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(as put together by D.H.)

26 Sept. 56

Ben-Gurion, David (Prime Minister of Israel)

- 1 letter to D.H.
- 1 letter from D.H.

ראש הממשלה  
THE PRIME MINISTER

Jerusalem, Israel.  
26 September 1956.

Dear Mr Hammarskjöld

I have been re-reading with the greatest care your two letters of 4 and 12 September. I could wish that I were not driven to the sad conclusion - still quite incomprehensible to me - that our exchanges of letters since our last meeting have not brought us any nearer together than our oral discussions, in which we had, I felt, reached a large measure of mutual understanding. Rather the contrary, in fact. The last thing I want is to find myself in disagreement with the representatives of the United Nations. You may not - certainly need not - believe in our virtue; but you will, I think, agree that we are aware of our interest in maintaining the best possible relations with world public opinion and with the organs of the United Nations.

But the United Nations is based on certain principles, which are as dear to us as they are to anybody else. It is our duty and our right to ensure, so far as we can, that these principles shall be applied to us in the same measure as to other States-Members. We cannot be expected to acquiesce in a "double standard": one for Israel and the other for the rest of the world. And I am sorry to have to say that this is just what has been happening.

Article I of the United Nations Charter provides for "international peace and security", and to that end for the taking of "effective collective measures for the prevention and removal  
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Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld,  
Secretary-General,  
The United Nations,  
New York, N.Y.,  
U.S.A.

of threats to the peace". We are subjected to continual, open, threats from the rulers of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. They fill the press, the radio, and the public speeches of the Egyptian dictator, the Jordanian King, the Syrian President, and the King of Sa'udi Arabia - in solo and in chorus. We complain - but what is being done by the United Nations representatives, here or elsewhere, to "prevent and remove" those threats?

The same Article provides for the "adjustment or settlement" of international disputes. Year after year we have been asking for such a settlement - but our voice is just "a voice crying in the wilderness." States-Members of the United Nations organise economic boycott and blockade against us in an attempt to strangle us economically, although Article 2(4) of the Charter clearly lays it down that

"All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations."

How can the boycott and blockade of Israel openly proclaimed and imposed by the Arab States be regarded as compatible with the Charter? If it is not, what have the institutions of the United Nations ever done or tried to do to assure to us our elementary rights under the Charter, or to prevent or stop our neighbours' hostile acts?

The United Nations is founded on the principle of "the sovereign equality of all its Members". Are we alone to be excluded from the application of that principle?

In 1949 we concluded Armistice Agreements with Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The key-article in all these Agreements is Article I, which lays down four principles for restoring permanent peace between the Contracting Parties. I quote it here:

"With a view to promoting the return of permanent peace in Palestine and in recognition of the importance in this regard of mutual assurances concerning the future military  
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operations of the parties, the following principles, which shall be fully observed by both Parties during the Armistice, are hereby affirmed:

- 1) The injunction of the Security Council against resort to military force in the settlement of the Palestine question shall henceforth be scrupulously respected by both Parties.
- 2) No aggressive action by the armed forces - land, sea or air - of either party shall be undertaken, planned or threatened against the people or the armed forces of the other; it being understood that the use of the term "planned" in this context has no bearing on normal staff planning as generally practised in military organisations.
- 3) The right of each Party to its security and freedom from fear of attack by the armed forces of the other shall be fully respected.
- 4) The establishment of an armistice between the armed forces of the two Parties is accepted as an indispensable step toward the liquidation of armed conflict and the restoration of peace in Palestine."

Each one of these four principles has been and is being repeatedly disregarded by Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and I am unaware of any attempt on the part of United Nations authorities to enforce their observance. The Agreements were all freely and voluntarily entered into by the States concerned. When you were here last April, you showed great concern for Articles 7 and 8 of the Agreement, and tried, with some success, to secure better observance of Article 2(2). But in the most important and crucial of all the provisions of the Agreement - Article I, with its four vital principles, you evinced little interest.

In your letter of September 12 you say:

"I have had to ask you to re-establish compliance, as I have had to ask the others to do so. Your stand has been that you cannot do anything in that direction unless and until the other party has taken the first steps."

With all respect, I feel bound to point out that this is not the case. Egypt has broken Article I over and over again

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these many years. She has violated the provisions of the Charter and the 1951 decision of the Security Council regarding free navigation in the Suez Canal. She has not complied with Article 8(3) of the Armistice Agreement ("On the Egyptian side of the frontier, facing the El Auja area, no Egyptian defensive positions shall be closer to El Auja than El Qou-seima and Abou Aoueigila"). She has refused, even after your own intervention, to carry out Article 9, regarding prisoners of war. Israel has never refused to comply with any of the Articles of the Armistice Agreements.

When you were here last April, we told you that, after these years of violations of these Agreements by the other parties, we could not be expected to regard them as binding on us alone. For eight years, Jordan has been violating Article 8, as well as Article 1, of our Agreement with her. We pointed this out to you, but the fact found no place in your Report to the Security Council. I had tried to explain to you the importance - religious, cultural, humanitarian - of that Article, but apparently without avail. For nineteen centuries - ever since the destruction of our Second Commonwealth - we have had access to the Wailing Wall, our people's most sacred place. We had that access under Moslem rule, under the Crusaders, under the Egyptians, under the Turks, and throughout the British Mandate. Jordan guaranteed us the same right in her Armistice Agreement with us - but she has never fulfilled her undertaking. And the representatives of the United Nations have condoned her breach of faith. We have our University buildings, library and laboratories on Mount Scopus. Our Agreement with Jordan provides for the resumption of their normal functioning, and for our free access thereto. For eight years that provision has been ignored by Jordan. I do not know what efforts you may have made to remedy all this on your visits to Jordan, or whether you have written to King

/Hussein

Hussein about it. I only know that no voice has been raised in the United Nations, here or in New York, to check this violation by Jordan of Article 8, though this Article is of the utmost importance to us.

It looks as if there is, in fact, a "double standard" - one law for us, and another for the Arab States. Can you reasonably regard the presence of a United Nations observer at Nitzana or at the North end of the Sea of Galilee as more important than observance of the principles of the Charter or of the provisions of the Armistice Agreements which are vital for the security and the elementary rights of Israel?

You know as well as I do that Israel is genuinely anxious to observe the Armistice Agreements in their entirety - and to go even further: to establish real peace and co-operation with all her neighbours on the basis of equality and reciprocity, under the United Nations Charter. Can it in truth be said of us that we are waiting for the other party to "take the first steps"? The other party has for years been refusing to carry out the provisions of the Charter and the Armistice Agreements. Even the present British Prime Minister (who can hardly be suspected of any bias in favour of Israel against the Arabs) has publicly stated that he did not care to take the Suez problem to the United Nations because Egypt had been able to ignore with impunity the Security Council's decision regarding the passage of Israel shipping through the Canal. He also stated in the House of Commons that the Egyptian dictator's next step would be an attack on Israel - and Nasser has issued no denial.

These are a few of the reasons why I find it incomprehensible that we should be accused of waiting till the other side takes the first step.

This letter has already become far too long, but in fairness to you I must make three more points:

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1) The Armistice Agreements were concluded between us and the neighbouring Arab States, not between us and the United Nations. They are based on reciprocity. They do not bind one side only. If Egypt violates her Agreement with us, she has no right to expect us to observe those provisions of it which she finds convenient. The same applies to Jordan and Syria.

2) The United Nations Charter provides (Article 51) that:

"Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security..."

In publicly condemning what you prefer to call "retaliation" you are really denying us our right to defend ourselves, so that the Arabs believe that they can go on murdering our civilians (they have acquired some respect for our soldiers) with impunity.

3) Your visits to our country will always be welcome, and I personally shall always be happy to discuss with you all matters of common concern. I am convinced that our talks in the past have been not only pleasant, but also useful, and - for me at least - instructive. But you are the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and it is not for me to decide whether and when you should visit this area. Whenever you may come, you will be a dear and honoured guest of my country. And if you are able to secure reciprocity in the observance of the Armistice Agreements, you will have achieved a very great thing for the welfare of all the peoples of the Middle East, and for the peace of the world.

Yours sincerely,

*D. Ben-Gurion*

26 September 1956

Dear Mr. Ben-Gurion,

By cable yesterday I received from General Burns parts of your letter to me of 25 September. In the present situation I wish only to make the following immediate comments.

As you well know, it is the Security Council that has repeatedly publicly condemned acts of retaliation. That I share their view is irrelevant in view of the fact that it would all the same be my duty publicly to maintain that stand. Your criticism of the impact of my statements on retaliation, which I consider unfounded, should, thus, with equal or greater justification be directed against the Security Council and its Members.

The situation is quite clear. You are convinced that a threat of retaliation has a deterrent effect. I am convinced that it is more of an incitement to individual members of the Arab forces than even what has been said by their own Governments. You are convinced that acts of retaliation will stop further incidents. I am convinced that they will lead to further incidents as they give both the immediate reason for counteraction from the other side and a legal justification which, if applicable to you, must be equally applicable to the others. You believe that this way of creating respect for Israel will pave the way for sound coexistence with the Arab peoples. I believe that the policy may postpone indefinitely the time for such coexistence.

However, I think the discussion of this question can be considered as closed since you, in spite of previous discouraging experiences, have taken the responsibility for large scale tests of the correctness of your belief.

His Excellency  
Mr. David Ben-Gurion  
Prime Minister and Minister of Defence  
Jerusalem