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Eshkol Tells Knesset Egypt's Blocking of Israeli Shipping Would be Act of War

JERUSALEM, May 23. (JTA) -- Premier Levi Eshkol told a tense Parliament tonight that any effort by Egypt to block Israeli transit through the Straits of Tiran would constitute an act of war. Speaking after consultations with leaders of all parties, and an extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet, the Premier again appealed to the Western powers to act to assure that the Gulf of Akaba would remain open to Israeli shipping. Egypt's President Nasser announced yesterday that Egypt was closing the Straits to Israeli shipping.

During the Premier's talks with leaders of the political parties, it was understood, a general agreement was reached on the Government's policy. Among those attending the talks were former Premier David Ben-Gurion, Shimon Peres and Gen. Moshe Dayan. Peres and Dayan are leaders of the dissident Israel Workers Party (Rafi) formed by Mr. Ben-Gurion as an opposition party.

Israeli security sources said this morning that the partial mobilization carried out in the last few days had provided sufficient force to meet any possible Egyptian attack. Should additional measures be necessary, they added, these would be effected without delay. All Israeli units mobilized since Egypt precipitated the current crisis by ordering UNEF off its territory, have been placed on full combat status. Israeli naval units off Eilat in the Gulf of Akaba also have been given emergency instructions and orders to be ready for any contingency.

The flash point, observers agreed, would be reached when the first ship with Israeli cargo seeks to go through the Tiran Straits. For obvious reasons, Israelis are not saying when this is scheduled.

People in the streets in Israel's major cities continued to show calm. The only notable sign of tension was the virtual standstill when the Israel Radio news program was being broadcast. At those moments almost everyone seemed to stop doing whatever he or she was doing to listen to the news.

Most Western Embassies in Israel have advised their nationals to leave the country. Large numbers of Americans, Canadians and British left today and more planned to leave tomorrow. The first Embassy to advise its nationals to leave was the United States which posted notices advising all American nationals to leave the Middle East danger zone. Israeli authorities announced that food supplies were plentiful for several months and while no details were supplied, it was generally believed that the oil situation also was excellent.

Moscow Pledges Support to Arabs; Says Israel Follows Policy of 'Imperialists'

WASHINGTON, May 23. (JTA) -- The Soviet Union has pledged support to Egypt, following the announcement by President Nasser that the Straits of Tiran were closed to Israeli shipping. A statement carried by Tass, official Soviet news agency, and reported here, said:

"He who would venture to unleash aggression in the Near East would encounter not only the united strength of the Arab countries, but also resolute resistance to all aggression on the part of the Soviet Union and all peace-loving states. Only a handful of colonial oil monopolies and their hangers-on can be interested in such a conflict. Only the forces of imperialism, in the wake of whose policy Israel follows, can be interested in this."

The Kremlin pronouncement said the Soviet Government is carefully watching Middle East developments. "The maintenance of peace and security in that district, which directly adjoins the frontiers of the Soviet Union, accords with the vital interests of the peoples of the USSR," said the statement. "Bearing in mind the obtaining situation, the Soviet Union does and will continue to do its utmost to prevent a violation of peace and security in the Near East, to protect the legitimate rights of the peoples."

Urgent Session of U.N. Security Council to Deal with Arab-Israel Crisis

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y., May 23. (JTA) -- The imminence of a call for an urgent session of the Security Council, strongly supported by the United States, to deal immediately with the crisis in the Middle East caused by Egypt President Nasser's closing of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, was announced here late in the evening.

A spokesman for Ambassador Arthur J. Goldberg, chief U.S. delegate here, said: "A request for an urgent meeting of the Security Council strongly supported by the United States, is imminent." The spokesman would not reveal the name of the United Nations member who would sponsor the call for a Council session.

Johnson Devotes His Weekly Foreign Policy Conference to Arab-Israeli Crisis

WASHINGTON, May 23. (JTA) -- President Johnson was reported to have devoted most of his regular weekly conference on foreign policy today to the war crisis in the Middle East. The President met with Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, Presidential Adviser Walt W. Rostow, and others.

Earlier, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee met on the Arab-Israeli crisis in secret session with Secretary Rusk. After the meeting, which lasted almost three hours, Secretary Rusk said, "I think the situation is very touchy." He added he considered it "unwise to comment at this time."

One Senate source revealed that the Administration was determined to do its utmost through diplomacy to avert war but did not intend to become involved unilaterally. This source said the United States will advise Israel to refrain from using the Akaba Gulf route until the visit of U.N. Secretary-General U Thant to Cairo was completed and the crisis lessened.

It was reported here by official sources that the Administration was seeking a "Tashkent formula" in which the Arab-Israel conflict would be regarded in the same sense that Washington saw the recent Pakistani-Indian outbreak. The United States would immediately cancel arms shipments to Israel and any Arab state involved in the fighting. Washington would then hope that the Soviet Union would use its influence with the Arabs to bring about a willingness to disengage.

Chairman J. W. Fulbright of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said today following the three-hour appearance of Secretary Rusk before the Committee, that Russia had a "great opportunity" to display devotion to peace by working with the Arabs and Israelis for a solution "even more spectacular than their success in mediating the war between India and Pakistan at the Tashkent Conference." He said the Russians were "widely commended" for the Tashkent formula and he hoped that such efforts might now be exerted to preserve Middle Eastern peace.

Another member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Stuart Symington, Missouri Democrat and former U.S. Air Force Secretary, said he was not reassured that America can defend both the Middle East and the Far East -- emphasizing that "the Middle East is more important to the security of the United States than is the Far East." He said it was an international responsibility to keep open the Gulf of Akaba.

Senate Republican leader Everett M. Dirksen, Illinois, told a press conference that Senate Republicans discussed the Rusk report on the Middle East and decided that it was apparent from what was reported that "no decisions" on American policy were reached as yet. He said, "the Soviet Union is very much behind this" and Israel is "boxed in."

State Department Refuses Comment on Egyptian Closure of Tiran Straits

WASHINGTON, May 23. (JTA) -- The official spokesman for the State Department refused today to comment on the Egyptian closure of the Straits of Tiran and declined to state the present American view of international maritime rights in that waterway. In response to newsmen's questions at a press conference, Robert McCloskey said he had no information on whether any instructions have been issued to United States vessels in transit to or from Eilat.

Asked whether the State Department today reaffirmed the pledge of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in 1957 regarding the international character of the Gulf of Akaba, Mr. McCloskey said he was not prepared to answer that question. When reporters asked if the United States had counselled Israel not to test the Straits blockade, Mr. McCloskey said America has been in touch with all governments concerned in efforts to avert war and he would "leave it at that."

He declined to discuss whether a reaffirmation of the Tripartite guarantees would be made. "We are deeply concerned about developments," he said, stressing that America was "urging restraint on all parties." He said that Tripartite principles remained at the basis of American policy although he could not state whether the Tripartite pact was still alive as a workable instrument.

State Department Advises Americans to Leave Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan

WASHINGTON, May 23. (JTA) -- State Department spokesman Robert McCloskey, at a press conference today reported that because of the gravity of the Arab-Israel situation, the estimated 13,500 American citizens in Israel, in addition to 4,250 in the Jerusalem area (Jordan and Israel) were being advised to leave. This pertained to persons whose presence in Israel is "non-essential." Those anticipating travel to Israel were advised by the United States Government to cancel plans. The United States also urged the departure of 2,650 Americans from Egypt, 925 from Syria, 830 from Jordan. Persons planning travel to those countries or Israel were urged to avoid the region.

The crisis was debated on the floor of the Senate, highlighted by a statement by Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield that Egyptian President Nasser has issued "an open invitation" to war and that responsibility appeared to rest upon Egypt.

LAST MINUTE NEWS**President Johnson Denounces Egyptian Blockade of Israeli Shipping as 'Illegal'**

WASHINGTON, May 23. (JTA) -- President Lyndon B. Johnson, in a statement urging action by the United Nations Security Council, today said free passage in the Gulf of Akaba is a "vital interest of the international community" and the United States "feels a blockade of Israeli shipping is illegal and potentially disastrous to the cause of peace."

President Johnson focused attention on what he described as "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 government, or against civilians, or territory, under control of another government.

"Second, we are dismayed at the hurried withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force from Gaza and Sinai after more than ten years of steadfast and effective service in keeping the peace, without action by either the General Assembly or the Security Council. We continue to regard the presence of the U.N. in the area as a matter of fundamental importance and shall support its continuance with all possible vigor.

"Third, we deplore the recent build-up of military forces and believe it a matter of urgent importance to reduce troop concentrations. The status of sensitive areas, as the Secretary-General emphasized in his report to the Security Council, such as the Gaza Strip and the Gulf of Akaba, is a particularly important aspect of the situation.

"In this connection, I want to add that the purported closing of the Gulf of Akaba to Israeli shipping has brought a new and grave dimension to the crisis. The United States considers the Gulf to be an international waterway and feels that a blockade of Israeli shipping is illegal and potentially disastrous to the cause of peace. The right of free, innocent passage of the international waterway is a vital interest of the international community.

"The Government of the United States is seeking clarification on this point. We have urged Secretary-General Thant to recognize the sensitivity of the Akaba question and to give it the highest priority in his discussions in Cairo."

Cites Policy of Three Preceding Presidents on Middle East

The President added that "to the leaders of all the nations of the Near East, I wish to say what three Presidents have said before -- that the United States is firmly committed to the support of the political independence and territorial integrity of all the nations of the area. The United States strongly opposes aggression by anyone in the area, in any form, overt or clandestine. This has been the policy of the United States led by four Presidents -- President Truman, President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and myself -- as well as the policy of both of our political parties. The record of the actions of the United States over the past 20 years, within and outside the U.N., is very clear on this point.

"The United States has consistently sought to have good relations with all the states of the Near East. Regrettably this has not always been possible, but we are convinced that our differences with each other must be worked out peacefully and in accordance with accepted international practice. We have always opposed -- and we oppose in other parts of the world at this moment -- the efforts of other nations to resolve their problems with their neighbors by aggression. We shall continue to do so. And we appeal to all other peace-loving nations to do likewise.

"We call upon all concerned to observe in a spirit of restraint their solemn responsibilities under the charter of the United Nations and the General Armistice Agreements. These provide an honorable means of preventing hostilities until, through the efforts of the international community, a peace with justice and honor can be achieved. I have been in close contact, and will be in the days ahead with Ambassador Goldberg at the U.N., where we are pursuing the matter with great vigor and hope the Security Council can act effectively." In prefacing remarks the President said:

"Tension has again risen along the armistice lines between Israel and the Arab states. The situation there is a matter of grave concern to the whole international community. We earnestly support all efforts, in and outside of 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 three of the world's great religions, it is the home of some sixty million people; and the crossroads between East and West. The world community has a vital interest in peace and stability in the Near East, one that has been expressed primarily through continuing U.N. action and assistance over the past 20 years."

Britain Supports Israel's Right to Navigation Through the Gulf of Akaba

LONDON, May 23, (JTA) -- The British Government publicly announced today its support for maintenance of Israel's right to navigation through the Gulf of Akaba. President Nasser of Egypt announced last night that his forces would not permit Israeli shipping through the Straits of Tiran which provide access from the Gulf of Akaba to the Red Sea and the East. The British declaration was made by the Foreign Office spokesman in reply to a question. "It has always been our view," he asserted, "that the Straits of Tiran constitute an international waterway which should remain open to the ships of all nations." Nasser has claimed that the narrow straits, less than two miles wide, were Egyptian territorial waters.

Meanwhile, British Foreign Secretary George Brown said on a television news program that he had decided to postpone a scheduled visit to Moscow during the current Middle East crisis. Foreign Office sources said that the Foreign Secretary felt he must remain in London until the Middle East situation, both on the spot and in the United Nations became clearer. It was indicated that after he had an opportunity to review the situation, he might then undertake the Moscow trip but in a curtailed form.

Following the lead of France, the British diplomat hedged on Britain's commitment to protect the Arab-Israeli borders in the 1950 Tripartite Agreement. He said that the agreement was 17 years old and that "changed conditions" required different methods. He added that he would not exclude British military intervention but that this was a "remote and unlikely" contingency and that if it did occur, it would take place only in conjunction with United Nations efforts in the area. He reiterated his criticism of U.N. Secretary-General U Thant for his hasty withdrawal of the U.N. Emergency Force from the Egyptian-Israeli border and declared he was working with other governments for some sort of U.N. presence in the area.

The Evening Standard, in an article by Jon Kimche, former editor of the Middle East Review, said that President Johnson sent a message to Soviet Premier Kosygin that the United States was fully committed to support Israel in maintaining the international character of the Strait of Tiran and the Gulf of Akaba. Kimche wrote that "this American commitment, the Russians and President Nasser of Egypt now know, embraces complete joint operational plans agreed to between the United States and Israel."

Mr. Kimche asserted that the commitment was made in May, 1964 when President Johnson and Premier Levi Eshkol of Israel met in Washington for 30 minutes after all United States and Israeli aides had been asked to leave the meeting. "This was the first undertaking of its kind which was made not in general terms but based on specific arrangements in which the United States Sixth Fleet, now moving into the Eastern Mediterranean, was closely concerned," the critic said.

Major U.S. Jewish Groups Continue to Voice Concern Over Arab-Israel Crisis

NEW YORK, May 23, (JTA) -- Major Jewish and Zionist organizations continued today to voice concern over the Middle East crisis, particularly the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force from the Israeli-Egyptian border and Egyptian President Nasser's threat to close the Tiran Straits to Israeli African-Asian transit.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, representing 21 national religious and secular groups, sent a message to Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol voicing its "deep sense of solidarity" with the people of Israel in the crisis. Conference chairman Joachim Prinz sent a message to President Johnson urging him "to make known to the world now America's commitment to safeguard Israel's territorial integrity and security."

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the national association of Reform synagogues, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Reform rabbinical group, sent a joint telegram to President Johnson asking for a "clear-cut affirmation" of United States intention to help safeguard Israel's integrity and to maintain full rights of passage in the Tiran Straits. The UAHC also sent a message to all member congregations, urging a special prayer this Sabbath for Middle East peace.

Jacques Torczyner, president of the Zionist Organization of America, sent an urgent plea to President Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and leaders of both houses of Congress to "reaffirm unequivocally" the United States commitment to Israel's security and territorial integrity. The National Committee for Labor Israel adopted a resolution deploring "the precipitate withdrawal" of UNEF when its presence was "most urgently needed to deter Arab military action." It urged the United States "to take all necessary measures to help reduce the imminent danger of war and turn the present crisis into a new opportunity for achievement of peace and progress in the Middle East."

The National Council of Jewish Women wired an appeal to President Johnson and said also that "bellicose actions of the Arab countries" could lead to a "major conflagration" which would reverberate "throughout the world." The Jewish War Veterans asked the Government to reiterate its previously announced intention to protect the territorial integrity of all Middle East nations. The Agudath Israel of America also called on President Johnson to reaffirm the United States commitment "to the 1950 Tripartite Declaration guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Israel against any use of force or threat of force."

President Shazar Participates in Israel's Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal

MONTREAL, May 23, (JTA) -- President Zalman Shazar returned to Montreal today to participate in Israel's pavilion at Expo '67 from Ottawa where he was the guest of honor at a luncheon given by Prime Minister Lester Pearson. Mr. Pearson reiterated at the luncheon an earlier statement that Israel had a full right to live in security and that all men of goodwill should help the Jewish State.

In response, Israel's President told the luncheon guests, who included most political leaders, including opposition leader John Diefenbaker, that "once more the Middle East is in crisis and the security and territorial integrity of my country are gravely threatened." He said also that the Middle East as a whole and Israel in particular were once more in urgent need of the "sagacity and statesmanship" of Mr. Pearson.

Prior to the luncheon, Mr. Shazar attended a rally for Israel at the Jewish Community Center in Ottawa where more than 1,000 persons demonstrated their support for Israel. He told the rally that Israel expected from the townspeople "your sympathy, aid, devotion and young people, on which we rely, in good times and bad." The President was the guest of honor last night at a reception and official dinner given by the Mayor of Montreal, Jean Drapeau, attended by Montreal civic leaders, clergymen and rabbis.

N.Y. City Commission Completes Hearings on Case of Anti-Jewish Bias

NEW YORK, May 23, (JTA) -- The New York City Commission on Human Rights has completed hearings on a complaint by a Spring Valley investment broker that he was refused the sale of a house in Whitestone, Queens, because he is Jewish.

The complainant, Charles Tisman, testified at the hearings that he replied to a newspaper ad for the sale of the house, and, after meeting with the occupant, John Burke, who, Mr. Tisman said, represented himself as the owner, agreed on a price of \$40,000 for the property. Before closing the deal, Mr. Tisman said that Mr. Burke asked him if he was Jewish and when he answered that he was, Mr. Burke said: "I am not selling this property to a Jew," and ordered Mr. Tisman and his party out of the house. Friends of Mr. Tisman who were present at the time of the conversation, corroborated Mr. Tisman's testimony.

Mr. Burke testified at the hearing that his wife, not he, was the owner of the house and that he made no religious references during the conversation about the sale of the house. The Commission reserved decision on the case.

First Volume of Written and Oral Works of Dr. Abba Hillel Silver Published

NEW YORK, May 23, (JTA) -- The first of a series of four proposed volumes on the written and oral works by the late Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, "Therefore Choose Life," was published today by the World Publishing Company.

Rabbi Herbert Weiner, of Temple Israel of the Oranges and Maplewood, N.J., is general editor of the project. Dr. Silver held almost every post of Zionist leadership in the years preceding the restoration of Israel and for many years thereafter until his death.

King of Belgium Awards Decoration to J.D.C. Leader for Services to Belgian Army

BRUSSELS, May 23, (JTA) -- King Badouin has nominated Charles H. Jordan, executive vice-chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee, as an Officer of the Order of Leopold II. The high honor and decoration according to the King's order, are to be given to Mr. Jordan "for world-wide humanitarian action and outstanding services rendered to Belgian Jewry in reconstructing Jewish community life after World War II."

Dr. Hertzberg Elected President of Conference of Jewish Social Studies

NEW YORK, May 23, (JTA) -- Dr. Arthur Hertzberg, a prominent Jewish historian and educator, was elected president of the Conference on Jewish Social Studies at its annual meeting here. Dr. Hertzberg succeeds Dr. Salo W. Baron, who was one of the founders of the Social Studies Conference in 1933.

Governor Rockefeller Presented with Louis Marshall Medal by Jewish Seminary

NEW YORK, May 23, (JTA) -- Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller was presented the Louis Marshall Distinguished Service Medal of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America for his "protection of the oppressed, his enlightened policy towards America's neighbors in this hemisphere and his quest for justice and peace." Presentation of the gold medal was made to the New York Governor by Dr. Louis Finkelstein, Seminary chancellor, at the Annual Founders Day Dinner attended by 500 friends of the Seminary in the New York Hilton.

Vandals Desecrate Twenty Tombstones in Jewish Cemetery in Argentina

BUENOS AIRES, May 23, (JTA) -- Twenty of the 24 tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in Santa Rosa in the Pampa province were desecrated, police reported today. The vandals erased or broke texts and Stars of David on the tombstones in the first such desecration in the history of Santa Rosa.