

**Middle East - Suez story No
7-14: Middle East - Suez story
No 7-14 - 23**

HS L 179:110



Dag Hammarskjöld's saml.

L 179: 110

Middle East/Suez story - Nr. 10

(as put together by Dag Hammarskjöld
and kept in his safe in his office, U.N. HQ)

10 - 26 May 56

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Unden, Östen (Swedish Foreign Minister)

- 1 letter from D.H. (personal)

10 May 1956

In sending you, through the Delegation, my official report on the Middle East mission, I want to add some personal observations.

The real situation in the Middle East is very different from what the World has been led to believe. In some respects it is better, because there is undoubtedly a very real peace will to be found at key points, irrespective of the side, but there is also a mentality which shocks me and makes me most worried. My greatest reason for concern is the Israeli attitude which, on the inside, is one of the harshest intransigence, but, as presented by the Israeli propaganda, one of a nation wishing only to live at peace with its neighbours, although continuously harassed by them. (I have experienced this contrast practically daily and in the most striking forms; for example, screams to the world about the danger created by this and that intrusion of civilians over the demarcation lines, only too understandable in the light of the prevailing circumstances, and at the same time a flat refusal to accept observer arrangements in order to forestall such transgressions.)

If you read the report carefully, I think you will find that the balance between the stands of the two sides does not correspond to the general ideas you find in the world press. And yet I have, in order

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Mr. E. A. ...
(personal)

not to make this document a speech for the prosecution -- and in that way to create further difficulties -- played down the inconsistencies and the, sometimes, incomprehensively negative reactions on the Israeli side which rendered this effort, as all similar efforts, exceedingly difficult.

The only man in the Middle East on whom efforts towards solutions can safely build at present, is Dr. Fawzi of Egypt. His sincerity, seriousness and competence as well as his international perspective make him a real asset. Without him the last manoeuvre would have been impossible. There is no doubt about the direction of his efforts, although I cannot speak too openly about it without running the risk of a weakening of his position in other Arab countries. He has no power, but on the other hand an obvious influence on Nasser, who increasingly seems to understand the limitation of his own international perspective.

The other man in the Arab world in whom I have personal confidence, is Prime Minister Rifai of Jordan, who is the King's man. His influence, however, is very limited, due to the disturbingly weak position of the Government in Jordan.

I know by now both Nasser and Ben Gurion very well. Their two tempers are such that a clash between them represents a constant risk factor. In spite of all noises and all actions which seem to indicate the opposite, I am personally convinced that neither of

them has any plan to attack the other one; that, in fact, each wishes to avoid a war. The trouble lies on a different level. Each has the deepest suspicion of the other one, but their ways of protecting their security represent opposite extremes. Nasser has very great patience, but a lot of the guerilla mentality which makes him assert himself, so to say, under the table and in irregular forms. Ben Gurion, on the other hand, is extremely impatient and believes it to be the height of morality to respond to the policy of the other one by blunt, open strokes, not understanding the complete futility of such retaliation and its exceedingly dangerous psychological consequences. Both have pushed self-righteousness to the extreme point of honestly believing that they always are right. In the case of Ben Gurion it goes even one step further than in the case of Nasser, as he — in perfectly good faith — is blowing up every single incident, whatever its origin, as a sign of the treachery of the other side, while never admitting publicly even fully evidenced transgressions and incursions. For example, he considers that everybody should have forgotten the unforgivable bombardment of the open city of Gaza (for which no legal theory on the basis of facts can build up a defence) and he forgets that the first breach of the cease-fire was when Israeli officers put UN observers under direct fire for seven minutes. But he uses all his means of communication and propaganda in order to make, for example, the Nahal Oz incident a proof of the bad faith of the Egyptians, although it is not even certain that the Egyptians fired first.

I do not blame any of them but I have to note that these are their attitudes and to note also in what risks they involve the two countries and all of us. Back of Nasser you find, not only Fawzi, but also General Amer whom I don't know, but he obviously represents an extreme form of security-mindedness. Back of Ben Gurion you have Sharett, emotional beyond all reasonable limits, and smart. You have further General Dayan, an intelligent but trigger-happy guerilla chief with a Stern gang background. I do not believe that either of the Commanders-in-Chief can push Ben Gurion or Nasser into an active war policy, but, as I said to both Ben Gurion and Nasser, when "everybody is playing safe in the way you do, the result is a state of utmost insecurity."

Jordan and Lebanon do not represent any risk factors. Syria does; not because it has any strength of initiative or any military strength, but because of an extremely unsettled state of affairs which may lead to the silliest adventures with unforeseeable consequences in view of the Israeli way of reacting and the Arab Defence Alliance. There is no "strong" man in Syria. The one I trust most, is in this case, in spite of all, the Commander-in-Chief, who certainly knows the weakness of the military resources and, as a Druse, is more stable than the rest seem to me to be.

In view of the Syrian attitude, the trigger for a new war, if

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we manage to keep the incidents under control, may well be an attempt on the Israeli side to start again on the Jordan River project. This point represented my greatest difficulty, in all directions. It is my personal conviction that the Israelis will not start digging this season, but they were not willing to give an expression to that fact, even by a simple recognition that the somewhat ambiguous resolution of the Security Council of 1953, which stopped the work, can, as to its present validity, be interpreted only by the Security Council. (I can in this context tell you that the Israelis go even so far as to say that no interpretation of the Security Council decision can derogate from the sovereignty of a nation -- in contradiction to express statements of the Charter and in neglect of the fact that Israel has no "sovereignty" in the demilitarized zone in question.)

There would be very much more to be said about these problems, but I have no time for any further comments. My views explain why I consider that it would be most unwise to take sides and to get committed to any of the two parties in the present conflict.

One thing is certain; if we manage to stabilize the cease-fire and to get a more or less complete compliance with the Armistice Agreements, the next step must be to provoke unilateral actions by the parties, reducing troop concentrations, eliminating the blockade, stopping the propaganda and so on and so forth. Only if and when such unilateral steps have been taken, is it possible with the slightest chance of success to approach the major problems. It follows that there is no

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basis on which one could try to mediate in the present situation.

I feel that I can say without any exaggeration that what was possible to achieve as matters now stand, by any of the means available, was reached through my mission, limited though its result is.

I hope one day to be able to give you the inside story which has elements of a "Thousand and One Nights," of the "Merchant of Venice" and of "Oedipus Rex".