the defendant is equal to a hundred exculpatory testimonies for the defence. And as if that were not enough, Al Hamishmar came out with an appeal on 29/10/56:*

It is a supreme commandment for our State to be vigilant against any attempt to draw it into a war of initiative and get involved in plans and preparations that have nothing to do with us ... Measures to put our trust in a decision for an initiated war entail a great danger for Israel. (*Al Hamishmar*, 29/10/56, editorial)

Two days after they took upon themselves *full responsibility* for the invasion, they call that same invasion "*a great danger for Israel*"!

Behold the leaders of Mapai in all their hypocrisy and moral degeneracy: they are partners in what they see as a crime – and they warn against it, they act like Zimri, then speak out against it in order to seek the reward of Phineas.

“Now the fact is determinative”

How did they try to rationalize their willingness to take full responsibility for “measures to put our trust in a decision for an initiated war” which entail a “great danger for Israel”?

The day after the invasion, *Al Hamishmar* explained in its editorial:

The storm that we had said *could have been avoided* – is now *upon us*, we are facing the supreme test. The Israel Defence Force will pass it, the entire nation will pass it. We will not at this time dwell on the question of whether events necessarily had to unfold in this way. We expressed our opinion according to the best of our consciousness and conscience. Now the fact is determinative – we are in the battle. And in every such battle in our special conditions *we stand with our backs to the wall*; we will therefore stand courageously, heroically and with determination to ensure Israel’s peace and its future. We did not refrain from speaking out, we did not turn a blind eye to the grave context of our situation. The Arab leaders are constantly brandishing the sword of vengeance and destruction over the head of Israel, they seek to tighten the noose of economic and military strangulation. They dispatch into Israel destructive and murderous bands in an attempt to deny a life of peace and construction to its citizens. Despite that, *we voted for a different line, one that could have led to a way out of the predicament. But now we find ourselves in the middle of the campaign.* We are at the beginning of a fateful campaign and we do not know what will be its form and its contours in the coming days. We are commanded to be prepared and alert. The nation is mobilized, the Israel Defence Force, including the best of the generation, is faithfully carrying out what it has been charged with. The campaign is taking place in a region in which different

forces and interests are entwined. Therefore the interest of Israel, its peace and security will always be a beacon for our fate.

In a time like this we also recall the supreme goal of our State – peace and good neighbourly relations, with equality and mutual respect of rights between Israel and the Arab peoples. The campaign is transient. *Neighbourly life and coexistence* are a fixed commandment of our historical fate. This campaign is the campaign of the entire nation. Courage and staying power are required not only of the soldier on the front but of every person in Israel. *Our heart is with the defenders and the fighters*, with our soldiers on the front and also our vanguard in the border communities. We, Israel, are experienced in battle; the rear did not embarrass the front – let it not disappoint this time. *Civil-defence measures will immediately be implemented. There can be no place for conscienceless shirkers* to exploit the emergency. Every manifestation of speculation and price-gouging will be eliminated. Mobilized and alert, equal to the occasion and full of confidence, we turn to face what is coming. (*Al Hamishmar*, 30/10/56. Emphasis ours)

This article is itself a remarkable example of “*exploitation of the emergency by conscienceless shirkers*”, a miserable attempt at shameless deception. *Here Mapam is openly evading* a discussion of the question of “whether events necessarily had to unfold in this way”; and what is even worse: the article contains *no mention* of the fact that the war it discusses *was launched at the initiative of Ben-Gurion and with the support of Mapam itself*.

Take note: “the storm *is upon us*”, that’s all – *upon us*, without any agency indicated. In vain will you seek an answer to the question of *who brought it upon us*. “Now the fact is determinative – we are at war”. *Who* was it who *determined* that fact? *Who supported* it? *Who is responsible* for it? “*We stand with our backs to the wall*” ... Are the forces of the IDF approaching the Suez Canal, hundreds of kilometres south of the southernmost Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz? God forbid! “*We stand with our backs to the wall*”! “*Our heart is with the defenders and the fighters*” ... If we did not know what was being talked

about, we would have got the impression from reading this article that on 29/10/56 an enemy had penetrated the borders of the State of Israel, rather than the opposite!

Indeed, the creation of such an impression was *precisely* the purpose of the entire article. The leaders of Mapam do not dare explain why they took upon themselves full responsibility for the invasion of the Sinai Desert, why they thereby betrayed all their declarations against a war initiated by Israel, why they did not have the courage to resign from the government the head of which decided on an action that completely contradicted the principles that Mapam had theretofore declared. So they put on an innocent face and compose their unctuous words in that form, as if the question is whether or not to defend *Israel* from an *Egyptian* invasion; but they know very well that it was not *that* question that presented itself on the day they wrote the article.

Crumbs from the table

Let us try to imagine what would have happened if the Mapam ministers, when they heard about Ben-Gurion's intention to launch an invasion, had submitted their resignations from the government and refused to take responsibility for an action that ran counter to the principles of their party.

Two possibilities come to mind:

Either Ben-Gurion would have been dissuaded from his intention at the last minute, upon seeing that the government was not unified behind him, or he would have executed his plan without paying attention to Mapam's opposition.

If the *first* scenario had occurred, that would have meant that Mapam had succeeded in preventing a step which *in its opinion* was "a great danger for Israel". In such a case the Sinai war would not have broken out at all. If the second scenario had occurred, then Operation Sinai would have begun, run its course and concluded exactly as it in fact began, ran its course and concluded. The only difference would have been that Mapam would not have been responsible for that shameful business.

What prevented Mapam from doing the only possible honourable thing – resigning from the government – was *not* its patriotic willingness “to be with the nation that is fighting for its life and with the defender-fighters of the Israel Defence Force” (in the words of Yaari in the Knesset on 7/11/56). That was *not* the reason – if only because it was not a case of “defence” and “fighting for one’s life”, but of attack and invasion in collaboration with Britain and France.

The true reason was much more prosaic: Mapam knew very well that if it resigned from the government on 28 October, it would perhaps succeed in preventing Operation Sinai, *but along with that it would have lost any hope of participating in any government headed by Ben-Gurion.*

In other words: if Mapam had acted according to its conscience, it would have become an *opposition party*, without any foreseeable chance of returning to the ministerial chairs. A party that took its ideas and its principles seriously would not have flinched from such a possibility. But Mapam is not such a party. The gratification that it derives from its participation in the government and the crumbs that it manages to get from the Coalition table are more important to it than all the ideas and principles in the world.

The iron fact of the war

In the history of the twentieth century there is one prominent episode that is very reminiscent of Mapam’s behaviour in October 1956.

Let us pick up the book *Sources for the History of the International Workers’ Movement*, published by Hakibbutz Haartzi/Hashomer Hatzair in collaboration with the Kibbutz Artzi Seminar at Giv’at Haviva. Let us open the book to page 108. We find there the following explanation, by the Mapam editor Yosef Shamir:

With the beginning of the First World War the Second International collapsed and most of its national sections became hitched to the cart of imperialism.

German Social-Democracy, the stronghold of the International, immediately joined the war-front; the others followed in its wake. “The collapse of the Second International”, says Lenin, “found its most prominent expression in the abominable

betrayal of most of the official social-democratic parties in Europe, which betrayed their principal opinions and declarations.”

The Hashomer Hatzair publishing house gives below an example of that “abominable betrayal”: the declaration by the Social Democratic (SD) faction in the Reichstag (the German parliament):

This is a fateful hour. The consequences of imperialist policy, because of which we have arrived at a period of armaments competition and an aggravation of contradictions between nations, have inundated Europe *with a tumultuous flood*. All responsibility for this falls upon the bearers of that policy; we reject it. The SD fought with all its strength against this development fraught with danger. Until the last hours before the outbreak of the war it fought for the survival of peace by vast demonstrations in all countries with profound cooperation with the French brothers. But all the efforts were in vain. Now we stand before *the iron fact of the war*. [emphasis in the original] All the horrors of the enemy’s invasion are threatening us; today we must decide not on war or against it, but on the measures that are necessary for the defence of our country. We are hereby commanded to think about the millions of our members and countrymen who have been swept into this calamity through no fault of their own. They will be affected by the war more than anyone. Our warmest greetings go out to those brothers, without distinction for party, who have been called to the flag.

Our thoughts are also with the mothers, who have been forced to give their sons, to women and children who have been robbed of their sustainers – to all those, whom, in addition to fear for the fate of their relatives, hunger also threatens; to all those will also be soon added tens of thousands of wounded and handicapped fighters. To stand by all of them, in order to alleviate their fate – we see this as an inescapable duty.

The triumph of Russian despotism [emphasis in the original] which has stained itself with the blood of the best sons of the Russian nation, threatens us – both ourselves and our free future – with the loss of all. It is incumbent upon us to resist

that danger and to ensure the existence of the *culture and independence* [emphasis in the original] of our country. Therefore we praise what we have always said: in time of danger we do not abandon our homeland [emphasis in the original].

At the same time we feel ourselves to be in complete conformity with the International, which has recognized the right of every people to national independence and self-defence. For that very same reason we reject any war of conquest. We demand that the war end immediately after the objective of ensuring our security has been achieved and our adversaries are ready for peace, *peace which will permit the existence of friendship between the neighbouring peoples*.

We demand this not only in the name of the international solidarity for which we have fought, but also for the interest of the German people.

We hope that the cruel school of war will arouse revulsion at war among millions and win them for the ideal of socialism and peace among peoples. In fidelity to these premises, *we ratify the requested arms budgets*. [Emphasis in the original] (The declaration of the SD faction in the *Reichstag*, 4/8/1914; quoted in *Sources for the history of the international workers' movement*, p. 109)

Whoever reads that declaration and compares it with the editorial in *Al Hamishmar* of 30/11/56 cannot fail to be impressed by the *great resemblance – not only in the content but also in the style – between the two documents*, which could have been written by the same hand.

But in truth there is one important difference between the position of the SD in 1914 and that of Mapam in 1956. On 4/8/1914 the German Social Democrats declared that they *rejected* any responsibility for the war that had broken out, and they voted only in favour of the *budget* for the war.

On 7/11/1956 M. Yaari announced in the Knesset that Mapam “takes full responsibility for the actions of the government and the campaign that is before us.”

Mapam’s betrayal of its principles was, therefore, more far-reaching even than the betrayal of the parties of the Second International, which Mapam itself is accustomed to condemning!

“We were tempted by an illusion”

Whoever betrays their principles once, is bound to do it again. And that happened to Mapam. That same party which – according to itself – opposed Operation Sinai and agreed to accept responsibility for it only because of “lack of choice” – that same party afterwards became the main proponent of the annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel! It would appear that logically it is impossible to *oppose* a war and at the same time to *support* the annexation of territories that were occupied in that same war. But Mapam is not bound by the laws of logic:

The government of Israel announced its willingness to remove its army from Gaza and to establish there a civil administration that would act in close coordination with representatives of the UN. That is the outer limit of our concessions ...

Thus declared Yaakov Hazan in the Knesset on 22 February 1957 (See *Knesset Records* 21/1149). And in that very same speech the Mapam leader said:

We are now positioned with our backs to the wall and we have nothing to concede. the political campaign threatens us with the elimination of the just results of the glorious military campaign. (Yaakov Hazan, *Knesset Records*, 12/1148, 22/2/57)

A naïve person will certainly think that with that, Mapam had renounced its “opposition” to Operation Sinai, for it declared it to be a “glorious military campaign” and its results to be “just”. But that was not the case:

We did not conceal that we did not support Operation Sinai when the decision was made by the government. ... we were convinced that it was still possible to strengthen our security and to continue to absorb immigration and develop the country and to fight for stable peace without the need to resort to desperate measures. In truth that was the majority belief within the parties that participated in the government until the last days before Operation Sinai. *I will not conceal the fact*

that the decisive change did not occur because our enemies imposed the zero hour upon us near the days of the decision. Rather, it was because we were tempted by the illusion of a historical opportunity that would not return. (Meir Yaari, Knesset Records, 21/1260, 6/3/57. Emphasis ours)

That is to say, the “glorious military campaign”, the results of which were “just”, was not an act of self-defence, but merely “temptation by the illusion of a historical opportunity that would not return.”

The question whether Mapam supported Operation Sinai or opposed it remains, therefore, without any satisfactory answer. In any case, it is clear that it strongly supported the annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel and saw the establishment of an Israeli civil administration in the Strip as “the outer limit of our concessions.” But when Ben-Gurion crossed even that “outer limit” and withdrew from the Gaza Strip, Mapam remained safely sitting in the government.

In summary: whether Operation Sinai was a “glorious campaign” and whether it was the result of a “temptation by an illusion”, whether the government announces the annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel, and whether it retreats from that decision – all that is neither here nor there; Mapam remained attached to the coalition, and when its toes and fingers were cut off it continued to gather under Ben-Gurion’s table.

Chapter 8

After Suez

Undoubtedly, the *status quo* has been shaken

After the Suez war, all the processes which had existed in the period before that war continued. This is self-evident to the extent that we are speaking of processes on a global scale such as, for example, the breakdown of the colonial system etc.; but it also became clear that it was true on the more modest scale of Israel-Arab relations.

This is to be wondered at to some extent, for one might have assumed that the results of the Suez War would motivate Israeli politicians to reconsider their position. Here we will briefly examine the main changes that occurred regarding the stability of the *status quo*, Western influence in the Middle East and Israeli policy in the wake of the failure of the Sinai adventure.

Regarding the *status quo*, unequivocal statements were made in the Knesset on 8 August 1958. In that debate various speakers in the house criticized the position of the Israeli delegation at the UN General Assembly.

It was really a strange position and one not understood by many. In his speech at the General Assembly regarding the withdrawal of American forces from Lebanon and British forces from Jordan (they had landed there after the revolution in Iraq), Abba Eban supported a Norwegian motion the practical meaning of which was to suspend the withdrawal. For their part, the Arab states submitted a joint motion that called for immediate withdrawal. To much astonishment, Mr. Eban voted for the Arabs' proposal even though it explicitly mentioned the name and position of the Arab League – which Israel refused to recognize.

Only those who understand the nature of the Israeli-Arab conflict can understand this astonishing behaviour. The reason for it was that the Arab motion contained among other things, the phrase: “the General Assembly ... calls upon all member states to act resolutely in accordance with the principles of mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.”

The Prime Minister explained in the Knesset:

... the line that this government has taken from its inception to this very day ... has not changed ... I will say here in summary what that line is. First, we want to maintain the status quo for as long as that is possible. Undoubtedly the status quo has been shaken, but as long as it is possible to maintain it we want to maintain it, because we do not long for what Knesset Member Landau longs for – whether seriously or not I do not know. (Knesset Records 24/2626, 8/8/58)

The aspirations of Herut MK Landau and his party are expressed in the song, “Two banks has the Jordan River; one is ours, the other is too”,⁴⁴ but B-G is not the one to mention this to him, for there was a time when he too aspired – in all seriousness – for Gaza. Mr. Ben-Gurion added:

I am not greatly impressed by that resolution, but I am committed to it and I appreciate it because I know that that resolution puts a political weapon in the hands of those whose sovereignty or territorial integrity they are trying to violate. (Knesset Records, 24/2625, 8/8/58)

It seems that the Israeli delegation voted for this resolution not because of affection for the Arabs, the Arab League or US and British military withdrawal, but because it saw in it an indirect recognition of the *status quo* by the UN and the Arabs.

Of course this is an invalid consideration, not only politically but also even formally, for the resolution speaks of “mutual respect for territorial integrity”, even while Israel still has no territory defined and recognized by the world. It has no fixed borders but only ceasefire lines with all four of its neighbours.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ A slogan of the Herut party at the time, which expressed that party’s view that Transjordan (now Jordan) was legally part of the State of Israel. It was also a line in a popular song, and in Hebrew it rhymes: “*shtei gadot la-yarden; zo shelanu, zo gam ken.*” – trans.

⁴⁵ This was true at the time these words were written. In subsequent decades Israel signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, and now has internationally recognized borders with these states – trans.

Moreover, we find ourselves learning anew what it is that bothers the government of Israel. Since 1956 the position of the *status quo* has been progressively undermined. After the revolution in Iraq (14/7/58) a rain of declarations from the lips of Nasser on the one hand, and from those of Qasim on the other, about the need to “re-establish the state of the Arabs of Palestine”, “to establish a Palestinian government in exile”, “to establish a Palestinian army” etc. These demands were heard with more emphasis and frequency than ever before. To be sure, these declarations were intended, to a great extent, to aggravate King Hussein’s internal difficulties, but one may well ask: why do they attack Hussein with the demand for the establishment of the State of Palestine? Why is it precisely *that* slogan that reverberates among many people in Jordan? Why does Hussein lose his temper every time that demand is heard, and not some other one? The position of the *status quo* has been progressively undermined, not only due to the influence of the declarations of Nasser and Qasim.

“In conformity with UN resolutions”

The Bandung Conference (April 1955) declared that “In view of the ongoing tension in the Middle East, which stems from the Palestinian problem, in view of the fact that this situation endangers the peace of the world, the Conference of the States of Asia and Africa expresses its full support for the rights of the Arabs of Palestine and calls for the implementation of the UN resolutions on Palestine, which call for a peaceful solution to the problem.”

The next Conferences of the Nations of Asia and Africa in Cairo (December 1957, February 1959), Addis-Ababa (June 1960) and Casablanca (January 1961) reaffirmed their support for the position that was expressed in Bandung on the question of Palestine. The Conference of the Nations of Asia and Africa in Cairo (December 1957) in which about 50 states participated, adopted among others, the following resolutions:

The Conference declares that the State of Israel is a base of imperialism which is endangering the development and security of the Middle East. The Conference

condemns Israel which is endangering peace in the world ... The Conference recognizes the rights of the Arabs in Palestine and the right of the refugees to return to their homeland.

And the Conference of the Nations of Africa which was convened in Addis-Ababa (June 1960) declared, on the same subject, that:

The Conference expresses its concern in view of the absence of UN resolutions on the question of Palestine and affirms the Palestine resolutions of Bandung and Accra. The Palestine question constitutes a danger to peace in northeast Africa.

The Casablanca Conference constituted a serious blow to Israeli policy when it declared:

The Conference strongly affirms the need to arrive at a just solution to these problems, in accordance with the UN resolutions and the resolutions of the Afro-Asian states at Bandung, in order to restore to the Palestinian Arabs their legitimate rights.

This is a particularly heavy blow, because it undermined one of the most important principles in Israeli foreign policy, as they were determined after the Suez war. In accordance with that principle, Israel should provide extensive economic, educational and military aid to the new states in Africa and thereby mobilize their support for Israel for the sake of the *status quo*. This meant that by virtue of the economic and cultural ties that these states forged with Israel, they would support Israel's position in the UN when the Palestine problem came up for discussion, and they would thereby prevail upon the Arab states – especially Egypt – to modify their approach to that problem. The Casablanca resolutions proved that that “ingenious” policy of “outflanking the Arab siege” and breaking it by mobilizing allies to its rear was without basis.

When it became conventional wisdom in Israel that the signature of Kwame Nkruma – who was Israel's firm friend in the African continent – on the Casablanca resolution was

nothing but a concession to Nasser, the Ghanaian press reported the following official position:

A report in the press has brought to the President's attention certain stories which appeared in the Israeli press regarding the interview with the Israeli ambassador in Accra about the Casablanca Conference. The President wishes to announce that he and the Government of Ghana support the Casablanca Conference and its resolutions. (18/1/61)

On 18/1/61 the Ghanaian evening newspaper *Evening News*, which belonged to the ruling party in Ghana, published a special supplement under the heading "*Despite the appeals of the Israeli press, Ghana reaffirms its adherence to the Casablanca resolutions.*"

Marshal Tito too, in his meeting with Nasser in Brioni (June 1960), reaffirmed the joint resolution that:

The problem of Palestine should be solved in accordance with the UN Charter and the resolutions that have already been passed by the international organization to reach a peaceful solution.

The Prime Minister of India and all the other politicians who supported the Bandung resolutions continue to hold similar positions.

At the Conference of Non-Aligned States at Belgrade (September 1961) another resolution was passed on the Palestine question:

Conference participants condemn the imperialist policy as it appears in the Middle East and declare their support for the full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian Arab people in accordance with the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations Organization.

The Voice of Israel and most of the newspapers cheered over the fact that the Conference did not adopt the draft of the original Arab resolution, which included strong condemnation of Israel, instead being satisfied with the version we have quoted here.

Indeed: new times, new tunes. When the Bandung Conference, at Nasser's suggestion, adopted the text of a resolution that was certainly no less moderate than the Belgrade resolution, all the official newspapers attacked it as an "extreme anti-Israel resolution". What was considered an anti-Israel resolution in 1955 was accepted in 1961 with cheers of triumph! On the other hand, if in 1955 Nasser himself submitted a moderate resolution, then in 1961 it required the moderating influence of other neutralist leaders in order for a similar resolution to be passed.

The Reconciliation Commission is revived

Another heavy blow sustained by supporters of the *status quo* was the resolution that was passed by the UN on 8/12/59, with a majority of 54 to the single isolated vote of Israel, on the revival of the Palestine Reconciliation Commission. Another corpse suddenly arose from the grave, to the astonishment of those who had already eulogized it.

The political correspondent of *Yedioth Aharonoth* explained:

... The Reconciliation Commission was established by the UN after the War of Independence and it is linked to the UN General Assembly resolutions of the time regarding the return of the refugees, the internationalization of Jerusalem and other things. (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 7/12/59)

It will be noted that France voted in favour of reviving the Commission, even though Israel supported France's position against Algeria at the same session and voted together with it regarding the detonation of the French atomic bomb in the Sahara Desert.

All Israel's efforts to prevent the passage of this resolution failed. While in 1959 the Reconciliation Commission was resurrected, an official delegation of Arab refugees from Palestine was received, for the first time after in many years, at the UN session that took

place at the end of 1960. The international organization thereby accorded *de facto* recognition to the Palestinian refugees as a political actor in their own right.

The Tripartite Declaration is dead

In February 1960, Nasser went to visit the Syrian part of the United Arab Republic. The visit was accompanied by statements against the 1950 declaration by the three Powers. In a speech he delivered in Damascus on 22/2/60 he said:

I declare in the name of the Arab people that the Declaration of the three Powers is dead and buried in the soil of Port-Said.

This was not an idle declaration. Erel Ginai truthfully commented:

The 1950 Declaration has little value for the following reasons: It has no “teeth”, that is, the force required to enforce its commitments. For this reason it is not likely to deter aggressors. The Soviet Union, which is not a party to the Declaration, is providing arms to the Arabs, and is thereby undermining the balance of power between Israel and the Arabs, while the West is doing nothing to preserve this balance by providing free military aid to Israel. (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 23/2/60)

The words of the Israeli journalist and the Egyptian politician hit the mark on the same point – that is, that the Declaration of the three Powers, which was based only on their economic, military and political domination of the Middle East, lost most of its impact when the Soviet Union appeared as an active and permanent force in the region, and when the attempt of two of the powers that were signatory to the Declaration to activate their military power in order to influence the course of events in the region met with complete failure. This state of affairs was quite worrisome to all those who had thrown in their lot with Western power. And in addition, Nasser’s declarations gave those same Israeli politicians a chance to confirm whether the three Powers still recognized their declaration of 1950; that is, to clarify the murky situation that had prevailed since the

Suez War and to state definitively whether Britain and France had also abandoned the Declaration *de jure*.

With the reports of Nasser's declarations, it was also learned that Israeli and Egyptian forces were concentrated along the ceasefire lines in the south. We will not enter here into a debate over which side had initiated the military buildup, and who had an interest in it. It suffices to point out that the concentration of the armies and the tensions that prevailed in consequence forced the Foreign Ministers of the three Western Powers openly to state their position.

And indeed on 8/3/60 the French Foreign Minister said to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly that "in the opinion of France the best policy in the Middle East at this time is to maintain the *status quo* in the region". (see *Maariv*, 9/3/60)

A few days earlier, the British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mr. John Porfumo, said in reply to a question in Parliament that the Tripartite Declaration remained in force. Similarly it was reported from an authoritative source at the American Department of State that "the United States considers the Declaration of the three Powers on the defence of the existing borders in the Middle East to be a document that remains in force. The United States considers itself bound by this Declaration". (*Davar*, 24/2/60)

Despite these reassuring statements, Israel's policy-makers were not reassured. In May 1960, a summit conference was to be held at which the Powers would discuss reducing the tensions in the main places where the danger of war was perceived. It can be surmised that the Israeli-Arab conflict was also to be discussed. In early March 1960, Ben-Gurion made a tour of Western capitals. One of his objectives was to ensure that the Western

Powers would not back away from their support for the *status quo*, and would not agree to a solution of the Palestine problem on the basis of UN resolutions. Erel Ginai commented in this regard:

Ben-Gurion ... did not ask the West to try to stop the flow of Soviet arms, or even to reduce it. He settled for a practical demand that the West, upon the conclusion of the summit conference, sign with the Soviet Union a declaration that would reaffirm that "no changes will be made to the existing borders in the Middle

East by force” and call for “all the states of the region to solve all their conflicts by means of negotiations.”

... What are the chances that this request of Ben-Gurion’s will be fulfilled? Not particularly great, claim many observers. The idea will not appeal to Nasser, since it came from Ben-Gurion and its only purpose is to strengthen the status quo. Moreover, the Soviet Union has no interest in doing anything that will produce resentment in Nasser and satisfaction in us. It is liable to demand that the communiqué should include something about the return of the refugees or a return to the 1947 borders. ... If so, why did Ben-Gurion raise such a proposal? Because we is worried about the possibility that the Middle East will come up for discussion one way or another at the summit, in which case it is preferable to have a text that is likely to do a certain amount of good without doing much harm, rather than to let the Powers compose a draft themselves ... (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 1/4/60)

The entire chain of events in February-March 1960 instructs us that, contrary to the opinion of many Israelis, the *status quo* is far from being stable. The very statements of the Western Powers in February-March 1960 in favour of a declaration that was made ten years before attested to the fact that the validity of the declaration had been cast in doubt; otherwise there would have been no need to reaffirm it again.

As we know, the summit meeting did not take place. But with the election of Mr. Kennedy to the US Presidency and the growing chances of a new summit meeting, it should be assumed that the problem of the stability of the *status quo* will become a more and more difficult problem for Israel’s politicians. In an interview with a correspondent for *Bamehaneh*, Yigal Allon (Unity of Labour) commented:

Grave political dangers are still lying in wait for Israel. I foresee a proposal for a new partition plan, something like the resolution of 29 November, and an attempt to impose it on Israel. (*Bamehaneh*, 7/6/60)

These words also explain the meaning of the following passage from Ben-Gurion's speech at the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Histadrut:

In the next decade we are likely to face a serious and maybe fateful military test.
(*Davar*, 3/2/1960)

Indeed, a solution to the Palestine problem is not a matter that belongs to the past, but to the future.

“A doctrine to defend the oil”

Nor did the political orientation of the government of Israel change after the failure of the Sinai adventure. On 12/2/57 the Soviet Union proposed to the West – the position of which in the Middle East had collapsed – a new solution in the Middle East. According to this proposal, the four Powers would conduct their policies on the following lines:

- The establishment of peace in the Middle and Near East through resolution of the issues under contention by peaceful means only, on the basis of negotiations.
- Non-intervention in the internal affairs of the countries of the region, respect for the sovereignty and independence of these countries.
- Renunciation of any attempt to draw these countries into military blocs of which the Great Powers are members.
- Closing the military bases and withdrawal of foreign armies from the territories of the countries of the Near and Middle East.
- Mutual renunciation of supplying arms to the countries of the region.

- Aid for the economic development of the countries of the region, with no conditions whatsoever – political, military or other – that are inconsistent with the honour and sovereignty of these countries.

A month after this proposal was raised, the Western Powers rejected them. The rejection of the Soviet Union's proposal created a comfortable situation for the USA, as France and Britain had scuttled what remained of their influence and authority in the region in the waters of the Suez Canal. If the participation of the Soviet Union in a solution to the problems of the region is not *wanted*, and Britain and France *cannot* participate, then the ground is prepared for a single custodianship. Thus was born the Eisenhower Doctrine.

According to this Doctrine:

1. The [American] President is authorized to help any state or group of states in the Middle East region and to cooperate with them, if they want it, to develop their economic independence, for the purpose of preserving their political independence.
2. The President is authorized to provide military aid to any country or group of countries in the region, if they want it.
3. The USA sees the preservation of the independence and integrity of the nations of the Middle East as vital for its national interest and for the peace of the world.
4. To this end the USA is prepared, if the President sees a need, to use its armed forces to help any state or group of states which request help against an armed attack from any country that is subjugated to international Communism, on the condition that this use be consistent with the USA's treaty commitments and the US Constitution.

(Resolution of the US Congress, 9/3/57)

So that there can be no doubt about the nature of the Doctrine itself, we quote Oregon Senator Wayne Morse's comments to a *Davar* correspondent:

This is a doctrine to protect the oil and the oil interests which glorify materialism, which glorifies reactionary states and does not defend the only democracy in the Middle East [the reference is to Israel!]. It will make solutions more remote instead of closer.

The *Davar* correspondent adds that the Senator raised his voice and exclaimed, "I will not vote to send our youth to defend the oil, without similar commitments by any other European countries."

Nevertheless, one of the two states that agreed to sign onto the "doctrine" was "the only democracy in the Middle East."

"We cannot be neutral"

On 3/5/57 Richards, Eisenhower's special emissary, came to Jerusalem as part of his tour of the Middle East, for the purpose of "selling" the Doctrine. Mr. Richards did not tarry long in Jerusalem. When he left it he had the Israeli government's reply. The Knesset, as usual, only discussed the subject *a month later*. At the opening of the discussion the Prime Minister rightly pointed out that "the fourth paragraph is the central one and the main innovation in this policy". (*Knesset Records*, 22/2040, 3/6/57)

In his speech, Ben-Gurion quoted the Israeli government's reply to the USA. Here is the main passage in the reply:

The government of Israel welcomes the support of the USA in guarding the independence of the states of the Middle East and the development of the economic capacity to realize their independence. (*Knesset Records*, 22/2041, 3/6/57)

In response, the US government stated:

The USA has registered Israel's declaration of 21/5/57 [Before the discussion in the Knesset ...] in which this government expresses its support for the goals of the Middle East policy that was outlined by President Eisenhower and ratified by a joint resolution of Congress on 9/3/57.

The first to participate in the debate in the Knesset was MK Begin (Herut), who criticized the phraseology in which the government wrapped its agreement:

... In my opinion this government is not distinguished by particular wisdom, but I assume that at least it understands this much, that many things can be said of the leaders of the Kremlin, except one – that they are stupid. The fine words that we in Jerusalem have written about the principles of the UN are not important to them. What is important to them is the emphasis that has been placed on this announcement in Washington. And the reply from Moscow came without delay. It immediately declared that this is an absolute, unreserved, unconditional alignment with Eisenhower's anti-Communist Doctrine, and it comprised a violation of the special commitment that was made by Israel's former Foreign Minister to the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union. (*Knesset Records* 22/2042, 3/6/57)

The “special commitment” Mr. Begin mentioned was Sharett's promise in August 1953: Israel will not join any alliance or grouping aimed at the Soviet Union.

MK Begin did not oppose adherence to the Doctrine, he only feared that the USA was not firm enough in its anti-Communism. In his criticism he attacked the fact that the Israeli government camouflaged its adherence to the Doctrine with phraseology about “preserving the peace in the region” and obedience to the UN. Mr. Begin concluded:

In the name of my friends I want to state that to the extent that the American Congress resolution means substantial resistance to Communist expansionism in the Middle East, we see this as positive. (Ibid., 22/2044)

Peretz Bernstein, the leader of the General Zionists, spoke after him. The rightwinger was suitably appreciative of the meaning of adherence to the Doctrine:

The government's decision to join what is called the Eisenhower Doctrine is indeed a decisive step, even if this step perhaps only formally concludes the development that has been going on for quite a long time now, but for all that, the official adherence to the Doctrine means, for the first time, an official choice between the two dominant groupings in the world. It is a decisive step. (Ibid. 22/2048)

He continued by expressing his agreement with this decisive step, but criticized the government for having taken it without consulting the Knesset. On that occasion he briefly surveyed Israel's political development:

At the beginning we wanted to remain neutral and non-alignment was spoken of ... As matters developed we too were made dependent, and I can express this in quantities: in today's foreign currency budget this dependence is expressed in approximately 200 million dollars a year. In the USA the money is given without any "strings attached" [these two words are in English – trans] but a state the economy of which is based on aid of such dimensions, even if it proved at a certain moment that it is not willing or able to forego it – which we have done – it is most clear to me that the freedom of choice and freedom of action of such a state is very limited.

In other states the opposition usually opposes the principles or political maneuvers of the government, while the coalition supports them. Not in Israel. In contradistinction to the parties of the right-wing opposition which supported the "decisive step", coalition parties

Mapam and Unity of Labour came out in opposition (verbally of course) to the decision. Yaakov Hazan gave a classic Mapam speech:

... Our policy stands at a crossroads. With the publication of our government's declaration and that of the US government regarding the visit of Mr. Richards, the special emissary of President Eisenhower, [Israel] has taken a path paved with dangers.

This exchange of declarations is liable to turn into the beginning of a steep and dangerous political slope. The evil in this resolution is likely to be very substantial, while the achievement – imaginary, the political success devoid of value – and the danger it entails is very weighty.

He concluded:

We will not support the exchange of declarations. We have decided to abstain from voting. Abstention is, in its essence and based on its content, a vote against. But our general evaluation of the situation in which the State of Israel finds itself in the international sphere and our desire not to burden it at this precise moment with a government crisis, our hope is that by our remaining in the government we will strengthen the hands of all those who want to avoid sliding down the slope of the Doctrine, the tasks of immigration and absorption that we are facing – all these tipped the balance. (Ibid. 22/2058, 3/6/57)

“Our abstention” was in fact “in its essence and based on its content” a typical Mapam submission to its coalitionist instincts. The pretext that its remaining in the Government would “strengthen the hands of those who seek to prevent the slide down the slope of the Doctrine” cannot withstand even the most superficial critique. Exactly the opposite is the case.

In his reply to the debaters, the Prime Minister commented:

The government, and I say this to Knesset Member Bernstein, is not neutral. We cannot be neutral. India is not neutral about what is done in South Africa, there are Indians in South Africa, and we cannot be neutral in our internal, psychological and ideological attitude to what is done in any state in the world because we are a global people.

I do not have to say that we cannot be neutral in the international political sense, because our security problem is not the security problem of all the states in the West or of all the states in the East. There is a quarrel between the USA and the Soviet Union, but the danger that we face stems from within the Middle East itself. The fact that we announce that we are neutral regarding the quarrel between the two global blocs will not change even to a small degree the danger we face from the rulers within the Middle East who are conspiring against our existence. (Ibid., 22/2075, 3/6/57)

In other words, in order to establish the *status quo* (“our security problem”), we must join the global bloc that supports its existence. Upon the conclusion of the debate three resolutions were submitted. The Maki resolution condemned the adherence to the Doctrine as an act of national betrayal; it was defeated by 100 votes to 5. The Herut resolution, which demanded a more strongly anti-Communist policy on the part of the government of Israel and the USA was defeated by 81 votes to 12 (12 abstentions).

The Government’s proposal – “The Knesset takes into consideration the Government’s declaration of 3/6/57” – was passed by 59 votes to 5 (Maki) and with the abstentions of 39 (including Mapam and Unity of Labour).

This entire discussion and the fact that Israel signed onto the Doctrine did not prevent the Government’s speechifiers and those of the various parties from continuing to declare from every public stage that “Israel does not belong to any bloc” and that “Israel has done all in its power to improve its relations with the Soviet Union.” Many Israelis accept these claims and are completely unaware of the fact that Israel has formally joined that overtly anti-Soviet Doctrine.

The allegation that the Doctrine was invalid in any case, and the whole business about signing on to it was unimportant, is baseless. If indeed the Doctrine is invalid, then it is

only because all the states of the Middle East oppose it and only Israel and Lebanon signed on to it. Moreover, the very *willingness* to sign an official document of that kind is a significant fact in foreign policy.

“The path is partnership and alliance”

Israel’s support for Western policy in the region was not restricted to signing documents. When a bitter anti-imperialist struggle broke out again in Jordan and Syria at the end of 1957, Turkey suddenly began to conduct military exercises along its border with Syria. King Hussein of Jordan barred an Israeli convoy from reaching the buildings of the Hebrew University in the demilitarized zone in Jerusalem, thereby affording an opportunity for Meir Argov (Chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee) and the organs of Herut and Unity of Labour to threaten to “break through by force”.

The *Haaretz* correspondent in the USA reported at the same time that:

The Israeli Foreign Minister made several extreme statements. One of them hinted that if a solution was not found to the deadlock between Israel and the Arab states, it would be impossible to avoid a world war [!]. Some in Israel were surprised by Mrs. Meir’s statements. (*Haaretz*, 15/10/57)

Once again the various threats from Turkey (Menderes), Iraq (Nuri Said) and Israel (Ben-Gurion) produced the opposite result from what the West had anticipated. Instead of submitting to the pressure, the Syrians struck a counter-blow. On 2/2/58 an Egyptian-Syrian union was created, which was called the United Arab Republic (UAR).

In response to the creation of the UAR, an Iraqi-Jordanian federation was created (15/2/58) on the initiative and under the protection of Britain, which lasted less than half a year. The anti-imperialist struggle in the region spread to Lebanon, which had theretofore been considered a secure bulwark for the West.

In June the struggle in Lebanon intensified to such a degree that Nuri Said requested in London that aid be rushed to his friend Camille Chamoun. That was on 23 June. Three weeks afterwards a crushing blow was struck against colonialism in the region.

On 14 July 1958 the revolution broke out in Iraq. The event was sudden, the change was absolute and rapid, and the impression it produced was overwhelming. Said's regime was so hated that the revolution took place without bloodshed (except for the hanging of Nuri and his few friends) and the newsreaders in the radio stations were not even replaced, but simply began to read different material in the broadcasts. The day after the revolution in Iraq the US Marines landed in Lebanon, and afterwards the British landed in Jordan.

The headlines in the Israeli press on 15/7/58 reflected Israel's official response to the event:

Davar: "What is not done in the next 24 hours will certainly never be done. We must now increase our security alertness and be prepared for any mission that events may impose on us."

Lamerhav: "The transformations occurring before our eyes are completely undermining the balance of power and the system of treaties that were signed upon the conclusion of the War of Independence, and Israel cannot stand aside in the face of conflicts that affect its fate and its future."

Herut: "There is only one power which can save the Middle East and humanity from a new danger – the danger of death caused by transferring the Free World to Khrushchev and his friends without a single shot being fired, and that power is Israel."

Only *Kol Ha'am* demanded, as usual, that "Israel must not get involved in a new warlike adventure", (17/7/58), and the weekly *Haolam Hazeh* shared this view. No one disagreed with the view that the revolution signified a blow to the West and another big victory for the forces of anti-imperialism. Of course, for this very reason, official circles

in Israel saw the revolution as a disaster and the death of Nuri Said as the loss of an ally. The eulogies they gave for him were very similar to the ones they gave for Abdullah.

The day after the revolution Britain asked the government of Israel for permission to fly aircraft to Jordan over Israel's territory, in order to land an army there. Before the requested permission was granted the aircraft began to cross, and of course they were not shot down by the IDF, even though they officially violated the sovereignty of the State.

On 17/7/58 the Government sent two notes to the government of Britain.

1. A note of protest against the violation of Israel's airspace.
2. A note indicating agreement to the crossing of aircraft.

The flights continued for a week.

The Chief-of-Staff Moshe Dayan openly expressed his opinion when he told a correspondent for *Herut*:

We should go into the international marketplace and be partners on the basis of give-and-take. We should not rely on one-sided protection or philanthropic feelings. In my opinion, the right path is partnership and alliance – alliance and reciprocity ... The State cannot create a network of reciprocal relations, if it wants to be neutral, refuses to permit the passage of foreign aircraft over its territory and declares that the IDF will only defend Nahalal and Negba. In short, if it is not willing to get its hands dirty ... (*Herut*, 16/11/58)

In this regard two proposals were put on the Knesset agenda. MK Begin (*Herut*) proposed:

1. To launch in Israel's name an information campaign for the rapid evacuation of British units from the Eastern Land of Israel [i.e. Jordan].

2. To act energetically and with initiative to sign a mutual aid treaty between Israel and France, and we express the hope that at this time at least, the government does not follow its usual rule according to which the Herut's ideas are not good because they are Herut's ideas.
3. To take the initiative to raise the demand before international public opinion that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Hammarskjöld, who is hostile to Israel, who has proved that he is on the side of subversive aggression in the Middle East and even encourages it, be removed from his duties.
4. The Government's initiative to acquire additional vital equipment for our armed forces on land, air and sea should be seen in a positive light. We anticipate and hope that these efforts will bear fruit.

(Knesset Records, 24/2338, 21/5/58)

The other proposal, which was submitted by MK Vilner (Maki), called upon the Knesset:

1. To demand the withdrawal of the American invaders from Lebanon and the British from Jordan.
2. To condemn the Ben-Gurion government's support for the colonialist invaders in any form whatsoever.
3. To express solidarity with the struggle of the nations of Asia for national liberation from the foreign yoke and from internal agents of colonialism.
4. To express support for the Soviet initiative for an immediate convening of a summit conference of the five Great Powers regarding a peaceful solution to the conflict in the Middle East, in order to avoid war.

(Knesset Records, 24/2341, 21/5/58)

Ben-Gurion, in rejecting these proposals, referred to the situation as follows:

The coup in Iraq is, without a doubt, one of the gravest events that has occurred since the Second World War, and the possible strengthening of the Egyptian tyrant and his besieging of the State of Israel constitute a great danger. The first thing that

we must do is to repel this danger as much as possible. I say “as much as possible” because it is not completely dependent on us. The other thing that we must do is: during the time in which we can repel this danger, increase our strength and acquire more friends. (*Knesset Records* 24/2341, 21/7/58)

God help the state that saw in the Iraqi revolution a “grave event” and not an encouraging development. Our era is necessarily fraught with more such “grave events”, and many more disappointments for such a policy. Indeed “it does not entirely depend on us”. Israeli policy cannot in the long run prevent the occurrence of internal transformations in the Arab states. Its influence over events in Arab states is very limited.

The policies of “increasing our strength” (more arms for the IDF) and “acquiring more friends” (being drawn into alliances with the West) over the course of 12 years have not succeeded in alleviating the Israeli-Arab conflict or in preventing internal changes in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon or Iraq. *This policy is going from failure to failure, on its way to the decisive failure.*

Only on 8/8/58 was a special session of the Knesset called for a discussion of the over-flights. MK Bernstein (General Zionists) commented:

... first, the matter of the flights. I want to mention that, whether or not permission was required, the public at any rate did not understand the exchange of permissions and prohibitions, which of course are not without significant political meaning in foreign relations. (*Knesset Records* 24/2620)

MK Vinler (Maki) condemned the flights and added:

The question is not how to thwart the Arab “encirclement”, but how the State of Israel will live and develop as an independent state in the surroundings in which it lives. That is the question. (*Ibid.*, 24/2622)

He proposed a resolution:

1. To withdraw permission for the passage of the aircraft.
2. A government commitment not to launch any initiated war.

As usual, this proposal was rejected.

“A firm ally”

It remains for us to remind the reader of Israel’s votes in the UN alongside France and against the nations of Africa on the question of the atomic explosion in the Sahara, the question of Algeria, its votes against Lumumba and the anti-imperialist bloc on the question of Congo, as well as the IDF’s raid on Tawfiq village in Syria at the beginning of February 1960.

In order to economize in the description of the above-mentioned matters, we will quote a passage from the influential French newspaper *Le Monde*, which was written on the occasion of Mr. Ben-Gurion’s trip to the Western capitals.

Western public opinion in its entirety cannot but see that the State of Israel represents for Europe and the United States one of their firmest allies in the Middle East. Israeli policy is conducted on lines parallel to those of the Common Market, the Atlantic Treaty, *the political and military strategy of the West*, even though in their fear of provoking the sensitive Arabs, Western governments hesitate to admit openly to this identity of outlook and interests. (*Le Monde*, 11/3/60. Emphasis ours)

This newspaper cannot be suspected, God forbid, of hatred for Israel; it simply needs no camouflage and writes things that are known to every politician in the world. Only in Israel are things of this kind denied, even if “between ourselves” everyone is willing to admit that they are true.

In reply to a passage in Ben-Gurion’s speech of 5/4/61 to a gathering of Mapai election workers, the Voice of Cairo broadcast:

Israel voted in 1952 against the independence of Tunisia, in 1953 against the independence of Morocco. It also voted against the independence of Arab Algeria in 1956, 1957, 1958. Its vote with France caused the failure of the motion for a resolution that had been proposed by the states of Africa regarding the independence of Algeria. In 1956 Israel supported France against a proposal for a resolution the Afro-Asian proposed resolution that called for giving independence to Algeria. In March 1959 Israel voted against a proposal for a resolution to conduct a free referendum under UN control on the matter of the independence of French Cameroon. As well it abstained more than once, in the vote on the proposal to give independence to Tanganyika and Rwanda-Urundi, within 5 years. Last year Israel voted against a resolution to condemn the French nuclear tests in the Sahara. Israel voted against a resolution that condemned racial discrimination in South Africa. It played an active role in realizing the plan of Belgium and its agents in Congo. (Voice of Cairo, 6/4/61)

Needless to say, this policy does not inspire friendship among the antiimperialists. The struggle is harsh and it is impossible to take an ambivalent. Whoever supports the atomic explosion in the Sahara is necessarily going to have a quarrel with Seko Toure. Whoever votes in the UN in favour of Kasabubu and against Lumumba necessarily has a quarrel with Nkrumah. The consequences were not slow in coming.

When the Prime Minister of Guinea hosted a party at the UN in November of 1959, he invited all 82 member-states of the UN, except for one – Israel. Israel was also not invited to the celebration of “African Liberation Day”, and deliberately so. The sharpest response was heard in the resolutions of the Casablanca Conference (7/1/61) in which it was stated:

The Conference notes with dismay that Israel has always stood on the side of the imperialists every time there was a need to make an important decision on vital problems related to African countries and especially regarding Algeria, Congo, and the nuclear tests. Therefore the Conference condemns Israel as an instrument in the

service of imperialism and neo-colonialism, not only in the Middle East but also in Africa and Asia.

Who condemns? Nkrumah condemns, Modibo Keita condemns, Seko Toure condemns. Does this not signify the destruction of Israel's "African policy"? Indeed the setback in Suez did not bring about any change in Israel's foreign policy. Is another setback needed, a much more serious one, in order to bring about a change?

"There is no reason to obfuscate"

If Israeli policy continued on its path, the West continued with its courtship of the Arabs, especially after it became clear that there was no possibility of subduing them by force.

The USA ratified loans to the UAR, including a loan for the development of the Suez Canal. Israel sent the ships Inge Toft and Astypalea to the Canal on the eve of the ratification of these loans, knowing very well that they would not be permitted to pass through the Canal. The timing was intended to force the USA to condition the giving of a loan on a demand that the Suez Canal be open to Israel as well. But the government of the USA ignored the detention of the ships and ratified the loans unconditionally.

Moreover, it became clear that the American fleet refrained from signing contracts for the transportation of oil for it with American ship-owners who did business with Israel, thereby recognizing the Arab boycott of Israel, submitting to it and even aiding it. (see *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 21/1/60).

When this practice was cancelled under pressure from the US press, and before the cries of triumph in Israel had yet died down, the American Department of Agriculture clarified that *the UAR, which receives food surplus from the US, can refuse to give its ratification to a transportation contract for any ship that is on the Arab countries' "blacklist"*.

Public opinion in Israel was by now accustomed to such measures by the US. But many were astonished when it became clear that the "eternal friend" – France, was also taking this path. At the beginning of October 1959 the French Renault company suddenly

cancelled the contract for assembling cars in Israel in partnership with the Kaiser Frazer company. It was a unilateral, unexpected, and illegal cancellation.

The Kaiser Frazer company is about to prove that behind the breaking of the agreement between Renault and Kaiser Frazer stands especially mainly the *French foreign ministry*, which according to its orders the supply of parts of Renault cars to Israel was cancelled. (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 20/10/59. Emphasis ours)

The newspaper's political analyst explained:

The Algeria problem has reached a delicate stage, and France needs the support of all the Arab moderates. (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 18/10/59)

When Israel hinted that it was inclined to delay the acquisition of a French ship in the wake of the Renault affair, France for its part hinted that all any economic reprisal would be considered a hostile act. The Renault affair was not unusual. It was followed by the Air France affair and the France-Israel cultural accord affair. The Israeli airline was about to sign a contract with Air France for the purpose of coordinating the movement of passengers on transatlantic routes. The contract had already been initialled when the representative of the French company suddenly requested to cancel it. *Haaretz* commented on 1/1/60: "This is a blow for Israel, and there is no reason to obfuscate this impression." The commentary continued:

In recent times, signs that the French believe that they do not need to take into consideration economic interests that are most important to Israel have proliferated. That non-consideration leaves a bitter taste, and we would not be fulfilling our public duty if we sought to sweeten the bitter pill. The French government is very sensitive to every matter in which it sees a vital interest on the political stage. Israel has the right to be no less sensitive to its vital interests, and submission to the Arab boycott is a severe blow to us.

France also hesitated on the final signing with Israel of a cultural agreement that was initialled in July 1959, for fear the French schools in Egypt would be boycotted. Only after much exertion and the opening of the schools in Egypt in October, was the accord finally signed at the end of November.

There is therefore a reasonable basis for assuming that the “friendship” with France is no different in nature than the “friendship” with the US. And it is nearly certain that any “friendship” of that kind with another Western power, such as Adenauer’s Germany for example, will be of the same type. Those who sow “unfortunate” policies end up harvesting rotten fruit.

Chapter 9

How is the Problem to be Solved?

“The Arab movement’s hatred of Israel”

Before we examine the various Israeli proposals for solving the Israeli-Arab conflict, we must first clarify its nature, by answering the following questions:

- What are the causes of the conflict?
- Who is the other side in the conflict?
- What is under contention today?

The attempt to answer the first question reveals a surprising fact. The view is widely held in Israel, both among the public and by most of the political parties, that there is in fact no conflict at all in the regular sense of the word. That view was well expressed by MK Bernstein, leader of the General Zionists, who said on one occasion:

There is no conflict here, there is one side that wants to destroy the other side and another side that does not want to be destroyed; that is not a conflict. A conflict exists when two states argue over a certain city, like Poland and Lithuania arguing over Vilnius. That is a conflict. Here there is no conflict. We would do well to rid ourselves of that idea once and for all. (*Knesset Records* 21/80, 16/10/55)

According to this view, there is no substantial bone of contention between the Israeli side and the Arab side; there is only the Arab desire to destroy Israel. The desire to destroy is seen as the result of aspirations for revenge, inflamed feelings and the primitive instincts of the Arab masses, whose leaders channel them in accordance with their political needs. Mr. Bernstein is far from the only one who holds that view. We could quote hundreds of passages in the same spirit. We will settle for only a few of them.

The political correspondent for *Haaretz*, Mr. Eliyahu Salpeter, commented:

A reality that has shaped Israel's foreign policy to a not inconsiderable degree is the hostility that the Arab states harbour for Israel. Not only do they see themselves in a state of war with Israel, but they desire its physical destruction. There is no parallel to such a situation in the entire world, not even in relations between the two Blocs. (*Haaretz*, 6/2/61)

These are the words of a “moderate”, “thoughtful” and “responsible” journalist, in a newspaper that abhors extremism.

When, after the Suez failure, certain circles in Israel came around to the view that the conflict does not admit of a solution by force and that it is necessary to seek a solution through compromise and mutual concessions, they were attacked on that very pretext. In that regard, the *Maariv* writer Shmuel Shnitzer wrote a long programmatic article against members of Semitic Action.⁴⁶ Shnitzer wrote:

The question presents itself: is the Nasserist movement for its part prepared to come to an understanding with Israel? Would it be enough for us to make a political change in order to “integrate into the Semitic region”? The problem is that all that preaching for rapprochement with Nasserism is based on one big illusion: that the Arabs' hatred of Israel is a rational phenomenon and it is possible to remove it from the world if we remove its causes ...

The hatred of the Arab movement and of the peoples of Asia in general [!]for Israel is not a rational hatred that results from our policies towards the Western Powers. It seizes upon our “imperialism” when we walk hand-in-hand with the Western Powers, and it remains unchanged when we wage a life-and-death struggle

⁴⁶ A small political organization established in the 1950s by a group of Jewish Israeli intellectuals, including Uri Avnery, Yaakov Yeredor and Nathan Yellin-Mor, which called for the integration of Israel into the Middle East through the rejection of Zionism and the adoption of a “Hebrew” identity based more on the (Semitic) Hebrew language than on the Jewish religion, and the self-identification of the “Hebrew” society as an indigenous part of the Semitic zone of the Middle East – the other part of which was composed of speaker of the (Semitic) Arabic language, rather than as residents of the homeland of world Jewry - trans.

with Western imperialism. (“Peace with Nasserism?” Maariv, 25/7/58. Emphasis ours)

That is a clear expression of a view to which many in Israel – including people who oppose the official policy towards the Arabs – subscribe.

As we have indicated, Shnitzer’s article was written against members of Semitic Action, and the passage that we have quoted was also directed against them. It is interesting to note, therefore, that the platform of Semitic Action itself stated in that regard:

The chasm that today separates Israel from the Arab states was not created by a specific concrete problem but rather it is the legacy of mutual hatred and mutual distrust and fear. (*The Hebrew Manifesto* September 1958, p. 22)

It is surprising that both those who propose a solution to solve the conflict and those who reject that solution share the same basic assumption about the nature of the conflict. This perception of the irrationality of the Israeli-Arab conflict, which is widely accepted among the Israeli public, is a very strong prop for ruling circles in Israel. If people like Bernstein and Avnery [who endorsed the view promoted in “The Hebrew Manifesto” – trans.] who deal in politics, who have some idea of the facts and what has been occurring in this country from 1948 to this day – hold that view, then no wonder people who do not concern themselves with politics and who lack precise information on the recent past believe it to be true.

The idea regarding the Arabs’ pathological hatred of Israel is not coincidental. It is the direct result of a combination of half-truths from official propaganda. If one honestly believes that in 1948, when the Jews of Palestine won their independence, “seven Arab states” suddenly attacked them for no reason; if one honestly believes that the IDF raids across the border were really reprisal for acts of sabotage and plunder by the Arabs; if one frequently reads in the newspaper about Arab declarations calling for the elimination of the State of Israel, whereas the government of Israel frequently announces its desire for peace; if one hears that the Arabs aspire to “restore the rights of the Arabs of

Palestine” and believes that this means the destruction of Israel – then it is no wonder that person accepts the view that the Arabs’ hatred of Israel is pathological, eternal and independent of anything; that the problem is not political but psychological.

The official half-truths about the history of the Israel-Arab conflict cumulatively add up to a new, very dangerous concept. For, if the Arabs’ hatred is not dependent on anything, what use is there in changing Israeli policy, what reason is there for a policy of compromise and willingness for concessions? After all, the hatred will remain; the appetite for destruction will not pass. It is not a coincidence that this idea is distributed so energetically by all the official propaganda organs and by all those who oppose compromise and concessions.

In order to examine this approach, it is necessary to examine once again the details of the official version of the nature of the conflict, and to compare it with the facts that we have mentioned in the previous chapters. For the purpose of clarity and brevity we will represent the essence of the arguments side-by-side in the following table:

The official version	The facts
1. The Israeli-Arab conflict is the consequence of the Arab invasion of Israel in 1948.	1. The conflict is nothing but the new form of the old “Palestine problem”
2. The War of Independence in 1948 was the Arabs’ war against the Jews.	2. The War of Independence was a war fought by the Jews of Palestine against British colonialism that was helped by the armies of Farouk, Abdullah, Nuri Said, and others.
3. The refugee problem was created by the Arabs themselves.	3. The refugee problem was created by the British, their Arab agents, and by the government of Israel.
4. Israel is not guilty of the fact that the UN Partition Plan was not implemented and that the Arabs of Palestine were left without a state.	4. The government of Israel and Abdullah divided the state of the Arabs of Palestine between themselves. The governments of Britain, Transjordan and Israel knowingly violated the UN resolution.
5. The other side in the conflict is the Arabs in general and the Egyptians in particular.	5. The other side in the conflict is the Palestinian Arab people. The government of Egypt became a principal adversary only after it began to conduct a resolutely antiimperialist policy.

6. The “reprisal actions” were a response to the murderous raids of the <i>Fedayeen</i> .	6. The “reprisal actions” were generally subject to the interests of the colonial Powers in the region and constituted the application of pressure on Arab states.
7. The Suez-Sinai war was intended to prevent the Arabs from destroying Israel. The cooperation with Britain and France was coincidental.	7. The Suez-Sinai war was intended to bring down Nasser’s regime, to return colonialism to the Middle East, to occupy the Canal and to “liberate territory of the Homeland that had been conquered by the enemy”, to impose a new <i>status quo</i> on the Arabs and to impose conditions of peace on them. The cooperation with France and Britain was intentional.
8. Israeli foreign policy aspires for peace with the Arab states, whereas they declare their desire to destroy Israel.	8. Israeli foreign policy aspires to perpetuate the <i>status quo</i> , whereas the present Arab policy aspires for a solution based on the UN resolutions.

“There are two peoples”

The facts that have been quoted in the previous chapters and summarized in the table suffice to refute the claims that the Israeli-Arab conflict stems from psychological, emotional, moral, religious, economic or geopolitical causes. All these are, at the most, certain aspects of the problem; but the essence of the matter is that we are faced with a conflict that is completely *political* in nature, the existence of which is derived from nothing other than the present *status quo*: the denial of the right of self-determination to the Arabs of Palestine.

Supporters of the *status quo* do not believe in the existence of a Palestinian Arab nation. This is one of the foundation stones of their outlook. In their opinion there is no such nation in existence and therefore by no means are they denying the right of self-determination to anybody. They deliberately speak of “the Arabs” in general, in a simplified formulation, and take care not to use the term “Palestinian [*falastiniyun* or *falastiniyin*, or *filastiniyun* or *filastiniyin* – trans.] Arabs”. They claim that the Palestinian Arabs’ attachment to their homeland is the consequence of Egyptian or other incitement, and that the right to self-determination of the Arabs of Palestine, if such a thing exists at all, can be realized in any Arab country.

Of course whoever accepts that version will have difficulty understanding why there has not yet been a peace agreement between Israel and its neighbours. In their opinion there is no substantial conflict and the tensions that exist are nothing but the consequence of “the Arabs’” pathological hatred of Israel. Those who agree with this view should be reminded of one fundamental fact, which MK Lavon flung in the face of MK Begin in 1949:

I want to tell Mr. Begin something that perhaps will not be easy for him to hear. In the reality of this country – Palestine, there are two peoples, and there have been two peoples, and these two peoples have two determinative political ideologies ...
(*Knesset Records*, 1/69, 8/3/49. Emphasis ours)

There were Palestinian Arabs, there still are Palestinian Arabs; their right to self-determination has not yet been realized, their national aspirations have not yet been satisfied. That is the root of the conflict. Not only was it hard for Mr. Begin to hear these words; they were also hard for all to hear who deny the right of the Arabs of Palestine to self-determination to hear, be they Jews or Arabs.

The problem is not only the fact that many of the Arabs of Palestine lost their property, their houses and their lands as a consequence of the 1948 war and became refugees. It is an important part of the problem, but the main point is that they were left without a homeland, without being able to satisfy their national aspirations. The right of self-determination was denied them after a conspiracy between Britain, Transjordan and Israel at the very moment when political situation could have allowed them to realize it. Not only were *people* left without a home, *farmers* without land, but a *nation* was left without being able to satisfy its national aspirations.

The violation of the UN Resolution, (at the time the best solution to the complex situation that existed in Palestine), created a very serious political problem in addition to legal, moral and economic ones. It is precisely that problem that is the main reason for the Israeli-Arab problem; as long as it is left without a solution, hostile relations and tensions will continue to prevail between Israel and its neighbours, and the situation will continue to be explosive.

This does not mean that the solution to the problem has to be based precisely on the details of the UN Partition Resolution. But it must take into account the existence and the rights of the *two* peoples in Palestine.

Israeli spokesmen represent the matter as if all that was needed for a solution to the conflict is the signing of a peace treaty between Israel and the Arab states. They are ready at any moment to sign such a treaty. To them it is taken for granted that the ceasefire lines are Israel's final borders, that the Palestinian refugees are and will be residents of the states in which they are currently located. In return for the Arab states' signature on a peace treaty, Israel's politicians are prepared to promise them compliance with that treaty on Israel's part and no more.

Of course, the Arab states (apart from Jordan!) and first and foremost the Palestinian refugees, who constitute a very influential actor in Arab politics, are not at all interested in hearing about such a solution, which would nail the coffin on their national aspirations. The very fact that a peace treaty based on the *status quo* has not been signed during all the years of the existence of the State of Israel, despite the Israeli government's aspirations to achieve it, not to mention the fact that the chances of achieving such a "solution" in the future are diminishing every year, gives one pause.

At first glance, Israel's propaganda situation is better. Spokesmen declare day and night that their desire is peace, for a "realistic solution" based on the facts that exist today, whereas the Arabs refuse to sign such an agreement. Every child knows that those who are interested in peace are "good" and those who refuse to make peace are "bad".

But the existing situation appears that way only at first glance. A politician who is familiar with the problem knows very well how to distinguish between proposals for a "realistic solution" and proposals for a "just solution", between proposals that are based on the current *status quo*, which constitutes an open violation of the United Nations General Assembly's Resolution of 29 November 1947, and proposals based on that Resolution.

The Arab position (since the Bandung Conference) is in fact much better. It is based on UN resolutions that condemn Israel for violating these resolutions. They are weighty claims, allegations that are decisive in any debate carried out at the UN. The UN cannot

recognize the violation of resolutions that it passed, especially if they are basic resolutions.

“I never called for the destruction of Israel”

It is important to emphasize that after the Suez War, Arab propaganda, especially Egyptian propaganda, continued to be based on the UN Partition Resolution. In the newspaper *Al-Bulisi* [as transcribed from the authors’ original Hebrew – trans.] of January 1957 the famous American journalist Dorothy Thompson related about her interview with Nasser:

I asked him directly: “Do you intend to destroy Israel? It has been said that is your aim.”

“I defy Mollet or Selwyn Lloyd to quote one word I have ever said to the effect that I intend to destroy Israel.”⁴⁷

On 11/6/57 Nasser replied to the questions of William Attwood, a correspondent for the *Daily Express*:

Question: will you destroy Israel or do you want peace? Which solution do you choose?

Reply: I never called for the destruction of Israel. A comprehensive solution must take into account the rights of the Arab refugees and the problem of the borders. On the Israeli side it must take into account the use of the Suez Canal and the Eilat Gulf.⁴⁸ I do not know when such a comprehensive solution will be possible.

⁴⁷ I was unable to track down “*Al-Bulisi*” (אל בוליס, in Hebrew letters). But Dorothy Thompson’s interview with Nasser was published in the *Waterloo* [Iowa] *Daily Courier* on 31 December 1956, under the heading “Nasser Denies That His Goal Is Creation of Arab Empire”. The English version of the excerpt from the interview with Nasser quoted above, which was presumably taken from a Hebrew translation of an Arabic version of that interview in “*Al-Bulisi*”, is quoted from that US newspaper. It corresponds exactly to the “*Al-Bulisi*” version quoted in Hebrew in the original Hebrew version of this book – trans.

⁴⁸ This interview was translated into Hebrew and published in a Hebrew newspaper. In the original, Nasser presumably said “Gulf of Aqaba” rather than “Eilat Gulf”, the latter being an Israeli appellation – trans.

Question: Were Israel's actions last fall (the Suez War) not justified in view of your claim that there has always been a state of war between Israel and Egypt?

Reply: We stopped at declarations, but they carried out a real attack. There is a difference between the two.

Question: You emphatically claim that Israel must adhere to the UN resolutions on matters such as the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, but at the same time you refuse to comply with the Security Council resolution of 1951 regarding freedom of passage for ships through the Suez Canal. How can you justify that double standard?

Reply: There is a big difference between the two resolutions. The 1951 resolution is in fact a judicial opinion regarding Egyptian territory whereas the other resolution was an order to an aggressor to withdraw from territory it had invaded.

Question: The Gaza Strip is an additional zone of tension, does Egypt intend to keep that part of Palestine permanently?

Reply: Gaza is an integral part of the refugee story we spoke of earlier. We will remain there until that problem is resolved.

Question: In an interview you gave in March you accused Israel of aspiring to conquer Egypt and to turn your people into refugees and you added: "We will have to take dramatic steps to defend our security from that threat." What dramatic steps did you have in mind? Your words were interpreted as meaning that you intended a preventive war.

Reply: Are you referring to a preventive war as understood by the newspapers of the United States? I do not believe in aggression, the world cannot allow itself any war that could turn into the Third World War, the danger is too great.

Question: In the United States you are also being criticized because it appears that you have no intention of resolving your differences with Israel by peaceful means. It is a fact that Israel offered negotiations on all the issues under contention, nearly every year since 1948. Are you not holding to the position that you declared on 14/10/55, that "there is no point in peace talks with Israel"?

Reply: I said that when the Israelis were carrying out a raid in the Gaza Strip after one of Ben-Gurion's famous "peace proposals". Exactly the same thing was repeated in the fall of last year (October 1956), when seven days before the attack on us he declared that Israel would not commit any aggressive act. Is it possible to negotiate with a man like that? Please take note – the Palestine problem is essentially the problem of a people that was expelled from its home and its country, the main problem is the problem of compensation and the return of the refugees.

(From *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 11-12/6/57)

On 2/7/57, in an interview on British television Nasser said:

We cannot separate the problem of the passage of Israeli shipping from the overall Palestine problem. We have noticed that the Western Powers are focussing now on the passage of Israeli shipping at Suez while setting aside all the other problems. According to the Constantinople Accord of 1888, Egypt has the right to defend its territory. In conformity with that Accord we have barred Israeli ships from the Canal since 1948 ... In our view the problem is not whether we recognize Israel or not. Our goal is to restore to the Palestinian people their rights, their homes and their property ... Ben-Gurion spoke of peace only in order to conceal his aggressive policy. Need I remind you that seven days before the Tripartite Aggression against our country Ben-Gurion gave a speech in which he spoke of peace? Last year too, Ben-Gurion announced one evening that he wanted to confer with me, and before dawn on the following day his armies attacked one of our positions.

On 11/6/57 the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Abdel Khalek Hassouna, said in an interview with a UP correspondent:

It is in Israel's interest to agree to the UN resolutions on this matter [Palestine]. It could be that after another two years a solution like this will no longer be possible. The State of Israel has become a reality that the Arab states will be unable to avoid recognizing after peace is achieved.

In a 19/12/57 interview with Nasser by Pierre Cot, the following was stated, among other things:

Question: Does Egypt's policy towards Israel not stand in contradiction to neutralism?

Reply: I do not think that Egypt's policy towards Israel contradicts neutralism. The problem of relations between the Arab world and the State of Israel is in fact the problem of Israel's expansion into the Arab world. That is a very delicate problem, which only time and history will be able fully to solve. At the moment we must restrict ourselves to efforts to improve the situation step by step.

Question: What is the Egyptian government's position on this matter?

Reply: It is the same position that has been taken by all the Arab states – both the neutral and the pro-Western. It was not we who created the problem that was caused by the creation of the State of Israel, but the UN – it is therefore the UN that should solve it.

President Nasser reminded me that he had frequently declared (and had done it again on the eve of his conversation with me in his speech of 5/12/57) that he was willing to recognize the State of Israel and to guarantee the borders that had been set for it when it was established by the UN, but at the same time he wants to see a solution to the problem of 800,000 Palestinian refugees who had been expelled from their homes and who live in appalling suffering.

Question: Do you believe that the government of Israel will be able to accept these proposals?

Reply: I hope so. It seems to me that it is in its interest to do that– as long as in return for its agreement, it receives international guarantees for its borders. But it will not do that unless it stops acting as an instrument in the Middle East for certain Western states. I have always been sorry that the Israeli government does not integrate more into the family of Middle Eastern nations, as it is called. For those nations are solidaric and have the same interests; to conserve their independence, to enhance their economic development. An Israeli policy based on neutralism and the nurturing of solidarity between all the nations of the Middle East would in my

opinion be the best – and maybe only! – means of ensuring the future of the State of Israel. (Published in *Kol Ha'am*, 8/1/58)

These reflections are a far cry from appeals to “throw the Jews into the sea”. How many Israelis know about these moderate declarations of Nasser’s? Why does it seem to most Israelis that the Arabs only declare their desire to eliminate the State of Israel? Why does the Israeli press publish every half-sentence by every mid-level civil servant in the Arab world which calls for the destruction of Israel, whereas moderate statements by a man like Nasser are generally concealed?

The answer to these questions lies in the official Israeli approach to the *status quo*.

“Egypt should immediately leave the Gaza Strip” – and Israel?

Those who strive with all their strength to perpetuate the *status quo*, while ignoring the existence and rights of the Arabs of Palestine, see in every statement that mentions the UN resolution of November 1947 as a call for the “destruction of Israel”.

Thus, for example, when the British Prime Minister Anthony Eden hinted on 9/11/55 in the Guildhall speech that there should be a compromise between the borders that were assigned to the Jewish state in the UN resolution and the ceasefire lines that were established in 1949, that is, the conceding of some of the current territory of Israel, Ben-Gurion characterized that, in the Knesset on 15/11/55, as “crushing the state of Israel”, *and that was not a demand to return to the Partition borders!* Ben-Gurion referred to the Bandung Conference resolutions, which called for a solution to the Palestine problem *by peaceful means*, on the basis of the UN resolutions, as a “sanctimonious accusation.”

It is a fact that everyone who calls for a solution to the Palestine problem in accordance with the UN resolutions, thereby recognizes not only the right of the *Arabs* of Palestine to self-determination, but also the right of the *Jews* of Palestine, that is, the State of Israel, to self-determination. But this fact does not at all interest the proponents of the *status quo*. On the contrary, it even aggravates them, because it is a moderate position, well-grounded politically and legally and it can easily obtain international support. It is much easier for the proponents of the *status quo* to hear Arab declarations

about the “destruction of Israel”, against which it is very easy to struggle, they have no moral or judicial justification, international public opinion rejects them emphatically and moreover, every such declaration serves as proof that there is no possibility of compromise with the Arabs and that the present situation must be perpetuated.

It is well known that proposals to “liberate Palestine from the Zionists” are often heard in the Arab world, much as in Israel we often hear proposals to “liberate territory of the homeland that is held by the enemy”, but this does not excuse the government of Israel from discussing Arab compromise proposals even if such proposals are rare.

The Israel Government *Yearbook* for 1959-60 includes a 50-page introduction written by Mr. Ben-Gurion, in which the Prime Minister surveys Israel’s foreign policy and security problems since 1948. The Prime Minister did not consider it necessary to discuss even one Arab compromise proposal in his long and detailed piece. We have mentioned at least 20 such proposals, but not one of them was considered by the Prime Minister to be worthy of mention in his article – even if only in passing, in order to dismiss it. Instead, he took pains to quote Egyptian declarations calling for the elimination of Israel.

In his reply to Mr. Eden’s Guildhall speech, Ben-Gurion said:

If Sir Anthony Eden does not see the 1949 ceasefire accords as being binding on all sides, and if he is correct to say that it is unjust to disregard UN resolutions, then Egypt should leave the Gaza Strip immediately, and Transjordan should withdraw from all of western Palestine [“Eretz Israel” – trans.]. (*Knesset Records* 15/11/55, *Shenaton ha-Memshalah* [*Government Yearbook*] 1959-1960, p. 9)

Mr. Ben-Gurion’s claims regarding Egypt and Jordan are correct, but we would ask the Prime Minister: In the event that Egypt evacuates the entire Gaza Strip, and Transjordan (normally he calls it “Jordan”)⁴⁹ evacuates all of western Palestine, will he himself be

⁴⁹ The Kingdom of Transjordan (in Arabic, *mamlakat sharqi al-urdun*, literally, “The Kingdom of the East of the Jordan”) changed its name to the Kingdom of Jordan in 1949 (in Arabic, *al-mamlaka al-urduniya al-hashimiya* – literally “The Hashemite Jordanian Kingdom”, but normally called in English “The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan”), after it had acquired territory west of the Jordan River (the West Bank, to which Ben-Gurion referred in the article under discussion as being territory of the “western Land of Israel” under Jordanian occupation) in the first Arab-Israel war – trans.

prepared to evacuate the territories he captured in 1949 and return to the Partition borders?

Does it not stand to reason that he inestimably prefers a situation in which the Egyptians are in the Strip, the Transjordanians hold part of the West Bank and he himself adheres to the *status quo*? What wonder is it that the government of Israel often comes out with proposals to sign a peace treaty with the Arab states? Israel “came out ahead” in the 1948 war, and all it wants is to receive other side’s ratification of these winnings.

It is not accurate to say that the Israeli peace declarations are nothing but hypocrisy or exercises in diversion, and that Ben-Gurion merely wants another war. The truth is that the government is genuinely interested in “peace”: “peace” as understood on Israel’s terms: ratification by the Arab side of the situation as it exists today; that is, recognition of the present ceasefire lines as borders recognized by both sides and recognition that the Arab refugees will remain in the countries where they are presently located.

At the time of the Suez war, when the IDF reached the banks of the Canal, Israel also announced its desire for peace with Egypt; a “peace”, of course, that would recognize the *new* ceasefire line as a border with the final agreement of both sides. Who does not want peace with their neighbours after they have taken land from them?

It is very nice to declare before the whole world your eternal longing for peace. It gets you sympathy in public opinion, and presents your country in a positive light; even those who disagree with Israeli policy find it difficult to explain this seemingly-positive phenomenon. To them it looks like a sleight-of-hand.

The solution to the puzzle is simple. In 1948 the government of Israel seized about 5,000 square kilometres that had been allocated to the Arab Palestinian state, it benefitted from the fact that hundreds of thousands of Arabs fled (for reasons that we have discussed above) from its territory, leaving behind them everything they had; now Israel has an interest in procuring the Arab side’s ratification of and agreement to this situation.

In moments of candour, Israel’s leaders are willing to admit that justice is not on their side:

Let us not cast accusations at the murderers. Who are we to complain of their intense hatred of us? For eight years they have been sitting in refugee camps in Gaza, while before their very eyes *we have converted the lands and the villages in which they and their forefathers lived into our inheritance.* (Moshe Dayan, speech at the grave of Ro'i Rothberg, *Davar* 2/5/56. Emphasis ours)

Moshe Dayan tells us that in our inability to rely on justice, we must rely on force:

How did we turn our eyes away from looking honestly at our future and from seeing the destiny of our generation in all its cruelty? ... We are a generation of settlement, and without the steel helmet and the muzzle of the cannon we will be unable to plant a tree or build a house. (Ibid.)

We will not deal here with the question – important in its own right – of whether that policy is moral or not. History is full of examples of immoral acts that were imposed by force on the *weak*. The question is whether it is in Israel's power to impose this solution on its neighbours. All the developments from 1948 to 1961 clearly point to the fact that that is impossible and becoming less possible every day. Moreover, even the continuation of the *status quo* without imposing it on the Arabs, that is to say, the continuation of the present situation without obtaining their consent to it, as has been done so far, is becoming more difficult every day. Time is working rapidly to undermine the *status quo*.

The Israeli peace declarations, which at least on two occasions were followed by large-scale IDF raids across the border (the Sabha battle, the Suez war) were not serious. No Arab state (apart from Jordan, of course) could accept these declarations, the basis of which was always the perpetuation of the *status quo*. The pressure of the Arab refugees would endanger any Arab government that agreed to these conditions.

Moreover, those in Israel who announced their desire for peace based on the *status quo* knew that such statements could not be accepted. For that reason they were comfortable in their proposals; they could make appeals for peace while being confident that the Arabs would reject them. As in the words of the prophet:

“They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.” (Jeremiah 6:14)

Did the government even once make a peace proposal that was not based on the perpetuation of the *status quo* as a precondition? The government is waiting for the Arabs to recognize the ceasefire lines as permanent borders, for the refugees finally to be settled in the countries where they are presently located, for the right of the Palestinian Arabs to self-determination to be done away with once and for all. Is that a realistic policy? Is there any chance that it will ever be realized?

The government claims that the reason why the refugee problem remains an open wound to this day does not stem from the aspirations of the refugees themselves but from the incitement of the Arab states, which use the refugee problem as a weapon against Israel (and Jordan).

Better proof that the problem exists on its own merits is the fact that *within* the State of Israel, in a place where the government is free to act as it sees fit, there is nevertheless a problem with the Arab minority, which to our dismay continues to be perpetuated.

Why has the government not yet succeeded in solving that problem?

Why do the Palestinian Arabs constitute an open wound *within* Israel?

Without getting into the economic and moral aspects of the military government,⁵⁰ it suffices to point out that the government itself has justified the need for a military government for 13 years and the need for it to continue into the future, and the need to deny elementary civil rights to the Arabs of Israel, by pointing to the fact that their national aspirations have not yet disappeared. If these aspirations have not disappeared in Israel, in which some of the Arabs have remained in at least part of their homes and lands, why should the aspirations of the refugees who were left destitute on the other side

⁵⁰ Arabs in Israel – Palestinians who remained in Israel after 1948 and became citizens of the State of Israel – were subject to a military administration from 1948 to 1966 – trans.

of the border disappear? It is not Nasser who is fanning the flames of the refugee problem; the refugees are inflaming Arab policy to ensure that their problem will not be neglected.

We and they

It is clear from all that has been said above that the various proposals to solve the problem should be examined not in terms of declarations of “aspirations for peace”, “striving towards peace”, etc., that appear in such proposals, but rather in terms of the way they relate to the *status quo*. No proposal which takes as its the starting-point the perpetuation of the *status quo*, or to put it differently, the expansion of Israel’s territory, can contribute anything to the solution of the problem, even if the word “peace” is mentioned in it a hundred times. Only proposals that involve discussion a certain withdrawal from the *status quo* on the issues of the refugees and the borders have a chance of moving us closer to the longed-for peace.

It is important to understand this point, because there is no party in Israel, including those that are interested in *expanding* the present territory of the State, that does not declare its aspiration for peace with the Arab states. But regarding a willingness to move away from the *status quo*, things are completely different. To our dismay, only one party has consistently called for compromise, mutual concessions and recognition of the right of self-determination for both the peoples of Palestine since 1949. Naturally, because of its unusual stance, this party has been the object of abuse and its members have been called “traitors to the Homeland”. These are not mere words; many in Israel are completely convinced that concessions on the refugees and the borders along the lines of the 1947 UN resolution would mean suicide for Israel. That is particularly true of those who believe that the source of the conflict is the Arabs’ hatred of Israel – an emotional, absolute and persistent hatred that is not dependent upon anything external. In their view, no Israeli concession would change that hatred, and the return of refugees would mean bringing sworn enemies, a “fifth column”, into the State.

Those who see the essence of the conflict as an emotional phenomenon – the Arabs’ hatred of Israel , are necessarily proponents of the *status quo*. On the other hand, those

who support the *status quo* for other reasons will necessarily enlist the Arabs' hatred of Israel for their purposes.

And the inverse is also true: those who see the essence of the conflict as a concrete phenomenon – the denial of the right of self-determination to the Arabs of Palestine – are usually (if they are interested in a solution to the conflict) among those who favour mutual concessions, compromise, and withdrawal from the *status quo*. And all who hold these views necessarily rely, in one way or another, on the argument that it is impossible to ensure the right of self-determination for the Jews of Palestine while denying it to its Arabs.

Those who try at all costs to build a life on the ruins of the Arabs of Palestine are placing themselves against the flow of history. They find themselves struggling not only against the Arabs of Palestine and the Arab states, but also against all the emancipated states of Asia and Africa; one thing depends on another and there is no escaping that cruel necessity.

If the proponents of compromise have perspective regarding the future of Israel, and they see friendly relations with the Arab states on the horizon, and economic and cultural growth taking place against a background of mutual normalized relations, then those who support the perpetuation of the current situation have no such perspective. In fact they sometimes admit that the future holds the possibility of calamity and destruction for Israel (Ben-Gurion: “In the next decade we are likely to face a grave and perhaps *fateful* military test”). None of that prevents them from adopting a stance of opposition to any concessions whatsoever. They prefer a grave military test, the outcome of which is likely to be *fateful*, over than the return of refugees and the concession of a few square kilometres. The more they stubbornly adhere to the *status quo*, the less seriously they take the future of the State of Israel.

It is very easy for those who do not seriously consider all the dangers inherent in the continuation of the existing situation to stubbornly insist on its continuation. But it is not only a matter of lack of thought about the future. That approach is above all a consequence of short-sighted and arrogant nationalism, which looks down on the Arabs.

In order to illustrate the role played by the nationalist outlook, we will quote here a few “pearls” from an article by the late Dr. Ezriel Carlebach, who was one of the most

important journalists in Israel in his time, and an editor of *Maariv* – the most popular newspaper in Israel.

In his article, “You cannot negotiate with Allah”, Dr. Carlebach commented:

... In the world of Islam you are faced with the obscure unexplained will of Allah. You are faced with a capricious, hidden, pathological tyrant. He wants this of that, and you don't hesitate or ask questions. That is the essence of the religion of Islam – not to ask questions ...

... The Islamic person does not create and does not change the face of the world, not even to his advantage. The motivations that push a Western person to produce more bread from the earth suffocate in the heart of the Muslim person. Islam – suffocation ...

If they are sick – it isn't just ignorance and backwardness, it would even be absurd to send them medicine and to think that they will recover. It is – Islam. It is the religion that fundamentally rejects the intervention of man in the fate that has been destined to him.

If they do not have a socialist movement – that is not only because they are ignorant and subjugated to the owners of property. It is – Islam. It is the religion that extirpated from their hearts all feelings of practical mutual solidarity. If they have no social justice – it is not because they have not yet emerged from an era of economic feudalism. It is – Islam. It is the religion that planted in their hearts the consciousness that power is justice and those who hold power are also just, the violent prevail. If they do not have democracy – that is not because they have not had the opportunity to realize it. It is – Islam. That is what educated them to worship the whip.

If they have no parties and no free press and no literature and no schools and no colleges and no scientists and no artists – it is Islam. It is the dictatorship of man hundreds of years, which permitted them no independent thought.

These countries do not suffer from poverty or from sickness or from ignorance and exploitation; they suffer only from that most terrible of afflictions – Islam

...Every place where Islamic psychology rules, tyranny and murderous aggression also rule ...

The danger is not in the psychology of Islam, which cannot integrate into a world of utility and progress, which lives in a world of delusions, tormented by inferiority complexes and megalomania, which dreams about the holy war. The danger is in the totalitarian world-view, *their innate appetite for murder*, the lack of logic, the stupidity, the hotheadedness, the boastfulness, and above all: the disbelief in everything that is sacred to the civilized world ... Their replies – to everything – have no connection to straightforward rationality. They are all emotional, unconsidered, transient, lacking in foundation. They always talk from their throats – mentally ill. You can talk “business” with everyone, even Satan. But not – with Allah ... That cries out from every grain of sand in this country. There were many and great civilizations within it, and invaders of all kinds – all of them, even the Crusaders, left signs of culture and efflorescence. But where Islam trod – even the trees died ...

After the learned doctor presented us with all the “merits” of Islam, he goes on to explain the close connection between his approach and the solution to the Palestine conflict:

We are adding a sin to a crime when we distort the picture and reduce the argument to a conflict over borders between Israel and its neighbours. First of all, this does not conform to reality. The question of borders is not the source of the conflict, but the Muslim psychology ... Besides that – representing the problem as a conflict between two similar sides, arms the Arabs with a claim that does not belong to them. If the argument with them is really political, then there are various aspects. Or then we are seen as having come to a country that was all Arab, and we conquered and inserted ourselves as a wedge between them, we burdened them with refugees and constitute a danger to them with our army, and so on and so forth – a person can justify one side or another. That is to say, this rational and political *representation* of the problem makes it understandable to European brains – *to our*

disadvantage. [indeed!] The Arabs make claims about a regular legal conflict that make sense to Western opinion. But the truth of the matter is, who knows better than we that this is not the source of their hostile stance. All these political and social concepts were never theirs. Conquest by the sword is no injustice in their eyes, in the eyes of Islam; on the contrary, it is confers rights and proof of eternal ownership. Concern for the refugees, for dispossessed brothers, is not part of their conceptual world. Allah expelled them – Allah will take care of them.

No Muslim politician has ever gotten excited about such a thing (unless his personal position was endangered by unrest). And if there were no occupation, even if there were no refugees, they would still oppose us just as emphatically. By talking to them on the basis of Western concepts, we are dressing savages in the robe of European justice ...

We are doing a disservice not only to our struggle for the survival of this state and the lives of our daughters and sons; we are doing a disservice to the whole world, if we conceal the simple truth that lies in the hearts of all of us, including government spokesmen, when they make appeals for peace – the truth that the enemy is the spirit of Islam.

It is not our enemy just because we just happen to be living here. *It would be an enemy to us even if we were living on the North Pole*. It is the enemy of all productive thought, every benevolent initiative, every creative idea. It is the sworn enemy of every Jew, every Christian – and every Muslim. Everything that it gets its hands on, whether it is a wooden sword, a steel tank, a jug of water – becomes in its hands a threat to its neighbours. It has never contributed and never will contribute anything positive. It has not produced a single personage who has moved the world forward in any place.

It is darkness.

It is reaction.

It is a prison for five hundred million suffering human beings.

It is a hidden mine against the peace of the world ...

(Ezriel Carlebach, “You cannot negotiate with Allah”, *Maariv*, 7/10/55. Emphasis ours)

This article, which would be accepted in any Nazi newspaper if the word “Islam” were replaced with “Judaism”, elicited no protests or indignant responses in Israel, no one pressed charges against the editor of “the most popular newspaper in Israel”, no one rebuked the honourable doctor. The truth is that many agreed with this opinion, and more than a few agree with it even today, even if they would formulate their opinions in a more moderate way. This article clarifies and demonstrates the close reciprocal relations between the psychological-nationalist outlook and the refusal to withdraw from the status quo.

It was no coincidence that Shmuel Shnitzer wrote in the article mentioned above:

When, in all five thousand years of history, have a people with a higher culture succeeded in “integrating” into surroundings with a lower culture? For the purposes of integration, must we give up the democratic principles of our government? Must we lower our level of hygiene? Must we close our schools and our health institutions? Must we hand over the government to the commanders of our armoured columns? How can we abandon the twentieth century in order to return to the 12th? How could it be done, in practical terms? How can we not be strangers in the world of murderous upheavals that surrounds us? Must we nurture bilharzia, liberate trachoma, have incomes of 30 pounds a year? How can a rational person believe that we, with our standard of living, with our hygienic needs, with all the cultural baggage that we brought with us, can be accepted as brothers by the millions of Arabs who surround us? How is it conceivable that the hungry Arab *fellah* in his shack could relate to us with anything other than envy and hatred? (Shmuel Shnitzer, “Peace with Nasserism?”, *Maariv*, 25/7/58)

We and we and we. With democracy and health and hygiene and schools and culture. And they – without culture, without hygiene and health, with trachoma, bilharzia, coups, murders and conflicts, and on and on.

This style and formulation are reminiscent of words that were spoken in a certain state in Europe 20 years ago. Mr. Shnitzer may have a high standard of living, which is clean and hygienic, but his ideas are dangerous. They are pushing for a “fateful military test”.

Fateful?

For whom?

For the Arabs?

The fact of the matter is, the conflict is not the result of hate; the hate is a necessary consequence of the political conflict. But those who *honestly* believe that the conflict is indeed a consequence of pathological hatred that the Arabs harbour for the Jews, independent of anything external, should pack their bags and emigrate from Israel, for there can be no doubt how the “final round” will end.

The conflict and the Cold War

Those who espouse the *status quo* also have relevant pretexts to justify their position. The main one is that in any case the fate of the peace of the region will not be determined within it but outside of it. That is, the lack of peace in the region is the result of the strained relations between the East and the West, the struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States.

It follows from this, of course, that as long as the international conflict is not resolved, there is no chance for stability in the Middle East. The conclusion? There is absolutely no need to change foreign and military policies. We will hold on to what we have, wait until the conflict between the major players is resolved, and in the meantime, no concessions.

Let us examine that claim for a moment. It is known to all that there is intervention by a Great Power in the problems of the Middle East, just as there is in the problems of every other region of the world. But what is the meaning of “intervention”? Is it intervention for its own sake, just to be involved? Does it make no difference to the Powers *which side* they are on?

Why, for example, did the Soviet Union in 1948 support the Jews of Palestine and not the Arab states? After all, then too the Arabs had more territories, oil and population than did the Jews. If it is true that Soviet intervention is intended to “win over the Arabs to their side”, why did the Soviets not intervene in 1948 on the side of Farouk, Abdallah, Nuri Said and their friends rather in favour of Israel? Did that help them to acquire the friendship of the Arabs? They say that “Russia helps Egypt against Israel”. Did Russia help Farouk in 1948? Did Russia support Nuri Said, Abdallah, Camille Chamoun, Hussein?

Great Britain, on the other hand, was known as a “friend of the Arabs” a dozen years ago when the entire region was under its exclusive influence. Is Britain today a friend of Nasser, Qasim, Nablulsi, Shihab, Khaled al-‘Azm?

Do the Great Powers intervene in the problems of the region? Of course. But it is a special kind of intervention: fundamental and permanent.

For the same fundamental reason that the Soviet Union supported Israel in 1948, it supported Egypt in 1956. For the same principled reason that Britain fought against Israel in 1948, it fought against Egypt in 1956. If it were not for arms and political support from the Soviet Union, it is doubtful if Israel could have won its independence in 1948, when it was threatened with the US “trusteeship” plan and when it was short of arms in the face of the British attack, or that Egypt in 1956 could have succeeded in overcoming the armies of Britain, France and Israel.

What prevented Britain from supporting the nationalization of the Suez Canal and from winning the sympathy of the Arab world, and what prevented Britain from asking Hussein to return what he stole from the Arabs of Palestine?

What prevented the USA from supporting the Iraqi revolution in 1958 and thereby obtaining the sympathy of the Arab world? What prevented France from giving self-determination to Algeria in 1954 and thereby obtaining prestige? If obtaining prestige among the Arabs is such an important and vital goal, why does the West lose that prestige time after time? Surely no one can claim that the West is lacking in experts well-versed in the problems of the region, that it lacks experience or that its politicians are saboteurs or agents of a foreign Power.

No “subversive propaganda” could ever succeed in making colonialism hated by the colonial peoples better than the colonial policy itself. Colonialism dug its own grave and nurtured its own gravediggers throughout all the years of its rule. Today the colonial peoples are rising up to eliminate it. This is a historical process that great statesmen foresaw decades ago. The existence and power of the Soviet Union, and its anti-colonialist struggle help to make this process successful, but did not create it.

The anti-colonialist struggle is not derived directly from the Cold War, but it is a product of the era. Indeed the main point of convergence between these two global struggles is due to the fact that one side in the Cold War – the Western side – is led by the colonial powers. More than it is integrated into the Cold War, the Israeli-Arab conflict is connected to the process of decay of the colonial system.

“Only fools hope to find logic in history”

The practical concern conserving the *status quo* falls on Mapai, which is the largest party in Israel and has had the central place in all the governments that have existed in Israel up to now. Therefore it is particularly important to examine its position regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict.

Back in 1955 a correspondent for the *Times* of London asked Mr. Ben-Gurion if he would say, for example, that hand in hand with the efforts to implement the basic goals he had set, there was also a need to launch a vigorous diplomatic campaign in order directly or indirectly to bring about some kind of accord between Israel and its neighbours. Ben-Gurion replied:

... We have gone a long way without peace and we can still continue to go a long way without it. *What we want is not dependent on peace by any means* ... I believe that a security accord between us and the United States would be a factor to convince the current Arab governments that they cannot isolate us ...

Question: ... Will Israel be willing to agree to changes in the present borders with the Arab states, if they are proposed as ways to peace?

Answer: We cannot agree to any changes whatsoever to the present borders. We will be prepared to consider small border adjustments through mutual agreement, but as a result of the peace and not as a condition for peace. *Peace with Israel can be only as Israel exists today in geographical terms*, and that means peace with the Arabs as they exist today in geographical terms. (*Times*, 26/8/55. Emphasis ours)

On a later date (13/6/56) the *New York Herald Tribune* ran an article by the famous American commentator Joseph Alsop on a conversation he had had in Jerusalem with Mr. Ben-Gurion:

“And if we cannot get real peace for 10 years or 20 years, why we can stand it, and there will be some blessing in it too.”

It seems a fantastical statement, in this self-indulgent age. But every word is plainly meant in deadly earnest.

[...]

“You say I am not logical. I answer that only fools look for logic in history. And I tell you, whatever power they may bring against us, Israel will not falter or submit.”⁵¹

Three articles from *Davar*

Three articles appear in the newspaper *Davar* from 6/4/61, which elucidate Mapai’s approach to the problem of Israel-Arab relations. David Ben-Gurion claims:

⁵¹ The original English text of the interview was found online in the *Komoko (Ind.) Tribune* of 16 June 1956 (<http://www.newspaperarchive.com/SiteMap/FreePdfPreview.aspx?img=113544630>) – trans.

... His [Professor Akiva Ernst Simon's] advice to return the Arab refugees is tantamount to advice to *annul the state of Israel* [!]. The Arab refugees, 500,000 in number, left the country on the instructions of their leaders and of their own free will. Jewish refugees from the Arab states came in their place, in the same numbers. ... The Arab states, which have more fertile and richer lands and also more space than we (Iraq and Syria) are doing everything to prevent the refugees, for whom they alone are responsible because they launched the war with Israel, from settling in their countries, and with unparalleled cruelty they have compelled the refugees to remain in camps in order to serve as a political weapon to destroy the State of Israel. (Emphasis ours)

These are clear and unequivocal words from the most authoritative source. In addition to the fact that these are falsifications, distortions and half-truths about the character of the 1948 war and the creation of the refugee problem, the declaration that "*advice to return the Arab refugees is tantamount to advice to annul the state of Israel*" should be engraved in the memory of every Israeli citizen as an example and personification of the rigid approach of the makers of Israeli policy.

Incidentally, this reveals how close is the tie between the distortion of the character of the 1948 war and the stubborn adherence to the *status quo*. The claim that the return of the refugees should not be discussed, on the grounds that Israel has absorbed Jewish refugees from Arab countries, is demagogic at best. First, there was no "population exchange" at all, for the Jewish immigrants did not come from the Arab countries where the refugees are located today. Second, even those refugees who left the country of their own free will did not emigrate from it and did not renounce their right to return, but left their homes for the duration of the hostilities.

But if they are speaking of an imposed population exchange, that is not only demagoguery but also a great danger. The idea is likely to boomerang on its proponents. Those who want to solve the Palestine problem by uprooting the Arab people from it by means of "population exchange" are inviting a counter proposal: to solve the problem by uprooting the Jews and annulling the State of Israel.

Moreover, Ben-Gurion would be well-advised to speak as little as possible about the immigration to Israel of the Jews of Arab countries, for some of the events connected with the immigration to Israel of the Jews of Iraq, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco are still shrouded in mystery. It seems likely that certain institutions to which Ben-Gurion himself is connected acted to “hasten” that migration.

Regarding the claim that in Iraq and Syria there are fertile and empty lands, which are suitable for the absorption of the refugees – it does not behove a Zionist to claim that. It is known that when the father of political Zionism, Binyamin Ze’ev (Theodor) Herzl proposed to establish a Jewish state in Uganda where there were empty fertile lands, he was rebuffed by the majority at the Zionist congress, which insisted that by virtue of nationalist sentiments and historical ties it was necessary that the Jews go to Palestine itself.

We ask again: if the Jews did not forget Palestine for two thousand years, why should the Arabs forget it after 13 years?

Is the problem of the refugees basically an economic one? It is in Hussein’s interest to eliminate the refugee camps in his country and settle the refugees permanently. Why have his plans failed? What can be alleged regarding Nasser – that he is inciting the refugees against Israel – cannot be said of Hussein, who is interested in their permanent settlement in his country. But the fact remains that in Jordan too there is a serious refugee problem. It would seem that we are faced not only with an economic or personal problem but also a political, national problem.

In the same issue of *Davar*, Mapai’s head Middle East academic, Michael Assaf, tries to answer the question: “... What is the nature of, and how deep is this hatred [for Israel] in its various manifestations in the land of Pharaoh [!]? And what are its sources in this particular period?”

To Assaf, the assumption that the source of the Israeli-Arab conflict is in the realm of emotion and not the realm of the political facts was beyond any doubt. His reply was:

Without a doubt the source of Egypt’s hatred of Israel and the Jews at this time is to be found to a great extent its failures in the two wars (1956 and 1948) with Israel, in fear of Israel’s strength, and in helpless gnashing of teeth, because of the

role that the State of Israel is fulfilling by its very existence, in reining in Nasser's pretensions in the Middle East. (Ibid.)

In reply to this, it should be noted that it was not Nasser who was responsible for Egypt's policy in 1948, but his enemy, the British puppet Farouk. Nasser did not proclaim an invasion of Israel and he is not responsible for the withdrawal from it; to a great extent he saw the war itself as a British stratagem the purpose of which was to distract public opinion in Egypt from the struggle for the evacuation of the Suez Canal Zone and to get rid of British colonialism from Egypt.

Regarding the war of 1956: although it is hard for many Israelis to digest this truth, it ended indeed with the victory of Egypt; and it did not produce the lowering of Nasser's stature, as various supporters of the West claim, but greatly advanced his prestige and his policy.

Regarding the "fear of Israel's strength", we would do well to adopt a sober attitude to the capacities of force. Proponents of the policy of force should remember that the battles of the war of 1948 lasted about 60 days, if we don't count the truces and the pauses. The battles of the war of 1956 lasted a total of 7 days. The decisive test of force between Israel and the Arab states has not yet taken place, to our great joy, and we hope that such a contention will not be will not take place in the future either.

By the way, it is evident that seeing the Arabs' hatred of Israel as a decisive cause of the conflict is not only the preserve of people like Dr. Ezriel Carlebach, but also that of a veteran Middle East academic like Michael Asaf.

The third article in that same issue of Davar is from the fruit of the reflections of Shimon Peres, the Deputy Minister of Defence:

... The correct way to ensure peace in the Middle East is not – we are sorry to say – by concessions that will annul the Arabs' desire to attack us (and which in practice will encourage them), but rather by neutralizing their ability to carry out that plot. It is possible that over the passage of time the inability to attack will turn into a psychological capacity for making peace. And in any case, until that day we must act such that non-peace from the on the Arabs part (which stems from in their

desire) is balanced by non-war on Israel's part (which stems from its capacity).
(*Davar*, 6/4/61)

Again: we cannot make concessions. They are infused with a pathological desire to destroy us. It is impossible to appease them. We must be stronger than they. One of these days they will reconcile themselves to the facts.

Statements made by Mapai ministers at public meetings were quoted in the 25/6/61 issue of *Davar*. Finance Minister Levi Eshkol declared at the Ron hall in Jerusalem:

The return of the Arab refugees to Israel would constitute a "time-bomb" against the existence of the State.

Minister of Trade and Industry Pinchas Sapir, in Kfar Hayarok:

The return of three hundred thousand Arabs to the country would be like an invasion without tanks and cannons. The result would be not only the undermining of the stability of our security, but also the undermining of economic stability.

Agriculture Minister Moshe Dayan, in the Mughrabi hall in Tel Aviv:

We are not prepared to accept the return of even one Arab refugee ... nor are we prepared for any territorial concessions either.

Education Minister Abba Eban, in Haifa:

Whoever proposes freedom of choice for the refugees is proposing something that negates the existence of Israel; and whoever desires both a solution to the refugee problem and the existence of Israel as well, should know that there is no solution other than settling them in the Arab countries. (*Davar*, 25/6/61)

As this typescript is being submitted for printing, it is known that Ben Gurion, in a speech prepared in advance and read in the Knesset on 11/10/61, emphatically and clearly reiterated the position of “not a single refugee”.

This is, in essence, Mapai’s approach to the problem, and of course that of the government of Israel as well. Since the government determines education and information policy, a substantial part of the Israeli public also holds these views; not to mention the fact that they share the same root as nationalistic views, and in fact constitute an inseparable part of them.

The allegation that the return of the refugees would constitute the introduction of a fifth column into the State of Israel does not stand up to serious criticism, for two reasons:

1. This claim does not take into account the fact that the hostility of the refugees stems for the most part from the very fact of their status as refugees: from their dispossession of their land and property. To correct the injustice would eliminate the main reason for the hatred, which would then gradually disappear.
2. Those who make that claim represent things as if what were being proposed was a mass return of refugees while Israel-Arab relations continue to be tense and hostile. In reality, a new approach to the refugee problem would be an integral part of an improvement in political relations. The entire business of a fifth column loses its meaning when we are speaking not of waging another war but of a process of consolidating peace.

No one is claiming that the refugees must be returned overnight; no one is claiming that the refugees who return will instantly be converted into Israeli patriots. In reality, there must be a fairly protracted interim period – a period of transition from hostility to friendship – between the present situation of tensions and hostility and one in which Israel-Arab relations are normal and friendly. Not only will political and economic rapprochement between the sides take place during that transitory period, but also cultural, psychological and emotional rapprochement. During that period the process of

return of the refugees will take place.

*** **

We have dealt here with some pretexts by means of which proponents of the *status quo* seek to prove that there is no possibility of any concessions on Israel's part. There are many more such pretexts which we have not dealt with. We believe that, as regards a substantial number of Israelis, such an endeavour would be a waste of effort on our part. We are referring to those people whose position on the question of Israel-Arab relations is not at all determined by relevant reasons or rational considerations. Their approach has been shaped by long years of chauvinistic education at home and at school, on the field and in civilian life. The pretexts are chosen only afterwards, in order to add logical justification to their pre-existing feelings and opinions; refuting these substantial pretexts cannot undermine their basic emotional approach.

Individuals often learn lessons from the experiences of others and add to their knowledge from reading books. Not so entire nations. Nations generally do not change their policies merely as a consequence of the perusal of books and from studying the experience of other nations. In many cases nations learn only from their own experiences, in the cruel school of national catastrophes and social upheavals.

The meaning of this general truth is necessarily fraught with danger for Israel. Due to Israel's special situation in the region, we fear that the tuition fee that we will be forced to pay for a self-taught history lesson will be very high – too high, we fear.

“Period”

The idea that peace will come maybe in another 20, 30 or 40 years, after the Arabs give up on their hope of destroying the State of Israel; the idea that the lack of peace, while indeed being an undesirable thing, is also to some extent a “blessing in disguise” because Israel cannot make any concession on the issues of the borders and the refugees, is repeated many times, in various forms, in the words of all the official politicians. It is a

position that is very easy to defend from within; most of the Israeli public does not oppose it. But it is very hard to defend it from the outside, because the UN and world public opinion are not willing to accept it.

In a debate over foreign policy that was conducted in the Knesset at the end of 1959, the Foreign Minister replied bitterly to a recent UN General Assembly resolution on the question of Palestine and expressed the position of the government:

... Not only we, but to the best of my knowledge, hardly any member of the UN seriously thinks that by reiterating year after year resolutions that were passed many years before [the reference is to the resolutions of 1947, 1948 and 1949] and which they knew at the outset had no substance [?!], that by this repetition of the resolutions in the years 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959 they add any strength, substance or real possibility of these resolutions being implemented. Even a resolution of the UN General Assembly does not have the ability to change history and facts that were created over a period of 12 years. It seems to me that that is known to everyone. The question is asked why these resolutions were made, that is another story, and it would be worthwhile for someone to conduct an analysis of the resolutions that were passed by the General Assembly – for what purpose they were passed, why, what practical utility there is to each one of them. But no one can imagine that by virtue of a resolution the State of Israel can be forced to do something counter to its vital interests [the withdrawal from Sinai?!]. In any case the position of the State of Israel is no longer a secret, as our representatives have expressed both in the General Assembly and in the Committee, it is impossible to force us to accept or not to accept someone. Our position on the matter of the refugees is quite clear. We have a great interest in a solution to the refugee problem, both politically and on the human level. It seems to me that we have nearly exclusive authority to claim for ourselves expertise on the matter of refugees. We are experts on both things related to refugees. There is no people like the people of Israel that has learned from experience and knows what it means to be refugees, and it seems to me that there is no other people in the world that has succeeded in finding a solution to the problem of the refugees, as we ourselves have proven since the founding of the State of

Israel. We cannot be indifferent to that problem when it appears in any place in the world. Not only from a directly political point of view, but also from a simple human point of view, we have an interest in a solution to the refugee problem, but precisely because we have an interest, we must approach the matter in the most practical way and say now what we have said throughout the years: there is a solution to the Arab refugee problem and for that there is only one single way – the settlement of the refugees in the Arab states. [“period”! – the Foreign Minister added for emphasis, and the record changed the word “period” to the punctuation mark “.”] Not only we but also objective international sources know that the refugee problem in our region is the easiest to solve of all the refugee problems in the world. The Arab refugees are located amongst their own people, they have one language, one religion, unified customs There is nothing that prevents a complete constructive solution of that problem except from the position of the Arab leaders, who have no human interest in a solution to this problem and the political stance of opposition to the State of Israel alone is what guides all their actions. (*Knesset Records* 23/124, 17/12/59)

“Our country was a special case”

The Foreign Minister’s words clearly expressed the official position. Many in Israel share that position; at first glance it appears to be understandable and logical. It is therefore worthwhile to remind all those who do not understand how it is possible to argue against that approach of a different analysis of the Palestine problem and a more clear Mapai approach towards it, that was made by MK David Hacoen, a Mapai leader:

... The Sudeten Germans were not a majority in Czechoslovakia. They were a minority. Our country was a special case to which the Arabs were very sensitive, *it was the refugees who were the majority and not the minority* [!]. *The nation that suddenly turned into refugees had been here for many generations and hundreds of years, with a feeling that it was not living on a volcano.* That was not the case elsewhere. In the examples I mentioned, the peoples that turned into refugees had

lived for long periods with the feeling that they were on a volcano. (Heckler from the General Zionists' benches: "The wise are careful what they say!") It is a historical fact sir! It was not I who discovered it. We are fighting it [!] with the constructive enterprise of our State and the ingathering of the exiles, and with excellent possibilities for the absorption of the Arabs in Arab states, and I am confident that we will overcome the problem. But do not think that it is a simple matter. Historical forces that are at work here must be recognized, and we should seek means and schemes to overcome them and not to pretend that they do not exist and to take the easy way out by scorning our foreign policy. (Emphasis ours)

These words, together with the catcalls from the General Zionist benches, clarify the nature of the problem more than all the books that have been written about the subject. Thus does Mapai make clear its belief that with the help of "the constructive enterprise of the State" and "means and schemes" it will be possible to overcome historical forces!

"The constructive enterprise" has many aspects. The endeavour is to bring as many Jews to Israel as possible in the minimum time possible by any means possible; to settle them in places that were left by the Arabs; to establish settlement points all along the ceasefire lines; compensate the farmers there for their losses, so that their residents do not abandon them; confiscate lands from their Arab owners on the pretext of "security"; set up villages and towns not from economic considerations but in conformity with the political imperative to solidify and stabilize the *status quo*; "judaize" the Galilee; establish in 1957 a new, all-Jewish city in Nazareth, which was nearly completely Arab,⁵² and settle new immigrants in it; create employment for them there and prevent the local Arabs of Nazareth from having access to the places of employment (that program was implemented not by the Ministry of the Interior or Development but by the *Defence* Ministry); change the names of villages and towns, neighbourhoods and streets from Arabic to Hebrew. Every long-established resident in this country would laugh if they knew, for example, that the name of the Katamon neighbourhood in Jerusalem was changed to "Gonen". But the name-changes and the plan for "judaization of the Western

⁵² The reference is to Upper Nazareth – *Natzrat 'Ilit* – trans.

Galilee are impelled by one idea: to force the other side to forget the past, to reconcile itself to the *faits accomplis* and to abandon any hope of correcting the injustice that has been done to it. Thus Ben-Gurion writes in the *Government Yearbook 1959-1960*:

... Israel can have no security without *aliyah*.

...Security means settlement and populating the empty territories in the north and the south, spreading the population and establishing industry in all over the country, developing agriculture in all the areas suitable for it.

... Security is conquest of the sea and the air and our becoming a major maritime power.

... Security is economic independence.

... Security is the fostering of research and scientific capability at a high level.

... Security is youth volunteering and the volunteering of the nation for hard missions in settlement, in security and for the integration of the exiles.

... There can be no security without the IDF.

... It is incumbent on us to maintain the quality of our armaments. (*Shenaton ha-Memshalah* [*Government Yearbook*] 1959-1960, p. 11. Hebrew)

It suffices to replace the word “security” with the words “stabilizing the status quo” in order to understand perfectly the official policy. It is a policy of creating social, economic and military facts that are intended to prevent any withdrawal from the status quo in the direction of the Partition Plan. One detail is conspicuous for its absence in this “security” list: the policy of recognizing the right of self-determination of the Arabs of Palestine and the struggle against colonialism.

It is no coincidence that the Israeli government's basic plan, which was submitted to the Knesset on 16/12/59 and approved the next day, included the following list of priorities:

1. Bringing Jewish immigrants from countries of distress and encouraging aliyah from other countries.
2. Accelerating the process of economic independence and a drive to mobilize international financing for the development of the country.
3. Enhanced efforts to integrate immigrant communities and close the gap between established Israelis and new immigrants by means of professional training, suitable housing, assistance for post-primary education and ensuring permanent employment.
4. The nurturing of the existing development areas and continuing to populate the empty areas in the north and the southern regions and the Negev.
5. An active policy to advance peace in the region and in the world, and diligence for the security of the State.
6. Strict observance of integrity, and encouragement for popular pioneering and volunteering, full employment for veterans and new immigrants and due diligence for a high standard of living.

(Knesset Records 16/12/59)

Is it not strange that action for peace between Israel and its neighbours appears in fifth place and not at the top of this list? Is that not the *most important* role that is incumbent on the government of Israel? Is it not typical that the practical meaning of the four provisions that appear before the provision on peace is: creating facts in order to consolidate the *status quo*?

We will not discuss here the moral dimensions of that policy, even though that question is important; we will merely ask: is it is this a realistic policy? Is does it have a chance of realizing its goals?

We will point out here its historical mistakes since 1948:

1. In 1948 that policy tried to make a deal with Abdullah over the heads of the Arabs of Palestine: peace in return for agreement to annexation. Half for me, half for you. The plan failed. In 1961 still there is no peace and there are no agreed-upon borders, not even with Jordan.
2. In the years 1950-1955, that policy led to efforts to make a deal with British colonialism and American imperialism: support for war against the national liberation movement in the Middle East in return for ratification of borders and the supply of arms. The idea was to establish a military alliance with the West, so the latter would impose the *status quo* on the Arabs. The West used its services, and fearing the reaction to a military alliance, began to court the Arabs.
3. In 1956 that policy caused Israel to join France and Britain in a war against Egypt in the hope that the victory would force Egypt to sign a peace treaty and Israel would acquire new territories. The invasion failed. Egypt emerged victorious. Territories were not acquired. Peace was set back. Israel was tarred as a collaborator with colonialism.
4. In the years 1957-1961, the policy was to court the emancipated nations of Asia and Africa, in the hope that they would strengthen Israel's hand against the Arabs. Israel gave them technical and economic aid but continued to support colonialism and to vote with it at the UN on important African issues. The result? – The Casablanca Conference Resolution of 7/1/1961.

To that list of failures can be added a series of mistakes in the evaluation of the relations of power in the region and the world. In 1948-50 the power of the nationalist movement among the Arabs of Palestine was viewed with scorn. From 1950 to 1956 there was scorn for the power of anti-imperialist movements all over the Middle East and there was a great deal of exaggeration of the power of the Western Powers and their ability to thwart the nationalist movements. In October 1956 there was an error in the estimation of popular support for Nasser in Egypt itself and throughout the Arab world.

The assessment of the military balance came at the expense of an evaluation of the significance of the votes at the UN, the glare of weapons obscured political vision. And similarly there was an error regarding measures that the Soviet Union and the USA were likely to take. From 1957 to 1961 there was scorn for the wisdom and the political maturity of the anti-imperialist movements in Africa.

In the best case, when this policy is not based on relations of power that existed in the *past*, it is based on relations of power that exist in the *present*. But it has become clear that post-World War II, it is a serious mistake to base policy towards Asia and Africa on the balance of forces that exist in the present. Even those who based their assessments on relations of power that would were to exist in the future, often erred in their predictions of the *speed* of developments.

Who believed in 1947 that within only eight years, British and French influence in the Near East and throughout Asia and Africa would decline to zero?

Who believed in 1950 that within six years the Soviet Union would have so much influence on events in Asia and Africa?

If indeed there were those who foresaw that development in advance, one thing is clear: it was not they who were directing Israeli foreign policy. They only received buckets of scorn, mockery and contempt from the spokesmen of both the Coalition parties and the opposition.

A professor of modern history at Hebrew University can permit himself to write, in a critique of Mr. Ben-Gurion:

Mr. David Ben-Gurion is among a half-dozen decisive figures in the history of the people of Israel from the day it became a nation. There are few political leaders in history whose historical vision was so confident and whose vision was vindicated so many times by historical events. (Jacob Talmon, *Haaretz*, 17/2/61)

We cannot share this view –if only for the simple reason that we can never forget the “Third Kingdom of Israel” affair. Moreover, if we remember that the collusion with Abdullah did not bring peace, the courting of the Western Powers did not bring about

overt Israeli membership in any military alliance, the “reprisal actions” did not produce quiet on the borders, and the various “shameful businesses” (especially the Suez War) did not succeed in imposing peace on the Arabs, then we may be forgiven if we cast doubt on the proposition that “There are few political leaders in history whose historical vision was so confident and whose vision was vindicated so many times by historical events.” And we also doubt whether Mr. Ben-Gurion and those who share his political and historical approach will ever be able to solve the basic problem of the Jews in Palestine – that is, the problem of their relations with the Arabs in Palestine and in the surrounding area.

We have enumerated some of the errors of the official policy. But it is not only a question of mistakes in the assessment of the relations of power. The initiators of that policy will continue to perpetuate it even if it becomes clear to them that the balance of power is not in their favour. They will not cut themselves off from the West and set out on the path of neutralism. Their brains and their hearts, their logic and their emotions are in with the West. Their policy has led Israel from failure to failure, from setback to greater setback. It is a near certainty that the big failures are still before us.

“There will be no return to the *status quo ante*”

As we have pointed out, the preservation of the *status quo* also means the preservation of the existing political situation in the Middle East, and especially in Jordan. One of the important cards held by makers of Israeli policy is the fact that one of the Arab states themselves, Jordan, also has an interest in the perpetuation of the *status quo*. It can easily be imagined what problems would emerge if there were a government in Jordan that was prepared to reconsider its approach to the problem of the Palestinian Arabs. There can be no doubt that such a change is on the way – it is only a question of time. Needless to say, that problem has not escaped the attention of Ben-Gurion and his entourage.

Note that their opposition to a change in the *status quo* is unilateral. The Suez affair proves that when they perceive that an “opportune time” has come (that is to say, when international conditions present them with the temptation) they cannot go against their instincts, they aspire to create a new *status quo*, and they hasten to “bury” the ceasefire lines. Thus we see an apparently strange contradiction: at the time of “Operation Sinai”

the primary slogan of the proponents of the *status quo* was “there will be no return to the *status quo ante*”.

Right – or might

If for Mapai and its satellites the expansion of the *status quo* is a hidden aspiration that emerges only at an “opportune moment”, then for the second-largest party in Israel the expansion of the borders is the first and main platform plank:

1. The right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel in its *historic entirety* is an eternal right which cannot be questioned.
2. A peace treaty between Israel and the Arab nations is possible on the basis of the realization of this right: the *restored integrity of the Land of Israel*, all the residents of which can live as free citizens of the *Hebrew state* with equal rights, without distinction by nationality, religion, or community. (From the Herut platform in the Fourth Knesset, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 29/8/59. Emphasis ours)

This is one of the more moderate formulations of the main plank in Herut’s platform. For the most part, that idea is expressed in more graphic terms, in the spirit of the main line of the Herut anthem: “In blood and fire Judea fell, in blood and fire shall Judea rise”.

In a debate in the Knesset on 7 November 1956 Mr. Begin vociferated:

The task has not yet been completed and *much of the land is yet to be inherited*, and every action that is carried out to liberate the occupied territories of the Homeland are will also constitute the legal right of national self-defence, on the way to the realization of our *eternal rights* ...

Only strategic operations at an opportune moment, planned in such a way as to avoid losses and to provide secure fighting conditions for the Hebrew soldier, and which result in the liberation of occupied territories of the Homeland, which had

become bases for the enemy's aggression, can prevent the calamity of a war on all fronts, give security to the nation and set it on its march to peace. (*Knesset Records* 21/202, 7/11/56. Emphasis ours)

Herut accuses Mapai and its satellites of inconsistency. The latter supported the Partition Plan, and at the time recognized the right of the Palestinian Arab people to part of Palestine; but after that, at an "opportune moment", they broke out of the Partition orders. Then they declared that Israel had no claims over the territories beyond the ceasefire lines – but at another "opportune moment" they "liberated" the Gaza Strip. It turns out, therefore, that Mapai does not rely on "historical right" in its policy but on force and the violent creation of facts. The Herut people, on the other hand, claim that the right of the people of Israel to "the Land of Israel within its full historical boundaries" is unconditional and eternal by its very nature. Herut recommends the use of force not in order to *create* that right (which in its view exists in any case) but only to realize it.

"The Land of Israel within its full historical boundaries"

One term, at least, on the Herut platform is somewhat ambiguous, and that is none other than the central term "the Land of Israel within its full historical borders." Does this refer to the borders that were promised by The Almighty to Abraham in the Covenant of Covenants, according to which:

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.
(Genesis 15:18)

Those borders include not only the Sinai desert but also much of the territory of today's Iraq. To all who smile mockingly upon reading that question, Mr. Begin replies:

I know: my writing about the Divine promise and about the holiness of our full inheritance I put a mocking smile on the faces of "realistic" people. "Is that

concrete”)? – they will ask, “Is that the actual policy”? in their blindness, for many do not see and do not understand that if not for the “Divine promise” and without the practical “irrational” faith of the actors and drivers of history in the existence of that “promise”, we would not have any of the “concrete”, we would not be returning to our homeland, we would not be taking possession of it, we would not conquer even a small piece of it. (Menachem Begin, “*On Foreign Policy*”, p. 16, published by *Herut* newspaper, July 1953)

But the borders that were promised in the Covenant of the Pieces were never realized. Jewish history knew other borders: the borders of the Kingdom of David, the borders of the Kingdom of Solomon (who ruled over all the kings “from Tiphseh even to Gaza”), the borders of the division between the Kingdom of Judea and the Kingdom of Israel, the borders of Jeroboam the Second (who “restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain”), or is the reference to the borders of the Hasmonean state, which were even more constricted than the borders of 29 November 1947?

Herut found a convenient way out of that thicket of historical questions. On its symbol it engraved a hand holding a rifle against the background of the borders Palestine (both east and west),⁵³ as they were set in 1917. These borders are not mentioned anywhere in the Holy Scriptures. They are nothing but the result of the division of the Middle East between Britain and France after the First World War, a division that was devoid of any geographical, historical, moral or other reference, and based exclusively on the power and the appetites of the involved Powers and on the geometry of oil pipelines.

An additional obscure point in the Herut platform: the equal rights that Mr. Begin accords to the Arab residents of the Hebrew state. Will that equality include the right to vote? The more the borders expand, the more the numbers of those residents will grow. In the event that they come to constitute a majority, will Mr. Begin permit them to vote for an Arab president, an Arab prime minister, an Arab chief of staff for the “Hebrew state”? Or does the proposed equality apply only as long as the Arabs are a minority? Naturally, Herut avoids the delicate question of the attitude of the Arabs themselves to

⁵³ I.e. including what is now Jordan – trans.

that generous and attractive offer. Will they agree to be “free and equal citizens” in the Hebrew state? And if they do not agree, how can the plan then be implemented?

We will not tarry longer on Herut’s grandiose programme. It is by no means a proposal to solve the Israeli-Arab conflict; at most it is a proposal for additional conflicts that are likely to end badly. The truth is that Herut does not have a plan for Israeli-Arab peace, but for Israeli-Arab war, only after which, they promise us, the hoped-for peace will come. There can be no doubt that Herut’s programme will never be realized, even if that party comes to power. But there may be attempts (and not only on the part of Herut) to realize it and these are likely to end with the destruction of the Third Temple.

The complete and undivided Land of Israel

The idea regarding about of “the wholeness of the Land of Israel” is not unique to Herut. Other major parties that espouse it include the United Workers’ Party (Mapam). The Secretary-General of that party stated:

The ideological platform of Hakibbutz Haartzi which has been with us since it was ratified, upon the establishment of Hakibbutz Haartzi in 1927, is nothing other than the revolutionary-pioneering doctrine of fulfilling the process of territorial concentration of the people of Israel in the *complete and undivided Land of Israel*. (Meir Yaari, *Kibbutz geluyot be-aspaqlariya shel yameinu* [The ingathering of exiles from the perspective of our times], p. 78, published by Hakibbutz Haartzi 1954. Hebrew. Emphasis ours)

Menachem Begin rightly praised Meir Yaari from the Knesset podium for the latter part of the passage quoted above. Mapam supports the “wholeness of the Land of Israel” by means of “*revolutionary implementation*”, but ... by peaceful means. However, when Ben-Gurion conquered the Gaza Strip by force of arms, Mapam did not protest against it and even gave him its blessing. As we know, the party expressed its opposition only to the *withdrawal* from the Gaza Strip.

On this as in other important matters, Mapam has not adhered to the Kibbutz Artzi platform that it has had since 1927. In fact it is most definitely willing to settle for the present *status quo*. In a parliamentary speech the contents of which were approved by the Mapam Central Committee, Meir Yaari said:

1. As a basic assumption for any plan like this [Israeli-Arab peace] the Resolution will serve to replace the existing situation of no war and no peace with a treaty for a stable peace based on the sovereignty of all the states in the region, including Israel within its present borders, and on the basis of mutual assistance.
2. That mutual assistance will be expressed in a plan for the joint development of Israel and the neighbouring states, which will facilitate the absorption of the overwhelming majority of refugees in their places of residence in Jordan, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon or Syria ... (*Al Hamishmar*, 24/6/60)

The meaning of the first paragraph is that recognition by the Arab side of the ceasefire lines as permanent borders is a necessary condition for peace. The second paragraph is merely a positive formulation of a negative idea: the unwillingness to return accept the return of the refugees.

In a Cabinet meeting on 9/7/61 the Mapam ministers Mordechai Bentov and Israel Barzilai again clarified the main points of that position:

- A proposal which, in the framework of Israeli-Arab peace, will solve the problem of the refugees through *permanent settlement in Arab states* and the absorption of a certain agreed number in the State of Israel.
- Emphasizing that the Arab states that invaded Israel bear principal responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem and its lack of a solution to this day; stressing that the position of the Arab rulers, who continue to this very day to maintain a state of hostilities, has rendered null and void the choice between

return to Israel and receiving compensation, as requested by President Kennedy, and *it must be rejected*; nevertheless, the humanitarian aspect of the problem must not be ignored, nor should the fact that some of the refugees were uprooted from their homes as a result of the difficult circumstances of the war, and therefore Israel should participate to the extent of its ability in finding a solution to that humanitarian problem.

- Repeating Israel's declared willingness to conduct *direct* negotiations on all the issues under contention, including the refugee problem, on the basis of guaranteeing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the states in the region, including Israel, and creating joint development programs that will help aid in the development of all the states of the region as well as constructive solutions to the refugee problem. (*Al Hamishmar*, 10/7/61. Emphasis ours)

If we strip this formulation of the fine words about “development programs”, “constructive solutions”, “the humanitarian aspect of the problem” etc., the meaning of these three points is:

1. Israel does not need to absorb the Arab refugees – apart from a few exceptional cases.
2. Israel must resist the holding of a referendum among the refugees for the purpose of clarifying whether they are interested in returning to their homeland.
3. Israel must resist territorial concessions, even while demanding direct negotiations.

Regarding the demand for direct negotiations: at first glance it looks positive and obvious. In reality, matters are not so simple. Of course at the final stage of contacts

intended to solve the problem, the two sides will have to sit together at one table to discuss the proposed accord and ratify it.

But it is not at all clear if the first contacts should be direct as well, or through an intermediary. The ultimatum-like demand that the negotiations be direct *from the outset* is tantamount to placing an additional obstacle on the path to reconciliation.

In the days that preceded the Suez War, a unique situation prevailed in which Egypt was particularly interested in finding a solution and even established direct and indirect contacts with Israeli representatives. The situation changed after the war, because the Arabs see the mere agreement to sit at one table with official Israeli representatives as a kind of far-reaching concession on their part, tantamount to official recognition of the State of Israel. The Suez War amplified the bitterness against Israel, and substantially reduced their willingness to make such a concession.

Moreover, there is no parallel Israeli concession to that unilateral Arab concession. Let us imagine a situation in which the Arabs accept the call for direct negotiations and come to the discussion table. The moment they sit at a table with representatives of Israel, they recognize the State of Israel. In their view that is a concession. Even if these direct negotiations come to nothing, and the representatives of both sides go back to where they came, from the representatives of Israel will leave with a substantial gain from the very fact of sitting together, whereas the Arabs will have lost a bargaining position.

One may deplore this approach, but it has to be taken into consideration. It may be assumed that the Israelis who aggressively stand by that very demand for direct negotiations (very much like those who declare their willingness to make peace immediately peace on the basis of the *status quo* without concessions or return of refugees) are deliberately raising a demand they know the other side is not prepared to accept. Such demands perhaps confer propaganda points on Israel, in that they represent the Arabs as opposing direct negotiations; but they do not at all advance a solution to the problem.

In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with mediation, if the mediator is accepted by both sides, does not intend to benefit only itself, and is able, by virtue of its unique political character, to make a true contribution to solving resolving the conflict.

Within the United Workers' Party (Mapam) there is also a left wing, which recommends certain concessions on the refugee issue. In the *internal* Israeli stage, the voice of that wing is silenced by the leadership of the party, but it flaunts it *to the outside*, through articles in the English-language periodical *New Outlook* and in its propaganda among the Arab population among other means.

Like Mapam, Unity of Labour, the Progressive Party, the General Zionists and the religious parties also support the consolidation of the *status quo* for the most part, but periodically raise proposals in the spirit of “the wholeness of the Land of Israel”, or “stabilization of our borders along the Jordan Valley”, all in accordance with the political conjuncture.

In an interview with a correspondent for *Haolam Hazeh*, for example, MK Yizhar Harari (Progressives – today now Liberals) stated:

It is forbidden to return even one refugee to this country; we do not owe a single penny of compensation. My position on that matter is more extremist than Mapai ...

We propose to give the Arab states a period of six months. If they agree by then to solve the problem, we will exhibit generosity and we will pay humanitarian compensation. If not – no.

(*Haolam Hazeh*, 2/9/59)

And in a symposium that took place on the Voice of Israel [*Kol Israel* – Israeli radio – trans.], Yizhar Harari declared:

In my opinion the problem is how to reach a peace between us and the Arab states as we are today and as the Arab states are today, without conditions and without concessions. (According to *Ner*, November-December 1960, p. 31)

Before the elections to the Fifth Knesset the Progressives merged with the General Zionists and created the Liberal Party. That party has no articulated position on the problem of Israel-Arab relations. Within it, the hard-line position of MK Yizhar Harari

cohabits with more moderate positions, inspired by the president of the Zionist Organization Dr. Nahum Goldmann. The latter espouses a softening of the Israeli position and the launching of a peace initiative. Accordingly he criticizes Israel's onesided embrace of the West. It is saddening that Dr. Goldmann's courage falls far short of his political wisdom; he often obscures his formulations and even backs away from his positions.

Dr. Goldman is not the only one who calls for a new approach to the problem. It is a sign of the times that in the recent period there have been many proposals in favour of a "new", "daring", "courageous" approach to Israel-Arab relations. Two things can be concluded from this:

1. The recognition is ripening among the Israeli public that there is a need for a change of foreign and defence policy.
2. It is *still* seen as a sign of "courage" and "daring" to suggest plans to solve the solution that require concessions from Israel.

But naturally, many of those who are raising new proposals are not well-versed in the political complexity of the problem and they rely more on the general feeling that "it could not be that everything's all right with us and only the other side is guilty". They have lost faith in the present political leadership but they still hold to many opinions that are a legacy of the past, they are still captives of the official line about the nature of the conflict and its history.

The various proposals can generally be summed up by the following demands:

1. Cancellation of the military administration (under which the Arabs of Israel are suffering).
2. The return of a limited number of refugees within the framework of family reunification.

3. Payment of monetary compensation.

There is no doubt that there is much goodwill in these proposals. Certainly they are an inseparable part of the necessary conditions for normalization in Israel-Arab relations. Every proposal for peace will need to include these points. But whoever believes that they suffice to produce a full solution of the problem is mistaken.

The problem of the Arabs of Palestine is not only humanitarian and personal. The source of the conflict is not only the suffering that was caused to them as individuals – even if their personal suffering is an inseparable part of the problem. The main issue is that that their political and national demands did have not been met. There is therefore a need to examine every peace proposal not only in terms of its approach to the personal problems of the Arabs of Palestine but in terms of its approach to their national problem.

Regarding all such proposals, the following must first be asked: Does the proposal recognize the right of the Arabs of Palestine to self-determination? Does the proposal recognize the obligations that such recognition imposes on Israel?

“Ihud”

Unlike the proposals that we have related so far, all of which are based on the stabilization of the *status quo* or on expanding the borders of Israel and the nonrecognition of the right of the refugees to return to their homeland and the right of self-determination of the Palestinian Arab people, there are three counter-proposals that include concessions on the *status quo*: the proposals of the Ihud [Unity] movement, Semitic Action and the Israeli Communist Party.

Ihud is a group of intellectuals and thinkers under the spiritual leadership of Professor Martin Buber, a group which has been calling for understanding and friendship between Jews and Arabs for many years. They are not politicians in the usual sense of the word. Their starting-point is first and foremost humanitarian-moral. For that reason their proposals are mainly concerned with a solution of the Arab refugee problem, and they do

not concern themselves much with territorial and political questions. On the question of the refugees their position is based on the following five principles:

1. The governments on the two sides do not pay attention to the enough attention to the human side of the refugee problem.

The government of Israel wants to eliminate that problem, which was caused for the most part by us, by settling them in Arab states, as far away as possible from their State. Such a materialistic outlook stands in complete contradiction to the Zionist idea that is based on the existence of an unbreakable tie between the people of Israel [i.e. the Jews – trans.] and the land of their fathers. If we did not forget the Land of Israel for 2,000 years, why do we imagine that it is possible for the Palestinian peasants to forget their homeland and the homeland of their fathers and their fathers' fathers eight years after their exile from it? Ihud does not believe that the national loyalty of the Arabs for their homeland is any less strong than the loyalty of the Jews for their State.

2. The Arab governments have not acted any better in this than has the government of Israel. They too neglected the humanitarian side of the problem and the sufferings of human beings.
3. As is their wont, the Great Powers and the United Nations related to the refugees as rich philanthropists, who distribute charity without dealing with the source of the poverty and the misery, but rather they lighten it by wasting money. As usual in that way – by charity – they incurably corrupt the morals of those who receive the charity.
4. We need a different approach to this painful problem. For all our sorrow and pain at the existing situation, from a moral point of view, we recognize that it is impossible to turn back the clock and bring all the refugees back to their places of residence without restrictions. An environment of hatred has been created between Jews and Arabs which has now existed for many years. There is a

security problem on both sides: the Jews who have already been brought there and the returning Arabs. A disorderly Arab return that is not guided by a reliable body that is responsible to a competent international institution will not solve the painful problem and will not heal the grave wound.

5. Accordingly, we propose that the United Nations be asked to send a committee to this country and to the refugee camps that will make practical proposals for the return of the refugees, after it has investigated the possibilities for absorption and after having spoken with the refugees personally and explaining to them the conditions that await them and the alternative proposals that they could choose, without any compulsion. The members of the Committee will be non-political and not people of commerce, or connected to the issue on any side whatsoever, but people of morality of international renown in whom the refugees can have faith, without doubts about the purity of their intentions.

The United Nations should help in a solution of this problem that resulted from the developments following their Resolution of November 1947. The government of Israel cannot claim sovereignty against these humanitarian concerns by the International Organization which to which it owes its right to exist; the Arab governments should pay attention to the bitter fate of their conationals and permit the refugees full, direct and free contact with the members of the UN committee without political guardianship and without fear of retribution in the event of political disagreements between them and the candidates for return.

(*Ner*, weekly on public issues and Jewish-Arab rapprochement, April-May 1956, p. 27)

Not only regarding the refugees does *Ihud* have a position that calls for compromise. The *Ihud* people opposed the Sinai War and the annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel. Their publications continuously call for compromise and mutual understanding. They deserve special appreciation for their moral courage, for being the only group in the Zionist camp

that espouses compromise and concessions. Their weak point is their non-political outlook. It is true that the Israeli Arab conflict, and especially the refugee problem, has a moral-humanitarian side. But it is essentially a political problem, and a moral approach does not suffice to disentangle the knot, and it certainly is not able to refute the official allegations.

“Semitic Action”

The results of the Suez War caused many people in Israel to reconsider their approach to the problem Israel Arab problem. They helped to create a group called Semitic Action, the official organ of which is *Etgar* [lit: “challenge” – trans.] and the unofficial instrument of expression of which is the large-circulation weekly *Haolam Hazeh*.

On 1/9/1958 Semitic Action published its platform, called *The Hebrew Manifesto*. It is quite a detailed programme, especially on the question of Israel-Arab relations. A revised and shortened edition of the *Manifesto* was published about a year later. Semitic Action explicitly recognizes the right of the Arab refugees to return to their homeland:

Recognizing that the Palestine refugee problem is a human tragedy and a political stumbling-block on the path to the unity of the country and the State’s integration into the region, the government of Israel should take the following actions to solve the problem of the refugees:

1. It will recognize in principle the right of every refugee to return to the State of Israel.
2. It will give every refugee the free choice between returning to the State of Israel and receiving compensation.
3. It will propose to the refugee public that they elect an independent representation that will participate together with the representatives of the

State of Israel, in an organization that will clarify the desire of every refugee and verify their demands.

4. It will absorb all who choose to return in ten yearly quotas. The order of return will be determined by the State of Israel, with consideration for economic and security factors.
5. It will absorb the returnees in accordance with the procedures that are usual regarding Jewish immigrants.
6. It will pay personal compensation in return for property, loss of livelihood and other rights of the refugees who permanently waive their right to return to Israel.
7. It will sign agreements that will permit farmers from one side of the border to work their lands on the other side.
8. It will finance the absorption of the returnees and the compensation of the non-returnees with the help of international moneys that will be raised in the form of grants and long-term loans.

The State of Israel will bring this programme into effect immediately and unilaterally and independent of a comprehensive settlement or on a peace settlement with the Arab states.

(The Semitic Manifesto, second edition, 1/7/59, p. 10)

Uri Avnery reiterated that formulation in *Haolam Hazeh* volume 1214 (28/12/60), in an article he wrote in the series “The Refugees: Danger or Opportunity?” If Semitic Action has a position that contradicts the *status quo* on the question of the refugees, this is not the case regarding the borders:

It is a fateful necessity to maintain the State of Israel within its present borders as a sovereign unit.

(*The Semitic Manifesto*, first edition, p. 25)

Nevertheless, Semitic Action recognizes the existence of a Palestinian Arab nation:

The Arabs of Palestine – in Jordan, Israel and Gaza – consider themselves to belong to a distinct Arab nation. That is a fact and that it would be foolish to ignore it. The Palestinian nation is the natural ally of Israel, as the only nation that lost the Semitic civil war in 1948. Hundreds of thousands of its people were expelled from their land in Israeli territory and, along with other sons of the nation, are subjugated to foreign regimes in Jordan and Gaza. Israel can extend decisive help to that nation's war of liberation, for its effort to attain self-determination in its own independent state. (Ibid., p. 24)

There is a certain amount of contradiction between the last two passages. On the one hand, there is recognition of the right of the Palestinian Arab people to self-determination and even to their own independent state. On the other hand, there is unwillingness to concede even a small part of the territory that was allocated to that state by the UN and which today is considered part of Israel. That is to say: Semitic Action demands that the “foreign regimes in Jordan and Gaza” concede part of the territory they took from the Arabs of Palestine, but it does not think that the regime in Israel is obliged to concede even a small part of its share in the spoils.

On foreign policy, *The Semitic Manifesto* declares:

The State of Israel will conduct an active regional policy on all levels through:

- Support for the war of liberation of the peoples of the region to eliminate the remnants of colonialism in all its forms: direct subjugation, foreign military bases, and political, economic or cultural dependence.

- A positive attitude to all national movements in the region that honestly strive for the unity of the Semitic Region on the basis of liberty, equality and progress for all of its peoples.

(*The Semitic Manifesto*, second edition, p. 11)

Weak points in the manifesto of Semitic Action

Semitic Action sees the root of the Israeli-Arab problem as “the dismemberment of the country into three parts”:

The dismemberment of Palestine into three parts – the State of Israel, the Kingdom of Jordan and the Gaza Strip – runs counter to the needs of the country, causes it constant tensions and endangers the independence of all its parts. (Ibid., p. 10)

That is to say, according to the *Manifesto*, the problem is basically geopolitical. In the opinion of Semitic Action, the problem will be solved when there is unity between the parts of the country; but it is not at all clear if such unity must also, in its opinion, include the east side of the Jordan River, or only the West Bank. In any case, while the *Manifesto* calls for extending “political and material assistance to the liberation movement of the Palestinian nation – in the Kingdom of Jordan and the Gaza Strip – which aspires to establish a free Palestinian state that will be a partner to the State of Israel”, at the same time it expresses explicit opposition to its use of that right to join another state:

The annexation of one part of Palestine to another state would amount to dismembering the country, and would constitute an act of aggression against its other parts. (Ibid., p. 10)

In fact, it is not at all clear whether history will put on the agenda the question of the *reunification* of the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, or the

question of its *re-partition*. At this moment the second possibility looks more likely. The very geopolitical approach is wrongheaded at its base. If the UN Partition Plan is implemented, *and despite that*, the Israeli-Arab conflict erupts anew, then it could perhaps be claimed that the *partition* of the territory of Palestine is the root of the evil. But in reality, it is the very fact that the partition of the country was *not* implemented as planned that has been the point of departure for the current conflict. The problem is not that the *country* was dismembered, but that *the Arab state* that was supposed to be created was dismembered. It is, therefore, not a geopolitical problem but a political problem.

That last question is not theoretical or abstract by any means. Semitic Action is walking on a slippery slope. One careless step, and it will find itself in the company of Herut and Co. Whoever demands the unity of The Land of Israel, even if they believe and declare that that unification must be executed by peaceful means – is in a weak position to oppose the “unification of the country” when it is executed by violent means, by means of conquest. Thus, for example, the day after the conquest of the Gaza Strip, Uri Avnery himself, one of the leaders of Semitic Action and its most prominent spokesman, commented:

Two great joys fill the heart of every person in Israel this week. The first, because Gaza has returned to Israel and there is one place on the body of the country where the bleeding wound called a border has been healed. (*Haolam Hazeh* 995, 7/11/56)

And when it became clear that Israel would be forced to withdraw from the Strip, he wrote:

Politically, the absorption of Gaza will strengthen the State immeasurably. The State will be *bigger*, it will solve part of the malignant problem of the refugees, which is the main asset held by those who seek to make Israel hated in the world, and Israel will become a state with a good message for the Arabs of Palestine in the Triangle, in Hebron, in Lebanon and in Syria ...

It is not an economic issue, it is not a political issue, it is not even a security issue. From all these perspectives an Israeli Gaza is preferable to a United Nations

Gaza. The Arabs of Gaza are part of the Arab people of Palestine. Everything that is done to them will serve as a clear message to all their co-nationals. *For the first time [!]Israel has an opportunity to make peace with part of the Arab people – not peace on paper, but living peace with living people with living acts. For the first time since the partition of Palestine there is a practical opportunity to do something for the reunification of the country. [Emphasis ours] (Haolam Hazeh 1002, 26/12/56)*

It is all too clear how the slogan “reunification of the country” can be interpreted. Between it and acceptance after the fact of acts of annexation and aggression is but a small step. Or did Uri Avnery think that the “liberation” of the Gaza Strip was *not* an act of aggression?

Let us assume for a moment that despite the opposition of Semitic Action, the government of Israel occupies the entire West Bank of the Jordan River. Based on Uri Avnery’s stance on the question of the Gaza Strip, Semitic Action would reply “Amen” to such an action after it was executed. After the fact it would see it as a possible point of departure for the unity of the country and for *peace!*

The vision of a unified Land of Israel, the two peoples of which live in harmony and cooperation and which will be a member of the family of nations of the Middle East and the emancipated nations, is without a doubt a heart-warming one. We hope that it will be realized one day. But *at this time* the problem is not how to unify Palestine but how to realize self-determination for its two peoples. Anyone who *now* puts the unification of Palestine on the agenda as a top priority, however well-intentioned, is greasing the wheels of those who espouse the “unity” of Palestine by means of conquest.

Another weak point in the Manifesto is the positing of “two super-powers” – the USA and the USSR – on the basis of equality in all that relates to their policy in the region. The first edition of the Manifesto speaks of “the intrigues of Western and Soviet imperialism” (the section entitled “Questions and Answers”, in which this expression is to be found does not appear in the second edition, but it contains expressions that are similar to it for the most part).

The truth is that there is no symmetry, but rather complete anti-symmetry between the roles of the “superpowers” in the Middle East. The national liberation movement that is the motivating force in this region and in Asia and Africa in general is aimed directly against the West and is supported directly by the East. *The history of the two proves that there is no possibility of conducting a neutralist and forceful anti-imperialist policy without economic and political support from the Soviet Union.*

Any Israeli who remembers the American “trusteeship” plan and arms embargo during the War of Independence on the one hand, and the Soviet veto and the Czech arms on the other, is deceiving himself if he places the policies of the two powers with one common denominator. And the same can be said of any Arab who remembers the Baghdad Pact, the nationalization of the Canal, the Suez War and the Iraqi revolution.

Semitic Action’s theoretical point of departure is that *“Israel is an inseparable part of the Land of Israel. The Land of Israel is an inseparable part of the Semitic region”*. (Op. Cit., p. 9)

Regarding the geopolitical approach, the platform of Semitic Action also contains a mystical-cultural-racial essence that is called the “Semitic mythos”. According to that perception, the basis that unifies the Middle East (in the broad sense, including apparently also the countries of northern Africa in the west) is the Semitic essence. Here too there is a complete confusion of concepts. Is the Middle East characterized by its “Semitic-ness”? Farouk, Nuri Said, Abdullah, Chamoun – all of them are strictly kosher Semites. Are Nasser, Qasim, Karami, Khaled al-Azm and Nabulsi like them? What characterizes the “region” these days is not shared racial origin, language or cultural background, but shared *political* bases and interests: to be more precise, the strong hard struggle that the peoples of the region – Semites and non-Semites alike – have conducted and are conducting against colonialism. A Semite who supports colonialism is an enemy of the peoples of the region, whereas an anti-imperialist, whatever his racial origin may be, is their ally.

Despite the weak points that we have enumerated in the platform of Semitic Action, as a new group that dares openly to declare unacceptable and non-typical ideas regarding the solution to the Israeli Arab conflict, Semitic Action should be welcomed. The mere

fact that debate on this question is being expanded is a breath of fresh air in the throttling atmosphere that prevailed in this area until to the time of the Sinai War.

Nevertheless, the Semitic Action people would do well to give some thought to the basic shortcomings of their platform: the idea of the reunification of Palestine is most dangerous, even if it is preached from good intentions. Their “Semitic mythos”, along the lines of Toynbee, obscures the political problem rather than clarifying it. To posit the existence of “two superpowers” with one common denominator is nothing but a distortion of the facts and its source is evidently in Semitic Action’s fear that they might be accused of being Communists.

Whoever is seriously preparing to solve the problem and contribute to the advancement of the matter of Israeli Arab peace must not be deterred by fear of being accused of “communism”. More than that, they must assume *in advance* that their adversaries will make *precisely* that accusation. And not by chance.

The Israeli Communist Party’s proposal for solving the conflict

The Israeli Communist Party (Maki) is the only political party in Israel that recognizes the Arab Palestinian people’s right to self-determination. It did not arrive at that position after Operation Sinai but has included it in its platform for many years now. Back in the day, the party demanded the implementation of the UN resolution for the creation of two states in Palestine and opposed the collusion with Abdullah. It supported the struggle of the peoples of the region for liberation from colonialism, called for a neutralist policy and called for Israel not to act as a “watchdog” for the West in the region; for that reason it opposed the “reprisal actions”. Its representatives in the Knesset were the only ones who voted – against the entire house – against the Sinai adventure. The party demanded that the IDF immediately return to the ceasefire lines and to evacuate all the occupied territories, including the Gaza Strip.

The Communists’ position on the question of the Israeli-Arab conflict has been expressed many times in great detail and it has not undergone substantial changes from 1947 to the present day. At the time of the War of Independence and a few years after it, the Communist Party’s position was based on the principle of the partition that was

accepted by the UN. In the program that was passed at the 12th Party Congress (June 1952), the party demands:

Peace with the neighbouring states on the basis of mutual respect for national sovereignty, annulation of the territorial annexations and recognition of the right of the Arab people of Palestine to establish its independent democratic state; the right of the Arab refugees to return to their country. (The program of the Israeli Communist Party, published by the Central Committee of the Israeli Communist Party, p. 18)

The Communists subsequently came to the conclusion that there was no basis for assuming that the creation of an independent Arab state in conformity with the Partition Plan would *under all circumstances* be the only path for the solution of the Palestinian problem. Maki therefore declared that it would be prepared to support *any* solution that took the rights of the two sides into account.

In Maki's 13th Party Congress (June 1957) the following resolution was passed:

The State of Israel must recognize the right of self-determination – including secession – of the Palestinian Arab people which is the basis for the solution of the territorial problem, as well as the right of the Arab refugees to return to their homeland and to be rehabilitated.

On the other side, the Arab states must recognize Israel's right to freedom of navigation in the Red Sea straits and the Suez Canal, recognize the State of Israel and sign a peace treaty that is posited on the recognition of the just rights of the people of Israel and the Palestinian Arab people.

Therefore the 13th Congress of Maki calls for the solution of the problems under contention between Israel and the Arab states by peaceful means only, through negotiation and accord between the two sides, based on the recognition of the just legitimate national rights of the people of Israel and the Palestinian Arab people.

The Israeli Communist Party will encourage and welcome any Israeli Arab peace agreement that that is acceptable to all the interested parties and that will take into account the legitimate rights of the peoples involved.

The Israeli Communist Party will support any peace accord that will be to the benefit of the peoples.

(Record of the 13th Congress of Maki, published by the Maki Central Committee, 1957, p. 211)

The historical choice that stands before Israel is: either to stand by imperialism to the end, which will involve very serious dangers for the State of Israel in view of the uprooting of imperialism and its expulsion from the region. Or to turn its back on imperialism before it is too late, talk with the Arab peoples on the basis of mutual recognition of national rights and consolidating Israel's status as a state that is recognized by the peoples of the region. (Ibid.)

Meir Vilner, a Maki leader and a member of its Political Committee, commented on the same matter:

Just as the people of Israel is not prepared to concede its national rights in Palestine, the same is true of the Palestinian Arab people. Just as the people of Israel want the Arab peoples to recognize the State of Israel, so also do the Arab people want the right of the Palestinian Arab people to self-determination in accordance with the UN resolutions to be recognized, these same resolutions that constitute the international basis for the existence of the State of Israel.

This realistic approach to the problems does necessarily require adherence to the details of the borders of 1947. But it does mean that in order to ensure Israel's future and to secure for it recognition by the Arab peoples, the State of Israel has to recognize the national rights of the Palestinian Arab people, the fact that its territory is held by Israel, and the right of the refugees who so desire to return to their homeland. (Meir Vilner, "How can we ensure the future of Israel as a Middle

Eastern state?" *Zo ha-Derekh*, the Maki organ for theoretical and practical problems, February 1958, p. 7)

Israel absolutely has the right to exist and it is possible for it to exist in the Middle East as a sovereign and peace-loving state. There is every likelihood that the Arab peoples will recognize the State of Israel and even cooperate with it in friendship in the political, economic and cultural spheres.

But in order for this vision to become a reality, Israel has to become not a part of "Europe" or of America, but part of the Middle East. Not a gendarme of imperialism against the Arab national liberation movement, but its ally. Not to negate the rights of the Palestinian Arab people, but to recognize them. (Ibid., p. 8)

A just solution to the problem of the borders does not mean holding to the 1947 Resolution in every detail on that matter, but there should be a fair and real basis for discussions that have to take into account all aspects of the matter, on the basis of the peoples' right of self-determination. Not a number of kilometers determines The security and political and economic strength of Israel is not determined by a number of kilometres, but by its entire network of Middle Eastern and international relations, in all spheres. (Ibid., p. 14)

When we say mutual recognition of the national rights of both of the peoples of Palestine – we are not proposing to weaken Israel but to strengthen it. We are not proposing to harm the new immigrants in Ramle, Lydda, Jaffa and Acre, but to give them – as for all the people of Israel – constructive lives of security and economic efflorescence.

"A people that enslaves another people cannot be free" – that maxim of Marx is also fully valid regarding relations between the two peoples of Palestine. We have no doubt that a neutral Israel could reach a just and agreed-upon solution to the territorial question and the refugee question which will safeguard the interests of the two peoples without one of them depriving the other. With good will it is possible to find a solution that is acceptable to all sides. (Ibid., p. 12)

When we say “neutral”, we are not proposing to break off our relations with the West, but to establish them on a basis of equality instead of the present basis of dependency. We are not proposing to enter into an alliance with the Soviet Union against “the West”, but to put an end to the political and military alliance with imperialism that exists in practice against the Soviet Union and the colonial peoples. (Ibid., p. 12)

In the 14th Congress (June 1961) the Communist Party again passed a resolution in a similar spirit:

The [Communist Party’s] point of departure for a solution of the problem of Israeli-Arab relations is the right of self-determination of the peoples; it is the fact that Palestine in its historical development has become the homeland of two nations, the Jewish and the Arab; it is the need and the possibility of guaranteeing the legitimate national rights of both peoples; it is the duty and the possibility of normalizing Israel-Arab relations by peaceful means, through negotiations and mutual accord.

... we demand an Israeli policy that will recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian Arab people and of the duty to correct the historical injustice that was done to them by the denial of these rights. The people of Israel too require Arab recognition of the State of Israel, including: recognition of its right to freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and in the Red Sea straits, the cancellation of the Arab boycott of Israel, an agreed-upon arrangement on the question of the waters and the rivers shared by Israel and the neighbouring states and the establishment of normal relations with Israel. In order to obtain that recognition from the Arab peoples, the Israeli side is also required to recognize the right of the Arab refugees to return to Israel, guarantee suitable compensation for the refugees who will decide to return and to be willing by means of mutual agreement to convert the provisional ceasefire lines into borders of peace and permanence. All that, on the basis of the right of self-determination of peoples.

Peace will be achieved if there is a mutual Israeli-Arab accord, and the mutuality of the accord is conditional on the willingness of the two sides to recognize the legitimate rights of both peoples.

[The Communist Party] will encourage and welcome any peace accord between the State of Israel and the Arab states and which will take into account the legitimate national rights of the both peoples. (Summary of the deliberations of the 14th Congress of the Israeli Communist Party, *Zo ha-Derekh*, April 1961, p. 10. Emphasis in the original)

“We choose the latter”

In the days of the War of Independence Ben-Gurion said to Luciaen Franc, the chief correspondent of Agence France Presse:

Between more territory, acquired by force of arms, and a smaller territory that is given either according to an international decision or by means of an agreement with the Arabs, *we choose the latter*. (*Davar*, 4/8/48. Emphasis ours)

The *only party* that supports that view *today* is the Communist Party. In its opinion, a smaller territory, with borders that have received recognition from the Arabs of Palestine, the Arab states and the entire world, is preferable to a larger territory, surrounded by ceasefire lines, which the Arabs and the entire world see as provisional lines only, and they will by no means accept as a final settlement.

Maki has consistently refrained from entering into technical details of the execution of its peace proposals. It does not insist that every Arab must receive his exact previous residence, or that the borders of Israel have to hug the partition lines. The party says only that the *principle* must be the willingness to compromise and the make concessions, and not stubborn refusal to withdraw from the existing situation along the lines of “not a single refugee, not a foot of land”.

Where exactly will the agreed border be? What will be the fate of this area or that one? How will the process of returning the refugees be carried out? What level of compensation will be paid for lands, houses, property, and loss of livelihood? In Maki’s

opinion a solution to these problems will be reached at the negotiation-table. In its view no serious peace plan can give a detailed technical answer at this stage. The problem that is on the agenda today is not technical but about principles: on what basis is it possible to go to the negotiation-table?

In order for peace negotiations to be justified, there must be at least one point of agreement between the approaches of the two sides, on which the first manifestation of rapprochement can be based. If we analyze the positions of the sides in the case before us, we realize that, while the minimal position of the government of Israel is based on the demand for the preservation of the *status quo* on borders and refugees, the Arab states demand a return to the UN Partition Plan of 1947 and to return the refugees to their previous residences. A point of convergence between the two approaches, the necessary condition for the first manifestation of rapprochement, is therefore missing. The principle that Maki proposes, of willingness for mutual concessions, provides the missing common ground. This does not mean that Israel must make concessions before sitting at the negotiation-table, but it is obliged must announce its willingness in principle not to be inflexible on the issue of conserving the *status quo* on the question of the refugees and the borders, and thereby to bring the other side to the table.

As long as no attempt is made in that direction, the government of Israel cannot accuse the Arab states of exclusive responsibility for the lack of peace in the region and the lack of willingness to sit at the negotiation-table.

Maki's demand to recognize the right of self-determination – including up to secession – of the Arab people of Palestine does not mean that that people *must* establish for itself a separate state. It means that only the Palestinian Arab people itself must decide on that issue. The right of self-determination can be realized in different ways: the creation of a separate state or voluntarily joining another state, or establishing a federation etc. The important thing is that the national aspirations of this people be satisfied, without harming the similar rights of other peoples.

In Maki's view, a situation has been created in which Israel must take care to avoid dictating to the Arabs of Palestine how they should realize their right to self-determination. That is their business alone, as just as the right of self-determination of the *Jews* of Palestine is their business alone, as long as it does not harm the neighbouring

people.

It is appropriate to point out that among the three bodies that support the idea of the return of the refugees and compromise, two – the Communists and Semitic Action – overtly declare themselves to be non- and even anti-Zionists. The Unity people are Zionists, as we have said. But their approach to the Israel Arab problem is not political but humanitarian-moral. On the other hand, all the parties that oppose the return of the refugees and compromise on the borders are Zionist parties. Indeed it is possible to claim that the president of the Zionist Congress Nahum Goldmann supports the solution of reconciliation and compromise; but his approach is unusual in the Zionist camp.

It is therefore fitting to ask: will *any Zionist policy* at all ever be able to resolve Israel Arab relations?

Whether the answer be positive or negative, it is clear from every perspective that as long as Ben-Gurion and his people in power, true peace with the Arabs is not likely, if only because the massacre in Qibya, the raid on Gaza, and the Sinai war stick to their foreheads like the mark of Cain.

Political arithmetic: 65 + 3 is bigger than 88 + 1

The fact that the Israeli Communist Party is small and has limited influence should not mislead us. It has already occurred more than once in the past that its political positions on the question of Israel Arab relations, which all the other parties opposed, despised and condemned as “national betrayal”, have been *imposed* on Israel by virtue of the international political reality. It suffices to point out that on that same day on which the Knesset rejected, by an overwhelming majority of 88 to Maki’s 3 votes, the motion to express non-confidence in the Ben-Gurion government regarding the invasion of Sinai and the demand to return the IDF to behind the ceasefire lines, a resolution calling for the immediate evacuation of the invading forces from Egyptian territory was passed by the UN General Assembly with a majority of 65 against the isolated vote of the Israeli delegation. At the end of the day the 3 added to the 65 defeated the 88 added to the 1. It can therefore be assumed that it is not the internal balance of forces that exists *at this time*

in Israel that will determine what form the solution to the Israeli Arab conflict will take. Indeed, all the indicators suggest that that internal balance too will continue to change.

Arousing the sleeping

As we have seen, the *status quo* continues to be undermined from year to year. The UN General Assembly resolutions and its committees from 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960 and 1961 keep pointing to the need for a solution based on the previous resolutions of the UN. The conferences of the nations of Africa and Asia in Bandung, Cairo, Accra, Addis-Ababa and Casablanca expressed support unreserved support for the rights of the Palestinian Arab people. The weight of the Arab states in the international stage is rising constantly and powerful states are compelled to take that into consideration. Time is working rapidly against the *status quo*. Even if its proponents are not willing to admit it, the fact is that the situation worries them.

After the failure of the Suez War, a new situation was created in the region. Until that war the Arab national movement and the government of Egypt that stood then at its head were interested in the conflict to a conclusion as rapidly as possible. They feared – and rightly so, as became clear in October 1956 – that any regional conflagration would serve as a pretext for colonialism to launch a military campaign against it on the ostensible purpose of “establishing peace in the region”. But after that fear was realized and after it became clear that the outside intervention had failed and there was not much chance that it would be repeated, it is no longer such an urgent question for the Arab national movement. It can wait; time is on its side. Their influence is constantly rising in the UN, on the international political stage, on the economic stage. The economic balance is unrelentingly changing in their favour. They have therefore no reason to rush. The opposite of that can be said regarding Israel: with each passing day it is more difficult for it to continue to exist without normal relations with its neighbours and its influence on the international stage continues to decline. A compromise in another 10 years will be much worse than a compromise today, and a compromise imposed by means of pressure from the Great Powers on Israel will be much worse than a compromise made by its own free will.

Those who oppose any concession will not admit it, but in fact they are worried about the possibility that the West – the USA first and foremost – will stop supporting Israel's hard-line position and force it to make concessions to the Arabs. That is the reason they fear the convening of a summit conference in which the Middle East will be discussed, among other things. They tremble in horror at any declaration by an American politician in favour of compromise in the Middle East.

The *Haaretz* correspondent in the USA summed up this state of affairs with the following words:

Since Operation Sinai, the Israeli Arab border has been calm and Palestine problem has been dormant, at least in military terms. We bask under the sun of the status quo and apparently are satisfied. Our foreign policy is based on the need for its continuation. For behind our constant calls for peace, our practical policy is that peace is an ideal that cannot be realized and that the existing situation is better than what could be achieved by changing it. We relate with suspicion, sometimes with fear, towards international initiatives for peace in the Middle East. Jerusalem's suspicion stems from the imperative, that even in cases in which intentions are good and pure, the time is simply not right for an agreement. As Messrs Eban and Dulles agreed between themselves a few years ago, it is better to "let sleeping dogs lie". In that approach we are not alone. The professional staff of many Western foreign ministries, including London and Washington, hold similar views and hope like us that Mr. Kennedy will not go far to implement fulfil his famous promise to put the "full prestige" of the White House behind the convening of an Israeli-Arab conference. We do not believe that anything will come of that at the present juncture. And even if we do not say it openly, Jerusalem hopes that Mr. Kennedy will not be too hasty. There are among us those who hope that he will simply forget the matter and do nothing. (*Haaretz*, 24/2/61)

These words are not conjectures. Immediately upon Kennedy's election to the Presidency, Israel submitted an official memorandum to the new Administration in the spirit of "let sleeping dogs lie". But is it is one thing if sleeping dogs lie and you take care

not to awaken them; it is quite another if they wake up nevertheless. The question of whether Palestine problem will continue to be dormant does not depend only on Israel. The truth is that the problem has *ceased to be* dormant for quite some time. It is sufficient to mention the revival of the Reconciliation Committee, the resolutions of the parallel UN Political Committee on the refugee issue (19/4/61).

In June 1961 Ben-Gurion traveled to the Western countries, including the USA. Like Moshe Dayan's visit to the USA at the time of the "unfortunate affair", and like the previous visit of Ben-Gurion himself (March 1960), this time too the visit was not conducted on the basis of an official invitation from Washington, because the State Department was not interested in excessively provoking the Arab states. Ben-Gurion met with the US president in a hotel in New York (not in Washington!) and had a "private conversation" with him. Since the Prime Minister refused to reveal the details of that conversation even to members of the government themselves, we must make do with quoting the analysis of a journalist who is usually well-versed in the secrets of Israeli policy:

Let us look at matters with clarity: Ben-Gurion travelled to the USA completely unprepared for any discussion of the refugees with President Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson. Since he met them anyway, he understood that the old formulations, however good they may be, are no longer good enough. True, the Arab states are guilty in the problem of the refugees; true, hundreds of thousands of Jews immigrated to Israel from Arab states and therefore there was an exchange of populations. All that is true – *but the fact remains that over the course 13 years we have been unable to convince not only our enemies, but also most of our good friends, old and new*, of these truths. It is worth recalling that the refugee problem will come up this year at the UN, and without the support of the USA, we can expect a crushing defeat. (Arel Ginai, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 30/6/61. Emphasis ours)

And the competing evening newspaper commented on that subject:

Mr. Ben-Gurion visited the president of the USA not in order to come to any agreement, but only in order to test the air and to find out about the plans that were devised at the US State Department regarding the Middle East. He thereby set various programs in motion and accelerated the discussion on that painful question, the accelerated discussion of which Israel was not interested.

... Those who have an interest in the status quo are not required to be activist. Those who are interested in the status quo need not be interested in rousing the sleeping. (*Maariv*, 30/6/61)

Maariv is right: proponents of the *status quo* are not interested in “arousing the sleeping”. But it would be an error to attribute that “awakening” to the actions of Ben-Gurion. It is political reality – and not this man or the other – which have put the problems again onto the agenda, and now there is no avoiding them.

“If you are willing and obedient ...” (Isaiah 1:19)

At this juncture the reader may say in his heart: this is all very fine and good; I accept the explanation of the nature of the Israeli-Arab conflict; the criticism of Israeli policy seems reasonable to me; but I also think that Israel’s current political situation is most serious; *what is the way out?*

In order to point to a way out, it is first necessary to establish one thing about which there can be no doubt: sooner or later Israel will withdraw from the *status quo* and will be forced to make certain concessions. The questions are only:

1. For how long can that be put off?
2. Is postponement to the benefit of Israel?

The proponents of the *status quo* have an answer to both parts of the question. They believe that by concentrating on fortifying its military and political power Israel will be able to postpone the day reckoning for a long time – twenty or thirty years. They imagine some kind of “statute of limitations” applies to Arab demands, and the longer that the

postponement lasts, the fewer concessions Israel will have to make. They usually defend themselves with the question: is there a guarantee that concessions from Israel will bring real peace?

Against that we ask: if there were such guarantees, would you be willing to agree to concessions? With those who answer in the negative, there is no point in arguing. To those who answer in the positive we would like to say: Indeed, there is no certainty that concessions *alone* will bring about peace; everything depends on *the form and the time* in which they are carried out. If the concessions come in consequence of political and economic compulsion – for example from a power like the USA – then there is no basis for assuming that the Arab states will consider themselves obliged to make counter-concessions and to make peace. It may be that the opposite of that is true. It may be that a consequence of Israel's giving in to American pressure will be Arab rapprochement with the USA, not Israel. In any case that is the consideration that motivated Washington to apply its pressure. In such a case Washington will pocket the Arab reward for Israeli concessions, and Israel will lose out both ways. Those who are forced to concede by compulsion lose bargaining-power.

Therefore it is clear that the full benefits will accrue from concessions only if they are proposed at Israel's initiative, without external compulsion, as a gesture of good will; only then can Israel receive the full reward.

Here the element of time comes into the picture. As we have seen, the time-factor is working for the benefit of the Arabs and against Israeli policy. The day is approaching when any Israeli concession will necessarily be seen as an unavoidable concession due to pressure and compulsion from outside. More than that – the extent of the concessions that will be demanded of Israel will increase. In medicine cases are known in which it is possible to save the patient by amputating one finger, as long as the operation is carried out *before it is too late*; if they are *later* than that, then even amputating the whole hand will not help.

Proponents of the *status quo* place their hopes on Israel's military superiority, on the policy of procurement and manufacture of arms, on the superiority of the Israeli soldier and even on the development of missiles and nuclear weapons. There is no basis believing that that superiority can be preserved in the long run; but even if it were

possible to preserve it, that superiority would not suffice to perpetuate the *status quo*, much less to bring about a solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict. One of the important lessons of Sinai is that what is decisive in Israel-Arab relations does not necessarily occur on the field of battle. The IDF did not withdraw from Sinai because of Egyptian military superiority, but in the wake of political and economic international pressure that was applied on Israel. A similar situation could also be created also in the future and thereby void all the calculations of Israeli militarists who warm themselves in the light of the Shavit [an Israeli rocket, launched for meteorological research in 1961, the name of which literally means “comet” – trans.] and who follow the false magic of the Mirage [a French fighter plane used by the Israeli air force in the 1960s – trans.].

What remains for Israel to do?

To that there can be only one answer: we must *immediately* declare our recognition of the national rights of the Arab Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination and the right of the refugees to return to their homeland. If the Arabs accept peace negotiations on that *principled* basis, so much the better. Next up for discussion is the translation of the principle into practical language: the concessions Israel will make and the reward Israel will receive in return. Realization of the national rights of the Arabs of Palestine – in return for the realization of the national rights of the Jews of Palestine, and of the State of Israel. But even if the Arab representatives – all of them or some of them – refuse to conduct negotiations on that principled and just basis, Israel will be in a much better situation than it is in now. Such a position will win inestimably much more sympathy and support than the wretched present one. A new situation will be created on the Middle Eastern stage: the demands of the Arabs of Palestine will be addressed towards those same Arab leaders who will oppose the following proposals to realize their rights. The pressure that was hitherto directed against Israel will be directed for the most part towards a different address. Israel will appear in the desirable position as an ally and supporter of the fraternal Palestinian Arab people, and not as an ally and supporter of the Hashemite regime.

That principled position – and it alone – will constitute a proper response to the various claims and demands that are directed against Israel. Just as disregard for the rights of the Arabs of Palestine is part and parcel of a policy of political and economic dependence on the West, so would a policy of recognizing these rights be part and parcel of a neutralist foreign policy. The experience of recent years has shown that even an *Arab* leader who conducts a policy of unilateral ties to the West necessarily comes across as being in opposition to the aspirations of most residents of the region and finds himself – in the best of cases – completely isolated. Therefore any *Israeli* politician who desires to come to an understanding and a peace arrangement with the Arab nations must insist on a policy based on neutralism.

“If you refuse and rebel ...” (Isaiah 1:20)

Many Israelis find for themselves an escape-route from serious political discussions on Israel-Arab issues by ascending up to the clouds of historical philosophy. They console themselves with the fact that the Jewish people – a “People of the World”, “a people that dwelleth alone” – has been prosecuted over thousands of years and for all that continued to exist. They rely on miracles and hope that “the Glory of Israel will not lie” (1 Samuel 15:29) and that – despite all the political forces arrayed against Israel – it will be able to swim against the current of history.

To them we say: those who rely on the lessons of the past, needs to pay equal heed not only to the history of the *people* of Israel but also to the history of the *land* of Israel.

Our country has already experienced something that is highly reminiscent of the Jewish State. In the years 1099 to 1291 the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem existed in this land. Despite the great difference in nature and the large distance in time, there are many points of similarity between the two states.

- The Crusader state was established as a an economic, political and ideological bridgehead of Europea in the Arab East.

- The founders of the Crusader state were suffused with recognition of the destiny of their mission; its rulers saw it as a state that existed not for its residents, but for a global body – the Catholic Church.
- The Crusader State was not a self-sufficient entity, but needed an unending flow of immigration and economic support from the Western states.
- Its leaders did not project any normalization of relations with the neighbouring states, and a constant state of hostility, tension and wars prevailed between them and their surroundings.

The Chief of Staff of the IDF declared, in a moment of candour:

“We are a generation of settlement, and without the steel helmet and the barrel of the cannon we cannot plant a tree or build a house. We must not be deterred from seeing the loathing that inflames and fills the lives of hundreds of thousands of Arabs who live around us. We must not avert our gaze lest our hand be weakened. This is the fate of our generation; it is the choice of our lives – to be ready and armed, strong and resilient – lest the sword fall from our grasp and our lives be cut short.” (Moshe Dayan, speech at the funeral of Ro'i Rotberg, *Davar*, 2/5/56)

There is scarcely any doubt that about nine hundred years ago, the adventurous Crusader knight Renaud de Châtillon speechified to his men in a similar vein ... There is a surprising degree of similarity between the two states not only as regards their essential characters, but also in their external relations.

- The Crusaders too organized a kind of “Operation Sinai” (known as the “Fifth Crusade”) against Egypt. And that operation too met at first with military success, but at the end it completely failed, when the Sultan of Egypt ordered the opening of the dams on the Nile, which flooded vast areas.

- The Crusaders too were not able to occupy the Gaza Strip for long.
- In the Crusader Kingdom too there existed a law that banned the sale of land to Arabs.
- The Crusader Kingdom too saw the rise of a generation of “Sabras” – the “poulines” – who scorned and mocked the “Zionism” of the Crusades.
- The Crusader community too was mainly urban, and the authorities encouraged movement from the city to the village, in order to ensure a supply of food for the kingdom.
- The Crusaders established outposts and “wall and tower” settlements – *real* walls and *real* towers.
- The Crusaders also introduced an original kind of pioneering movement to the world: the religious-military orders, the cooperative agricultural farms of which were distinguished by their economic efficiency.
- The Crusaders too developed the wine industry (that was brought from Europe for religious sentimental reasons).
- The Crusaders too changed the names of many places in the country.
- The Crusaders too likened their kingdom to the ancient Hebrew kingdom; they called their state the “Kingdom of David” (“Regnum David”).

It is no coincidence that official Israeli historians speak with affection for and identification with the Crusader period:

The Crusader period was a period of efflorescence and prosperity compared to the Arab period that preceded it and the Mamluk period that followed it. The Crusader

ruins in this country also attest to a great deal of activity *in undertakings of defence and settlement*, that have no parallel in the Arab periods. The Crusaders applied themselves to the *development of the country*, but since they suffered from shortages of materials and manpower, they also applied themselves to *fortifying the country and defending it*, and they built a chain of mighty fortresses along important roads. (Emmanuel Anati, *Ha-tequfot ha-arkheologiyot be-eretz-yisra'el* [Archaeological periods in the land of Israel], published by the General Staff/Chief Education Officer, 1957, p 138. Hebrew. Emphasis ours)

Indeed, “enterprises of defence and settlement”, “development”, “fortification of the country” are not new concepts in the history of Palestine. Many are the points of similarity between the Crusader Kingdom and the State of Israel; but the difference between them too is great. The Crusader Kingdom was attacked and defeated when *Salah al-Din* united Egypt and Syria under his rule, responded to the adventurous raids of the Crusader knights and launched a Holy War against them. The Crusader Kingdom passed out of this world when Baybars reunited Egypt with Syria and reconquered the remaining Crusader cities one by one.

It is not a historical necessity that the end of the State of Israel be like the end of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Will the partial analogy between the two states become a complete analogy? The answer to that fateful question has not yet been given; it depends first and foremost on the policy Israel adopts.

They say that “history repeats itself”; we hope for our sakes and for that of every Israeli that this does not happen. We hope with all our might that the State of Israel is not a transient historical episode that leaves behind it nothing but archaeological remnants.

Epilogue

In the years that passed between the time we began working on this book and submitting the manuscript to the printer, profound changes have occurred in the political consciousness – and subconscious – of the Israeli public.

The outcry that surrounded the Lavon Affair dispersed a substantial part of the sacred smoke that enveloped the concept of “security”. The era of tranquilizers passed, and the scalpel of criticism began to cut into the living flesh of the stricken subjects.

Indeed, the criticism has not yet penetrated to the roots of the issues. The public debate at the time of the Lavon Affair revolved mainly around the question of “who gave the order?” – and the way in which the affairs of the Defence Ministry were conducted. The nature and meaning of the “unfortunate affair” itself and the policies that engendered it have not yet become the subject of serious discussion among the general public.

Now the time has come – and the ground has been prepared – to change not only the composition of the government but also the political line; we should not be satisfied with changing horses; we must take a new path.

Let us present matters clearly:

The Jews of Israel and the Arabs of Palestine live, and will live in the future, as neighbours. If over the course of time there is no compromise between the sides that is voluntary and mutually agreed-upon, then what can be expected instead?

Only two possibilities remain: a compromise imposed from outside, or the political elimination of one of the sides (a “fateful military test”).

Will the realization of these possibilities be to the advantage of *Israel*? Is it *worth waiting* until they are realized? Is that not a fateful bet on the very existence of the State, along the lines of “*all or nothing*”?

It is a vital necessity for our people to remove from power those leaders who are not willing or able to set out on that path. We cannot have peace with the Arab states as long as those leaders hold on to power. The time has come to implement changes in Israeli policy and Israeli political consciousness.

And the sooner the better.

Appendices

(1999)

Appendix 1

Article by Shaul Zadka in *Haaretz* on the 30th anniversary of “Operation Qadesh”

Anthony Eden, the prime minister of Britain during Operation Sinai, destroyed all documents that indicated that he and Israel had devised a joint plan to attack Egypt. The British had hitherto claimed that they did not know about Israel’s military plans. That claim was made not only in Parliament but also in a book written by the Foreign Minister at the time, Selwyn Lloyd.

The two sides concluded the last details of the action at the famous meeting that took place near Paris on 23 October 1956. But when Eden heard that the plan had been put on paper, and that a copy was in the possession of the Israelis, he became alarmed and assigned two senior officials to acquire it.

The *Guardian* reports that the British applied heavy pressure on Israel, and after a great deal of effort convinced Moshe Dayan to drop paratroopers beyond Mitla. British television, which is dedicating many programmes to the Suez operation on its 30th anniversary, reports that after the meeting in France, David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan were satisfied with the results and went to spend the night at Place Pigalle in Paris.

(*Haaretz*, 31 October 1986, p A5)

Appendix 2

Excerpts from Mordechai Artzieli's article in *Haaretz* (31 October 1986) on the conference at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Israeli-British-French invasion of Egypt on 29 October 1956.

One of the obstacles that prevent complete disclosure of the details of Operation Sinai is the fact that no stenographic records were made of the secret talks. All we have to go on is the testimony of those who took part in the meetings, and the diaries of Ben-Gurion and Anthony Eden. During his life Ben-Gurion forbade any publication from his diary on the secret contacts, the “conspiracy” that was elaborated with the French and the British. In Moshe Dayan’s book *Diary of the Sinai Campaign* that was published in 1965 there are few hints on the covert political processes. Also in his autobiographical book *Milestones* that was published 20 years after the operation, there are few details about the deliberations at the secret conference in the Paris suburb of Sèvres in which Ben-Gurion, the prime minister of France and the British foreign minister took part. Nor is there any full report on those secret contacts in Dr. Michael Bar-Zohar’s book. Ben-Gurion’s diary that deals with that period has not yet been released. We must wait a few more months. What are the British, the French, the Americans, the Israelis and the Egyptians saying, what are they thinking today with the perspective of 30 years? ...

The harshest critic of Operation Sinai was Sir Julian Amery, Member of Parliament. During the Second World War he was the contact man with the underground in the Middle East, Europe and the Far East and after Operation Sinai he served as Deputy Minister of War. That Conservative, who over 30 years ago was one of the heads of the “Sinai Group” that struggled against the British evacuation of from Egypt, characterized the operation as “Europe’s Waterloo”.

Amery did not spare the rod in his critique of the Americans who in his opinion caused the operation to fail.

The failure harmed Britain’s relations with the Third World, caused a rupture between

Britain and France, forced the French to withdraw from Algeria, brought about a process of decolonization ... He also attacked Eden who lied in Parliament when he denied that the British had had contacts with Israel over the operation.

“Diplomacy”, he said, “is the art of lying to others for your country, but not of lying to your own people.”

... An entire panel was dedicated to the subject of the limitations of force, and in that discussion Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin stole the show. His lecture, which he did not read from a text, was marvellously constructed and in it he incisively and clearly expounded his political-strategic outlook. The idea that it is possible to solve the Israeli-Arab conflict with a “hit-and-run” war is a very dangerous delusion.

A war in which peace is imposed on the defeated Arabs and that will put an end to all wars is preordained to failure. Our great military power has limits. He pointed to the similarity between Operation Qadesh and the “Peace for Galilee” war [in Lebanon, starting in 1982 – trans.] they were both wars of choice ...

... The one who forged the ties with France, and who was involved in, if not the initiator of the joint operation – Shimon Peres – said that when the straits were closed Ben-Gurion decided to open blockade, even by military means. Before “the Old Man” went to France he did not want to change the map but to change the situation; and in a face-to-face meeting, “the Old Man” said that we would not stay in Sinai after the operation. But in public he said that we would stay in Sinai, in order to achieve what he wanted – opening the Straits and stopping the *Fedayeen* actions. After the Operation, said Peres, our ties with France became much closer.

He did not disclose that after the Operation he realized a personal dream and procured aid from France to build the nuclear reactor at Dimona ...

(*Haaretz*, 31 October 1986, p B7)

Appendix 3

What can be revealed after 30 years

[The following excerpt is quoted from Lt.-Col. Mordechai Bar-On’s book *Etgar ve-tigra* [Challenge and quarrel], published by the Ben-Gurion Legacy Centre, Sde Boker, 1991,

in Hebrew. Bar-On was the adjutant and secretary of Chief-of-Staff Moshe Dayan in 1956-1957. He wrote these words at the time of the occurrences but the material was cleared for publication only 30 years afterward. Bar-On reports on a meeting in the town of Vermars in France, on 23 June 1956, between senior members of the Israeli and French defence ministries. Explanations appear within square brackets – Akiva Orr]

* * * *** **

At 11 o'clock they gathered for the initial session. Who attended?

A look at the list of participants is all that is needed to understand the great importance that the two sides place on the matter.

These are the participants on the French side:

Pierre Boursicot, head of French intelligence, who also acted as the chair of the conference.

General Labeau⁵⁴, in charge of production and supply at the Ministry of Defence.

General Challe, the French Deputy Chief of Staff. Colonel Birambeau*, chief of staff of the armies [of France] in North Africa.

Colonel Bernet⁵⁵, military advisor to Lacoste [the French governor of Algeria].

Louis Mangin, representative and political advisor of the French defence minister.

And these were those who attended from Israel:

Major-General Moshe Dayan – the Chief of Staff.

Shimon Peres, Director-General of the Ministry of Defence.

Yossi Nehemias, representative of the Ministry of Defence in Western Europe.

Colonel Yehoshafat Harkabi, head of Military Intelligence.

Colonel Emmanuel Nishri, IDF Attaché in Paris.

Boursicot opened the conference and gave the floor to Moshe Dayan.

Dayan began by pointing to the two main dangers that Nasser's regime presents to France and Israel:

⁵⁴ Conjectural re-translation from the Hebrew – trans.

⁵⁵ Conjectural re-translation from the Hebrew – trans.

1. Elimination of European influence in the Middle East.
2. The establishment of a Soviet base in Egypt.

Israel's direct objective is the downfall of Nasser's regime. In that context it appears to Israel that there is a firm basis for cooperation between Israel and France. In acting against Nasser Israel will be willing to act with France as much as France wishes, as long as complete partnership is assured. But beyond all these joint actions Israel believes that its military power itself constitutes a vital interest for France as well. The Arab empire that Nasser is dreaming of will not rise without the subjugation of Israel. Moreover, every victory that Nasser wins in his war against Israel will strengthen his activity on all the other fronts. Therefore there is a direct link between what occurs on the Israel-Egypt border and what occurs in Algeria.

At this stage of the proceedings it is important to be clear about the main question: is France prepared to cooperate with Israel in order to bring down the regime of Nasser on the one hand, and to strengthen Israel on the other?

In his words of reply Boursicot identified with the basic approach outlined by Dayan and affirmed France's willingness to cooperate.

(*Etgar ve-tigra* [Challenge and quarrel], Mordechai Bar-On, published by the Ben-Gurion Legacy Centre, 1991, p. 153. Hebrew)

* * * * *

[Bar-On writes later (on 15 October 1956), (four months after the Vermars meeting), two weeks before the Israel attacked Egypt]:

At this point [15 October 1956] General Challe puts a new and surprising idea on the discussion table. The "ripening" of the General during two weeks of various discussions with Israel and his close familiarity with the operative thought of the IDF are now bearing fruit.

He now proposes a “scenario”, produced and planned in advance, according to which Israel will launch an attack on Egypt in Sinai, by itself without any apparent connection to its allies.

When its armies arrive at the Canal Zone the armies of Britain and France will enter and occupy the Canal on the pretence of separating between the warring sides and guaranteeing the peace and integrity of the Canal that are endangered by the war that is occurring in its vicinity. In order to support its position Britain can even invoke its rights under the 1955 agreement according to which it evacuated the Canal.

Eden eagerly seized upon this idea. If such a scenario could be implemented then finally the redeeming pretext, which he had been seeking for weeks now, would be found. He would also be able to represent Britain’s military intervention before the world not as anti-Egyptian aggression but as an international mission to ensure [freedom of navigation in] the Canal for the benefit of the entire world. Eden is excited by the idea and promises to examine it immediately and already they are setting a secret meeting between the prime ministers of France and Britain in the Palais Matignon on 16 October. (Mordechai Bar-On, *Challenge and Quarrel* [Hebrew], published by the Ben-Gurion Legacy Centre, Sde Boker, 1991, p. 239)

Appendix 4

What cannot be revealed after 40 years

[On the 40th anniversary of Operation Qadesh, *Yedioth Aharonoth* published the following article. Comments in square brackets. Akiva Orr]

Revealed for the first time: the secret agreement between Israeli and French intelligence agencies: arms for liquidations.

By: Yigal Sarna

A covert accord between France and Israel on the eve of “Operation Qadesh” discussed Israeli assistance in suppressing the great revolt in Algeria, in return for arms. Israel received tanks, aircraft and ammunition from France.

In return Israel was asked to provide intelligence, terrorist attacks and liquidations. The French desire for vengeance linked up with the Israeli desire for war. On the Israeli side sat Shimon Peres, Moshe Dayan and Yehoshafat Harkabi. “Operation Qadesh” saved Israel from implementing most of its part of the shady deal. A new investigation.

* * * * *

Most of the people who were involved in the secret and shady “Operation Fig” are now deceased: Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, the minister Moshe Sharett who knew about part of what was being done and struggled against it, General Yehoshafat Harkabi, General Meir Zorea, Major-General Haim Laksov and the main person involved in the deal that fortunately was not fully implemented, the then-Chief of Staff, Major-General Moshe Dayan.

Others are still alive. The affair has special resonance now, after forty years, under a Prime Minister who is inexperienced but known for his authority and compartmentalization, for the covert way in which it occurred.

It is a rare occurrence, in which light is shed on the way in which covert agreements are made behind the scenes between intelligence services, which bring together arms and murder, military alliance and explosives.

One of the senior partners is found today on the centre of the Israeli political stage: the outgoing Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Some of his qualities were already prominent in 1955, when he was a young senior functionary, a wise and fast-acting man who had fantastic connections and the ability to construct a complete and complex plan on a razor’s edge, all parts of which come together at the decisive moment.

There are also parties to the secret like Moraleh Bar-On, the head of the Chief-of-Staff’s office at the time, who today writes about the past, but continues to keep the secret of “Fig”, or the physicist Yuval Ne’eman, then a young intelligence officer and the programme’s emissary in Paris, in whose office a week ago I heard mainly stunned

silence.

How do all these words, which were said behind closed doors of the Israeli military intelligence and the French intelligence agency, suddenly emerge into the light. “Only if you bring me a personal note from the head of the Mossad now, [indicating] that he has authorization from the head of French intelligence that I can speak, will I open my mouth”, says [Prof. Yuval Ne’eman] and refused to speak even about things that have been revealed here and now in a new study by Motti Golani [of the University of Haifa] *There Will Be War in Summer*, a study officially published by the Ministry of Defence, that was published quite by chance while the President of France, Jacques Chirac, was visiting Israel.

It happened in the summer of 1956. Dayan, Peres and the Chief of Military Intelligence Harkabi returned in June from three days of feverish negotiations in the town of Vermars, south of Paris. Facing the Israelis, in the luxurious rooms of the French secret service sat Boursicot, the head of the French secret service and counter-intelligence. Ben-Gurion himself, when he saw the plan for Operations “Fig” and “High Tide”, signed by Boursicot and Military Intelligence Chief Harkabi, immediately said “that there are many things there that are definitely fantastical and superfluous, that have no basis, but in this [matter] I trust in the wisdom of those who were sitting there. Fine, we will enter into this business, it is an adventure that is a little dangerous, but what to do, our entire existence is like that”.

To summarize with crude simplicity, the venture that was agreed upon there was as follows: The French would give Israel arms of high quality and quantity, for the first time. In return, little Israel would provide them with intelligence, terrorist attacks and liquidations. Even the most energetic proponents of the plan saw it matter as sensitive and problematic, from which wafted an unpleasant smell, and Dayan said, five days after his return from the Vermars talks, that Israel should take great care not to become a “contractor for affairs of murder and destruction, receiving weapons as a brothel-fee.” Thus did they speak behind closed doors in the hot summer of 1956, before Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and gave everyone a pretext for war. At that time there were no leaks, there was no press poking around everywhere in order to write and also to prevent superfluous disasters.

No one reminded them now much harm the “Unfortunate Affair” caused, which had occurred less than two years earlier, and which was also built on terrorist attacks [by Mossad people against American institutions] in Egypt. There was fear of war, and that silenced every other voice. And there were those who wanted war.

There were also two states: a strong Power that sought revenge, and a young state whose Chief-of-Staff wanted new arms and a convenient war. The two states found each other.

Fear and desire for war

Many readers of this newspaper were not yet born in 1956. Few of them fought in the Sinai war. Others sat in houses or a crowded transit camp, and I, a boy of four that year, retain the image of all the residents of the building on Dizengoff Street where we lived, gathered on the ground floor because of the siren, sitting on benches in a darkened hall. Seven years after the hard War of Independence Israel was filled with fear and believed that it was saved from annihilation by a miracle. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion highhandedly ruled over multitudes of Holocaust survivors and Sephardic refugees in transit camps. For a short time he relinquished the reins of power in 1955, and the moderate Moshe Sharett replaced him, very temporarily. At the head of the IDF stood the charismatic Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, who had a hand in both the army and the party, in a way that is unknown today.

In the fall of 1955 the big arms deal between Czechoslovakia and Egypt hovered in the air like a sword, and Ben-Gurion believed that Egypt was arming itself in order to attack Israel. There will be war in the summer, wrote Ben-Gurion to Teddy Kollek in the USA, “Egypt, along with Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia”.

There was a wait for the blow to be struck, even though they knew that Nasser talked a lot and did little. “There was real fear”, the scholar Golani told me, “so real that it didn’t let the facts get in the way. There was no evidence that the Egyptians would attack. They reduced their forces in the Sinai, but Yehoshafat Harkabi told me: ‘I exhorted for war with Ben-Gurion at that time’. They did not understand why Nasser was accumulating so many weapons and talking about war, and they concluded that he was plotting a war”.

Everybody was talking about war in the summer of 1956, in the newspapers and on the street, in [political] parties and in editorials. The Israeli fear that returns every few years gripped everyone. Fear is the mother of the next war.

If war, then initiated war, thought Dayan. He believed that it was desirable for Israel to force the crisis on its own timetable, and dismissed the old idea that Israel should respond only after an Arab attack. “There is war that is constructive”, said Dayan at a meeting with writers, “whereas a certain kind of peace is destruction and ruin”. In his political thought he saw another war with Egypt before a peace accord as more convenient for Israel. In the summer of 1955, when Peres visited France, the French Chief-of-Staff Guillaume: “so what’s with Dayan?” And Peres replied: “he’s content with life, they’re making war”.

The Military Intelligence officer Yuval Ne’eman sat on the General Staff and prepared contingency plans for the coming wars. The General Staff “dungeon”, that was called a “high command post”, was then in the mixed [Jewish-Arab – trans.] town of Ramle. “We built the Staff there”, says Yuval Ne’eman, “in case of war. The General Staff itself, in time of peace, was located on a hill in Ramat-Gan. Already by 1952 we had carried out a big General Staff war exercise, that included the capture of the command post, and I directed the exercise. Rabin was the Chief of the Operations Department. Just when Ramat-Gan was captured by the Arabs in the exercise, the exercise ended, because President Weizmann died, and the exercise staff became a funeral staff ... In 1954 I prepared the plan for the Six-Day War – a planned attack before an assault by all the Arab armies. There was a night when we sat with the Minister Lavon [Pinchas Lavon, the Minister of Defence] until three in the morning, until he authorized the war plan. As for Dayan, it was not impossible that he was calling for war. He talked to me about reprisal actions then, [and asked] if they were deterring the Egyptians or “heating them up”. In conversations with the French, Dayan was already quite open to the possibility of war.

The French were entangled in the Algeria war [against the FLN – National Liberation Front of the Algerian people] and saw in Nasser, who aided, at least in declarations, the underground, against them [i.e. the French – trans.] – the root of all evil. They thought that the enemy of Nasser – like us – was their friend”. Thus [says Yuval] Ne’eman today. Peres and Dayan were seeking arms. They knew that Ben-Gurion, who was alarmed at

the arming of Egypt, would not give a green light to war as long as the small IDF did not get new weapons. At that time there was already the flow of Mystère aircraft from France, but it was not a decisive turnaround. The breakthrough, according to Golani, was made only at the beginning of the summer of 1956, when Peres discovered that a deal with India for 200 Mystère planes had been cancelled, and suddenly there was a surplus. He wanted an arms deal that would dramatically change the arms balance and the feeling of military security, and he rapidly set out, as the Director-General of the Defence Ministry, with Chief-of-Staff Dayan and with the Chief of Military Intelligence Harkabi, to close the deal.

In the town of Vermars the three of them closed the double deal for a great deal of arms and also a strong military ally in return for Israeli assistance in the war against Nasser and in Algeria [against the National Liberation Front of the Algerian people]. The head of French intelligence, and the head of Israeli military intelligence signed an accord so as to avoid the need for ratification by their governments. The most fateful decisions in the life of a nation, and the most dangerous ones, like this one, or regarding the opening of tunnels [a reference to Netanyahu's decision to open the "Western Wall tunnel"], are usually made in nearly-empty rooms.

Motti Golani, a 41-year-old lecturer from Haifa University, has been researching the Sinai War for years. It is his doctoral work. He found the covert "Operation Fig" without learning of its existence through logical conclusions. For a long time he sought an answer to the question that troubled him: why did Israel go to war precisely in October 1956, when no one was threatening it? He found that the timing was French. He added two and two and went to the French Air Force archives. The three French military archives are located in the Chateau de Vincennes in the suburbs of Paris. An old palace, well-guarded as an army base, managed by army officers and civilian researchers with high [security] classification, it was nearly closed to foreigners. The fortunate Golani arrived there five years ago, in the winter of 1991, and enjoyed a rare moment of goodwill towards Israel during the Gulf War. Suddenly they opened everything to him.

A hot potato

When he asked for material about the Suez War [known in Israel as “Operation Qadesh”], it became clear that they did not have any such file. For the entire Sinai War was a section within the “Algeria War”. That cruel *intifada* war that France conducted against the Algerian underground that strove for independence and tried [should be “struggled”] to evict a long-standing French occupation that was backed by a mighty army and two million settlers [French people who settled in Algeria a hundred years ago]. For the French any price was worth paying to win this lost battle. When the boxes of materials and the secret files were placed on Golani’s table, “I felt like I was holding a hot potato”.

That is the feeling he described to me at our meeting, and which a journalist also sometimes feels when he gets his hands on material that provokes feverish excitement, lest someone “snatch it from his hands”. That’s how Motti Golani felt.

For eight days he sat in the military archive at Vincennes and every evening he sent everything he had photographed to Israel, in case the French changed their minds. Eight days of worry and fear, and joy, at the end of which the complete picture of “Operation Fig” and the entire plan that preceded the Sinai war emerged for him.

The reason why the secret material was located in the Air Force archive was because General Maurice Challe, who in 1955 was the French Deputy Chief-of-Staff and an air force officer, elaborated the strange conspiracy from the French side. A short time later Challe would become the commander of the French army in Algeria, and after that one of those who rebelled against President de Gaulle’s decision to get out of Algeria.

Among the orders of the French air force Golani found all the agreements that were made with IDF representatives regarding “Operation Fig”. The IDF controlled everything in that affair, and the Deputy Chief of Military Intelligence, the officer Yuval Ne’eman, was chosen to be the main contact for “Operation Fig” with the French intelligence agency in Paris.

Liquidations of the rebel leaders

Yuval Ne'eman's office is on the fourth floor of the Tel Aviv University's Shenkar Physics Building. It is a large and well-furnished office, full of objects and memorabilia, a large bust of Ne'eman, as befits one who has a mild degree of self-admiration. Models of spaceships, satellite photos, [photographs of] the world from the moon and even a photograph of the father of the hydrogen bomb, Edward Teller, with a personal dedication.

Ne'eman himself quoted to me from the diaries of Ben-Gurion, who wrote that Ne'eman was a prodigy who had to be promoted. He was indeed promoted as a creative and brilliant IDF intelligence officer and rapidly became "our man" in Paris for the purposes of [Operation] "Fig". Upon the conclusion of a large regimental exercise he took off for France. He knew the French very well from the period [he spent at] the command and staff college there, and upon his arrival he began to elaborate all the details, with a rapidity that frightened the French.

Didn't you feel inferiority or weakness, a young officer facing the French intelligence people by yourself, on their turf?

"I felt no weakness. Sometimes I was amazed that we in the [Israeli – trans.] Military Intelligence were progressing faster than the French. They were quite square, schematic, and we were creative. We did everything faster than they thought. At the same time, in 1955, we in the Military Intelligence began to work with the first big computer, that was called Weizac, that they made here at the Weizmann Institute, and they appreciated that".

You arranged with them the orders for assassinations of the leaders of the Algerian underground?

"The assassinations are mentioned in Motti Golani's material? I will not reply to that. That is intelligence material that will remain with me forever."

Is it connected to the murder of Ben-Barka? [Ben-Barka was the leader of the left-wing opposition in Morocco and was murdered in Paris in 1965 by the Moroccan secret service. The Israeli Mossad helped with the murder. See below]

"Ask Meir Amit, who was the head of the Mossad then."

Ne'eman took eight trips from Israel to France, and Dayan arranged for his wife Devorah and his two children, aged two and four, to join him there, so that Ne'eman would not be shuttling back and forth from here to there and everything would run smoothly without any disturbances. The business involved the covert transfer of arms, aggressive for the most part, in return for helping France to suppress the uprising in Algeria. In the framework of Operation "High Tide", Israel requested and received 200 MX tanks and 72 Mystère planes, along with ammunition. There was to be a series of actions, some of which cannot be talked about to this day. They included, among other things, the bombing of the Voice of Cairo station and the radio station in Damascus. The French, wrote Golani, wanted to hit the radio studios in Cairo and Damascus and even prepared the explosive devices that Israel's agents were to plant.

Colonel Morland met with General Meir Zorea, who was there at the beginning, even before Ne'eman. When Golani mentioned Morland's name in Ne'eman's office, the latter jumped up and asked: "Where do you know him from?"

"Morland" was the code name of the head of the "Service Action" unit, one of five subservices of the French "Mossad" [i.e. the external intelligence service – trans.]. Ne'eman worked with him on the "Fig" file. A nobleman who was active in the underground against the Nazis, who then teamed up with Israel in the fight against Nasser.

An entanglement of suspicions and quarrels

By the time Yuval Ne'eman arrived in Paris there were already close intelligence contacts between Israel and France. Still during the period of the British Mandate, in the 1940s, representatives of the Haganah, the Irgun and Lehi met with the chief of French intelligence who was involved in what was going on. Since independence ties were established mainly between the French "Shabak" [i.e. the internal intelligence agency – trans.] and the Israeli Mossad over the organization of illegal immigration to Israel of Jews from North Africa, and self-defence there. Israel periodically provided information to the French from there. There was also progress in the sphere of nuclear cooperation, which was then at its height.

When the ties over “Operation Fig” began to be elaborated, there was concern in Israel that the security services might become confuse. How will the new tie between Israeli military intelligence and the French “Mossad” function? With Ben-Gurion’s approval, Dayan issued a directive according to which “it is necessary that the people of Israel talk to its friends with one voice, otherwise we will lose control over what is being done and we will end up falling into an entanglement of errors, suspicions and quarrels”.

Dayan thereby succeeded in getting full and exclusive control over what was going on, and “Dayan and Peres, in a secret alliance, executed a complete takeover of covert Israel-France relations.”

The issue of secrecy was particularly central when it involved Israel’s helping to suppress a rebellion against a colonialist power, and therefore it was decided that there would be a strong compartmentalization, minimizing the number of those who were party to the secret and accordingly “there will be only one contact with the French in Paris, and he is Yuval Ne’eman. All the others will be represented as his assistants. He can be helped by the Mossad representative there.”

In his reports from Paris, Ne’eman wrote that the issue of individual terrorism to which we had committed ourselves had in the meantime become dormant. He made inquiries and discovered that the requests for assassinations were not active at that stage, and he was instructed not to “awake my love, till he please.”⁵⁶ Israel constantly endeavoured, based on the guidelines of Dayan and Peres, to diminish both its involvement and “Operation Fig” and to pay as little as possible in terms of actions in return for the weapons of “Operation High Tide”. But Chief of Military Intelligence Harkabi also recalled that “our aim is war against Nasser, that is where it is our interest to strike, and on all fronts, since for him it makes no difference if he fails on the Libyan front or the Israel front. If we want to make the French partners in our war we have to get involved in their war.”

As in every sweeping and covert process of decision-making led by a strong and forceful man like Moshe Dayan, there were few dissenting voices. The adviser to the Minister of Defence for Special Affairs, Shaul Avigur, warned against the commitments that Israel undertook in return for arms, but Dayan and silenced him right away. Despite

⁵⁶ Song of Solomon, 2:7

the fresh and painful memory of the “Unfortunate Affair” in Egypt [when on instructions from Israel, Israeli agents blew up American propaganda institutions in Cairo in order to sabotage US-Egyptian relations. The agents were caught, put on trial, some of them were sentenced to death, and they became known in Israel as the “Martyrs of Cairo”. The debate over “who gave the order” caused the resignation of Defence Minister Lavon, and years later, the departure of Ben-Gurion, Dayan and Peres from their party, because of the falsification of documents to create the impression that Lavon was responsible for the action].

Israel expressed willingness to carry out additional terrorist attacks as if the lesson [from the failure of the attacks by the “Martyrs of Cairo”] – which at that time had not yet been broken and was not yet covered in the press – was not learned. Apparently only luck saved Israel in the summer of 1956 from “Operation Fig” or at least, from some of its objectives. Two days after the first consignment of French weapons arrived in Israel in July, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company and created the mother of all pretexts for war, in which Britain too would participate. There was no longer a need for the objectives of the “Fig” and the latter was pushed aside or postponed. The French and the Israelis could now strike at Nasser because of an overt action and not because of covert revenge or vague anxieties.

The war [the Sinai War of 1956] broke out and it was not followed by the comfortable peace as Dayan had planned. Colonel Yuval Ne’eman proposed building a synagogue on the summit of Mount Sinai and declaring it to be a holy place for Judaism but Dayan rejected that. Ben-Gurion proclaimed the “Kingdom of Israel” at Sinai, and immediately withdrew.

“A year after I discussed ‘Operation Fig’ with Colonel Morland,” Ne’eman told me in his office, “I travelled as Deputy Chief of Military Intelligence on a mission to North Africa in under an assumed identity and I was about to fly from Casablanca to Tunis, and a man with a big moustache was standing in front of me in the passports line. When he turned around I saw that it was the head of the French [secret] service Morland, who was also travelling under cover and with an assumed identity to a place where it was forbidden for him to be, he had a Portuguese passport.” The two of them, who knew each other so well from weeks of secret talks, did not exchange a word. Two very senior spies,

disguised with moustaches and passports, encountering each other in the same line in a place where they had jointly planned to activate secret agents.

(“Arms for assassinations”, by Yigal Sarna, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 25 October 1996, p. 12)

[Motti Golani’s book, *Ba-qayitz tiyeh milhama: yisra’el ba-derekh le-milhemet Sinai 1955-1956* [There will be war in the summer: Israel’s path to the Sinai war 1955-1956] (in Hebrew) was published by the Defence Ministry’s “Maarakhot” in 1997. There is no mention in the book of “Operation Fig”. Who is preventing publication of “Operation Fig” 40 years after the fact, and why?]

His blood is on our heads

**The full story of the Israel’s involvement in the
assassination of the Moroccan Mahdi Ben-Barka**

[Article by Moshe Zonder in *Maariv*, 8 January 1999, in the “*Sofshavua*” supplement, p.34]

Mahdi Ben-Barka, a mathematician, was a Moroccan opposition leader who called for abrogating the monarchy headed by King Hassan II and its [Morocco’s] conversion into a popular republic. He was accused of involvement in a conspiracy against the King Hassan in July 1963, convicted in a military court of treason and sentenced to death *in absentia*. Ben-Barka escaped from Morocco and lived in exile. He was not satisfied with attacking the policy and regime of King Hassan, and also attacked the governments of the industrialized states that robbed the economic resources and the cheap manpower of the countries of the Third World. In Morocco the decision was made to liquidate Ben-Barka. Oufkir and Dlimi led the team that put it into action. The Moroccans pursued after Ben-Barka. On 27 September 1965 Dlimi reported to the [Israeli] Mossad that “Ben-Barka is on his way to France from Cuba, where he was involved in organizing an international anti-Western conference. Those who liquidate him will be private French citizens. The French security services know about this and are not opposed to the action.” On 1

October 1956 the Moroccans asked [Israel] for a safe-house in Paris and five foreign passports. Four years ago in *Yedioth Aharonoth* Shlomo Nakdimon published an exchange between Meir Amit [head of Mossad] and the then Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol, on the Ben-Barka affair. On 4 October Amit reported for the first time to Eshkol about the Moroccans' request. Eshkol, who is anti-*bithonist*⁵⁷ was repulsed by the idea.

Eshkol: "This business smells bad to me."

Amit: "To me, too."

Eshkol: "We decided once that it was enough."

Amit: "I will take no measures without notifying you."

Amit and Eshkol had to decide whether Israel would have a part in a heinous criminal act like political murder. Amit and Eshkol decided in the affirmative.

... On 5 November Amit reported to Eshkol: "The Moroccans have liquidated Ben-Barka. Israel had no physical connection to the act itself." In a summary document Amit wrote: "We did a little more than we thought. If mistakes were made here and there, they did not result from absent-mindedness but because it was not possible to foresee them in advance. The people in the field, who were working under time pressure and under very difficult circumstances, made certain mistakes, and I take all responsibility upon myself. Despite the mistakes we are still within the security line that we set for ourselves to provide technical help only, which, even if it is disclosed, will withstand the test of normal comprehensive mutual aid between [secret] 'services', without direct intervention. We delimited a clear security zone for ourselves and acted in good faith and with full responsibility ... there is no proof better than reality itself."

The term "in good faith" in the context of the hunting down of a man who was walking around with a death certificate in his pocket provokes a shudder. According to one version, the Jewish film producer Arthur Cohen, who was had been recruited by the Mossad in order to act as bait, waited for Ben-Barka in Brasserie Lipp [a bar in Paris]. The President of France, Charles de Gaulle, was livid when he learned what had taken place under his nose. From de Gaulle's point of view, this was an attack on his honour and on French sovereignty. On 22 September, about five weeks before his abduction, de

⁵⁷ The Hebrew word *bithonist* is a common term that is used in Israel to refer to the right-wing view that the perceived end of "security" (*bitahon*) justifies the means used to ensure it.

Gaulle had met with Ben-Barka. The murder embarrassed de Gaulle. A man with whom he had conferred was murdered on French soil with the cooperation of the French secret service, without de Gaulle's having ordered it or even being in on the secret. De Gaulle poured his wrath onto his secret services, on the Moroccans, especially Oufkir and Dlimi, and on the [Israeli] Mossad. Mossad people were later expelled from Paris.

[Moshe Zonder, "His blood is on our heads" (Hebrew). *Maariv*, *Sofshavua* supplement, 8 January 1999, p. 34]

Appendix 5

Excerpts from Ben-Gurion's personal diary

(Akiva Orr's comments within square brackets)

19 October 1956

At eleven [Pierre] Gilbert [the French Ambassador to Israel], who has just returned from France, came to see me. In his opinion the situation of the government there is strong. Mollet [the French Prime Minister] is the strong man in the government, not Pineau [the French Foreign Minister], and basically the triumvirate – Mollet, Bourguès-Maunoury [the French Defence Minister], and Lacoste are the mainstay of the regime.

I told him in general terms of my plan to arrange matters in the Middle East and he agrees with it and believes that his government will make an effort to prevail upon Britain to accept my programme because without England the plan is unlikely to be realized. The general lines [of my plan] are: getting rid of Nasser. The partition of Jordan, its east to Iraq [and its west to Israel] so that [Iraq] can make peace with Israel and settle the [1948 Palestinian] refugees on its territory with the help of American money. The borders of Lebanon will be shortened and it will become a Christian state. It is not clear to me what will be done with Syria. Gilbert believes that Shishakli [the President of Syria] is the man because America believes in him.

22 October 1956

Upon my arrival at Hatzor [the air force airfield] I learned from Moshe [Dayan, the Chief-of-Staff] that he had spoken during the day with Mangeant,⁵⁸ and Challe, [the French Deputy Chief-of-Staff], and that the second proposal still exists – the English proposal. What then was the purpose of the trip [to France]? I fear that it will just worsen our relations with France. During the night, Challe formulated a slightly different plan – that we would launch [an attack] at night against the Egyptians, and three hours later they [the French and the English] would begin to bomb the airfields.

They have 500 aircraft in Cyprus, including 120 bombers.

They will depose Nasser and set up a new government.

I fear that there is a lot of “wishful thinking” [these two words appear in English in the original – trans.] here. How will Nasser fall? Even if they occupy Cairo and defeat his army, he will organize a guerrilla.

How will England agree to that?

How – and this is the biggest question – will our people agree to this? What will America say? And Russia?

Moshe [Dayan] tells me in Challe’s name that Ély⁵⁹ travelled to meet with Radford,⁶⁰ and it looks like he agrees, and he has access to Eisenhower [the US President] no less than to Dulles [the US Secretary of State]. But Eisenhower speaks differently every day – and he is emphasizing precisely the point of peace.

⁵⁸ Conjectural re-transliteration from the Hebrew text – trans.

⁵⁹ General Paul Ély, Chief-of-Staff of the French armed forces – trans.

⁶⁰ Admiral Arthur Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US armed forces - trans.

My general plan – it too is in doubt, because above all it requires good will and good faith from England, and that cannot be done rapidly.

The USA must be brought around to the idea – but in theory it solves the problem of the Middle East and meets the needs of England, France and Israel – and also of Iraq and Lebanon: [and the plan is:]

Deposing Nasser (if possible).

The partition of Jordan – the east to Iraq [and the west to Israel] on two conditions: 1. [Iraqi] peace with Israel. 2. Settlement of the [Palestinian] refugees [from 1948, in Iraq].

Reducing the territory of Lebanon so that a Christian state can be created.

Attaching part [of Lebanon] to (Shishakli's?) Syria and part of it – up to the Litani – to us.

This gives the French two allies in the Middle East [Israel and Iraq] (and maybe three – Syria), reinforces England's position in the oil area, frees France from the Nasser problem, and makes possible a peace solution in Algeria [where the Algerian liberation organization was fighting, with Nasser's support, for liberation from French rule] and in North Africa. But it will take time.

I told Eban [Abba Eban, the Israeli representative to the UN] about that plan and he proposes that Eisenhower invite me to Washington (in the elections [in the US that year] he will probably say that he will go to the Middle East, like he said 4 years ago that he would go to Korea) and also some Arab king. Anderson is a friend and he is willing to help us on this matter.

We were supposed to go to our destination [Paris] this morning at eight, but there was fog over Paris, and we stayed several hours in Marseilles.

Moshe brought two books with him – B. Z.'s and Braslavsky's that deal with Tiran. They are both illegible, because they did not draw on the source (Procopius) [a Byzantine historian from the sixth century on whom B-G relied in order to justify Israel's claim to the islands of Tiran and Sanafir in the Gulf of Aqaba], but rather on second-hand sources.

Before travelling I consulted on these matters with [the Mapai ministers in the government] Golda [Meir, the Foreign Minister], [Pinhas] Sapir [the Minister of Industry

and Trade], [Levi] Eshkol [the Finance Minister], Ziama [Zalman Aran, Minister of Education] and [Peretz] Naftali [Minister Without Portfolio]. Bar-Yehuda [Mapam MK and Minister of the Interior] asked me why are no joint government sessions on this matter? ...

On Saturday evening we also held a meeting of the ambassadors [Israel's ambassadors to France, Britain, the USA and the USSR] in the Prime Minister's office and the next day the four of them addressed the government.

In a villa "somewhere in France"

We circled over Paris for more than two hours without being able to land, because the skies were cloudy. Already they wanted to return to the airfield in Argent [transliterated from Hebrew – trans.] and from there to travel by train – a distance of 9 hours, but in the end we got off at the military airfield, and at 3:00 they brought me to a French villa near Versailles that belongs to the family of a youth who killed — Darlan [Vichy French Admiral – trans.] — in the Second World War, and they served us a French lunch, which I could not enjoy because I had eaten sandwiches on the plane.

During the meal [came] the three: Guy Mollet [the French PM], Pinau [the French Foreign Minister], and Bourguès-Maunoury [the French Defence Minister]. They waited for us until we finished eating, and then a meeting began that lasted about three or four hours. I explained the reasons why I opposed the "secret" proposal one – that we launch a war against Egypt, and after 48 hours and an ultimatum to the two sides, the English and French would take the Canal [the Suez Canal]. [I raised] moral, political, and military reasons. Why should we suddenly become aggressors – and our friends in the world will condemn us (Pineau tried to explain that they would use a veto to prevent condemnation in the UN Security Council), the USA would disapprove, and there no knowing what Russia will do. The main point – Egypt would bomb the airfields in Tel Aviv and Haifa. Instead I proposed a plan for rearranging the Middle East – not in an improvised way, but after comprehensive consultations with the USA and England. A plan which I called "fantastical", but executable on the condition of English good will and good faith,⁶¹ of

⁶¹ The latter five words are in English in the original – trans.

which I doubt. The plan – as I said in the meeting with the ambassadors – the partition of Jordan between us and between Iraq, the shortening of the borders of Lebanon which will become a Christian state, and limiting Syria. I said that I do not know how and who can “stabilize” Syria, though the Americans have faith in Shishakli. Our border will be at the Litani. Above all, of course – the elimination and defeat of Nasser. Because as long as Nasser is in power it cannot happen.

The condition for handing eastern Jordan over to Iraq – peace with Israel and settling the [1948 Palestinian] refugees. That will allow give France two faithful friends in the Middle East [Israel and Iraq], and maybe three (Syria), will ensure guarantee England’s interests in the oil region, and establish peace in the Middle East.

Guy Mollet said that my plan is not fantastical and he is willing to accept it, but the time is of the essence regarding Nasser and the Canal, because they have mobilized forces and they cannot keep [mobilized] them for long. I said we will agree to action soon – if after we begin on zero night, [the French and the English] bomb the Egyptian airfields after giving an ultimatum to Egypt. Guy Mollet explained that Eden [the British PM] strongly in favour of action but Selwyn Lloyd [the British Foreign Minister] seeks compromise with Nasser, (with Fawzi) [the Egyptian Foreign Minister]. I pointed out that in England the Prime Minister can replace a minister if he wants, and Pineau pointed out that Eden is prevented [from doing that] by Labour’s opposition. Mollet said that he had talked for two hours with Gaitskell [the leader of the Labour Party], and [that Gaitskell] nearly agreed with him, but Labour’s opposition to Eden in general, and the fear of Bevin [the leader of the left wing of the Labour Party] tipped the scales against the Eden’s line.

While we were still talking, it was announced at six or seven in the evening that the number 2 of the British government had arrived in Paris for discussions. There were guesses whether it was Salisbury, Lloyd or Butler. It turned out to be Lloyd. To my amazement I was invited to a three-way conversation that passed on to another room. I explained to Lloyd the reasons against the two days. He said that the new plan – to attack the [Egyptian] airfields the day after [the Israeli attack on Egypt] in the morning – is quite new. England would be condemned because of that action. I asked him why we would take on ourselves to an action that we would be condemned for?

He said that Nasser hates us and denies our rights. I said: he has done that for years and nobody protested. Lloyd recognized the justice of my fears about the bombing of Tel Aviv, Haifa and the airfields but remained in opposition [to an attack on Egypt]. It was proposed that the day after [the Israeli attack] in the morning, the French would act, and on the second day England would join in. Pineau tends inclines toward that proposal but said that he has no bombers. I said that England should “lend” bombers and pilots, and there the an example of [US President during WWII] Roosevelt’s loan to England of 50 destroyers. Lloyd scorned those destroyers which he said were of no value. I replied that it had great political and moral value. Lloyd and also Pineau – Guy Mollet was not present at that conversation – applied a great deal of pressure and it was agreed that the action would be carried out – if it was carried out at all –next Monday, on the 29th of this month. We will launch the action at seven in the evening beside the border and with forces transported near the Canal [dropping paratroopers at the Mitla Pass], the two Cabinets [the governments of Britain and France] would convene immediately, they would decide to submit an ultimatum, and early in the morning they would begin to bomb the Egyptian airfields.

The conversation ended at ten for dinner, and afterwards continued until 12. When Lloyd persisted in his opposition to action 12 hours [after the Israeli invasion] Pineau announced that they were prepared to act alone, and the English would join in the next day, that is, after 48 hours as had been discussed. But it turned out that because for a serious action they would need to operate from the bases in Cyprus. Challe [the Deputy Chief-of-Staff of the French army] thought that the the Mystères [French fighter planes] would suffice to shoot down the Egyptian bombers if they tried to strike Israel but I said that that did not in my opinion ensure us against the danger and insisted that they hit the Egyptian airfields.

It was agreed that Lloyd would return at night [to England]. Tomorrow morning he will convene the Cabinet [the government of Britain] and immediately after the meeting send an emissary to France to announce their decision. In the conversation that we continued with Pineau after the Lloyd left, Pineau stated that he did not rely on Lloyd and he would tomorrow fly in the evening to London to talk with Lloyd. He sees two

difficulties: 1) division within the English people – Labour's opposition; 2) the lack of French bombers.

I proposed that he “borrow” from the English 50 bombers with their pilots and paint them in French colours. The conversation on that matter did not conclude with a clear conclusion. Challe (who is an air force man) believes that my fears are exaggerated and that they will be able to defend us with the Mystère force.

We will see what happens tomorrow. My fear is that Pineau's trip will be in vain. After Lloyd passes [in the British government] the decision he wants, against the opinion of the French and our opinion.

23 October 1956, Tuesday, France

From Israel of course there is no news. In Jordan the pro-Egyptians did not receive a majority, as it looked yesterday morning. The forces are nearly balanced equal and it will be difficult to set up a government there.

In the afternoon they will vote here, in the French parliament, on a resolution of confidence I in the government – our friends are ensured that they will receive confidence. And at twelve-thirty French time we will eat lunch and continue with the talks. By then perhaps we will know what the British decided. It later became clear that there is a pro-Egyptian majority in Jordan and Ibrahim Hashim [the Jordanian PM] has submitted his resignation. Now it is clear that the Iraqis will not enter [Jordan] because at the moment others have “entered”. If the [Jordanian] parliament - in the event that they let it open – abrogates the Anglo-Jordanian treaty, which nearly undoubtedly will be done – I will not be very sorry about that. Better to stand against Jordan alone than against Jordan and England.

Meanwhile it was learned that the French caught five of the leaders of the rebels [the FLN – The National Liberation Front in Algeria]. The fools were traveling in a plane the pilots of which were French and they walked into the trap.

In Tunis a general strike broke out to demand the liberation of those who were caught and there is unrest in Morocco as well.

Before noon, before members of the government Bourgès-Maunoury and Pineau (who is also called president – because he was once a prime minister) could come, there was a conversation with Thomas the Director-General of the [French] Defence Ministry. He is very pessimistic and believes: now or never!

If action against Nasser is not taken immediately, France will not have the strength – especially the moral strength – to do it any other time, and that perhaps also applies to the English. At the moment the entire nation – besides the Communists – is standing behind the government, a motion of confidence is before the parliament but they have no doubt that it will pass. No one wants to bring the government down now – they have now mobilized the reserves, sent forces to Cyprus. If they are have to return empty-handed from Cyprus there will be bitter disappointment in France – and helplessness will increase. Nasser's prestige will rise and they will have no hope of bringing the conflict in Algeria to a conclusion. Also the conflict in Morocco and Tunisia will perhaps get worse, and Bourguiba [the President of Tunisia] is vacillating.

Black children in Equatorial Africa are already waving flags with Nasser's picture. Also England will be expelled from Jordan and Iraq. At the moment morale among the French people is high, and they are prepared for any effort and support the government. If nothing is done, despair will increase, and there will be no strength to start again. Now that England is going along with them, in the new elections it is likely that the Labour Party will win. At the moment, America is preoccupied with elections and will not do anything, after the elections – and they think Eisenhower will be elected – America will make an arrangement with the USSR, divide spheres of influence, neglect the Middle East – because it will fall into the hands of the Russians, and their [the French] situation in North Africa will be grave. They cannot leave Algeria, and in whatever way they must tie it – and not loosely – to France.

It will be possible only after the fall of Nasser. It is clear that this is not Thomas' view alone, but the opinion of the entire government, and indeed in the afternoon I heard the same words from Bourgès-Maunoury.

Bourgès-Maunoury came for the meal, which was a bit late by French standards, and after him Pineau.

Challe explained his new plan on how to make the transition from the first day after our confrontation with the Egyptians on Monday night – we will stage an aerial attack on Beersheva, and that will make it possible for England immediately to join the action. Pineau said that he agreed, but the English would not accept that. I stated, speaking for myself alone – as a Jew – that I would not be able to have a part in deceiving the world [see Appendix 10].

We have many claims against the world for the past and over the slaughter in Europe, and we did not despair and continued carried on and established a state and defeated our enemies because we believed in the justice of our cause, and when we fight, we will fight with that belief. But I do not see how we would be able to deceive the world and by staging such a thing [see Appendix 10].

Challe and his friend from the [French] air force, Martin, then proposed a different plan to defend Israel against the Egyptian air force on Tuesday and Moshe [Dayan] will sit with them in order to clarify the matter.

Pineau took leave of us because he was going to London, and I talked with Bourgès-Maunoury who explained to me the position, hardships and chances of France today.

Beside the table, during the meal, Pineau related that in the morning they had met with the president [of France] [René] Coty – he, the Prime Minister, and Bourgès-Maunoury. They told him about the discussions with us and with Lloyd, and explained to him that problem is in the fact that the Israelis believe the French but do not believe the English. I told him that that is precisely the case.

Due to Pineau's trip [to London] and the problems of the PM [Guy Mollet] in their "Knesset" – they are preoccupied with the issue of the [Algerian] leaders who were caught – our trip [back to Israel] was postponed to tomorrow, and talks will not take place until three in the afternoon tomorrow, after Pineau's return from London. All the gang everybody is in the city [Paris] and Nehemia [Argov, B.G.'s secretary] joined them too and only Arthur [Ben-Natan, Israel's ambassador in Germany] stayed with me in the evening. We searched [on the radio] a long time for The Voice of Israel and I did not find it. At a late hour Arthur discovered a small radio and on it he found "The Voice of Israel for the Diaspora", and at ten-thirty we heard the news from Israel in French: In Nazareth

two *Fedayeen* [Palestinian fighters] were caught, who had come from Lebanon, sent by the Egyptian military attaché [See the next annex] or his emissary.

Wednesday, 24 October 1956

Nehemia [Argov, Ben-Gurion's secretary] did not return from Paris until the morning, and at the moment (ten o'clock Israeli time) I have no information on what is going on in the world because Arthur too has disappeared.

Meanwhile I considered the situation, and if they take efficient aerial measures to defend us in for a day or two until the French and the English bomb the Egyptian airfields – it seems to me that action is necessary. This is the only opportunity for two not small powers to try to eliminate Nasser, and we will face him alone when he gets stronger and conquers the Arab states.

The action required from us is a “raid”, with larger forces this time, but if it succeeds we will ensure freedom of navigation in the Red Sea straits, because we will take Sharm al-Sheikh and Tiran Island – historical Yotvat – and maybe the whole situation in the Middle East will be changed according to my plan.

But there is no confidence that Jordan and Syria and maybe also Iraq will not try to attack us, and who knows if Russian “volunteers” will not come. In any case we will have to ensure our freedom of action in Jordan – if the latter attacks us. I asked Moshe [Dayan] and Shimon [Peres] to come here immediately (it is 11 o'clock Israel time) and I recorded a list of questions that have to be clarified among ourselves, and between us and our friends:

1. [What is] D-Day – for us, for the French, for the English?
2. When will the Egyptian airfields be bombed, and by whom?
3. How many French and English forces will go into action immediately and where – on both sides of the Canal?
4. Will they go on to occupy Cairo and will they set up a new Egyptian government?
5. Until when will they remain at the Canal?
6. Does England guarantee the neutrality of Jordan and Iraq, and if either or both of

them attacks, will we have freedom of action?

7. What will become of the British force in Aqaba and Amman?

8. Will we be able to conquer and keep the Red Sea coast and Tiran Island?

Questions to ourselves:

1. What is the force that we send across the border (Rafah or Sinai) and to the Canal?

2. How will we defend our force at the Canal and how will we bring it back?

3. How will we ensure our eastern border against Jordan and Syria?

4. How many do we have to mobilize right away?

5. What is the strength of the French assistance force in the air the day after our raid?

6. What form will the resolution take that we will present to the Government?

Thursday 25 October 1956, on the plane [back to Israel]

Yesterday – it seems – was a big day. After Pineau broke the resistance of Selwyn Lloyd, and Eden and his three friends (Butler, Macmillan, Salisbury) voted in favour of the “Operation” in opposition to Eden [error in the diary. Should be Lloyd], at about four o’clock in the afternoon we came to an understanding on the modalities of the action. At lunch – which began at three – only Bourguès-Maunoury participated and later Pineau joined in.

Two Englishmen came – Logan, who it turned out was not Eden’s emissary but Lloyd’s second personal secretary (he has 4) and Dean, Defence Minister Head’s general secretary. I had been speaking with Guy Mollet before, I explained to him about the discovery of a large amount of oil in the western part of southern Sinai, and it would be worth tearing that peninsula away from Egypt, to which it does not belong, but that the English stole it from the Turks when they thought the Egyptians were in their pocket. I proposed laying an oil pipeline from Sinai to Haifa for refining, and Mollet displayed interest in that proposal. Incidentally he apologized about an accusation of anti-Semitism

that apparently had reached my ears. I told him that I had heard that he was a professor, but I had not heard that he was anti-Semitic. He complained about his Jewish friends in the [French Socialist] Party who are extremist and I explained to him about the inferiority complex Diaspora Jews have, which compels them to be more French than the French.

There was a conversation between us and the French, and there was a conversation between the French and the English, at the end a three-way conversation took place. The English proposed as a pretext for our attack the sending of an Israeli ship through the Canal [So that the Egyptian authorities would detain it – as Israel had done with the ship “Bat-Galim” on 26 September 1954 in an attempt to persuade the British not to evacuate their army from the Canal Zone]. I expressed much doubt that time constraints would permit us to do that, because after all for after all only 4 days will be left to us after we get home, and we have an adequate pretext [to launch a war] [because of] the violation of the UN Charter, the Ceasefire Accord, the Security Council resolution about freedom of navigation, and the organizing of the *Fedayeen*.

A time was set for the beginning of the action – 7 PM on Monday the 29th of this month. Immediately the next day the two states will direct an “appeal” to the two sides: to cease firing and to withdraw to 10 miles from the Canal.

Egypt will also be asked to allow the occupation of the Canal by French and British forces until an agreement is reached. Israel will not be obliged to stop any action unless Egypt accepts the three demands and implements them. The critical day for us will be Tuesday. The French will give us two squadrons (one of Mystères and one of F-84s) besides the “volunteers” for the Mystères, and they will also send two warships to Haifa and to Jaffa with powerful anti-aircraft guns.

I asked what will happen if Syria or Jordan attack us?

The English replied that they have no interest in Syria, but they would not help Jordan if it attacks.

I promised that we would not do anything against Jordan if the latter sat quietly.

On the Wednesday night, at a time that will be agreed upon by the commanders, the French and the British will begin to bomb the Egyptian airfields. I told them that the Suez [Canal] is not all that important to us, our Suez is the Eilat Straits and the islands in them. They asked to whom the islands belonged, I said that up to a few years ago they were NO

MAN'S LAND [in English upper case in the original – trans.] because they were desolate and they had no water even though up to the sixth century there was an independent Jewish state there, which Justinian conquered. Egypt acquired these islands only a few years ago and we must get them in order to ensure freedom of navigation in the Red Sea. After all the points were clarified I suggested drafting a protocol of the conclusions, to be signed by the three sides and ratified by the three governments. That was accepted and immediately six – two from each side – sat down to formulate the conclusions. On our side was Yosef Nehemias [the representative of the Israeli Defence Ministry in France] and Moshe [Dayan]. The protocol was drafted in French, everyone signed three copies, and it was agreed that the next day, that is, today, the British government would inform whether it ratifies or not, and as soon as we in Israel receive Britain's ratification, via the French government, we will announce our ratification. In addition, each government will send two letters of ratification to each of the parties. Dean (the director of the British Defence Ministry), Pineau and I signed.

Last night Moshe [Dayan] sent an order to the Staff to mobilize the armoured corps, and in the plane he arranged the operational command.

We left our house in Sèvres at about ten o'clock, and at 11:00 we took off from the military airfield [at Paris] in the same plane in which we had come (de Gaulle's plane). If, upon our return home in about two hours, we find that the British government has given its ratification, then we are in great and historical times, but I doubt very much whether the ratification from London will come.

At 12:00 we landed at Hatzor, and at quarter past one I arrived in Jerusalem. In the morning newspapers I saw that Mollet too had reconciled with Khrushchev [the leader of the Soviet Union], or the other way round, and that in Hungary the army had forcefully suppressed the popular uprising. Moscow is still in control to a great extent.

Meanwhile a unified command was set up for Egypt, Jordan and Syria, that is to say, Egypt is in command of the two countries. The situation is becoming more complicated. Among the other things that were discussed yesterday with members of the French government was the our debt [to France] (about twenty million dollars), instructions to their representative in the Security Council about Jordan's complaint.

Shimon [Peres] informed me that they had agreed “cancel” (or to defer?) the debt, and we would not be required to pay 8 million dollars this month. Pineau gave instructions to his representative [at the UN] to condemn both sides [Israel and Egypt] and to veto a onesided condemnation [of Israel].

Friday 25 October 1956. 21 Heshvan⁶²

The expected news from Paris that arrived yesterday was not clear: the draft that we received of the English speaks of an accord for a plan of action, but it does not speak of an agreement on the protocol of “Sèvres”. Late in the evening, after the dinner at the King David hotel for a delegation of the [American United Jewish] Appeal, after Moshe [Dayan] and Shimon [Peres] arrived, I sent a telegram to Yosef [Nehemias], to ask for clarifications whether Britain and France had ratified the Sèvres protocol. This morning a reply came from Yosef which said: Pineau officially informs you that France and England have both ratified the Sèvres conclusions. I therefore note that the conclusions have been ratified by the government of Israel and I hereby inform the British government of that fact. They are expecting that Arthur [Ben-Natan, Israel’s ambassador in Germany] will come today at midday (I am writing at 4 PM) in a French plane with the documents from France and Britain.

First thing this morning I invited Shapira [National Religious Party MK and the Attorney General⁶³] and Burg [National Religious Party MK and Minister of Postal Services] and I presented my plan to them – our action on Tuesday in the evening, and France and Britain’s “appeal” the next day and their action before sunrise on Wednesday [the invasion of Suez]. Afterwards I invited Bar-Yehuda [Unity of Labour MK and Minister of the Interior], Carmel [Unity of Labour MK and Minister of Transportation] and Israel Galili [Unity of Labour MK] (it was impossible to reach Ben-Aharon), I asked them whom they would consult. They said: with Tabenkin and Ben-Aharon. I asked if they would be able if they could promise in the name of those two that matters would

⁶² Erratum. The date was 26 October – trans.

⁶³ Erratum. Haim-Moshe Shapira was not the Attorney General; it was Haim Cohn – trans.

remain secret (Shapira and Burg also swore on their honour to keep the secret) – they replied positively. I told them what I told Shapira, and I already told Shapira and Burg, and I will tell Rosen [Progressive Party MK and Minister of Justice] but not Barzilai [Mapam MK, Minister of Health] and Bentov [Mapam MK, Minister of Development]. After a discussion they asked for permission to consult and tomorrow at six in the evening they will come to me again. For six I invited Rosen and Harari [Progressive Party MK].

Meanwhile the British Ambassador, Sir John Nicholls, will visit me on my invitation. Nicholls came at four-thirty. After “small talk” about this and that (Russia, Poland, Hungary, and so on) he told me that he regretted our lack of confidence in the English government and in Eden. I admitted that there is such lack of confidence, and I told him about my proposal to Robertson [the commander of British ground forces in the Middle East who visited Israel in 1951] six years ago and how Eden brought it to a close without even giving an explanation. That year our bitterness increased because we were in mortal danger and Britain refused to sell us the arms it had sold to Egypt. He said that he understands that but England is not guilty of what we suspect. The government may make mistakes but it has no policy against us, and he had been charged with coming to see me personally that evening and to tell me that the [British] government had concluded that it was definitely necessary to get rid of Nasser. I asked him when they had notified him of that? He replied: a week ago, last Saturday.

Afterwards he expressed astonishment why I had asked about the date. I told him that already knew about it. He asked: was the source from another country? I told him, from an authoritative English source. He was astonished, and to my question he replied that he knows nothing about it. I said if that’s the case, I have no authority to talk to you about what I know. At the end I asked him about the protocol: if it obliges [him] to address only the [British] Foreign Minister, he said, yes. He asked what was the question: I told him that I had a plan to arrange matters in the Middle East, and the key to that is England’s position, that is to say, Eden’s position, and I was ready to talk only about that, in an unofficial way and without anyone knowing about it. He asked: is such a thing possible? I said, it is very possible, if Eden wants. He said that he would be able to notify inform Eden directly, and would do that next Friday, when he sent the diplomatic pouch. I said

that there was no hurry about the matter, and that next week is better. Again he was astonished – without asking me anything, but he understood that there was something that was unknown to him, and I felt that he did not know exactly about the plan.

While he was still sitting with me, Rosen [Minister of Justice and Progressive MK] and Harari [Progressive MK] arrived, and their ears rang upon hearing my words. Rosen advised that we should also tell Barzilai [Mapam MK], and I explained my concerns. Harari was very excited and saw this as an extraordinary historical opportunity [for conquests]. He asked if there was no danger that Jordan would attack. I replied that if it attacks, that is no danger, but maybe the opposite. And regarding the two proposals that will be brought before the government – either a reprisal action or the Eilat Straits – Rosen’s view, unlike Galili’s, favours a reprisal action. Meanwhile Nehemia [Argov, BG’s military secretary] informed me that Arthur [Ben-Natan] had arrived with a letter from the [British] PM and he was to take my letter back with him.

Appendix 6

Ben-Gurion’s grand design

[This Appendix, as well as the one following it, was added to the 2009 English translation, and its content is excerpted from Avi Shlaim’s article “The Protocol of Sèvres 1956: Anatomy of a War Plot”, *International Affairs* 73:3 (1997), 509-530. Reprinted in David Tal, ed., *The 1956 War: Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass 2001), 119-43. Trans.]

The senior members of the Israeli delegation to the talks in Paris were David Ben-Gurion, who was defence minister as well as prime minister, Moshe Dayan, the IDF chief of staff, and Shimon Peres, the director-general of the ministry of defence. France was represented by Guy Mollet, Christian Pineau, and Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury, the minister of defence. Also present were General Challe, Louis Mangin, Bourgès-Maunoury’s friend and adviser, and Abel Thomas, the director-general of the ministry of defence.

Although it was essentially a political meeting, with the politicians bearing the ultimate responsibility for decision, it was the military men who had pressed for the meeting and who provided most of the ideas that were finally agreed upon.

Most of the Frenchmen had been active in the Resistance against Nazi Germany during the Second World War. All of them saw Nasser as a dangerous new dictator, not least because of his support for the Algerian rebels, and all of them were united by the conviction that military action was urgently required in order to seize the canal and knock Nasser off his perch. The French military had three priorities at that time: Algeria, Algeria, and Algeria. And they proceeded on the assumption, for which there was no solid basis, that if only Nasser could be toppled, the Algerian rebellion would collapse.

The French politicians were haunted by the spectre of another Munich. The spacious villa, in Rue Emanuel Girot in the leafy suburb of Sèvres, belonged to a family that had supported General de Gaulle against the Vichy regime. It had been used by Bourguès-Maunoury as a Resistance base during the war. The collective determination of the Frenchmen that this time there must be no appeasement was conveyed by Abel Thomas to the Israeli leader soon after his arrival at the villa. "One day the Sèvres conference will no doubt be publicized", said Thomas. "It therefore depends on us whether it is remembered as the Yalta conference or as the Munich conference of the Middle East."

The first session started at 4 p.m. on Monday, 22 October, in the conservatory of the villa and it was intended to enable the leaders of the two countries to get to know each other and to have a preliminary discussion. Ben-Gurion opened the discussion by listing his military, political and moral considerations against "the English plan". His main objection was that Israel would be branded as the aggressor while Britain and France would pose as peace-makers but he was also exceedingly apprehensive about exposing Israeli cities to attack by the Egyptian Air Force. Instead he presented a comprehensive plan, which he himself called "fantastic", for the reorganization of the Middle East.

Jordan, he observed, was not viable as an independent state and should therefore be divided. Iraq would get the East Bank in return for a promise to settle the Palestinian refugees there and to make peace with Israel while the West Bank would be attached to Israel as a semi-autonomous region. Lebanon suffered from having a large Muslim population which was concentrated in the south. The problem could be solved by Israel's

expansion up to the Litani River, thereby helping to turn Lebanon into a more compact Christian state. The Suez Canal area should be given an international status while the Straits of Tiran in the Gulf of Aqaba should come under Israeli control to ensure freedom of navigation. A prior condition for realizing this plan was the elimination of Nasser and the replacement of his regime with a pro-Western government which would also be prepared to make peace with Israel. Ben-Gurion argued that his plan would serve the interests of all the Western powers as well as those of Israel by destroying Nasser and the forces of Arab nationalism that he had unleashed. The Suez Canal would revert to being an international waterway. Britain would restore her hegemony in Iraq and Jordan and secure her access to the oil of the Middle East. France would consolidate her influence in the Middle East through Lebanon and Israel while her problems in Algeria would come to an end with the fall of Nasser. Even America might be persuaded to support the plan for it would promote stable, pro-Western regimes and help to check Soviet advances in the Middle East. Before rushing into a military campaign against Egypt, Ben-Gurion urged that they take time to consider the wider political possibilities. His plan might appear fantastic at first sight, he remarked, but it was not beyond the realm of possibility given time, British goodwill and good faith. The French leaders listened patiently to Ben-Gurion's presentation but they showed no disposition to be diverted from the immediate task of launching a military campaign against Egypt with British involvement.

They told Ben-Gurion politely that his plan was not fantastic but added that they had a unique opportunity to strike at their common enemy and that any delay might be fatal. They also considered that while Eden himself was determined to fight, he faced growing opposition in the country and the Cabinet, with Selwyn Lloyd showing a preference for a diplomatic solution. The Americans usually trailed behind events, as their record in the two world wars had shown, and they were therefore unlikely to support military action to get rid of Nasser. Technical considerations, such as the onset of winter, were also cited by the French in support of immediate action. In the end Ben-Gurion was persuaded that priority had to be given to the campaign against Egypt but he continued to insist on full co-ordination of their military plans with those of Britain.

Appendix 7
Protocol of Sèvres, 1956

[This Appendix, as well as the one preceding it, was added to the 2009 English translation, and its content is excerpted from Avi Shlaim's article "The Protocol of Sèvres 1956: Anatomy of a War Plot", *International Affairs* 73:3 (1997), 509-530. Reprinted in David Tal, ed., *The 1956 War: Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass 2001), 119-43. Trans.]

PROTOCOL

The results of the conversations which took place at Sèvres from 22-24 October 1956 between the representatives of the Governments of the United Kingdom, the State of Israel and of France are the following:

The Israeli forces launch in the evening of 29 October 1956 a large scale attack on the Egyptian forces with the aim of reaching the Canal Zone the following day. On being apprised of these events, the British and French Governments during the day of 30 October 1956 respectively and simultaneously make two appeals to the Egyptian Government and the Israeli Government on the following lines:

A) To the Egyptian Government

- a) halt all acts of war
- b) withdraw all its troops ten miles from the Canal.
- c) accept temporary occupation of key positions on the Canal by the Anglo-French forces to guarantee freedom of passage through the Canal by vessels of all nations until a final settlement.

B) To the Israeli Government

- a) halt all acts of war.
- b) withdraw all its troops ten miles to the east of the Canal.

In addition, the Israeli Government will be notified that the French and British Governments have demanded of the Egyptian Government to accept temporary occupation of key positions along the Canal by Anglo-French forces.

It is agreed that if one of the Governments refused, or did not give its consent, within twelve hours the Anglo-French forces would intervene with the means necessary to ensure that their demands are accepted.

C. The representatives of the three Governments agree that the Israeli Government will not be required to meet the conditions in the appeal addressed to it, in the event that the Egyptian Government does not accept those in the appeal addressed to it for their part. In the event that the Egyptian Government should fail to agree within the stipulated time to the conditions of the appeal addressed to it, the Anglo-French forces will launch military operations against the Egyptian forces in the early hours of the morning of 31 October. The Israeli Government will send forces to occupy the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba and the group of islands Tirane and Sanafir to ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba.

Israel undertakes not to attack Jordan during the period of operations against Egypt. But in the event that during the same period Jordan should attack Israel, the British Government undertakes not to come to the aid of Jordan.

The arrangements of the present protocol must remain strictly secret.

They will enter into force after the agreement of the three Governments.

(signed)

DAVID BEN-GURION

PATRICK DEAN

CHRISTIAN PINEAU

Appendix 8

The affair of the “*Fedayeen*” who were “sent by the Egyptian military attaché”

(See above, Ben-Gurion’s diary, 23 October 1956, the first section)

[The following section is quoted from the book *Milhemet breira: ha-derekh le-sinai ve-hazara 1956-1957* [A War of Choice: The Road to Sinai and Back 1956-1957] by Eyal Kafkafi (Hebrew). The book was published in 1994 by Yad Tabenkin and the Association for the Legacy of Moshe Sharett. Clarifications appear between square brackets – A. Orr. Kafkafi quotes from a 1974 interview with Dar that was filed as “Hagana Archive”, file 80/299/74. The quote is from that interview, in italics]

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In the context of the deceptions and trickery that were interwoven into Operation Sinai, Military Intelligence invented “the ruse of the *Fedayeen*” who had supposedly carried out an action at the behest of Egypt. Military Intelligence officer Avraham Dar rightly thought that Providence had endowed him with an imagination that was quite fruitful, even “crazy”. Avraham Dar took “two [of our] dark-skinned officers” and dressed them in *Fedayeen* uniforms:

“On 29 [October 1956] in the morning I dressed them as *Fedayeen*. I took them to some place in Herzliya where there was a puddle, there was light rain, and there I put them into the mud. Then it took [the form] of sand like in Sinai, and I put them in a truck. I took them like army men, with machine-guns and everything, and we put them in the Jaffa police station, and then the policemen took them to a press conference.”

The problem that troubled Dar was a very real fear that the Israeli policemen might honour “our dark-skinned men” with the usual prisoners’ reception and give them a good beating:

“... because the policemen wanted to hurt them, and I was afraid, these were my guys, and they were so scared, they really looked a little miserable, and the journalists said to me: “listen they are really miserable. Take care a little”. I said: “That’s the way it is. When a man is caught he is miserable.” Isn’t that moronic? They were so scared. And the policemen went and did a press conference for them, and I took guys dressed like paratroopers and what we did was: “then we caught ... a cell that arrived this morning – it was caught.” And it worked. It was published in the press.”

The “operation” of catching the *Fedayeen* was published in *Lamerhav* [the daily newspaper of the Unity of Labour Party] and one of the newspapers to which IDF reported the most at that time. On 30 October 1956, alongside a report about the penetration of Israeli forces into Sinai, the following report appeared in that newspaper: “Four *Fedayeen* were caught this morning after a short battle with an Israeli force in the Erez district in the Negev. In the afternoon hours a time-bomb exploded in a well. It is believed that it was the *Fedayeen* cell that was captured, apparently among them an Egyptian officer, or a different cell that managed to escape – although apparently there were no wounded⁶⁴ among them – that placed the time bomb in the well. Under questioning, the head of one of the cells admitted that they had been sent to Israel for the purpose of sabotage and murder. ... The well that was bombed was near the border, but they had planned to do other things in that ill-fated district, which is the “*Fedayeen* trail”, where they went into action in the district of Migdal Ashkelon and reached as far as the orchards of Nes Ziona. It should be assumed that the *Fedayeen* cell intended to carry out its actions far to the north, but the Israeli guard managed to discover them next to the border and stopped them. It is believed that two of the members of the band escaped after they threw down their weapons.”

The invented story about the *Fedayeen* was “meticulously” recorded by a “military correspondent” who added:

⁶⁴ The word “no” was apparently inserted by mistake either by the reporter or by the authors of this book who transcribed the reporter’s words. It should be read “... although apparently there were wounded among them” – trans.

“The day after the Israeli invasion of Sinai, additional proof of Egypt’s aggressive intentions is provided by four *Fedayeen* men who were sent from Gaza into Israeli territory for the purpose of sabotage and murder, and who fell into the hands of the IDF before they managed to carry out the missions that had been assigned to them by the Egyptian military command in the Gaza Strip. Two of the prisoners were wounded when they were caught, two others fell into the IDF’s hands healthy and whole. It appears that an additional *Fedayeen* cell was operating near those two cells, because spots of blood were detected on the trail along with hastily-discarded equipment.”

The ease with which Avraham Dar imagined and reported “facts” to the public on the apparent aggressiveness of the Egyptians, was one of the signs of the time, as becomes evident in the rest of the fictitious description [in *Lamerhav*]:

“Three of the prisoners are former residents of Palestine [i.e. Palestinians (*falastinim* – trans.)] whereas the fourth, who by all indications commanded the raid, is Egyptian. The latter refused today to answer the questions of IDF and Israel Police interrogators, saying only: “I am a soldier”. It seems that the man is an officer in the regular Egyptian army. The four *Fedayeen* fell into an IDF ambush in the wadi that passes near Erez Farm. “When in the middle of the night, early on Monday morning, I received information about the presence of *Fedayeen* in the district, I instructed my men to set ambushes”, the commander of the IDF unit that captured the Egyptian commando said today.

“The soldiers lay in ambush for three hours and only near 3:30 in the morning was a suspicious movement detected in the wadi. The place is about 7 km from border of the Strip. I discerned the forms of people moving within the wadi”, the commander went on. “We ordered them to stand and to give the password, but heavy machine-gun fire was directed at us in reply. We responded with a rain of shots. We heard cries and understood that the *Fedayeen* were fleeing for their lives.” When the guns fell silent, the ambushers began meticulously to comb the area. Two wounded men were found next to each other. Their clothes indicated that they were *Fedayeen* from Gaza. At a certain distance from them could be seen two others lying face-down on the ground. They were healthy and in

one piece. Six Karl-Gustav submachine-guns, grenades, and a large amount of explosives were found in the area. As well, tracks of other people were found, with spots of blood beside them. The two wounded were transferred to the hospital and the healthy ones were taken into custody and handed over to the Israel Police.”

Apparently Avraham Dar’s “dark-skinned officers” played their parts well:

[the *Lamerhav* correspondent continues]:

“I saw the two of them in the detention cell. The Egyptian was wearing shoes. The other was sitting barefooted. They were blindfolded. Their heads were bowed down. They were both wearing the famous “*Fedayeen*” headgear. They were silent and seemed to be dozing. They had not been able to see much of the Israel to which they had been sent in the middle of the night for the purpose of reconnaissance, sabotage and murder. They spent most of the hours of their first day in Israeli captivity in complete darkness. The barefooted captive exhibited more willingness to talk about himself than did the Egyptian officer. He did not conceal that his name was Mustafa ‘Uthman, formerly a resident of Burayr village, who knew the paths of the Negev since his childhood. “I was the commander of the cell and not Yusuf”, he said. Thus it was learned that Yusuf was the name of his silent friend. And Mustafa also related that the cell had left Gaza in the middle of the night, from the *Fedayeen* camp. Upon nightfall they were called to the police station, where they were given the details of the assignment. Apart from the mysterious Yusuf they all wore army uniforms. Yusuf wore [*erratum*: “regular” or “civilian” was apparently omitted here – trans.] clothes and *Fedayeen* headgear. *It is indicative of the importance that the Egyptians attributed to the mission and to Yusuf that the members of the cell were told that they were responsible for returning Yusuf alive to the Egyptian command in Gaza.*”

The emphasized words [in the *Lamerhav* article] were not unique to this colourful article. But Avraham Dar’s imaginative powers did not stop there:

“It appears that ‘Yusuf’s’ participation in the raid was supposed to impart to it the character of an important commando mission. Various signs indicate that the appearance of that commando, the members of which were heavily-laden with weapons and explosives, likely constitutes a very meaningful page regarding the intentions of the Egyptian army.”

That was the level of trustworthiness of the reporting to the Israeli public in the days of Operation Sinai.

(Eyal Kafkafi, *Milhemet breira: ha-derekh le-sinai ve-hazara 1956-1957* [A War of Choice: The Road to Sinai and Back, 1956-1957], pp. 99-101. Hebrew)

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On 30 October 1956, *Haaretz* carried the following report on Avraham Dar’s operation:

Four *Fedayeen* Captured in the South

A well next to Nir-‘Am sabotaged with a time-bomb

By Haviv Canaan, *Haaretz* military correspondent.

Four *Fedayeen* who were sent by the Egyptians into Israeli territory from Gaza for the purposes of sabotage and murder fell into the hands of the IDF yesterday. Two of the captives were wounded when they were caught. It appears that an additional *Fedayeen* cell was operating in the area which left drops of blood and hastily-discarded equipment on the path of their retreat. Three of the captives are former residents of Palestine [“*Eretz yisra’el*” – “the Land of Israel – trans.] and the fourth, who by all indications commanded the others, is Egyptian. The latter refused all day yesterday to reply to the questions of the interrogators saying only, “I am a soldier”. It appears that the man is an officer in the regular Egyptian army.

A movement in the wadi in the middle of the night

The four fell into an IDF ambush in the wadi that passes near the Erez Farm in the south. “When I received information about the presence of *Fedayeen* in the region in the middle of the night, early on Monday morning, I instructed my men to set up ambushes”, the commander of the IDF unit that captured the four said yesterday. For about three hours they lay in ambush and only near 3:30 in the morning was a suspicious movement detected in the wadi. The place is about 7 kilometres from the border of the Strip. “We discerned the forms of people moving in the wadi”, continued the commander, “we ordered them to stand and state the password but fire was directed at us in reply. We responded with shots. We heard cries and understood that the *Fedayeen* were fleeing for their lives”.

When the guns fell silent the ambushers began a thorough search of the area. Two wounded men were found next to each other. Their clothes indicated that they were *Fedayeen* from Gaza. At a certain distance two others were seen lying face-down on the ground, and they were healthy and whole. Karl-Gustav submachine-guns, grenades, and a large amount of explosives were found in the area. Tracks of other people were also seen, drops of blood beside them. The two wounded men were taken to the hospital. The healthy ones were taken into custody and handed over to the Israel Police.

In the detention cell

I saw the two of them in the detention cell. The Egyptian was wearing shoes. The other was sitting barefooted. They were blindfolded. Their heads were bowed. They both wore *Fedayeen* headgear. They were silent and seemed to be dozing. They had not managed to see much of Palestine to which they had been sent in the middle of the night for the purpose of reconnaissance, sabotage and murder. They spent most of the hours of their first day in captivity in complete darkness.

“We were instructed to return him alive”

The barefooted man exhibited more willingness to talk about himself than did the silent one with the shoes. He did not conceal that his name was Mustafa ‘Uthman, formerly a resident of Burayr village, who has known the paths of the Negev since his childhood. “I was the commander of the cell and not Yusuf”, he said. Thus the name of his silent friend became known. And Mustafa also related that the cell had set out from Gaza in the middle of the night, from the police camp, at a place where the details of the mission that they were to carry out were given to them. Apart from Yusuf they all wore army uniforms. Yusuf wore civilian clothes and wore Feda’iyun headgear. The fact that the other members of the cell had been told that they were responsible for returning “Yusuf” alive to the command in Gaza attests to the degree of importance that the Egyptians attached to Yusuf’s mission and his person.

(*Haaretz*, 30 October 1956, p. 4)

[Note: the identical formulations in both reports, like “they were silent and seemed to be dozing”, or “The fact that the other members of the cell had been told that they were responsible for returning ‘Yusuf’ alive to the command in Gaza attests to the degree of importance that the Egyptians attached to Yusuf’s mission and his person”, indicate that the material had been distributed to journalists in printed form, and was not the product of an independent investigation. A. O.]

Appendix 9

Moshe Sharett’s observations on “Operation Qadesh” in his diary on 2 December 1956

[Moshe Sharett, Israel’s Foreign Minister, was deposed on 18 May 1956 by Ben-Gurion, who saw him as an obstacle to the implementation of “the plan to reorganize the Middle East”. Sharett was on a visit to the Far East when the war broke out. While he was in Cambodia, he recorded the following observations. Clarifications in square brackets – A. Orr]

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The public – all of it – it is clear from the newspapers of all the parties – is party to the double consciousness, (that [the poet] Natan A. [Alterman] expressed): first, That *the state has survived an existential threat, or at least a terribly destructive disaster*. [A. O.’s emphasis] And secondly, that they are indebted for their rescue to the planning, vision and courage of one man [B-G] ... It is clear to all that the campaign and the victory involved victims and losses and new dangers – in every regard and on every front. And it is also clear to me that one of the losses – “casualties” in foreign language [“casualties” appears in English in the original – trans.] – is none other than myself. As a politician I have fallen victim in this campaign. And this loss too should be recorded.

(From the “Personal Diary” of Moshe Sharett, Maariv Publications, 1978, volume 7, p. 1894).

Appendix 10

Details that do not appear in Ben-Gurion’s diary

[As part of the cautionary measures the IDF took on the eve of the Suez War in 1956, a curfew was imposed on areas in Israel that were populated by Palestinians. The objective of the curfew was to prevent demonstrations of support for Nasser by Palestinians. The curfew was declared at midday, on the radio, six hours before the Israeli invasion of Egypt began. Palestinians who were at work did not listen to the radio and did not know about the curfew at all. Forty-nine Palestinian workers – citizens of Israel – who were returning from their workplaces in Petah-Tikva to their homes in Kfar Kassem, after the declaration of the curfew, were stopped by soldiers of the Border Guard, who lined them up in a row and shot them to death. Ben-Gurion knew about this immediately but he did not mention it in his diary from that period.

Another massacre that is not mentioned in the diary was the raid of Unit 101 under the command of Ariel Sharon in the village of Qibya on 24 October 1953. The raid took

place at night. In the morning it emerged that the force had killed 69 residents, many of them women and children. It was widely published all over the world, and the outcry that occurred caused Ben-Gurion's resignation from the government. Ben-Gurion knew about that massacre but there is no mention of it in his diary from that period. There was a stormy debate about the two actions in the government but this too Ben-Gurion does not mention in his diary. But the stormy debate was documented in the government records and was released for publication 40 years later.]

Aryeh Bender in *Maariv* (18 April 1997) on the discussion in the government over the Qibya massacre

[Clarifications in square brackets – A. Orr]:

On the night of 14 October 1953, paratroopers and soldiers of Unit 101 [under the personal command of Ariel Sharon] raided the houses of the Jordanian [Palestinian] village of Qibya, opposite the Ben-Shemen and Beit-Naballah region, as a reprisal action against the murder of a mother and her two children in Yehud the day before.

The soldiers blew up 45 structures in the village, including the local school. When the clouds of dust and columns of smoke that the explosions left behind them dissipated, the disastrous dimensions of the action became clear. The bodies of 69 Jordanian civilians, including many women and children that the IDF had not bothered to find before they blew up the houses, were discovered. The result was very embarrassing to the government and the IDF.

It quickly became clear that the reprisal action had caused serious international damage to Israel's image, so it was decided in Jerusalem to deny any responsibility. After five days of thunderous silence, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion announced in a radio broadcast that the action had been carried out by "residents of the communities in the border area" whose patience had run out in the face of the terror actions from across the border.

That mendacious version, which was not much believed in Israel or abroad, was adopted by the government, under Ben-Gurion's guidance, as the official *hasbara* line of

the State of Israel. Today for the first time, after being suppressed for more than forty years, the secret records of the meetings of the third and fourth governments, including the records of the dramatic session that dealt with the Qibya action and its consequences, have been released.

The cabinet meeting after the Qibya action convened on 18 October. At that time most of the ministers did not have the faintest idea about the action – who carried it out and who gave the order. They were very quickly shown a gloomy picture of the situation. ...

... In the agenda that had been distributed to the ministers, there was no mention of the Qibya action. The discussion opened with a survey of the political and security situation.

When at the beginning of the meeting the Minister of the Interior and Religions Moshe Shapira requested to know whether the security section in the government's agenda also included "what happened at the border". Ben-Gurion interrupted him impatiently: "the security section is security and it does not belong to border matters." And thus the minister was kept in limbo until the Foreign Minister concluded his survey on the subject of the international storm that had arisen over Israel's decision to dig a canal in the demilitarized zone near the Bnot-Yaakov bridge and Lake Hula. Only towards the end of his presentation did Sharett reach the most pressing subject of all – the reprisal action at Qibya.

... Sharett goes on to say that what bothers him is how to explain what happened at Qibya to the world. He points out that at the session of the Israel/Jordan Mixed Armistice Commission the IDF representative said that the army had had no part in the action. "I could not bring myself to say anything regarding the matter", he admitted, confessed that he was not comfortable with the outcome of the action. "If we take the position that the [Israeli – trans.] residents of the border zone could no longer tolerate the attacks any longer, then it looks like we have found no other explanation. But it will be clear that no one in the world will believe us".

He proposed that the government come out with an announcement denying responsibility for the incident, but expressing sorrow over the bloodshed that had been caused.

Ben-Gurion, who sensed which way the wind was blowing, hastened to take the floor and astonished the ministers when he claimed that [in spite of his being the PM] he had known nothing about the intention to carry out an action at Qibya. “I was on vacation and no one has to ask me whether to do a reprisal action or not. If I had been asked I would have said to do it”, he told the stunned ministers ...

... He [Ben-Gurion] proposed to lay all the blame for what had happened at England’s door, for it was England that trained the Jordanian Legion and it was England that could have closed the border with Israel to prevent terror attacks from Jordanian territory.

At the conclusion of his presentation Ben-Gurion instructed the ministers by no means to permit the name of the IDF to be associated with the Qibya action. He instructed them to use only the cover story about settlers in the border zone who had gone to attack their enemies. He gave a very convincing reason: “The army really did not do that. The regular army is not able to do that. Just as we established a special border police against infiltrators, there is also something especially for reprisal actions [Unit 101]. It is not the business of the regular army.”

The Prime Minister rebuked the ministers who expressed doubt that the world would be willing to “buy” such a story. ... “We have to stand by the version that it was not the army. Deny it emphatically; it makes no difference whether they believe it or not.”

... At the conclusion of the session the government assigned Ben-Gurion the task of drafting an announcement in which the government denied responsibility for the Qibya action, but expressed sorrow over the deaths of innocents.

Ben-Gurion read the announcement a few days later in a speech to the nation on the Voice of Israel: “The Government of Israel emphatically denies the foolish and fantastical allegation that six hundred soldiers of the Israel Defence Force participated in an action against the village of Qibya. We conducted a thorough investigation and we found out with certitude that not a single military unit, not even the smallest, was missing from its base on the night of the attack on Qibya”.

Ben-Gurion reiterated the version according to which it was a revenge action by residents of the border district. It is unlikely that there was anybody in Israel, Transjordan or the world who believed that story. But the government, in under the pressure by “the Old Man”, stuck to that mendacious story, perhaps from a desperate effort to evade

responsibility.

Later the protagonists of the affair would exchange accusations among themselves regarding the extent of their responsibility.

(Aryeh Bender, *Maariv*, 18 April 1997, pp. 18-19)

[Ben-Gurion mentions this in his diary eight days later, on 22 October 1953:]

On Tuesday 19 October 1953, there was a second session of the Government at which I spoke on security matters, and also I made a declaration in the name of the Government about Qibya. It was proposed that the Government Spokesman should present the declaration. That did not seem suitable to me. Because of the death of Rabbi Yosef the session was ended.

In the afternoon I did the final draft of the declaration and I decided to broadcast it in the evening. Moshe [Sharett, Foreign Minister] agreed with that. On Tuesday at six PM (20 October 1953) I resumed and concluded my talk on security and the army. Before that, [Nehemia] Argov [Ben-Gurion's secretary] approached me about "that matter" – and I told him that I would write a letter for members of the Government at an appropriate time, and I would give the letter to every member of [of the Government] to read who requested it. I told him that so far there is nothing to tell. I am again working as before. Personally and privately I told him that I was leaving the Government and would go to work in the Negev. I elucidated to him the reasons. He committed himself not to talk about it with anybody.

Subsequently the following passage appears in the diary:

"The day before yesterday I invited Aharon⁶⁵ Sharon from Kfar Malal, 25 years old, the commander of the special unit [101].

⁶⁵ Erratum. The reference is to Ariel Sharon, who later went on to become the Prime Minister of Israel in 2001–trans.

... There are 45 men in the unit, of whom 35 are conscript soldiers. The others include 4 youths from Nahalal, 1 from Kfar Yehezkiel, 1 from Haifa, one from Tel-Aviv, the remainder are Jerusalemites. Most of the conscript soldiers are from farms, including 3 from Mizra (Mapam) and another maybe another two from Mapam. They train on the Ein Kerem-Ramat Ezriel road [at the Sataf camp]. They train in explosives, physical training, field training on the platoon level, first aid, communications.

He [Sharon] promises that there is absolutely no fear that [members of Unit 101] will turn into “professionals”. If there is no action after Arab attacks, [they] will get angry, but he is sure would not do anything on their own account. They will remain disciplined. [The men of the 101st] would not get angry at my broadcast [B-G’s denial on the radio that an IDF unit carried out the raid on Qibya].

(Ben-Gurion’s diary, 22 October 1953)

A historian’s testimony after 43 years

On the morning of 13 October [1953], Ben-Gurion, who was then vacationing in Tiberias, met with acting Defence Minister Lavon, Chief of Staff Maklef, and the head of Military Intelligence Dayan (Sharett was not invited) on the slopes of a hill west of Lake Kinneret, where an IDF exercise was taking place, and they decided to respond strongly to the killing that had occurred in Yehud. It appears that one of those present proposed that the target should be Qibya, and it was decided that 50 out of 280 of that village’s houses would be blown up. The village, which stands on the road between the Latrun salient and Qalqilya, was always permanently marked in the Israeli intelligence reports in the early 1950s as one of the “bases of infiltration”. The objective of the raid on Qibya, which remained unchanged in the eyes of the decision-makers, was both revenge and deterrence. Dayan transmitted an order to the head of the Staff Directorate in the IDF, Col. Meir Amit, and the latter ordered his aides to prepare the “ ‘Operation Shoshanna’ order” which stated:

The General Staff's intention: the execution of strong retaliatory actions against the villages that act as bases [for infiltration actions] ... The mission: (1) penetration into the villages of Ni'lin and Shaqba for the purpose of blowing up and destroying several houses and attacking their occupants, (2) attacking the village of Qibya for the purpose of temporary occupation, blowing up houses, attacking residents and causing them to flee from the village.

(IDF Archive 13 October 1953, 644/56/207)

The order was transferred by messenger to the Central Command, where the order was issued for the operation with these words:

The General Staff's aim: execution of strong retaliatory actions in the form of destruction and inflicting casualties in Arab villages ... The intention: attacking the village of Qibya, temporarily occupying it, and carrying out destruction and causing maximum harm to human life [Heb: *pegi'a maximalit be-nefesh* – trans.] in order to make the residents flee from their houses ... A raid on the villages of Shaqba and Ni'lin for the purpose of destruction of several houses and killing residents and soldiers in the village ...

(IDF Archive, 13 October 1953, 644/56/207)

It is not clear why the Central Command “strengthened” the operation order that had been issued by the Staff Directorate/Operations, and it is not clear who did that – Lt.-Col. David Eliezer, operations officer of the Central Command, or Lt.-Col. Rehavam Ze'evi, the head of the Operations Branch in the Staff Directorate/General Staff, or another officer. In any case, Ariel Sharon [the commander of Unit 101 to whom the operation had been assigned] Complied with the Command version, not the General Staff one, and composed his operational order to those under his command in similar language:

The aim of the Command was for the execution of strong reprisal actions ...

The intention: attacking the village of Qibya, occupying it, and maximum damage to life and property ... raids on the villages of Shaqba and Ni'lin with the inclination being towards killing and blowing up houses.

(IDF Archive 644/56/207)

(Benny Morris, *Milhamot ha-gvul shel yisra'el 1949-1956* [Israel's Border Wars 1949-1956], published by Am Oved, 1966, p. 275. Hebrew)⁶⁶

Excerpts from Moshe Sharett's personal diary on the massacre in Qibya

⁶⁶ [Translator's rendering of the Hebrew version. Below is the English version of Morris' book, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War*, by Benny Morris, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, which draws on several sources that were published after the 1966 Hebrew edition. – trans.]

On the morning of 13 October, a vacationing Ben-Gurion met with Acting Defence Minister Lavon, CGS Makleff, and Dayan (Sharett had not been invited) on a hillside to the west of the Sea of Galilee, where an IDF exercise was in progress, and decided on a 'sharp' reaction to the Yehud killings. One of the participants proposed Qibya as the target, and it was decided that fifty of the village's 280 houses should be blown up. The aim was both revenge and deterrence. In the General Staff operational order to Central Command, the attacking force was ordered 'temporarily to conquer the village of Qibya – with the aim of blowing up houses and striking at the inhabitants [Heb: *lifgoa' ba-Toshavim* – trans.] ...'. In turn, Central Command's operational instructions to the units were 'to attack and temporarily to occupy the village, carry out destruction and maximum killing, in order to drive the inhabitants of the village out of their homes'. (p. 245) [What follows is Benny Morris' footnote (84) for the above passage. Bibliographical information on the cited texts appears below – trans.] The quotations from the written General Staff and Central Command orders for *Mivtza Shoshana* (Operation Rose), as the raid was called, are from Drori, 'Mediniyut HaGmul', 54. Drori, a former IDF brigade commander, enjoyed privileged access to IDFA files. Teveth (*Dayan* 392-6), less authoritative, says that 'there is reason to believe' that, at the Ben-Gurion-Lavon-Makleff-Dayan meeting, prospective Jordanian losses were estimated at 10-12 dead. Ben-Gurion, says Teveth, charged in a political campaign speech on 31 July 1965 that Lavon (then a political enemy) had specifically ordered the army to hit civilians. In the pre-attack, oral briefing to Sharon, who commanded the raiders, Dayan instructed that the IDF blow up 'a maximum number of houses, about 50', according to Teveth. Sharon recalled that 'the orders were clear. Qibya was to be a lesson. I was to inflict as many casualties as I could on the Arab home guard [i.e. the NG] and on whatever Jordanian reinforcements showed up. I was also to blow up every major building in the town' (*Warrior*, 88). Again, Sharon is mistaken. The order, as quoted above, was to kill as many Arabs as possible; it did not distinguish between civilians, National Guardsmen, and Legionnaires. Nor apparently, was there any mention of the orders of 'major' buildings as (perhaps) distinct from residential homes. Following the raid, Acting Prime Minister Sharett asked Acting Defence Minister Lavon for a copy of the operational order (apparently not differentiating between the General Staff/Operations order and the Central Command order). According to Teveth, Lavon eventually gave Sharett a version of the order from which a particular line had been deleted. Sharett, apparently, only learnt of the crucial deletion – amounting to deception – a few months later, after he became prime minister. He then noted laconically in his diary, regarding Lavon: 'the forgery of the Qibya order: To kill and destroy, all know that he deceives the prime minister' (Sharett, *Yoman Ishi*, ii. 562, entry for 29 July 1954). Presumably the line excised by Lavon was the one – quoted above – instructing the raiders to kill as many Arabs as possible. After the attack, Sharett asked both Makleff and his own aide de camp, Lt.-Col Nehemia Argov, for the Qibya post-battle report, but neither gave him a copy (Sharett, *Yoman Ishi*, i. 75, entry for 24 Oct. 1953). [Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, pp. 245-246] [From Morris' bibliography (in order of citations in the footnote): DRORI, Z., 'Mediniyut HaGmul BeShnot Ha-50: Helko shel HaDereg HaTzva'i BeTahalich HaHaslama' (in Hebrew; The retaliatory policy in the 1950s: The role of the military echelon in the escalation process), MA thesis (Tel Aviv, 1988). TEVETH, S., *Moshe Dayan* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1971). SHARON, A. (with Charnoff, D.), *Warrior* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989). SHARETT, M., *Yoman Ishi* (in Hebrew; Personal diary), 8 vols., 1953-7, (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv Press, 1978)

Tuesday, 13 October 1953 [1955 in the original; *erratum* corrected by trans.] [a day before the massacre in Qibya]

“While leaving the meeting-room in which the “political” had convened, I was accompanied by [Pinchas] Lavon [Minister of Defence] and he told me that they were about to carry out a response to the recent attacks in the Jordanian border area. Which reached a climax with the killing of a woman and her two children in Yehud (yesterday after midnight). (*Personal Diary*, Moshe Sharett [in Hebrew], Maariv publications, 1978, vol. 1, p. 34)

14 October 1953 [the morning after the massacre]

“At 9:30 the Dutch delegate came to visit, who has returned from two months’ vacation in Europe. He exhibited wonderful familiarity and complete identification with our position regarding the Bnot-Yaakov bridge. I explained to him I well explained to him the strategic aspect of the issue and the groundlessness of Benika’s [a UN person] approach. Despite that he unequivocally condemned the Qibya operation and said, in all friendliness, that we will not be forgiven for such a thing.

He hinted that [the massacre at Qibya] was like Deir Yassin (on 9 April 1948 when Irgun and Lehi units went to that village near Jerusalem and killed about 250 of its 400 residents).” (Sharett, *Personal Diary*, Vol. 1, p. 58)

I told Tziporah [my wife], that I would resign if I was called upon to stand in front of a microphone and broadcast to the residents of Zion and the whole world a falsified version of an incident that occurred. But Ben Gurion himself initiated the version and the broadcast and did it in with confidence in the justness of his cause and in the inherent truthfulness of the words. But the human conscience is an enigma. (Sharett, *Personal Diary*, [Hebrew] Vol. 1, p. 60)

Appendix 11

The Palestinians confront Britain and Zionism

[During the years 1936-1939 the Palestinians rose in rebellion against the British regime. This revolt is known in Arab history as “the Great Revolt” and in Zionist history books as “the disturbances”. The revolt began in April 1936 with a general strike of the entire Palestinian population, which numbered about a million people. The strike lasted 183 days and paralyzed the country. The railroad workers and workers at the ports of Haifa and Jaffa were Palestinians, and the ports and the railroads were paralyzed. The leadership of the Jewish *Yishuv* saw the duty to “conquer” these workplaces as part of the policy of “conquest of labour” and they mobilized Jews to take over the workplaces of the striking Palestinians. That thwarted the Palestinian effort to bring pressure to bear on the British regime by shutting down the economy. Then the Palestinians moved on to armed struggle against the British. The British responded by enlisting the Jews into a new military force – “the Settlements Police” that mainly served for defence, and Orde Wingate’s Special Night Squads, that played an aggressive role. These forces participated in the military campaign against the Palestinians. The Palestinian struggle was directed against the British regime for the simple reason that the British – not the Jews – were the rulers in Palestine. The High Commissioner, the law, the courts, the prisons, the army and the police were British.

In the Jewish community the Revolt was described as being directed against the Jews, and the newspapers called them “the disturbances”.

In reply to that, one of the leaders of the Revolt addressed the following appeal to the Jews.

The appeal was published in March 1939⁶⁷ in *Kol Ha’am* (the Palestinian Communist Party Hebrew-language newspaper) in issue no. 18. It was reprinted in March 1979 in issue 85/86 of *Matzpen*.]

To the Jewish people in this country and outside it

⁶⁷ The first two editions of this book indicated that this appeal was published in the September 1938 issue of *Kol Ha’am*, but it has subsequently emerged that it was more likely to have been in the March 1939 issue – trans.

When we rose in rebellion we put our trust first and foremost in God, and the Arab and Muslim worlds were aroused and came to our help and support in our holy war of liberation, and behind the Arab world was the sympathy of the democratic world. Three years have now passed since that Revolt began, and we unflinchingly continue to stand by our battle against modern means of killing and the laws of deadly imperialism. We stood unbendingly and our faith in and recognition of the justice of our national war has grown.

We were motivated in this war by our yearning for freedom, to save our homeland from the danger of British imperialism and its ally, Zionism. Our movement is a national liberation movement that is directed against imperialism and Zionism and against all who stand in our path to freedom.

Our movement therefore is absolutely not based on religious or racial hatred. The English and the leaders of the “Anglicizing” leaders of Zionism are deliberately concealing this truth from you and are presenting our movement as one that is religious and racial. Their intention is for you to continue being enemies to us so they can mobilize you to implement partition and to defend British and Zionist interests: guarding the oil pipeline and establishing the borders, even if it leads to your destruction and that of the Arabs together.

Your treacherous Zionist leaders are deceiving you and taking advantage of you in order to defend the interests of imperialism just as they led you astray by bringing you to this country by describing to it to you as “flowing with milk and honey”. By means of your treacherous leaders Britain is inciting you against the Arabs while pretending that it [i.e. Britain – trans.] will stand by you forever.

We know Britain well. We know that it will not hesitate to abandon you when it is in their interests to do so. Your eyes see the vicissitudes in the international situation. And when Britain leaves you on your own what good will your leaders be to you? They will be of no more use to you than the leaders of the Armenians and the Assyrians were to their peoples. These leaders roused their people with the incitement of Britain and its allies against Turkey and Iraq and when they were defeated Britain did not come to their defence and left them at the mercy of the Turks and the Arabs.

We hereby advise you to separate from the English and from your leaders who have sold you to England, and not to fight against the Arab national movement. That way you will ensure your safety and will be left in peace.

We reject partition, we want to liberate all of Palestine from the yoke of imperialism and to establish an elected democratic government.

And as regards the Jews, they will live in peace just as they lived before the English came and just as today they live in the various Arab countries. It is a lie that our intention is “to throw you into the sea” or that we will treat you like they treat you in Europe.

Jews have long lived under the rule of Arabs and the Muslims. Did they do to them what is being done to them today in Europe? Were they not doctors of medicine and philosophy, such as Maimonides, alongside the Arab doctors in the courts of the princes in Spain? And did they not live in peace during under King Faisal and Ghazi in Iraq? It is our commitment to you to ensure your safety and freedom as long as you do not act in collaboration with imperialism against us.

Peace, Commander of the rebels, Aref abd-al-Razeq
Taibeh, September 1938.

Appendix 12

Interview with Prime Minister Golda Meir with the editor of *Bamahane*

(*Bamahane*, Independence Day issue, May 1970, p. 22)

Livni (the editor of *Bamahane*): Today the Palestinians are declaring the independence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. There is no other central actor that represents them. There are those who believe that we should not prevent the Palestinians from organizing themselves in the West Bank as a political body, on the condition of course, that it be based on willingness for co-existence. That perhaps implies a degree of recognition of a Palestinian entity. How do you respond to that?

Mrs. Meir: First of all, we are talking about a Palestinian entity, secondly we assume that it will want co-existence. And then, after these two assumptions, we say: why not make peace with them?

First we need to clarify what is a Palestinian entity.

Is it something separate from Jordan? And the Palestinians in Jordan?

Is it some distinct people of the West Bank?

When did they turn into a people?

There may be someone sitting at this table who was not Palestinian, but I am a Palestinian. From the year 1921 to 1948 I had a different passport and I knew that in Palestine there were Arabs and there were Jews, and all of them were Palestinians. The West Bank was never handed over officially, legally, to Abdullah. But he got up one fine morning, and made an annexation. He took the West Bank and said that it belonged to Jordan.

There were two states that recognized that, England and Pakistan. Why did the Palestinians in the West Bank accept that annexation – willingly or unwillingly, but in any case without an uprising with explosives and bombs? Why did they accept Jordanian citizenship, participate in elections to the parliament, become members of parliament and members of the Jordanian government? What happened? Why did they awaken as a Palestinian entity only after the Six-Day War?

What distinguishes between a Palestinian in Nablus and a Palestinian in Amman? Language? Religion? Culture? Why is it “the Jordanian people” over there and the Palestinian people over here? What is the meaning of the word “Palestinian entity”? Is there an additional Arab people?

Most of the population in Jordan are people who were Palestinians. Some of the Arabs of Palestine remained in this country [i.e. Israel – trans.] and they are now citizens of the State of Israel. Some are citizens of Jordan. Some – because Egypt did not let them enter

its country, did not give them citizenship, and did not give them anything – they are Palestinians [the reference is to the residents of the Gaza Strip – trans.]. But I do not know when another people was born, apart from the Arabs who were in Palestine, and afterwards received Jordanian citizenship?

If they decide that they want to call Jordan Palestine – that is not my business. I will not oppose that. I will not declare war on them because of that. But if they want suddenly to make the State of Israel into Palestine again –that I do oppose.

That is regarding the Palestinian entity.

Secondly: Who of them said that they really want to live with us in coexistence?

The most liberal thing that I heard from Arafat, when he was being a big democrat, is that Israel needs to be a democratic state where Muslims, Jews and Christians will live. It is unlikely that all the Jews will stay, because some place I read that he is willing to encourage the government of Iraq to take back the Jews of Iraq. The former Iraqi foreign minister – he has already left this world – together with Nuri Said, told me once from the podium of the UN General Assembly: “Golda Meir, return to Milwaukee”. I do not know if Milwaukee will take me, if Iraq will take the Jews of Iraq, if Libya will take the Jews of Libya. But after he sends the Jews back to their countries of origin, then he will be a democrat and there will be coexistence here. That is the most liberal thing that I heard from him.

So where is the coexistence?

Appendix 13

“History will not forgive”

[From Rubik Rosenthal’s interview with Victor Shem-Tov (Health Minister in Golda Meir’s government) in the “People of war” supplement in *Maariv*, 29 September 1998, (p. 70) on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, 1973). Clarifications in within square brackets – Akiva Orr.]

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Shem-Tov calls the government's refusal in February 1971 to accept the initiative of UN emissary Gunnar Jarring "catastrophic".

Shem-Tov: It is impossible to forgive that. History will not forgive. A UN emissary comes, who is in effect acting on behalf of the two Powers [The USA and the USSR].

It cannot be that Jarring would initiate such a thing – to write two letters, nearly the same text, to Israel and to Egypt – without talking with Dobrynin [the Soviet ambassador in the USA] and without talking with Kissinger [the Chairman of the US National Security Council]. The astute Galili says to the astute Golda:

'Don't rush to answer. Does not Sadat say that there will be no peace in this generation, and he needs in response to commit to full peace in return for all of Sinai. He will reply negatively to Jarring, so we will not have to answer'. A week later, on 10 February, Sadat officially tells the government of Israel, in an international document, that he is willing to sign a peace treaty with Israel with security arrangements that will be agreed upon, on condition that he receive sovereignty over all of Sinai. There is not even a word about the settlements [there is no demand for the evacuation of the Israeli settlements in Sinai].

Galili and Golda are greatly vexed. Counter to their predictions Sadat gave a positive answer.

What does the government do? Galili produces the basic principles of the government, which he had drafted himself, and says: 'we are all responsible for the basic principles of the government, in which it is written that we will not return to the 1967 borders. Jarring is requesting that we commit to that in advance. And therefore our reply is negative: even in return for a peace treaty Israel will not return to the 1967 borders.'

Galili's legalistic pretext paralyzed the government. Even the Mapam ministers. Even a labyrinthine tortuous formula that would permit the continuation of the process did not occur to anyone.

Shem-Tov: "It was possible to create a dynamic of negotiations that would not have obliged the Egyptian government to think about a military option. Sadat went for the military option in order to open a political process.

It was a great opportunity to open negotiations. Instead the government went and entrenched itself in refusal. Golda brought about the refusal, Galili was the advisor. This was perhaps one of the failures of the dovish Left.

We did not say: 'Let us change the basic principles, let us write that we are willing to consider a return to the 1967 borders and open a political process. The negative reply was a big mistake.

(*Maariv* 19 September 1998)

Appendix 14

The will to win – the first condition for victory!

[This Appendix did not appear in either of the two Hebrew editions of this book. It was added in the English translation, which was done in 2009. It is a leaflet that was distributed to soldiers of the IDF during the Sinai War in 1956 – trans.]

The will to win – the first condition for victory!

Combat page no. 2

27 Heshvan 5717, 1 November 1956

Soldiers and officers of the Brigade!

Once again, new recruits and much-decorated and battle-hardened combat veterans have gathered in the south and in the Negev.

We are a mighty force of builders and settlers, men of the field, workshop and city men of labour – an army of farmers and fighters.⁶⁸

The IDF struck the Egyptian enemy on the sea, on land and in the air and is landing death-blows.

Tonight our forces will burst into the Gaza Strip!

Gaza: a living organ of the body of the State of Israel that was torn from it.

A fist in the face of the State, a base for the murderous emissaries of Egypt. A centre of the *Fedayeen*, a constant threat to our security.

And on the other side: Nahal-Oz, Be'eri, Kissufim, Nirim – a chain of flourishing settlements facing a hostile border. Our settlements stood isolated in the face of threats and harassment, shellings and victims. – and with their bodies they defended our border in the south.

Settlements of the Negev – today your hour has come!

Fighters!

Tonight we will break through and wipe out the enemy's strongholds until we have ripped out the gates of Gaza.

As veterans of battles we take with us the best of the battle tradition, our military ability and our iron will to strike the enemy and defeat him!

We will contend with him with the full measure of our military and human stature.

Fighters!

Strike the enemy! Strike him again!

Until he is smitten by the swords of the fighters of the Brigade.

⁶⁸ In Hebrew: “tzeva shibolim ve-herev” – literally “an army of stalks of grain and a sword”: an allusion to the official emblem of the Palmach, the main fighting force of the Jewish community in Palestine before the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. The emblem was a sword pointing upward and to the right, framed by two stalks of grain (shibolim), one on each side of it – trans.

Onward to battle and to victory!

Commander of the Brigade.

Appendix 15
“How dare he presume?”

[This Appendix did not appear in either of the two Hebrew editions of this book. It was added in the English translation, which was done in 2009 – trans.]

From the “Weekend” supplement of Maariv, 1/4/1994

By Professor Yehuda Lapidot

How dare he presume?

In an interview with the Prime Minister [Yitzhak Rabin – A. O.] that was published in the Passover supplement of Maariv (25/3/1994) the interviewer (Sima Kadmon) writes “At one point in the interview Rabin told me that one of the terrible events that are conserved in his memory was the evacuation of Lydda in 1948. There were terrible scenes there”, he said, and refused to elaborate. I asked him if the massacre in Hebron [carried out by the settler Baruch Goldstein at the Tomb of the Patriarchs on 25 February 1994 – A.O.] caused him the same kind of shock. “No”, said Rabin. “There we did not kill, there by agreement, by half agreement, Lydda was evacuated”.

How dare he presume to say that “there we did not kill”, when according to the testimony of Moshe Kalman, the Palmach commander at Lydda, the order was “to shoot at everything that moved”, and within two hours about 200 Arabs were killed: men, women and children. The terrified Arabs sought refuge in the mosque and locked the gates behind them. The Palmach fighters fired PIAT shells into the mosque and when they

broke in they saw a horrible sight. The carpets were soaked with blood and the bodies of men and women were scattered about everywhere.

Moreover, in an excerpt from his autobiography quoted in *The New York Times*, Rabin writes: “The residents of Lydda did not leave of their own accord, there was no choice but to use force and warning shots in order to induce the residents to walk to the Legion lines [the Arab Legion: the Transjordanian army – A.O.]. Are we to understand that to mean “by agreement, by half agreement, Lydda was evacuated”?”

The massacre in Lydda in 1948 does not justify the massacre in Hebron in 1994, but there is a big difference between saying this and re-writing history.

Appendix 16

Memoirs of looting and liquidations

[This Appendix did not appear in either of the two Hebrew editions of this book. It was added in the English translation, which was done in 2009 – trans.]

Memoirs of looting and liquidations in 1948 by Uri Yarom, later the father of the IDF helicopter squadron, from an interview with Moshe Zunder (Maariv, 21/9/2001) on the occasion of the publication of his book *Kenaf Renanim* [“Songbird” – Hebrew].

Zunder: In your house there is a beautiful clock that you took from an Arab house whose residents were forced to abandon it during the War of Independence.

Yarom: “I look at its pendulum swinging back and forth and I always feel that it is saying to me: “tut, tut, tut. You shouldn’t have taken me.”

In [Yarom’s new book] *Songbird*, there is a heartrending description, the content of which could have been excerpted from a combination of S. Yizhar’s *Khirbet Khizeh* and a penetrating and unsettling study by one of the “New Historians”.

It should be mentioned that Yarom was a candidate on his friend Rehavam Ze'evi's Moledet list for the 11th Knesset.

He writes that Operation Danny, in which Lydda and Ramleh were conquered, was “an unchallenging operation that did not leave any particular impression on me.”

Subsequently he gives a description of the columns of refugees who were fleeing for their lives.

“... The closer we got to the road going out of Lydda, on the way to Ben-Shemen, the more we saw entire families fleeing for their lives on foot, on vehicles, in wagons hitched to animals or pulled by men, riding on the backs of animals and on bicycles ... most of the women were carrying screaming babies, and they had increased their pace to a run, red faced and drenched in sweat. There were also flocks of sheep among the fleeing crowd, which added to the tumult and increased the cloud of dust. We stopped to watch the scene. On a nearby hill stood a jeep with a machine-gun mounted on it and a radio. Every few minutes the gunner fired a long burst over the heads of the refugees, who thereupon increased their pace and discarded more pieces of property that were slowing them down. The road was strewn with clothes and household objects of various kinds.”

When I read that passage to Yarom, he said: “What I did not write in the book was that the order to shoot over the heads of the Arabs, so that they would be filled with terror and would run, was given by Yitzhak Rabin.”

He then tells about soldiers who looted from the refugees' baggage and the jewellery of the women. Later the houses were looted.

Yarom was astonished, and wrote: “upon our return to Tzrifin after the Operation, I learned that there was a “booty committee”, which took care to ensure that the spoils were fairly distributed among the various hakhsharot⁶⁹ that the looters belonged to.”

Yarom, who did not belong to any hakhshara, was given permission by the committee to loot the beautiful pendulum clock.

Did you hesitate to publish those words?

“Many people said to me that I should not write those words and that they would be angry about it, but when I began to write I said to myself: keep silent or give a true picture of what happened. People kill in war. There were also guys who put their hands inside Arabs’ shirts and ripped off their chains.

What did you feel at the sight of the column of refugees?

“Compassion. I saw children running in the dust after their mothers. I saw people losing their homes. It was terrible. But one of the things that irritate me most is when they tell me that I hate Arabs. I grew up and lived among Arabs. During the disturbances of 1936 I was five years old. People were killed every day by mines in the groves. My father came home wounded in the head from a stone thrown by Arabs. I perceived that they were in the wrong and we were in the right, but I do not hate them.”

You tell of a soldier who tried to persuade you to join him in executing an old couple that was left behind. You refused. You did not write what he did but it can be understood that he killed them himself.

⁶⁹ Hakhsharot (sing. hakhshara): programmes based in kibbutzim that combined military training with agricultural work in order to prepare young people for service in the Palmach – the combat branch of the Hagana, which became the IDF after 14 May 1948 – trans.

“I hesitated a great deal about that story. I left it open to interpretation. I heard volleys of shots. I believe he killed them. Afterwards that creep came and tried to explain to me that he did it out of mercy, because they had been left alone in the village.”

You wrote about a morning when you woke up to the sound of the “terrible cries” of a group of Arabs who were being tortured by our intelligence people.

“If you stop today by the side of the road, in front of Kfar Daniel, as soon as you see a date-palm, there is a two-storey house with a flat roof. That was the house of the sheikh or the mukhtar and I went up onto the roof to sleep. In the morning I woke up and heard horrible screams.”

What did they do to them?

“I cannot describe it to a newspaper. It was a terrible sight for a boy not quite 17 years old.”

Yarom tells me not to quote what he saw. But I can say that if an IDF prisoner were tortured that way, the whole country would be in an uproar and it would be additional “proof” of Arab cruelty and barbarism.

Appendix 17

Announcement in *Haaretz*, 22 September 1967

Our right to defend ourselves against destruction does not confer on us the right to oppress others.

Conquest leads to foreign rule.

Foreign rule leads to resistance.

Resistance leads to oppression.

Oppression leads to terror and counter-terror.

The victims of terror are usually innocent people.

Keeping the occupied territories will convert us into a nation of murderers and murder victims.

Let us leave the occupied territories immediately.

Shimon Tzabar

David Arnfeld

Dan Omer

Ra'if Elias

Haim Hanegbi

Uri Lifshitz

Dr. Moshe Machover

Eli Aminov

Rafi Zichroni

Aryeh Buber

Shniur Sherman

Yehudah Rozenstrauch