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A SELECT CHRONOLOGY
AND
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
RELATING TO THE
MIDDLE EAST
(First revised edition)

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE



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31. SPEECH BY PRESIDENT NASSER ON CLOSING OF THE GULF OF AQABA, MAY 22, 1967¹

The entire country looks up to you today. The entire Arab nation supports you. It is clear that in these circumstance the entire people fully support you and consider the armed forces as their hope today. It is definite that the entire Arab nation also supports our armed forces in the present circumstances through which the entire Arab nation is passing.

What I wish to say is that we are now in 1967, and not in 1956 after the tripartite aggression. A great deal was said and all the secrets were ambiguous. Israel, its commanders and rulers, boasted a great deal after 1956. I have read every word written about the 1956 events, and I also know exactly what happened in 1956.

On the night of Oct. 29, 1956, the Israeli aggression against us began. Fighting began on Oct. 30. We received the Anglo-French ultimatum which asked us to withdraw several miles west of the Suez Canal.

On Oct. 31, the Anglo-French attack on us began. The air raids began at sunset on Oct. 31. At the same time, all our forces in Sinai were withdrawn completely to inside Egypt. Thus in 1956 we did not have an opportunity to fight Israel. We decided to withdraw before the actual fighting with Israel began.

Despite our decision to withdraw, Israel was unable to occupy any of our positions except after we left them. But Israel created a big uproar, boasted and said a great deal about the Sinai campaign and the Sinai battle.

Every one of you knows all the rubbish that was said. They probably believed it themselves.

Today, more than 10 years after Suez, all the secrets have been exposed. The most important secret concerns Ben-Gurion, when the imperialists brought him to France to employ him as a dog for imperialism to begin the operation.

Ben-Gurion refused to undertake anything unless he was given a written guarantee that they would protect him from the Egyptian bombers and the Egyptian Air Force. All this is no longer secret. The entire world knows.

It was on this basis that France sent fighter planes to Ben-Gurion, and it was also on this basis that Britain pledged to Ben-Gurion to bomb Egyptian airfields within 24 hours after the aggression began.

This goes to show how much they took into account the Egyptian forces. Ben-Gurion himself said he had to think about the Haifa-Jerusalem-Tel Aviv triangle, which contains one-third of Israel's population. He could not attack Egypt out of fear of the Egyptian Air Force and bombers.

At that time we had a few Ilyushin bombers. We had just acquired them to arm ourselves. Today we have many Ilyushins and others. There is a great difference between yesterday and today, between 1956 and 1967.

Why do I say all this? I say it because we are in a confrontation with Israel. Israel today is not backed by Britain and France as was the

¹ New York Times, May 26, 1967.

case in 1956. It has the United States, which supports it and supplies it with arms. But the world cannot again accept the plotting which took place in 1956.

Israel has been clamoring since 1956. It speaks of Israel's competence and high standard of training. It is backed in this by the West and the Western press. They capitalized on the Sinai campaign, where no fighting actually took place because we had withdrawn to confront Britain and France.

Today we have a chance to prove the fact. We have, indeed, a chance to make the world see matters in their true perspective. We are now face to face with Israel. In recent days Israel has been making threats of aggression and it has been boasting.

On May 12 a very impertinent statement was made. Anyone reading this statement must believe that these people are so boastful and deceitful that one simply cannot remain silent. The statement said that the Israeli commanders have announced they would carry out military operations against Syria in order to occupy Damascus and overthrow the Syrian Government.

On the same day, Israeli Premier Eshkol made a strongly threatening statement against Syria. At the same time, the commentaries said that Israel believed Egypt could not make a move because it was bogged down in Yemen.

Of course they say that we are bogged down in Yemen and have problems there. We are in Yemen. But they seem to believe the lies they have been saying all these years about our existence in Yemen. It is also possible that the Israelis believe such lies.

We are capable of bearing our duties in Yemen, and at the same time doing our national duty here in Egypt in defending our borders and in attacking if Israel attacks Arab country.

On May 13 we received accurate information that Israel was concentrating on the Syrian border huge armed forces of about 11 to 13 brigades. These forces were divided into two fronts, one south of Lake Tiberias and the other north of the lake.

The decision made by Israel at this time was to carry out an aggression against Syria as of May 17. On May 14 we took our measures, discussed the matter and contacted our Syrian brothers. The Syrians also had this information.

On this basis, Lieut. Gen. Mahmud Fawzi left for Syria to coordinate matters. We told them that we had decided that if Syria was attacked, Egypt would enter the battle from the first minute. This was the situation May 14. The forces began to move in the direction of Sinai to take up normal positions.

News agencies reported yesterday that these military movements must have been the result of a previously well-laid plan. And I say that the sequence of events determined the plan. We had no plan before May 13, because we believed that Israel would not dare attack any Arab country and that Israel would not have dared to make such an impertinent statement.

On May 16 we requested the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in a letter from Lieut. Gen. Mahmud Fawzi. We then requested the complete withdrawal of UNEF.

A big worldwide campaign, led by the United States, Britain and Canada, began opposing the withdrawal of UNEF from Egypt.

Thus we felt that there were attempts to turn UNEF into a force serving neoimperialism.

It is obvious that UNEF entered Egypt with our approval and therefore cannot continue to stay in Egypt except with our approval. Until yesterday, a great deal was said about UNEF.

A campaign is also being mounted against the United Nations Secretary General because he made a faithful and honest decision and could not surrender to the pressure brought to bear upon him by the United States, Britain and Canada to make UNEF an instrument for implementing imperialism's plans.

It is quite natural—and I say this quite frankly—that had UNEF ignored its basic mission and turned to achieving the aims of imperialism, we would have regarded it as a hostile force and forcibly disarmed it. We are definitely capable of doing such a job.

I say this now not to discredit the UNEF but to those who have neoimperialist ideas and who want the United Nations to achieve their aims: There is not a single nation which truly respects itself and enjoys full sovereignty which could accept these methods in any form.

At the same time I say that the UNEF has honorably and faithfully carried out its duties. And the U.N. Secretary General refused to succumb to pressure. Thus he issued immediate orders to withdraw. Consequently, we laud the UNEF which stayed 10 years in our country serving peace.

And when they left—at a time when we found that the neoimperialist forces wanted to divert them from their basic aim—we gave them a cheerful sendoff and saluted them.

Our forces are now in Sinai, and we are in a state of complete mobilization in Gaza and Sinai. We note that there is a great deal of talk about peace these days. Peace, peace, international peace, international security, U.N. intervention and so on and so forth, which appears daily in the press.

Why is it that no one spoke about peace, the United Nations and security when on May 12 the Israeli Premier and the Israeli commanders made their statements that they would occupy Damascus, overthrow the Syrian region, strike vigorously at Syria and occupy a part of Syrian territory?

It was obvious that they approved of the statements made by the Israeli Premier and commanders.

There is talk about peace now. What is peace? If there is a true desire for peace, we say that we also work for peace.

But does peace mean that we should ignore the rights of the Palestinian people because of the lapse of time? Does peace mean that we should concede our rights because of the lapse of time? Nowadays they speak about a "U.N. presence in the region for the sake of peace." Does "U.N. presence in the region for peace" mean that we should close our eyes to everything?

The United Nations adopted a number of resolutions in favor of the Palestinian people. Israel implemented none of these resolutions. This brought no reaction from the United States.

Today U.S. Senators, members of the House of Representatives, the press and the entire world speak in favor of Israel, of the Jews. But nothing is said in favor of the Arabs.

The U.N. resolutions which are in favor of the Arabs were not implemented. What does this mean? No one is speaking in the Arabs' favor. How does the United Nations stand with regard to the Palestinian people? How does it stand with regard to the tragedy which has continued since 1958?

The peace talk is heard only when Israel is in danger. But when Arab rights and the rights of the Palestinian people are lost, no one speaks about peace, rights or anything.

Therefore it is clear that an alliance exists between the Western powers—chiefly represented by the United States and Britain—and Israel. There is a political alliance. This political alliance prompts the Western powers to give military equipment to Israel.

Yesterday and the day before yesterday the entire world was speaking about Sharm el Sheik, navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba, the Elath port. This morning I heard the B.B.C. say that in 1956 Abdel Nasser pledged to open the Gulf of Aqaba.

Of course this is not true. It was copied from a British paper called The Daily Mail. No such thing happened. Abdel Nasser would never forfeit any U.A.R. right. As I said, we would never give away a grain of sand from our soil or our country.

The armed forces' responsibility is now yours. The armed forces yesterday occupied Sharm el Sheik. What is the meaning of the armed force's occupation of Sharm el Sheik? It is an affirmation of our rights and our sovereignty over the Aqaba Gulf. The Aqaba Gulf constitutes our Egyptian territorial waters. Under no circumstances will we allow the Israeli flag to pass through the Aqaba Gulf.

The Jews threatened war. We tell them: You are welcome, we are ready for war. Our armed forces and all our people are ready for war, but under no circumstances will we abandon any of our rights. This water is ours.

War might be an opportunity for the Jews—for Israel and Rabin [Maj. Gen. Itzhak Rabin, the Chief of Staff]—to test their forces against ours and to see that what they wrote about the 1956 battle and the occupation of Sinai was all a lot of nonsense.

Of course there is imperialism, Israel and reaction. Reaction casts doubt on everything, and so does the Islamic Alliance.

We all know that the Islamic Alliance is now represented by three states: the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the kingdom of Jordan, and Iran. They are saying that the purpose of the Islamic Alliance is to unite the Moslems against Israel.

I would like the Islamic Alliance to serve the Palestine question in only one way: by preventing the supply of oil to Israel. The oil which now reaches Israel through Elath comes from one of the Islamic Alliance states. It goes to Elath from Iran.

Who is supplying Israel with oil? The Islamic Alliance—Iran, an Islamic Alliance state.

Such is the Islamic Alliance. It is an imperialist alliance, and this means it sides with Zionism because Zionism is the main ally of imperialism.

The Arab world, which is now mobilized to the highest degree, knows all this. It knows how to deal with the imperialist agents, the allies of Zionism and the fifth column. They say they want to co-ordinate their plans with us. We cannot at all coordinate our plans

with the Islamic Alliance members because it would mean giving our plans to the Jews and to Israel.

This is a serious battle. When we said we were ready for the battle, we meant that we would indeed fight if Syria or any other Arab state was subjected to aggression.

The armed forces are now everywhere. The army and all the forces are now mobilized, and so are the people. They are all behind you, praying for you day and night and feeling that you are the pride of their nation, of the Arab nation. This is the feeling of the Arab people in Egypt and outside Egypt. We are confident that you will honor the trust.

Every one of us is ready to die and not give away a grain of his country's sand. This, for us, is the greatest honor. It is the greatest honor for us to defend our country. We are not scared by imperialist, Zionist or reactionary campaigns.

We are independent, and we know the taste of freedom. We have built a strong national army and achieved our objectives. We are building our country.

There is currently a propaganda campaign, a psychological campaign and a campaign of doubt against us. We leave all this behind us and follow the course of duty and victory.

May God be with you !

32. THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST: Statement by President Johnson, May 23, 1967¹

In recent days, tension has again arisen along the armistice lines between Israel and the Arab States. The situation there is a matter of very grave concern to the whole international community. We earnestly support all efforts, in and outside the United Nations and through its appropriate organs, including the Secretary General, to reduce tensions and to restore stability. The Secretary General has gone to the Near East on his mission of peace with the hopes and prayers of men of good will everywhere.

The Near East links three continents. The birthplace of civilization and of three of the world's great religions, it is the home of some 60 million people and it is the crossroads between the East and the West.

The world community has a vital interest in peace and stability in the Near East, one that has been expressed primarily through continuing United Nations action and assistance over the past 20 years.

The United States, as a member of the United Nations and as a nation dedicated to a world order based on law and mutual respect, has actively supported efforts to maintain peace in the Near East.

The danger, and it is a very grave danger, lies in some miscalculation arising from a misunderstanding of the intentions and actions of others.

The Government of the United States is deeply concerned, in particular, with three potentially explosive aspects of the present confrontation.

First, we regret that the General Armistice Agreements have failed to prevent warlike acts from the territory of one against another

¹ Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, May 29, 1967, pp. 776-777.