

Middle East conflict - correspondence with participating countries: Middle ...

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Walker, Ronald E. (Dr., Perm. Representative
of Australia to the U.N.)

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21 May 1957

PERSONAL

Dear Dr. Walker,

I much appreciated the spirit in which, the other day, you brought up the question of Australian criticism of the United Nations policies during the past six or seven months. Later my attention has been drawn to the wording of Mr. Menzies' observations in the House of Representatives. According to my information he should, among other things, have said: "What has the United Nations done about it? It has been bowing to Colonel Nasser on this matter, through its chief executive officer, with bated breath and whispering humbleness." Permit me to say that whatever the political reasons for a critical line, this statement is one which seems to require a basis in facts. If it were felt that there is such a basis, it would be fully justified to raise the issue in the United Nations.

As the text of the statement causes me to revert to our conversation, I may perhaps also use the occasion for putting on record what I said concerning two examples to which you referred in support of the criticism.

I understand that the feeling in Canberra is that we should have "exposed" the Egyptian Government for their delay in permitting work on "Edgar Bonnet". During the time of the delay, however, we did not know whether it was justified or not. Our people on the spot had only "impressions". To go beyond the diplomatic pressures which were, in fact, applied and make the matter a public issue, would have been objectionable on two scores: We did not know whether an open criticism would have been justified, and there was reason to believe that it would not help towards a speedy conclusion of the whole operation with its complicated and far-reaching technical cooperation with the Egyptian authorities. We have often to face choices of this type, but, for example, we have not been criticized on bowing to Mr. Ben Gurion for the reason that we have not exposed Israel's "scorched earth" policy, in contradiction to written assurances given to us, nor, for example, their refusal, so far, to comply with the General Assembly request for a deployment of the UNEF which would render the Force fully effective and stabilize it as an instrument for peace in the region.

His Excellency
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The other example was our supposed retreat on the use of British ships down the Canal. As you will remember, there was never any difficulty in the use of British ships. The question referred to the use of British crews, formally in the service of the Navy, the very weeks or indeed days after evacuation, deep down in Egyptian territory. We also had to face contradictory judgments concerning the usefulness of the six ships, later experience showing that those were right who maintained that the ships were in no way needed. In the situation facing me around Christmas, I informed the British that I could not, at that time, take the responsibility for the security of British crews down the Canal. In his conversation with President Nasser at the same time concerning the clearing operation, Mr. Cordier had no reason to raise the issue, much less to make any concession, as the combined impact of the very doubtful technical value and the security aspect had already killed the suggestion, irrespective of Egyptian view-points.

I believe that a study of, for example, the Gaza and Tiran situations would likewise show that the United Nations policy neither has been one of weakness nor one of double standards.

Dag Hammarskjöld,
Secretary-General.