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Embattled Israel - A report on his visit to Israel, 1956.

April 8, 1956

"EMBATTLED ISRAEL"

A Report On His Visit To Israel

It has been five years since I last visited Israel and I was very eager to see the progress of the country during that time. I was also very eager to discuss with the leaders of the nation the present rather tense political situation and to exchange views with them. I also wished to acquaint myself with the temper of the temper of the people under the present situation. The immediate purpose of my visit was, of course, to attend the Dedication of Kfar Silver - an agricultural settlement and school which was established in my honor and to whose dedication I was invited.

My visit was a short one -- all too short -- but I did manage to crowd into the fourteen days which I spent in Israel a great deal of 'seeing' as well as a great deal of talking and listening. Touring the country, visiting the new towns and settlements, especially in that part of the country with which I was not very well acquainted - the Negev -- inspecting the recently established industrial plants -- watching Israeli soldiers and pilots and parachutists in training -- spending some time in the border settlement and the outpost settlements along the Gaza Strip --(I happened to be in Kh. Sufiyin where the last show took place, just about twenty-four hours before the show took place) -- I had several meetings with the President of the State of Israel, Itzhak Ben-Zvi -- I first visited him in the City of Sodom, of biblical fame, at the very tip of the Dead Sea, 1392 feet below sea-level, where now the important potash works have resumed. It was there that I transmitted to the President of the State of Israel the cordial letter from the President of the United States. I had several meetings with the Prime Minister of the State of Israel, Mr. Ben Gurion, with the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Moshe Sharret, with the Minister of Finance, Mr. Levi Eshkol and with the American Ambassador to Israel, Mr. Edward Lawson. I met with the leaders of the various political parties and contacted several others of the key figures in Israel. I visited the new campus

of the Hebrew University, met with the President and members of the faculty (its a remarkable campus which is being built there in Jerusalem). I visited also the new Municiple University of the City of Tel-Aviv, and other cultural and religious institutions. I had Seder with the Chief Rabbi of Israel and spent a very pleasant and profitable hour with the Chief Rabbi of the Safardi Community of Israel, Rabbi N . I worshipped the first Passover day in the Synagogue in Jerusalem and the last day of Passover in the great Synagogue of Tel-Aviv and in both places I was honored with , which you know is a choice morsel indeed. I was the guest of honor of the three cities of Israel, Tel-Aviv, Ramat Gan and Natanya, of which cities I am an honorary citizen, and attended quite a number of civic lunches and dinners, receptions, teas. I attended a banquet in my honor at the Z.O.A. House in Tel-Aviv which was attended by hundreds of public officials and leading citizens of Israel, where I delivered a political address, my one major political address in Israel, other than the address which I delivered, of course, at the Dedication of Kfar Silver. I rounded out my visit with a Press Conference attended by representatives of the Press, The News Services in Israel. I found time to see the Habima Players in a Hebrew version of Faust, and another play called (The War of The Children of Light) built around the history of Alexander , and superbly produced by the Kamerie Theater. I left Israel thoroughly inspired and completely exhausted.

I have not had time yet to organize all my impressions but I can share with you the cumulative - the total - effect, the impact upon me of all that I saw and heard in Israel. And it was all one of deep gratification and great reassurance. After almost five years of absence I found the progress and developmnt of the country truly remarkable, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The great irrigation project has been successfully completed and vast areas of the country, heretofore desert and wilderness, have been put under cultivation. A sixty-five mile pipe-line (the pipes are all built in Israel) now carries the waters of the River Yarkon to the thirsty lands of the Negev. Israel is already producing more than seventy percent.

of her food. And in some instances, in the case of vegetables for example, there is now already a sufficient abundance that Israel can export some of it. And of course, the export of citrus fruits, oranges especially, and of fruit juices, are the chief source of national income in Israel today.

The regime of enforced austerity and of scarcity, which prevailed for quite a number of years is now definitely over. Industry has expanded at a swift pace in the last five years. I am told that over seven hundred new industrial enterprises have been established in Israel in the last five years. One sees everywhere new factories and new manufacturing plants - chemical, textile, metal and pharmaceutical - some of them equipped with the latest and most modern and most efficient machinery, using the most advanced techniques and they are today producing many items which heretofore had to be imported into the country. I visited a cotton gin in the vicinity of _____, in the newly developed _____ area in the Negev and I found there American machinery of the latest models, processing cotton. Now five years ago there was no cotton raised in Israel. This last year seven thousand five hundred tons of cotton was produced on some five thousand acres, and cotton now promises to become one of the most important and most lucrative enterprises in Israel. Adjacent to this cotton gin I am told that a large spinning mill is soon to be erected in which I was informed some Cleveland capital would be invested. Cleveland Jews have done well by the industries of Israel. They invested in some other very important industrial enterprises, chief among them, the very large tire manufacturing plant which I visited. Along with cotton, the cultivation of the humble peanut is looming large as a source of considerable wealth for the nation. At the moment some sixteen thousand acres are under cultivation. And of course the discovery of oil at _____ has the country on the tip-toe of great economic expectancy. I visited _____. They have already brought in three oil producing wells, the largest of them is at the moment producing some fifteen hundred barrels of oil a day. They are endeavoring to develop their whole field, and also

an adjacent field in the Negba. Israel has a refining plant of its own in Haifa and it is very likely that before very long Israel will be able to produce all the oil and all the gasoline that is required for home consumption. That, of course, will be a tremendous saving in its dollar hard cash reserve.

As a parting gift before I left Israel, the President, Mr. Itzhak Ben-Zvi presented me with a little cruze of Cheletz Oil to take back home as a symbol, he said, of the land that is flowing with milk and honey and as he hopes, also with oil.

While I was there the new railway station at Beher Sheba was dedicated. A forty-eight mile extension of the Israeli railroad was carried down to the Beher Sheba. Beher Sheba, just five or six years ago, was just an oasis in the wilderness. A small oriental town to which Nomads and Bedoins would come. Today it is a thriving, well-planned, modern city of over twenty thousand, the industrial heart of the Negev.

While I was there in Israel, the passenger ship _____, flying between Haifa and New York, completed her maiden voyage and pointed up the fact that Israel is developing rapidly an impressive merchant marine. Last year nine new ships were added to the fleet and Israel's cargo and passenger ships, manned by Israel-trained officers and men, are now linking Israel with many major ports of the world.

And everywhere -- wherever you go and move in Israel -- you see building going on. Public institutions, schools, colleges, Yeshivas, hospitals, social agencies, synagogues - a magnificent symphony hall is being completed in Tel-Aviv - a public hall, comparable to ours here in Cleveland is ~~being-completed~~ approaching completion in Jerusalem. And especially private homes - for families, for old settlers and for new settlers, are being built at a very rapid rate. The tempo of building ^{in Israel} is truly phenomenal. The _____, the temporary immigrant shelters, are giving way rapidly to permanent homes for the new arrivals, built in many instances by the immigrants themselves, with plans, of course, and materials provided by the government.

Today new immigrants, as they arrive, and they are arriving -- within the last year over 37,000 new immigrants arrived in Israel -- new immigrants are no longer sent to , but are taken directly to new settlements where temporary quarters have been prepared for their reception, but which temporary quarters, after a few months give way to ^{permanent} new homes. I visited many of these permanent homes for the new arrivals and I assure you that they were infinitely better than anything which these Jewish immigrants or refugees from Morocco or Algeria or Iraq had back home. And many lovely homes are being built in Israel by the more well to do of the population, but I would not have you think of Israel as a land exclusively of poor immigrants or of recent arrivals. There are quarters in Israel, in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, Haifa - in Natanya and elsewhere that would be objects of admiration for beauty and comfort in any city of the United States.

All in all, one cannot help but be impressed, as I was, by the dynamism, by the constructive energy, by the bold and confident planning of the citizens of Israel. You have a feeling of solidity, of stability and of confidence that to me was most gratifying. But not only has there been a quantitative development of remarkable extent and proportion, but also a qualitative, and to me that is most important. The eagerness of people of Israel to absorb the new immigrant, to integrate them as quickly as possible into the life of the country, to raise their standard of living, because many of them come from the most primitive, medieval circumstances -- to raise their standard of living, their standard of health, their standard of education, to care more especially for their children -- that to me has been one of the most gratifying phenomena that I saw in Israel. These people have come from fifteen different countries of the world. And Israel is determined, as rapidly as possible, to merge them into one nation. The high cultural standards of the country, which are not being sacrificed to the demands of pioneering life. You will find a most active cultural activity in the most outlying settlements in Israel. You come in the most humble of rooms - in a kibbutz - and you will find a shelf of books. You will find a newspaper. You talk to the people and they are

ready to discuss with you all that is happening in the great world, with knowledge and with insight. There are more books being printed in Israel today per capita than in any other part of the world. This people of the book is determined to maintain intellectual and cultural standards even in the hard process of building the country. And there is a high regard for the rights of the individual -- for the protection of his elementary human rights. An effort to avert, in this new land, all forms, if possible, of exploitation of man by his fellow men -- all forms of economic abuse.

Here then is a progressive, a civilized community, abreast with the best in modern life and reaching out even for the better. And all would be well -- all would be well indeed -- but for the dark shadow which hangs over the life of the people -- the political shadow. The nearby danger of the threatening and unreconciled neighbors. The absence of peace on its borders. Let me say this at the very outset. The people of Israel are concerned, but they are not afraid. And I am measuring my words, speaking with great deliberateness and not with any propaganda motive. I found no fear or panic anywhere in Israel. When I left the United States the headlines were full of rumors of the imminence of war in the Near East and I was prepared to find the people of Israel in a condition somewhat approaching a war panic. Instead of which I found them going about their business preparing not for war for for the Pesach - for Passover. American tourists were scared away. Hundreds and hundreds of cancellations made by Americans who had intended to spend the Passover Holiday in Israel. I am sorry that they made these cancellations. There was no occasion for it whatsoever. They could have spent a most joyous and happy Passover, as I did, under the most favorable conditions. The hotels in Israel to which tourists usually go are among the finest in the world, comparable to anything we have here in this country. The food is abundant and tourists naturally usually like the comforts when they are on a visit and I am sorry that so many of these Americans tourists were scared away by the headlines in the newspapers. The Israeli are unperturbed. Life goes on as usual. Work - Study - and Play. Planning

and Building and Investing - for the future. They know their own strength. Their moral is high. But naturally they are concerned. Their neighbors - right next door are threatening war. They are forging military alliances, building a chain around them. Their neighbors rebuff every invitation to negotiate outstanding issues and to make peace. They are continuing their boycott and their blockade and their blacklist and their inciting-hate propaganda. Now until recently all these threats and hostile acts were not of excessive concern to the Israeli. The Israeli felt secure in their military defenses and in their fine army which they have. They could patiently bide their time until their Arab neighbors could come around to seeing the wisdom of concluding a permanent peace with Israel for which Israel is always prepared. But last September something unforeseen happened. Something which took the whole Western world by surprise. Egypt obtained, at bargain rates, and at extra-ordinarily swift delivery, a vast accession of modern arms from Czechoslovakia, the newest and the swiftest and the deadliest Jet Bombers along with many other modern weapons of destruction, together with the latest Centurian Tanks which she obtained from Great Britain. About the same time Russia made similar offers of arms to other Arab countries along with the promise of economic and technical aid. The Soviet Union thus, this powerful block of States, threw the weight of its political power and influence, to the side of the Arabs. That was of course her way of penetrating into the Middle East. And all this has radically upset the political and more especially the military balance ~~of~~ vis a vis Israel and her neighbors. Israel has no planes capable of the speed and the altitudes of these Russian Ilyusian Bombers, nor tanks comparable to the Centurian Tanks. Israel is thus at a great disadvantage should war break out tomorrow. Egypt is in a position to bomb the cities of Tel-Aviv, Haifa, from her nearby bases and destroy the air-bases of Israel in a very short time indeed. It can cause havoc in the country before the fighting forces of Israel could get into action. Hence the desperate urgency of the plea which Israel made to the free nations of the West and especially to the United States to permit it to obtain the necessary arms, especially planes, swift planes

to insure its own defense in case of attack and what is more important by being in possession of such weapons to deter any aggressive act on the part of Egypt. For if Egypt knows that Israel is prepared, it will not be attacked. Nasser will not and cannot risk a defeat. His regime is a three-year old regime and not at all sufficiently entrenched. If he goes into war he must win or he is destroyed. But Israel's defenselessness, or relative defenselessness, is a standing invitation to Nasser or to his military junta, to attack and destroy Israel and thereby pave the way for a triumphant leadership on the part of Nasser and Egypt and the whole Arab world from Morocco to Persia. Nasser has great ambitions, as all dictators have. This is what has caused the intensification of concern in Israel in recent months.

Israel's deep concern at the sharp turn of events would be less at the moment if it were persuaded that the protection which was promised it, under the 1950 Tripartite Declaration made by Great Britain, France and the United States were anything more than a declaration of intention. But this declaration has never been submitted, for example as a treaty to the Congress of the United States and President Eisenhower has stated time and again, with considerable force and emphasis, that he will not move any armed forces into the Near East without a clear authorization from Congress, and by the time such an authorization is obtained, Israel may well be a shambles.

The American government has likewise indicated, and that quite recently, that the Arab-Israel question is after all a United Nations concern. That it would prefer to have the U. N. act in the matter. Well it sounds good on the face of it. Why not? Why shouldn't the U.N. act? But with a powerful Soviet-Arab block in the United Nations, and with the Soviet Union possessing a veto power in the Security Council one can readily surmise how quickly and effectively the United Nations would act in case Israel was attacked. Quite recently too, our State Department has suggested that Israel should obtain her needed defensive weapons elsewhere. From other countries of the West. America will raise no objection to such procedure. And our State

Department would like us to know that this attitude on its part is really a most generous and chivalrous one. But frankly, neither the Israeli nor, I believe, men of good will anywhere in the world are impressed either with the chivalry or the candor or the morality of this new attitude. To urge other nations to do what you don't want to do out of expediency or opportunism is to say the least quite reprehensible. Our government has declared officially that the preservation of the State of Israel is one of the goals of American Foreign Policy. Mr. Dulles has said so. The President of the United States has indicated it. The United States was the first country to recognize the State of Israel and did much to bring it about -- to bring it into existence. Our State Department recognizes the present danger to Israel in the procurement of this/^{immense}armament by Egypt from the Communist world. It sees the potential danger and the unbridled ambitions of Nasser, but it will not commit itself to any mutual security pact with Israel and our government has some forty such mutual security pacts with other nations. It will not ask Congress to give the President of the United States the same measure of authority to act - quickly - at his own discretion - in an emergency - the authority which Congress did grant President Eisenhower, in the case of Formosa, which beyond any shadow of doubt has acted as a deterrent, to Communist China and restrained it from attacking Formosa - and our Government will not sell arms to Israel to defend itself. Let it be borne in mind that Israel did not ask for any gift or grant of arms. Let it be borne clearly in mind that Israel is not asking the United States to intervene militarily in the Near East. Israel is not asking for American soldiers to fight for it. It is willing to do its own fighting. All that Israel is asking of the United States is ^{to permit it}~~permission~~ to PURCHASE ARMS - DEFENSIVE WEAPONS in view of this imminent danger which threatens it -- threatens its very survival! It does not understand that the man in the street in Israel, to many of whom I spoke, not to speak of the leaders of government, do not understand what it is that is keeping the United States from doing the most reasonable, the most just, the most necessary act -- to enable a free and democratic

people which is menaced from protecting itself against possible aggression. The United States sends arms to Iraq, an Arab country. It sends arms to Saudi-Arabia another Arab country. It does not raise the question of an arms race when it equips Iraq which promised to come to the aid of Syria and Egypt in case of a war with Israel. It does not regard the sending of arms to Iraq and Saudi-Arabia as encouraging an arms race, but in the case of Israel that spurious argument is flung into the arena of discussion -- we don't want to send you arms for fear that we will start an arms race. What has been the foreign policy of the United States right along? To arm the free nations everywhere against possible aggression. Its entire foreign policy ~~is-in~~ has been built upon arming, through NATO, through SEATO through the Baghdad Pact -- arming nations of the world against attack. Why is this argument first trotted out only in the case of Israel.

All that our government seems to be at the moment prepared to do, after six months since Israel made the request for arms, is to refer Israel to other nations. To give Israel addresses. Israel has all the addresses. It doesn't have to receive them from Washington. And it is quite doubtful whether these other nations will be prepared to do what the United States, that claims leadership in the world, leadership in the free world, is not willing to do.

I maintain that this present attitude - and I don't believe that it is the last word at all - represents neither leadership, nor statesmanship, nor is in the best interests, nor in the finest traditions of America. This is not the voice of America speaking. This is the voice of ARAMCO - of the oil lobby speaking. I realize that the foreign policy of our government with reference to the Middle East is at the moment undergoing a tremendous restudy - revision. Because the whole line seems to have collapsed. Up to last September our country and Great Britain were under the impression that the Middle East was a sort of private preserve of their own. They did not anticipate the swift action of the intrusion of Russia and Communism in that part of the world where so many basic British and American interests are. They did not anticipate that General Glubb would be thrown

out of Jordan which was always looked upon as a sort of a pocket colony of Great Britain, whose army Great Britain financially supported and the military leadership of that army was in the hands of the British. There has been a collapse of the foreign policy in both countries in that part of the world - a collapse which by the way some of the leaders of our movement warned them about a long time ago. And so the whole subject is being restudied. But at the moment the improvisations are such that they do not give reassurance to Israel. What is taking place seems to the Israeli very much in the nature of an embargo. And it was an embargo you may remember - an embargo on the part of the free nations of the world which destroyed Republican Spain and enabled Franco to come into power - and enabled the Fascists and of the Nazis to believe that they can now proceed with their military adventures and ushered in the second world war. And we were a part of that embargo upon Republican Spain. And we have since had occasion to beat our breasts at that colossal^{diplomatic}/blunder which was committed by the free nations of the world. And there is a real danger that a similar embargo, dictated by momentary expediency, but whose consequences they do not foresee and cannot foresee, may be in the making against Israel.

Those who maintain that there is no danger in the Near East at the moment and that therefore the United States need not send or permit Israel to purchase the arms that she requested, are taking upon themselves the gravest of responsibility. They are not omniscient in any regard. The Russian coup in Egypt came to them, in spite of their vast intelligent service, as a complete surprise -- as did the ousting of Glubb from Jordan to Great Britain. They ought not to arrogate to themselves omniscience and tremendous foresight. They should do what is immediately and logically dictated by the events of the moment. A SMALL FREE PEOPLE, BESET BY NEIGHBORS WHO THREATEN WAR AND WHO ARE PREPARING FOR WAR AND WHO HAVE NOW OBTAINED THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE WEAPONS IN COLOSSAL PROPORTIONS TO CARRY ON A WAR IS PLEADING FOR THE RIGHT OF SELF DEFENSE -- FOR TOOLS WITH WHICH TO DEFEND ITSELF. AND THAT IS THE CLEAR MORAL MANDATE OF THE HOUR FOR ALL THE FREE NATIONS OF THE WORLD.

I am persuaded that peace can come to the Near East. I am persuaded that peace would have come to the Near East if some real statesmanship had been exercised by those in the interested western nations who had the decision in their hands. There was time and again an opportunity for package settlements which were lost. There is nothing outstanding between the Arab peoples and Israel that cannot be peacefully adjusted. The Arabs do not need the territory of Israel. They have plenty of territory of their own. Hundreds of thousands of square miles of land which are crying for cultivation - which are crying to have done to them what Israel did to its Negev. Israel wants nothing from its Arab neighbors. There are problems which require adjustment - refugee problems - problems of compensation to the Arabs - minor territorial adjustments - all of these Israel is prepared to discuss in the friendliest terms possible around a conference table. It is in my humble judgment the sole task - should be the sole task of diplomacy on the part of the western world to bring about this conference - this meeting of Israel and its neighbor -- to bring every possible diplomatic pressure upon them - not to woo them -- not to coax them -- not to make concessions to them which simply feed their intransigence and their truculence, but to reassert the political initiative on the part of the great powers of the world in the Near East, and to call the Arab peoples to time - to conference - to peace negotiations for the sake of the peace of the world.

As long as the Arabs know that Israel is weak and will be kept weak by the unwillingness of the western powers to arm it, the Arabs will not consent to such a conference. Why should they? They will wait another year and another year until they get stronger and stronger and Israel remains relatively static and then they will strike. They have said so. The surest way to bring the Arabs to their senses - to bring about peace negotiations - is to enable Israel to equip itself with all the defensive arms which it needs so that the Arabs will know that any military adventure may prove to be "too high a price to pay for the whistle."

I hope this will come to be. We have been through darker moments than this politically. There was a time when it looked hopeless that a State of Israel ^{ever} would/be established. There was a time after the decision of the United Nations when a sharp reversal took place and the United Nations determined to reimpose another trusteeship of Israel. There was time when six Arab States sent their armies into Israel to drive the Israeli into the Sea. There were dark moments. Israel stood firm. The Jewish people throughout the world stood firm. Friends of good will in the Christian world everywhere who believe in international justice and morality stood firm and the situation changed. It will change again. What is called for is a great alertness - mobilization of forces and an indication on the part of the citizenry of the United States to their elected officials in government as to what they believe should be done out of justice and in defense of the noble traditions of American freedom and American democracy.

