

STATE OF ISRAEL
DOCUMENTS ON THE FOREIGN POLICY
OF ISRAEL, JANUARY – OCTOBER 1956

COMPANION VOLUME

STATE OF ISRAEL
ISRAEL STATE ARCHIVES

DOCUMENTS ON THE
FOREIGN POLICY
OF ISRAEL

VOLUME 11
JANUARY – OCTOBER 1956

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FOREWORD

The present volume is the eleventh in the series of volumes of documents relating to the foreign policy of Israel. It covers the first ten months of 1956, up to the Sinai Campaign which began on 29 October. The Sinai Campaign and its political and military results will be documented in a separate volume which will be published later.

The documents appearing in this volume are merely a limited selection of the many thousands of documents dealing with the foreign relations and security of Israel. In this volume documents dealing with domestic affairs, political and economic issues have been included only when these matters had an influence on foreign and security affairs. Strict criteria had to be applied also when making the selection of documents on foreign relations so as to remain within the framework of the volume. Thus only a small amount of documents on Israel's relations with Latin America, Eastern Europe and many other European states have been included. On the other hand, some subjects were documented almost in their entirety, such as the moves leading up to the Sèvres agreement or Israel's relations with the Eisenhower Administration. The editors wish to stress that the whole process of selection and editing took place without the imposition of any restrictions or prohibitions of a personal or political nature, and with unlimited access to archival sources.

Most of the documents in the volume come from the files of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs kept in the Israel State Archives. Since in 1956 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was excluded from two important events – the arms purchase from France and the preparations for the Sinai Campaign, the editors had recourse to complementary material from the Israel Military and Defence Establishment Archives and from the Ben-Gurion Archives, and also used books dealing with this period.

Arrangement of the documents. The documents are arranged in chronological order. Telegrams were arranged according to the earliest known date, in most cases the date when the telegram was written. If this date was not known, the date of receipt was used. Reports of meetings and discussions were arranged according to the date of writing the report rather than the date when the meeting or discussion took place.

The text. The text printed in the Main Volume is that of the original document, except for the following editorial changes and emendations:

(a) Addresses of senders and addressees, as well as dates in their original form, have been deleted. In some reports, memoranda and minutes the original headings have also been omitted. These details have been incorporated in part in a standard format in the heading supplied by the

editors (see below) or in a note. The lists of addressees to whom copies of the documents were sent have also been omitted, except in cases where the editors felt it was important to indicate the distribution of the document, when the information was included in a footnote.

(b) In some documents words or passages that are of no direct relevance to foreign policy or are of a personal nature have been omitted. All such omissions are explained in a note.

(c) Slips of the pen, typographical errors and misspellings have been corrected silently. No further attempt has been made to correct style, syntax or grammar.

(d) Common abbreviations and abbreviations whose meaning is not in doubt have been expanded to full form. In cases of doubt the abbreviation appears in full form in square brackets. Abbreviations of proper names and place names have always been expanded to full form in square brackets. Abbreviations commonly pronounced as such and acronyms (e.g., U.N., I.D.F., U.S., NATO, etc.) have not been altered.

(e) Words missing in the original have been added, either conjecturally (within square brackets) or on the basis of a parallel text of the same document (in square brackets and with an explanatory note).

(f) Original punctuation and capitalisation, as well as British or American spelling, have been retained except in cases of obvious mistakes or to avoid misunderstandings. In telegrams, where the original punctuation is partial, the editors have exercised greater liberty in determining capitalisation and punctuation.

Editorial headings. The heading includes the names of the sender and the addressee, the file reference of the document and the destination, except when the addressee is the Foreign Ministry or another agency of the Government of Israel. The origin of the document and the date are given in standard format in the heading.

Editorial Notes. These provide information on important events or developments which are not found in the documents. They have been placed before the document mentioning the subject for the first time or the date of the event and numbered in sequence together with the documents.

The footnotes explain and expand subjects which are not clear in the text, give cross-references to other documents mentioned in the text or containing further information and give references to additional literature. Biographical information has been given only when necessary for a proper understanding of the text. In other cases the biographical index, which gives basic information on most persons mentioned in the documents, should be consulted.

Companion volume. This volume consists of English summaries of the Hebrew documents and a full translation of the list of documents, introduction, editorial notes, footnotes and indexes to the Main Volume.

Indexes and list of documents. A list of documents and editorial notes, indicating their main subjects, appears at the beginning of the volume. Two indexes, one for persons, and one for topics and places, appear at the end of the volume. References in the index are to document numbers.

We would like to thank all the individuals and institutions who helped in the preparation of this volume: Ambassador (retired) Daniel Mokadi, who read the manuscript and made many important comments; Mrs. Michal Zur, the director of the Israel Defence and Military Establishment Archives, and Mrs. Hannah Pinschau, the director of the Ben-Gurion Archives, for their assistance in locating additional documentation; the veteran staff of the Foreign Ministry, who are too numerous to mention by name, who advised the editors on their field of expertise; Ambassador (retired) Yoel Sher, for his generous assistance in proofreading and solving problems connected with the documents in French; Arnon Lammfromm, who was responsible for the picture research; the Government Printer and their staff, for their dedicated and accurate work; David Herman, who translated the companion volume and Alfred Yarrow, who reviewed the translation; Joan Hooper, who was responsible for proofreading and all those who contributed to preparing and publishing this volume.

INTRODUCTION

1956 opened in Israel with a feeling of siege and isolation. This was due to a number of events which had occurred over the past few years and particularly during the preceding year. The Soviet Union's penetration into the Middle East led (in September 1955) to an arms deal between its ally Czechoslovakia and Egypt, which endowed the latter's army with modern weaponry, mainly planes and armour, so that the arms balance in the Middle East shifted against Israel. Egypt initiated a series of alliances against Israel: on 19 October 1955 it signed an agreement with Syria under which each of them undertook to come to the aid of its neighbour if attacked. A similar agreement was signed on 27 October between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In April 1956 an Egyptian-Saudi-Yemeni military agreement was signed, and in the same month agreements were also signed between Egypt and Jordan and between Syria and Jordan on military cooperation on their borders with Israel. The blockade of the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran, Israel's international shipping lanes, continued. The Arab states, particularly Egypt and Jordan, initiated bloody incidents on their borders with Israel as well as deep inside its territory, by means of regular and irregular forces, initially called "infiltrators" and subsequently "fedayeen," and life in the border settlements became unbearable. Israel responded with reprisal raids, which at times ended with particularly heavy losses on the Arab side, and this led to sharp condemnation of Israel in the international arena.

Already on 2 January Prime Minister Ben-Gurion warned about the serious situation which Israel was in during a political debate in the Knesset. Among other things he said: "We shall be risking our lives if we do not see with open eyes the danger of attack increasingly approaching from Egypt – and perhaps not from it alone – and if we do not prepare in advance with the essence of our moral, economic and military capability. However, we shall also be making a grave mistake if we assume that the war against us is a decree that cannot be avoided."¹

And in fact Israel did act during the period under review in the spirit of Ben-Gurion's remarks: on the one hand, it invested vigorous efforts to procure defensive arms, as will be detailed below, while on the other it sought avenues for peace with its neighbours. In this connection the efforts of Robert Anderson must be mentioned, and his mission on behalf of President Eisenhower when he attempted to mediate between Israel and Egypt. He visited these states in January-March and again in August. In his talks with

1. See *Divrei Haknesset* (Knesset Reports), First Session of the Third Knesset, Vol. XIX, p. 671.

Nasser in January the latter told him that he desired peace with Israel, but as a condition for this he demanded (a) giving “freedom of choice” to the Arab refugees from Palestine between receiving compensation and returning to Israeli territory and (b) the creation of territorial continuity between Egypt and Jordan (meaning that Israel give up territory in the Negev).

In his meetings with Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Sharett, the mediator heard of Israel’s desire for peace, in view of “the lack of substantial conflicts of interest between Israel and Egypt”; however they rejected Nasser’s demands. They suggested a meeting between Israeli and Egyptian leaders without preconditions, and the possibility was raised of the signing of a non-aggression treaty as a transitional stage.

In March Nasser rejected the idea of a meeting, expressing fear for his fate and that of his government (in a conversation with the mediator he mentioned the assassination of King Abdullah of Jordan). He expressed willingness to continue contacts with Israel through the United States, and reiterated his two demands from the start of the talks. Ben-Gurion responded: “If Nasser recoils from a meeting out of fear for his life, who will guarantee us that he will not consider it necessary to break his promise to the envoy [Anderson] and to start a war in order to preserve his life from the fury of his Arab colleagues.” In his opinion, “Nasser is playing to gain time in order to complete his army’s training and to assimilate the arms,” and “the only way to avoid war is to provide Israel with defensive weapons.”²

As the sense of suffocation and siege increased in Israel, the idea of launching a preventive war against Egypt was raised, even though Israel’s leaders did not admit it.³ In this connection, there was deterioration in the relations between Ben-Gurion and Sharett, which had been tense ever since the I.D.F.’s operation on the shore of Lake Tiberias in December 1955. Ben-Gurion asserted that foreign policy was meant to serve the needs of security, whereas Sharett saw security problems as a political issue no less than a military one and preferred to exhaust political action before resorting to force of arms.

To this was added the difference of opinion between the I.D.F. and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over control of the mixed armistice commissions, a dispute which had gone on for some years. Ben-Gurion and Sharett did not see eye to eye about the measures which Israel should adopt in the demilitarized zone in Nitzana. Sharett opposed the army’s plan to establish a settlement in the area in addition to Kibbutz Ktsiot, since

2. See Nos. 54 and 144.

3. See, for example, Ben-Gurion’s remarks in the Knesset on 18 June 1956: “A preventive war is madness.” *Divrei Haknesset* (Knesset Reports), First Session of the Third Knesset, Vol. XX, p. 2069.

this ran counter to commitments made to United Nations Secretary-General Hammarskjöld. After a sharp exchange in the government meeting it was decided to postpone the establishment of the settlement, but to continue with the necessary development work.⁴ Following this, an acrimonious correspondence ensued between the two. Ben-Gurion threatened to resign from the government immediately after the “danger of war” had passed, and maintained that Sharett was expecting him to forego his views as minister of defence and to act as an adviser to the minister of foreign affairs. Sharett responded: “I am not prepared to serve in a government in which the basic concepts of mutual assistance, collective responsibility and fulfillment of primary obligations are not accepted in practice.”⁵

Against this background, apparently, Ben-Gurion decided that the time had come for Sharett to leave the government. At the end of May-beginning of June Sharett was informed that Ben-Gurion was demanding his resignation, and threatening that if Sharett did not resign, he himself would step down as head of the government.⁶ Sharett had no alternative but to submit his resignation at the special government meeting on 18 June, and on the same day he explained to the Knesset the background to his resignation. He said that at the formation of the Ben-Gurion government in November 1955 he had been reluctant to join it because he had a “well-founded suspicion” that cooperation between himself and Ben-Gurion would not succeed, but Ben-Gurion had rejected his refusal. During his term of office in the government the partnership between the two of them had undergone a number of “tests which were not easy,” but in view of the state of emergency in the country and in an attempt to preserve their cooperation of many years’ duration, they had overcome them. However, in recent weeks it had become clear to him that resignation was unavoidable.⁷

In a Knesset debate on the resignation on 19 June, Ben-Gurion explained the background as follows: “Since the security affairs of the state had become particularly acute, and foreign policy dangers had grown more than in the past [...] I came to the conclusion that it is now essential for the good of the state that there should be full coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, and that a different leadership is now required for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [...] as long as there is a real danger of our being attacked by our neighbours, security needs must

4. See stenographic report of the government meeting of 18 March 1956, pp. 11-38.
5. See *Moshe Sharett: The Second Prime Minister (1894-1965)* [Hebrew], No. 146 and No. 159 in this volume.
6. See *Moshe Sharett*, *ibid.*, pp. 565-566.
7. See *Divrei Haknesset* (Knesset Reports), First Session of the Third Knesset, Vol. XX, pp. 2042-2043.

have first priority. This means that both foreign and internal policy have to be coordinated to serve the needs of security.”⁸

In place of Sharett, the Minister of Labour, Golda Myerson, who agreed with Ben-Gurion’s views, was appointed. In July 1956 she took the Hebrew name Meir.

In the summer of 1956 the ties between the defence establishments of France and Israel became increasingly close, as they both saw Nasser as a common enemy (France mainly because of Nasser’s support for the Algerian rebels). After Nasser’s nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July, in September France informed Israel of its intention to launch an offensive against Nasser together with Britain. France invited Israel to join in, and Ben-Gurion, who saw an opportunity to launch a preventive war against Egypt in conjunction with the Powers, accepted the challenge. On 29 October Israel launched the campaign known as “Operation Kadesh” (the Sinai Campaign).

Israel’s Relations with the United States

Israel’s relations with the United States in the period under review were influenced, as in past years, by concern for its security as a result of the upsetting of the arms balance between it and the Arab states. These concerns increased following the Czech-Egyptian arms deal in September 1955.⁹ Israel hoped that Washington would help it in two ways: by signing a security agreement or pact and by the supply of arms. In these two spheres it was bitterly disappointed. In February U.S. Secretary of State Dulles said that despite the negotiations which took place two years earlier, the United States had never seriously contemplated signing a security agreement with Israel.¹⁰ Israeli Ambassador Eban reacted with dismay, but Sharett cabled in response that “all our energy today must be directed to demanding arms,”

8. See *ibid.*, pp. 2067-2068.

9. The following is a summary of developments in the area of arms procurement from the United States, from the time of the Egyptian-Czech deal until the end of 1955: Sharett raised the issue with Dulles in Paris on 26 October (see Eban (from Paris) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, unnumbered telegram dated 26 October 1955, 130.02/2456/8) and in Geneva on 31 October (see Eban (from Geneva), Tel. 32, 31 October 1956, 130.09/2310/16). In the second conversation Dulles said that “there will be a favourable study of any list which Israel presents, and if the types of weapons are defensive – the discussion will be still more favourable.” However, on 13 December 1955 Eban was informed by the State Department that because of various factors, in particular the Lake Tiberias incident (on the night between 11-12 December 1955) the secretary was unable to keep his promise (see No. 172, n. 5).

10. See No. 105.

whereas the slogan of a security agreement, which “we do not renounce, is for the moment played down.”¹¹

However, talks on arms supply held by the Israeli embassy staff in Washington, headed by Eban, at the State Department did not produce the desired results. Ben-Gurion sent two letters on the issue to President Eisenhower. The first, dated 14 February,¹² received an evasive response.¹³ In reply to the second letter, dated 16 March¹⁴ Eban was summoned to the State Department on 28 March and heard from Dulles explicitly that the United States believed that for the benefit of the West and Israel, it must maintain and bolster its influence in the Arab world, and because of this, it hoped that Israel would concentrate its efforts on seeking mainly defensive weapons in European countries from which it had received arms in the past. The United States government had helped with the “Mystère deal”¹⁵ and would view further projects favourably: “I am not certain that it is vital for Israel necessarily to receive its main arms from the United States.” Dulles added that he had been forced to adopt a policy that would prevent splitting the Middle East between the Arab world backed by the Soviets, and Israel backed by the West. In order to promote the influence of the United States government in the Arab world he had to avoid excessive identification with Israel.¹⁶

In his remarks about arms Dulles was referring mainly to France,¹⁷ Italy,¹⁸ and also to Canada.¹⁹

Following Eban’s disappointing conversation with Dulles, on 3 April a consultation regarding arms procurement took place with the participation of Ben-Gurion, Sharett, Lieutenant-General Moshe Dayan, the I.D.F. chief

11. See No. 136.

12. See No. 91.

13. See No. 112.

14. See No. 152.

15. See No. 1, n. 1.

16. See No. 165.

17. In the middle of the year the defence establishments of France and Israel reached an agreement under which France opened up its arms storerooms to Israel – See No. 316, n. 1.

18. However, contrary to Dulles’ remarks, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on 7 April to Israel’s ambassador in Rome that the United States embassy had informed them that Washington was unable to authorise the sale of F-86 planes to Israel – see No. 165, n. 9.

19. After negotiations between Canada and Israel, with the help of the United States, Ottawa agreed on 20 September to supply Israel with 24 F-86 planes. This transaction was suspended due to the outbreak of the Sinai Campaign. In December Israel decided to see in the suspension a pretext for cancelling the transaction (see No. 429 and Comay to Leger, 93.08/391/2, 31 December 1956).

of staff, and Shimon Peres, the director-general of the Defence Ministry. Describing Peres' activity in France as nothing short of miraculous, Dayan suggested that dealing with arms procurement be transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs missions abroad to the Ministry of Defence delegations and the I.D.F attachés. Sharett responded that negotiations with Army headquarters and factory managements would not bring results without a political decision by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, contact with which was conducted only through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs missions. Ben-Gurion ruled that "We must immediately cease all further lobbying in the United States, and also not exploit its mediation for obtaining arms from other states, but approach them directly." Sharett summed up in his diary: "The consultation was confused and ended inconclusively. We did not resolve the main question of the tactics vis-à-vis the United States, and I saw no [need] at all to raise it in the presence of military men who had no connection with the issue."²⁰

In spite of Ben-Gurion's decision, Eban continued with efforts in the State Department to obtain arms, which were unsuccessful.²¹ Ben-Gurion also softened his position, and this is how he summed up the situation with regard to procurement from the United States in his speech in the Knesset on 15 October: "The United States [...] has recognised in theory the need to adjust the arms balance between Israel and the neighbouring countries and has encouraged its allies to supply us with defensive weapons. We cannot be satisfied with this encouragement alone, and we shall continue to demand from the United States government defensive weapons in the air, land and sea, which will deter the enemy. Nonetheless, we also do not underestimate the value of encouragement, which has also yielded concrete results."²²

The issue of aid for setting up water projects was second in importance in the overall relations between the two states. In 1953 sharp differences of opinion had emerged between them after Israel began (in September) to carry out diversionary work in the channel of the Jordan river, south of the Benot Yaaqov Bridge (in the demilitarized zone on the Syrian border), as the first stage of the national water project for diverting the Jordan waters to the Negev. At that time the United States was engaged in drawing up a regional water plan to exploit the waters of the Jordan and the Yarmuk rivers, in accordance with the request of the United Nations Relief and

20. See M. Sharett, *Personal Diary*, Vol. 5, pp. 1385-1386 [Hebrew].

21. For example, on 9 August Dulles told Eban that the United States wished to deny Nasser the possibility of presenting to the Arab world that the supply of arms to Israel was in reprisal for the nationalisation of the Suez Canal (See No. 375).

22. See *Divrei Haknesset* (Knesset Reports), Second Session of the Third Knesset, Vol. XXI, p. 58.

Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (U.N.R.W.A.). The initiative taken by Israel, without consulting with the United States, was interpreted in the State Department as opposition to American policy. Washington reacted angrily by withholding the grant-in-aid to Israel, while Syria lodged a complaint with the Security Council. Israel was compelled to suspend work in the demilitarized zone, and only then did the United States release the grant, totalling 26 million dollars.²³

The task of preparing the regional water plan of the United States was entrusted to Eric Johnston, the chairman of the Advisory Board for International Development and a confidant of President Eisenhower. In 1953-1955 he visited Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan several times for discussions with their leaders. In 1955 he presented his plan, and in 1956 an improved version of it.²⁴ Israel and Jordan accepted the plan. Syria and Lebanon rejected it. Nasser took it upon himself to persuade Syria to accept the plan, but did not keep his word. In October 1955 Sharett told Johnston that Israel was prepared to delay carrying out the work in the demilitarized zone until February 1956. Consequently, at the beginning of January 1956 Sharett instructed Eban to inform Johnston that Israel considered itself free to resume the work in the demilitarized zone at the end of the rainy season, in addition to work being carried on outside the demilitarized zone. Eban was asked to find out if Israel could receive financial assistance for its project in exchange for an undertaking on its part that, in the event that the Johnston plan was not implemented, it would not deviate from the quantities of water allocated to it under the plan. Sharett explained that this presentation of Israel's position was a tactic to try to get the United States to offer financial aid to Israel for its water plan, on condition that it avoided working in the demilitarized zone "for the present."²⁵

In March Israel submitted its request for a \$75 million loan both to the Export-Import Bank and to the State Department.²⁶ Dulles promised to support Israel's request to the Export-Import Bank, and to explain that the possibility existed of agreement with Israel concerning projects connected with the waters of the Yarmuk which would not run counter to the Johnston plan, and which could be implemented separately and concurrently with

23. On the affair and its repercussions on Israel's relations with the United States, Syria and the U.N., see introduction to *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel*, Vol. 8, Companion Volume, pp. xxxiv-xxxviii.

24. The main points of the Johnston plan: division of the waters of the Jordan and the Yarmuk as follows: to Jordan – 56%, to Israel – 31%, to Syria – 10.3%, to Lebanon – 2.7% (See A. Soffer, *Rivers of Fire: the Conflict over Water in the Middle East*, pp.158-161).

25. See No. 62.

26. See No. 155.

a certain project in the Kingdom of Jordan.²⁷ In August Eban reported that he had heard from Johnston that the latter had been asked by the management of the Export-Import Bank if he saw any reason to oppose the loan, and he had answered that he saw none, on condition that the matter was financially sound.²⁸ In September talks took place on the issue with the heads of the Bank, with the participation of the Minister of Finance, Levi Eshkol.²⁹ Following them, on 9 October, the president of the Bank, Waugh, announced that the Bank was prepared to send a delegation to Israel in order to examine the subject on the spot (in view of Israel's difficult economic situation at that time, there were doubts in the Bank regarding Israel's ability to repay the loan). An official announcement on the matter was issued on 11 October, and in it prominence was given to the fact that the delegation would be headed by the Bank's vice-president, L.V. Stambaugh.³⁰ Because of the Sinai Campaign the delegation's visit was postponed and took place only in July 1957.³¹

Israel's Relations with Britain

The period under review began with the "Guildhall speech" by Foreign Minister Anthony Eden (9 November 1955) still echoing in Israel. In this speech he called, among other things, for a reduction of its borders.³² In reply Ben-Gurion declared in the Knesset on 15 November 1955 that Eden's suggestion lacked any legal or ethical basis, and should not even be considered.³³ Off the record Ben-Gurion said: "Outside the Middle East I see two great powers whose rulers do not care about the destruction of Israel. One of the powers is the Soviet Union, and the second [...]England [...]" In

27. This refers to the Eastern Ghor plan whose aim was to transport water from the Yarmuk in a canal along the Jordan Valley and from there to carry it by secondary channels to irrigate fields in the region.

28. See No. 404, n. 5.

29. See No. 415.

30. See No. 475.

31. In the end the loan was authorised in March 1958, but the sum was much lower than that requested by Israel: 24.3 million dollars (See Vol. 13, No. 59. notes 1 and 2).

32. In the first half of 1955 the United States and Britain worked out a plan for an overall settlement between Israel and its neighbours which was given the code name "Project Alpha." Central to it was the proposal for territorial concessions by Israel and a guarantee by the Western Powers of its new borders. The "Guildhall speech" was based on this plan.

33. See *Divrei Haknesset* (Knesset Reports), First Session of the Third Knesset, Vol. XIX, p. 325.

my opinion, for both of them acquiring Arab friends is most important of all [...] and Eden is not much different in his attitude to Israel from Bevin.”³⁴

These remarks expressed Israel’s suspicion of Britain, which at that time was in the throes of giving up its assets in the Middle East. In March 1956 the British commander of the Jordanian Arab Legion, Lieutenant-General John B. Glubb, was dismissed. In June the British army evacuated the Suez Canal region. Britain made efforts to retain control over positions which it still held, principally in the Hashemite states – oil-rich Iraq, and Jordan, where it had military bases. Hence its frosty attitude towards Israel, which was expressed in several issues:

- *Entry of an Iraqi army into Jordan.* Britain and its Hashemite allies initiated (in October) a plan for the entry of an Iraqi army into Jordan, in order to save it from Nasserite subversion. Israel was not happy about this (Iraq, which had invaded Israel in 1948, had refused to sign an armistice agreement with it). In the end Israel’s fears were not realised. The Iraqi army, which entered Jordan in November and left in December, was stationed only on the East Bank and had no contact with the I.D.F.

- *The situation on the Jordan-Israel border.* Jordan had an agreement with Britain, signed in 1948, under which Britain was obligated to come to its assistance if it was attacked. The more the situation on the Jordan-Israel border worsened, and as a result the scale of the Israeli reprisal raids, the greater grew the danger of British military intervention against Israel. The Israeli reprisal raids in Qalqiliya on the night of 10-11 October exceeded previous raids in scope, and difficulties arose compelling the I.D.F. to call in the air force. King Hussein then asked for British military assistance. Only the fact that the battle had ended in the meantime saved the I.D.F. from a serious confrontation with the forces of Her Majesty’s Government.³⁵ Ben-Gurion had good reason to make Israel’s participation in the Franco-British campaign against Egypt conditional on a British undertaking not to come to the aid of Jordan if the latter attacked Israel.³⁶

- *Nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company.* In its diplomatic efforts in reaction to Nasser’s step of nationalising the Suez Canal (the three London conferences and the debates in the Security Council), Britain did not involve Israel (see below, “Israel and the Suez Canal Company Nationalisation Crisis”).

- *The British-French campaign against Egypt (Operation Musketeer).* Britain was in no hurry to include Israel in the campaign, and agreed to it

34. See stenographic record of the government meeting of 4 December 1955, pp. 10-11.

35. See No. 476.

36. See No. 500.

in spite of itself only after it transpired that this step alone was capable of supplying the pretext which was vital for the operation. In discussions prior to the campaign, Britain tried as much as possible to avoid direct contact with Israel, and France was compelled to mediate between its two partners. Characteristic of this situation was the fact that the letter in which Britain announced its final agreement to participate in the campaign was sent only to Guy Mollet, the French prime minister. The latter informed Ben-Gurion in a letter of his own about France's agreement as well as that of Britain.³⁷

- *The sphere of arms procurement.* Here too, Israel did not obtain much satisfaction from Britain. The main item which it asked for were Centurion tanks, in order to balance, even if only partially, the 230 T-34 tanks which Egypt had received in the Czech arms deal. Its requests were rejected on a variety of grounds: 1. Israel's reprisal raids against Jordan³⁸; 2. The fear that supplying arms to Israel would make it easier for Nasser to unite all the Arab states around him.³⁹ Nevertheless, Israel was supplied with a limited number of items: Mosquito and Meteor planes, cannon, armoured personnel carriers, radar instruments and anti-tank mines. Two destroyers were also sold to Israel.⁴⁰

Israel's Relations with France

In the period under review France became the main source of Israeli military procurement. Evidence of this can be found in Ben-Gurion's remarks during a political debate in the Knesset on 15 October 1956. Among other things he said: "We owe a great debt of gratitude and sincere thanks to France which was the first to supply us with 24 new jet planes of the Mystère 4 type." Hinting at the other items of weaponry which France had supplied, he said: "I shall not dwell on the affair of our efforts to ensure for the Israel Defense Forces a minimum of the essential equipment, because this affair has not ended yet [...] and perhaps it would be appropriate for me to tell you of one of the experiences as it was immortalised by a poet of tremendous expressive power who signs himself Nathan A." He then read out a poem written by the poet Nathan Alterman, after he had been invited to witness the unloading of an arms consignment that had arrived from France. Ben-Gurion continued: "In my poor prose I shall only say that there has

37. See Nos. 501 and 505.

38. See No. 319.

39. See No. 367.

40. See No. 389

been a marked change for the better in the I.D.F.'s capability [...] we are not defenseless as we were at the beginning of the year.”⁴¹

The improvement in Franco-Israeli relations had already begun in 1954, when France invited Chief of Staff Dayan for an official visit. It also approved several of Israel's arms requests. Behind the rapprochement between the two states were firstly France's difficulties in North Africa, particularly in Algeria, which led to its confrontation with the Arab League states, with Egypt at their head; secondly, the fact that Britain and the United States ignored France when they organised pacts for the defence of the Middle East which France viewed as adversely affecting its interests in the region (both France and Israel were opposed to the Baghdad Pact which was signed as a result of this activity); and lastly France's desire to adopt an independent political line in its international policy. However, there was a difference between the attitude of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the “Quai” [d'Orsay] in Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs parlance) and that of the French defence establishment.

The French diplomats thought that Egypt could be appeased and were afraid of a rift between themselves and their American and British allies, hence their reservations about drawing too close to Israel. On the other hand the defence establishment harboured no illusions regarding relations with the Arab states and saw Israel as an important ally, which could be helpful in the struggle against Nasser. Therefore they approved several of Israel's arms requests, at times without the knowledge of their Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In July 1955 France agreed to sell Israel 12 Mystère A4 type planes. These were being made in France for NATO with American funding, hence American approval was needed for selling them to Israel. The sale also required the authorisation of the “Near East Arms Coordinating Committee” of the three Western Powers.⁴² Because of this there was a delay in delivering the planes. In September 1955 the Czech-Egyptian arms transaction was made under which Egypt received 100-150 MIG jet fighters, about 50 Ilyushin-22 bombers, and about 70 Ilyushin-14 transport planes. In view

41. See *Divrei Haknesset* (Knesset Reports), Second Session of the Third Knesset, Vol. XXI, pp. 58-60.

42. See No. 1, n.1.

of this development the Israeli need for planes increased still further.⁴³ Meanwhile, a fresh obstacle arose; on account of the I.D.F. operation on Lake Tiberias on the night of 11-12 December 1955, the three Western powers decided to halt the supply of arms to Israel until the end of the Security Council debate on Syria's complaint about the Israeli operation. This debate ended on 19 January 1956, and, after a new government had come to power in France on 31 January, the Israeli ambassador in Paris, Jacob Tsur, renewed his efforts to obtain arms from France, especially the planes. To this end he met with the three central figures in the new government: Prime Minister Guy Mollet, Minister of Foreign Affairs Christian Pineau, and Minister of Defence Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury.

Pineau told Tsur (on 1 March) that he had informed the Americans and the British that France would deliver the planes to Israel on 15 March, whatever their answer was.⁴⁴ On 6 March the French minister of defence told Tsur that he had received an instruction to deliver the 12 Mystères and promised to support Israel's request for a further 12 planes and for tanks.⁴⁵ The prime minister told Tsur (on 10 March) that he was authorising him to inform Ben-Gurion that France would continue to supply Israel with arms, on condition that this was done in secret and that the arms would reach Israel in installments.⁴⁶ In fact the 12 Mystères reached Israel on 11 April.

A day earlier, on 10 April, a consultation regarding arms procurement from France was held in Ben-Gurion's office, with the participation of Sharett, Dayan, Peres and Tsur, who had arrived in Israel for the planned visit of the French minister of foreign affairs. The visit was cancelled at the last moment

43. After the Czech-Egyptian arms deal, Sharett, who was still prime minister, left for talks in Paris and Geneva with the ministers of foreign affairs of the three Western Powers and of the Soviet Union, in order to ask for defensive weapons for Israel. He also met on 26 October 1955 with the French prime minister, Edgar Faure, who told him: "Mr. Prime Minister, there are no differences of opinion between us [...] what can I do for you?" Sharett gave him a list of weapons which Faure passed on to the minister of defense. Further talks were held with the minister of defense and the minister of foreign affairs in a positive atmosphere (See J. Tsur, *Paris Diary*, pp. 187-188 and 190-191 [Hebrew]). As a result of these talks, at the beginning of November an agreement was signed between France and Israel, under which Israel would "immediately" receive 12 Ouragan planes and 12 Mystère A4 aircraft, as well as 60 AMX-type tanks and additional items of weaponry. The French undertook to make an effort to supply Israel with another 60 Mystères within three months (see Tsur and Peres' telegram to Ben-Gurion, Sharett and Dayan, No. 42, 4 November 1955, 130.09/2346/4).

44. See No. 119, n. 2.

45. See No. 134, and also J. Tsur, *Paris Diary*, pp. 230-231 [Hebrew].

46. See No. 143, and also J. Tsur, *ibid.*, pp. 244-245.

due to serious incidents on the border with the Gaza Strip. Tsur reviewed Franco-Israeli relations and concluded that despite the positive attitude of that country, Israel could still expect difficult struggles, particularly with regard to the supply of the planes. He added that a coordinated effort by all the agencies of Israel was required in order to achieve the goal. Dayan asked if the possibility existed of making an arrangement with the Ministry of Defence in order to overcome the opposition of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Tsur replied that there was no chance of such a deal. The minister of defence did not belong to the prime minister's party, whose strength was decisive. He said further that he was certain that nothing would be done without the agreement and knowledge of the minister of foreign affairs, In his diary Tsur wrote: "It seems to me that there is something hidden behind the chief of staff's question."⁴⁷

Just before Tsur's return to Paris, Ben-Gurion gave him a letter to the French prime minister, Guy Mollet. In the letter he described the danger of destruction which a heavily-armed Egypt posed for Israel, and asked France to assist in restoring the balance of forces between the two states. Tsur delivered the letter on 16 April, at a meeting with Mollet, at which Peres was also present. Mollet responded that France would do all in its power, but unfortunately, "only what was in its power." At the same time, he reiterated his identification with Israel and his readiness to do everything in order to rush aid to it.⁴⁸

Afterwards Peres met, this time alone, with Minister of Defence Bourguès-Maunoury, and on 23 April signed an agreement with him for the delivery of a further 12 planes of the Mystère A4 type.⁴⁹

Tsur, on his part, met on 24 April with the Foreign Minister Pineau, and handed him a letter from Sharett. Pineau voiced criticism that Israel's arms demands reached him "through different channels." He said that 12 more Mystères would be ready at the end of May, and he was able to promise that Israel would receive them⁵⁰ (without knowing that his colleague, the minister of defence, had already signed an agreement with Peres the previous day).

The ties between the defence establishments of the two states grew still closer, and became increasingly intimate. In June an agreement was signed between them under which France undertook to open its arms warehouses

47. See Tsur, *ibid.*, pp. 242-243.

48. See No. 202, and also Tsur, *ibid.*, pp. 244-245.

49. See M. Bar-On, *Challenge and Quarrel: The Road to Sinai – 1956*, pp. 145-146 [Hebrew].

50. See No. 216.

to Israel, without asking permission from the United States and Britain. In return Israel undertook to provide military and intelligence cooperation that would assist France in its fight against the rebels in Algeria, and against Nasser who was helping them, after France had been convinced that Israel could do this. Israel's readiness to pay for the arms in cash and in dollars was an additional factor in France's agreement to the deal.⁵¹

As a result of this agreement Pineau informed Tsur on 3 July that he and the minister of defence had agreed on a plan to supply Israel with arms secretly, without the knowledge of the United States and Britain. He added that the practical arrangements would be made directly between the defence establishments of the two states. Further details, he added, could not be divulged even to Tsur. Tsur reported back to Israel, and in response received an instruction to come immediately to Jerusalem. In his talks with Ben-Gurion and Myerson it became clear to him that the information had already been given to them by the Ministry of Defence. Tsur requested to maintain coordination between the embassy and the Ministry of Defence delegation in Paris. He also said that for the sake of the secrecy of the operation it was important that he should continue "for the sake of appearances" with his lobbying to receive arms.⁵²

The first arms shipment arrived on 24 July in the dead of night aboard a French landing craft in the Kishon port. It contained 30 tanks of the AMX13 type and 60 tons of spare parts. The second shipment, of 30 tanks and spare parts, arrived on 30 July in the same way. The third shipment, of over 100 tons of shells, arrived on 3 August. The fourth shipment arrived on 13 August and the fifth on 30 August. After that it was decided that Israel would bring the arms shipments in regular ships, since the French needed the landing craft for preparation for "Operation Musketeer." In addition, Israel Air Force pilots flew 36 planes of the Mystère A4 type in direct flights from France to Israel.⁵³

The close ties between the defence establishments of France and Israel led to Israel hearing for the first time about the British and French plans to attack Egypt, with Israel supplying the pretext, from the French defence establishment.⁵⁴

51. See M. Golani, *Israel in Search of a War*, pp. 25-36.

52. See No. 316, n. 3.

53. See Golani, *ibid.*

54. See below.

Israel's Relations with the Soviet Union and the East European States

Israel's relations with the Soviet Union in the period under review were marked by the latter's increasing interest in the Middle East and the strengthening of its ties with Arab states, whilst adopting a line which worried Israel. In a speech in the Supreme Soviet on 29 December 1955 Khrushchev said among other things: "One cannot [...] fail to recognize as deserving of condemnation the acts of the State of Israel, which ever since it came into being has been threatening its neighbours and pursuing a policy hostile to them. It stands to reason that such a policy does not conform to the national interests of the State of Israel, and that imperialist Powers stand behind those who are carrying out this policy. They are seeking to use Israel as their instrument against the Arab peoples with an eye to the ruthless exploitation of the natural wealth of that area."⁵⁵ The Soviet press and its official spokesmen repeated this version on different occasions. The subject came up at a meeting between the Israeli ambassador in Moscow, Avidar, and Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Molotov on 1 February 1956. The ambassador summed up the situation between the two states as follows: "It is hard to point to any progress in relations [...] there are limited trade relations, but the efforts to expand them and diversify them have not produced any positive results. Cultural relations are almost non-existent [...] the sale of Czech arms to Egypt and the position taken by the Soviet Union on this issue have had a harmful and direct effect on Israel's vital interests. Presenting Israel to the Soviet public in a negative and one-sided light, and recently the remarks of Khrushchev in the Supreme Soviet, displayed an unfriendly attitude towards Israel." The ambassador continued: "Israel conducts an independent policy, it does not have military bases for foreign states [...] it aspires to the strengthening of friendly ties and expanding relations with the Soviet Union. This aspiration has not been reciprocated by the Soviet Union."

Molotov replied that it should be remembered that the Soviet Union had helped with the establishment of the State of Israel. It had hoped that friendly relations would develop between Israel and the Soviet Union, but foreign and "aggressive" influences had begun to be felt in Israel, and its leaders had begun to adopt an extreme anti-Soviet policy, "similar to the most reactionary and aggressive circles in the world." "This attitude," said Molotov, "and public appearances accompanying it had led to the

55. Sharett rejected Khrushchev's remarks in a political speech in the Knesset on 2 January (see *Divrei Haknesset* (Knesset Reports), First Session of the Third Knesset, Vol. XIX, pp. 677-678).

'Tel Aviv incident' and the rift in relations.⁵⁶ With the healing of the rift, normal relations had begun to develop, until 'certain states' had begun to attack the modest arms transaction between Czechoslovakia and Egypt [...] the opinions voiced in Israel on this subject were sharper than what was said by the extremists among 'those with selfish interests in the region.'" Molotov concluded by saying that Khrushchev had analysed the situation "honestly and straightforwardly" and that, had Israel not hitched itself up to the anti-Soviet wagon, relations would most certainly have developed increasingly.⁵⁷

Prior to the visits of Khrushchev and Bulganin to Britain (in April) and Mollet and Pineau to the Soviet Union (in May), on 17 April the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement about the situation in the Middle East,⁵⁸ which was designed to delineate the focus of the talks and to establish a priori the Soviet Union's status as a party to any Middle East settlement. The statement contained a number of positive elements from Israel's standpoint, such as the Soviet Union's support for Israel's independence, its opposition to changing the armistice lines by force, and a call for a peaceful settlement between Israel and the Arab states. Sharett analysed the statement in a speech in the Knesset on 23 April, and among other things said that it would be judged by its results. It contained "certain new elements" compared to statements made in recent months, but also some negative aspects from Israel's standpoint, for example, when it mentioned the need for a peace settlement between Israel and the Arab states, it did not say that such a settlement must be achieved through direct negotiation.⁵⁹

The Soviet Union had disregarded Israel's proposals for signing a trade and payments agreement, with a view to expanding trade relations between them, but had agreed that its fuel company, "Soyuzneft Export," would sign (in July 1956) an agreement with the Israeli companies "Delek" and "Yarden," under which the Israeli companies were supposed to purchase, in 1957, 300,000 tons of crude oil and 220,000 tons of mazut (fuel oil) and in 1958, 350,00 tons of crude oil and 270,00 tons of mazut. At the same time there were negotiations between Israeli and Soviet companies for the purchase of drilling equipment which were unsuccessful. After the

56. On 9 February 1953, explosives were thrown into the courtyard of the Soviet legation in Israel. Three of the legation personnel were wounded and damage was done to the building. This act served as a pretext for the Soviet Union to sever its diplomatic relations with Israel. Relations were renewed in June of that year.

57. See No. 66.

58. The main points of the declaration, see No. 205.

59. See *Divrei Haknesset* (Knesset Reports), First Session of the Third Knesset, Vol. XX, p. 1725 [Hebrew].

Arab states reacted angrily to the fuel deal with Israel, the Soviet Union tried to downplay its importance. At a press conference on 21 July, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shepilov, said that this deal “is an unimportant trade agreement, to which unfortunately certain people ascribe exaggerated importance. One should not emphasize here [...] political aspects which do not exist.”⁶⁰ Following the Sinai campaign the Soviets unilaterally broke off their trade relations with Israel.

Among the issues concerning which there were disagreements between the Soviet Union and Israel were Moscow’s reactions to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company and Israel’s reprisal raids. The Soviet Union maintained that “the principle of freedom of shipping which was laid down in the 1888 Constantinople Convention remains inviolate and has been fully observed.” It demanded that the Arab states and other countries be invited to the London conference which was to discuss the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company, but Israel was not included among them. Nor did it back Israel’s request to enable it to intervene in the Security Council debates concerning the nationalisation.⁶¹

The Soviet Union reacted sharply to Israel’s reprisal raids and associated them with the tension in the Middle East on account of the Suez crisis.

In the period under review Israel continued to follow the situation of Soviet Jewry closely through “Nativ,” an organization established in 1954. Its emissaries worked in the framework of the embassy in Moscow in order to disseminate information about Israel among the Jews and to distribute material, including daily and festival prayer books. They also made contact with worshippers in the synagogues and especially encouraged them to immigrate to Israel.

In 1955 a section of “Nativ” called “Bar” was set up whose task it was to bring the issue of Soviet Jewry and the Jews of Eastern Europe to the attention of the Western states. Among its operations in the year under review: exploiting the visit of Khrushchev and Bulganin to Britain to bring the issue of Soviet Jewry before the Soviet leaders through British personalities, like the Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskell; a high-level delegation of the French Socialist Party which visited the Soviet Union in June acted in a similar fashion; in February a Jewish journalist was sent from New York to the Soviet Union and on his return he reported the disappearance of 68 writers and Yiddish cultural figures, half of whom had been executed without trial in August 1952.

60. See No. 343, n.1.

61. See Nos. 376 and 455.

In conclusion, it may be said that Israel's efforts to improve its relations with the Soviet Union in the period under review were unsuccessful, because the latter preferred to strengthen its ties with the Arab states. The Soviet leaders, to justify their position, accused Israel of adopting an extreme anti-Soviet stance under "foreign" and "aggressive" influence.

On the other hand Israel made some modest headway in its relations with East European states, particularly in the area of trade and cultural ties.⁶²

Czechoslovakia's arms transactions with Egypt (September 1955) and Syria (February 1956) cast a heavy shadow over its relations with Israel, which had suffered from tension as a result of the anti-Israel, anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish tone expressed during the Slánský trial. The release of Mordechai Oren led to an improvement in relations, expressed among other things by raising the level of representation between the two states from permanent *chargés d'affaires* to ministers. Nevertheless, the fact that Oren's release did not lead to the clearing of the accused's name or put an end to the campaign of defamation against the State of Israel and its leaders continued to cloud relations between the two states. Nor was there any positive movement on the subjects of immigration and the Prisoners of Zion (imprisoned Zionists).

In the period under review, trade and tourism relations between Israel and Poland grew stronger. Israel participated for the first time in the international trade fair which took place in Poznań. Cultural ties expanded and there was an increase in immigration to Israel, both in the context of reunification of families and of the immigration of orphans. The improvement in political relations led Israel to appoint a minister in its Warsaw mission, after three years during which a permanent *chargé d'affaires* had headed it.

In Hungary the release of Prisoners of Zion contributed to an improvement in relations. In June a new trade agreement was signed. The number of immigrants rose as compared with 1955, but the problem of immigration, including that of family reunification, had not yet been resolved.

Relations with Romania were under the shadow of the restriction on emigration and the non-release of Prisoners of Zion (some of them were released in May) although the authorities did promise to review favourably requests for the reunification of separated families. There was some progress in cultural ties.

The shooting down of an El Al plane, which entered Bulgarian air space in July 1955, adversely affected relations with Bulgaria. Israel's demand for compensation was not accepted, and the issue continued to be a subject for negotiation between the two states. Bulgaria did not put obstacles in the way

62. *Government Year-Book 5717 (1956)*, pp. 250-251.

of potential immigrants and cultural relations, which had been weakened as a result of the downing of the plane, began to improve gradually.

In the period under review exchanges of parliamentary delegations and exchange visits of scientists took place between Yugoslavia and Israel. Good relations also existed between the trade unions of the two states and between the youth movements.

Israel's Relations with the Federal German Republic

In the period under review the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) continued to abide scrupulously by the reparations agreement signed in September 1952 and ratified by the Bundestag (the German parliament) in March 1953.

After the signing of the reparations agreement Chancellor Adenauer suggested establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, but Ben-Gurion, who had steered the course of Israeli-German relations from the beginning, felt that the time was not yet ripe since Israeli public opinion was not yet sufficiently ready for it.⁶³ In the absence of diplomatic relations, German-Israeli relations were conducted through the reparations delegation in Cologne, headed by Dr. F. Eliezer Shinnar (at that time he held the rank of minister, later of ambassador). The Germans conferred diplomatic status on this delegation, which was attached to the Israeli Finance Ministry, and apart from a small consular department there were no officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As Germany's international standing grew, Israel's attitude towards the establishment of diplomatic relations began to change. However the Germans were in no hurry. In the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs they were afraid that establishing diplomatic relations with Israel might lead to the recognition by the Arab states of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and establishing relations with it. This step would oblige West Germany to sever its relations with those states, in accordance with the "Hallstein Doctrine," whereby West Germany did not have diplomatic relations with a state which had established such relations with East Germany (with the exception of the Soviet Union). Highly influential circles among businessmen and financial personalities in Germany were interested in economic cooperation with the Arab states and feared negative repercussions in the event of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel.

63. See A. Ben-Natan, "The Way to the Establishment of Relations: the Israeli Aspect" in *"Normal Relations": the Relations between Germany and Israel*, p. 24 [Hebrew].

As an alternative to the establishment of diplomatic relations, in 1955 Germany had proposed, via Dr. Shinnar, sending an economic-consular delegation to Israel similar in form to the Israeli delegation in Cologne. Shinnar reported back to Israel and subsequently the Israeli government, on 15 January 1956, held a debate on relations with Germany. A proposal to act to establish normal diplomatic relations with it was rejected, and instead it was decided “to authorise the minister of foreign affairs to take all the steps necessary to bring about the immediate setting up of an economic-consular delegation of the German Federal Republic in Israel.”⁶⁴

At the same time Israel made a number of concessions towards Germany: it stopped voting against it at international conferences, Israeli diplomats were permitted to have contact with their German counterparts, it was permitted for German representatives to participate in international conferences taking place in Israel and for Israeli representatives to participate in international conferences taking place in Germany. The Israeli government also decided to abolish the restriction “apart from Germany” in Israeli passports.

In a letter dated 14 May 1956 the German minister of foreign affairs, Heinrich von Brentano, informed Shinnar of his government’s decision in principle to set up in Israel “a liaison office” (Dienststelle) having the same format as that of the Israeli delegation in Cologne. He was also informed verbally that it was scheduled to leave for Israel at the end of May.⁶⁵

However, at the end of May Shinnar reported that there was great anxiety in Germany lest the dispatch of the delegation might lead the Arabs to recognise the German Democratic Republic. Sharett replied: “If you encounter a tendency to delay the coming of the delegation, don’t argue and don’t seek favours, but only point out the responsibility which they are taking upon themselves for the future of our relations, and end the conversation.” Sharett added further: “Under no circumstances can we entertain a situation in which Israel entreats Germany to do us a kindness, while the latter refuses or evades...”⁶⁶

Indeed, on 14 May the director-general of the German Foreign Ministry, Walter Hallstein, informed Shinnar that it had been decided “temporarily” to postpone dispatch of the delegation to Israel, for fear that the Soviet Union would exploit the rapprochement between Germany and Israel in its anti-German propaganda in the Arab states, and that they would react to

64. See resolution No. 215 of the government meeting on 15 January 1956 (kept in the Government Secretariat).

65. See No. 150.

66. See No. 245, n. 1.

this by recognising East Germany. Shinnar was told that it was preferable to wait for an opportune moment to establish full diplomatic ties instead of the alternative option of the delegation.⁶⁷

In response Sharett instructed the Israeli representatives abroad to cool their relations with their German counterparts: “we will not publicise anything but we must react at once with a display of coldness [...] we must not offer any explanation, but if they approach and ask what has happened you must say that we have the clear impression that they are not interested in advancing our relations [...] and it is also desirable to hint to loyal friends in the corps that the German behaviour is improper [...] so that they should themselves approach the Germans and ask what has happened between Bonn and Israel, and all this in order that they [German diplomats] should report back to Bonn.”⁶⁸

Israel’s Relations with Iran and Turkey

In the period under review Israel continued efforts to improve its relations with the two non-Arab Moslem states in the Middle East, Iran and Turkey, Iran recognised Israel de facto in March 1950, and established a mission there in that year. This was closed in July 1951, against the background of Iran’s struggle with Britain over oil nationalisation.⁶⁹ Iran estimated that this step would garner it support from the Arab states in its struggle. In spite of the severing of relations, in 1954 Israel gained a significant achievement: the national Iranian oil company agreed to sell it fuel.⁷⁰ In order to promote relations, in March 1956 Israel sent an unofficial representative to Teheran, Dr. Zvi Doriel, who appeared using the “cover” of a representative of a commercial company named IRIS – the initials of Iran-Israel. The first task he was charged with was to maintain the connection with the national Iranian oil company and to thwart the efforts of the Arab states to sabotage these ties.⁷¹

Over the years, the Israeli mission in Teheran became to all intents and purposes an embassy, and Iran also opened a mission in Israel, at first in the

67. See No. 247.

68. See No. 264.

69. See *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel*, Vol. 6, No. 268, n. 3.

70. On the sale of Iranian oil to Israel, see U. Bialer, “Fuel from Iran – Zvi Doriel’s Mission in Teheran, 1956-1963,” in *Iyunim Betkumat Israel: Studies in Zionism, the Yishuv and the State of Israel*, No. 8, pp. 150-180, and No. 9, pp. 128-166 [Hebrew].

71. See No. 135.

framework of the Swiss embassy and afterwards independently. There was a considerable amount of practical content in the relations, in which more was hidden than met the eye. The rise of Khomeini to power in 1979 put an end to these relations.

With Turkey, which recognised Israel *de facto* in 1950, diplomatic relations were maintained at the legation level. In practical terms relations developed mainly in the economic and trade spheres. At that time the economies of the two states complemented each other: Turkey bought mainly industrial goods from Israel, and sold it agricultural goods.

In the period under review there were some positive developments in relations between the two states: trade relations continued to flourish, Israeli contracting companies won tenders for projects, Turkish journalists who visited Israel (in April) published extremely positive articles from Israel's standpoint. The Turkish prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, who attended a Baghdad Pact conference held in Teheran in April, did not, as was their habit, voice pro-Arab statements. This time Egypt was hurt by the remarks of Prime Minister Menderes, who in his speech to the conference attacked Egypt's opposition to the Baghdad Pact, and claimed that the Nasser government did not represent the Egyptian people, which elicited a sharp reaction in the Egyptian press.⁷²

In November 1956, outside the scope of this volume, a serious crisis arose in Turkish-Israeli relations: Egypt exploited the Sinai Campaign in its propaganda against the Iraqi government, claiming that it was the ally of Turkey in the Baghdad Pact, and the latter maintained close ties with Israel, which had attacked Egypt together with Britain and France. In the Turkish government meeting of 24 November 1956 Prime Minister Menderes explained to his ministers that "a sacrifice must be made" in order to save the standing of the Iraqi prime minister – to sever relations with Israel. This statement met with the opposition of the majority of the ministers, and as a compromise it was decided to recall the minister from Tel Aviv.⁷³ After the Israeli minister left Ankara at the end of his tour of duty in December 1956 the Turkish mission in Israel and the Israeli mission in Ankara were headed by *chargés d'affaires* until December 1991, when the two states agreed to raise the level of the representation from legations to embassies and to exchange ambassadors.

72. See No. 215.

73. See Fischer to Eytan, 3 December 1956 (in file 130.23/3125/5).

Israel's Relations with the Asian States

In the period under review Israel made efforts, which were unsuccessful, to improve its relations with two important states in Asia: India and the People's Republic of China.

On 27 June the Israeli ambassador in London, Eliahu Elath, met with the Indian prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who came to the British capital on the occasion of the conference of British Commonwealth heads of state. Nehru explained to Elath that because of considerations associated with his country's relations with Pakistan and with the Arab states, there was no possibility of improving India-Israel relations. He failed to respond to the invitation which Ben-Gurion had sent him to visit Israel.⁷⁴

The Israeli ambassador in Moscow, Yosef Avidar, was sent to Peking (Beijing) in order to sound out China's intentions vis-à-vis Israel. On 7 July he met with the Chinese deputy minister of foreign affairs, Chang Hen Fu, who told him that, even though the current circumstances were not ripe for establishing diplomatic relations between China and Israel, he hoped that friendly relations and mutual interests between the two states would continue to develop.⁷⁵

The firmest foothold Israel managed to gain in Asia was in Burma, whose leaders had connections with Israel's leaders in the framework of the Asian Socialist Conference. The person who in particular contributed to the strengthening of ties with Israel was the prime minister of Burma, U Nu, who was the first officiating prime minister to visit Israel (in 1955). Burma saw Israel as an example of democratic socialist development of the economy and society and a state possessing the latest western technology, but without aggressive or imperialistic aspirations, and sought to derive benefit from its experience in the social, economic and scientific spheres.⁷⁶

On 5 March 1956 an economic agreement was signed in Rangoon between Israel and Burma, under which joint enterprises of the two states would be established in Burma, Israeli experts would be sent there, and trainees would come from Burma to Israel for further training.⁷⁷ The cooperation in this sphere was an example for other states in Asia and later on also in Africa.

74. See No. 306.

75. See No. 329. For a summary of the developments in China-Israel relations, see No. 52.

76. On Israel-Burma relations see the chapter "Burma-Myanmar" in M. Yager's book *The Long Journey to Asia*.

77. Published in *Reshumot, Treaties*, Vol. 7, p. 228, from 12 April 1957.

In June 1956 letters were exchanged between Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Israel, whereby it was agreed in principle to establish diplomatic relations at the level of legations. Agreement was given for the appointment of Yaacov Shimoni, the minister in Rangoon, as non-resident minister in Colombo, but the presentation of his letters of accreditation was delayed for a number of reasons, mainly the Sinai Campaign, and he did so in November 1957. Ceylon delayed the appointment of a non-resident minister to Israel due to its fear of the reaction of the Arab states who were good customers for a certain variety of Ceylonese tea which was not in demand in other states.⁷⁸

Immigration to Israel from East European and North African Countries

Ever since its establishment, the State of Israel had attached great importance to immigration, both for ideological and practical reasons: rescuing Jews from countries where they were in danger, and increasing the population of the State. Consequently immigration aroused opposition in the Arab states, which made efforts to have it stopped, by exerting pressure on the states from which the immigrants came or those which served as transit stations for immigrants on their way to Israel.

Israel undertook to bring in Jews from the lands of distress – Eastern Europe and North Africa – at times in unorthodox ways. Naturally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its overseas missions had collaborators in this field: various government agencies, the Jewish Agency, and Jewish organisations. Therefore the documentation of the subject in this section is only partial.

The emigration policy of the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe underwent upheavals, and was influenced by three main factors: a) acknowledgement of the right of Jews to repatriation to their historic homeland; b) internal policy considerations (getting rid of disloyal or undesirable ethnic elements); c) reacting to Israel's diplomatic pressure or to counter-pressure by the Arab states.⁷⁹

To those dealing with the issue in Israel it became clear that there was no possibility of smuggling Jews across the border of the Soviet Union (or its satellites), but there was a possibility of breaking through the Iron Curtain by obtaining permits for the immigration of parents, mainly elderly, in the

78. See No. 306, n. 4.

79. See Y. Govrin, *Israeli-Soviet Relations: From Confrontation to Disruption*, pp. 118-128.

framework of “family reunification” – hence the need to encourage and urge Israelis who had relatives in the Soviet Union to send them “vyzovy” (requests for immigration which made it possible to receive a passport and exit permit). And it was in fact this track which paved the way for large-scale immigration in the course of time.⁸⁰

In 1956 an increase was registered in the number of immigrants from most of the East European countries compared to the previous year; 753 immigrants from the Soviet Union, as against 105; 3,635 immigrants from Poland as against 206; 714 immigrants from Romania as against 235; 999 immigrants from Hungary as against 274. (Yugoslavia and Bulgaria did not impose restrictions on emigration.) Perhaps this increase was caused by the regard of the Soviet Union and its satellites for world public opinion, whose attention had been drawn by Israel to the distress of the Jews of Eastern Europe, mainly through the efforts of the Bar department of Nativ.

The increased immigration, modest as it was, did not escape the attention of the Arab countries which protested to the Soviet Union. According to Arab sources, the Soviets informed the Syrian president that it did not encourage Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union and the rest of the Eastern European states, and that Poland had only permitted the emigration of elderly people, and not of people of military age. Poland also conveyed a statement to the Arab League to this effect.⁸¹

Another region of distress from which Israel wished to bring the Jews was North Africa.

In the final years of French rule immigration from Morocco to Israel proceeded uninterruptedly, in accordance with an agreement obtained in 1949 between the French authorities in Morocco (in coordination with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and representatives of the Jewish Agency and the Zionist federations in France and in Morocco, which permitted the Jewish Agency to set up emigration machinery (known as “Kadima”) which would operate discreetly. This body set up a transit camp near Casablanca, from where the immigrants were sent to Israel via Marseilles. In the years of its existence Kadima brought about 90,000 immigrants to Israel.⁸²

As the day set for Moroccan independence grew closer, fears about emigration increased. The party in power at the time, Al-Istiqlal, was nationalistic and had close ties with Nasser’s Egypt. Israel acted to “avert the evil decree” by activating a number of sources, such as the governments of the United States and France, as well as the World Jewish Congress,

80. See N. Levanon, “*Nativ*” was the Code Name, pp. 137-138 [Hebrew].

81. See No. 427.

82. See M. Laskier, “The Clandestine Aliya from Morocco,” *Peamim* 63, Ben-Zvi Institute Publications, p. 135 [Hebrew].

whose leaders were already on good terms with the leaders of Morocco in the days of French rule.

These fears were realised in June 1956, when emigration was officially forbidden. In response to the inquiries of the Israeli ambassador in France, Tsur, he was told by the French that they recognised the right of the Moroccan Jews to emigrate and France was prepared to express this opinion to the Rabat authorities, but they were doubtful about France's influence in Morocco or the ability of the Moroccan government itself to stand up to the pressure of the Arab states. The representative of the World Jewish Congress, A. Easterman, who rushed to Morocco, was informed that the Rabat government did not oppose Jewish emigration, but it was "strongly opposed" to the activity of a "foreign state" within its borders, to propaganda for leaving and to the existence of a kind of "government within a government" which had been introduced by the French regime. Any person wishing to leave could submit a request which the Ministry of the Interior would consider carefully, but collective travel permits would not be issued as Kadima had demanded, and as had been the custom in the past. After an argument Easterman obtained an intermediate solution: a) the Kadima office and its Israeli emissaries would be able to continue to operate for another three months, in the same format as before; b) after this period the office would be closed permanently and a new procedure would be established, better suited to independent Morocco. The intention of the Moroccan authorities was to turn the issue of exit from their country into the individual problem of those wishing to migrate and to oppose the existence of Israeli emigration centers in their country.⁸³

After Israel had exerted pressure, with the aid of world public opinion, particularly in the United States, the Moroccan government decided (on 26 July) to permit the exit of some 19,000 immigration candidates who were being accommodated in the transit camp, on condition that they left in secret and without publicity, and that they left in groups of 200 or 300 persons.⁸⁴

In light of these circumstances it was decided in Israel that the immigration in Morocco would proceed clandestinely through a secret Israeli branch which had operated in Morocco since 1955. The branch was codenamed "Hamisgeret" (the framework) and its function was to organise Jewish youth in three North African states for self-defence. An agreement to this effect was signed in September 1956 between Isser Harel, director of the Central Institute for Intelligence and Special Duties, and S. Z. Shragai, the head

83. See No. 286.

84. See No. 354.

of the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency.⁸⁵ This arrangement remained in force until 1961, when the new king of Morocco, Hassan II, changed the emigration policy.⁸⁶ Between 1956 and 1961 some 18,000 Jews immigrated clandestinely from Morocco.

Newly independent Tunisia did not raise any objections to Jews leaving or the activities of the Jewish Agency emissaries, on condition that things were done discreetly. Only in 1960 was the office of the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency in Tunis closed.

The Jews of Algeria, who were almost all French citizens under the “Crémieux Decree,” did not evince great interest in emigrating, despite their difficult situation, trapped between the hammer and the anvil – between the French on the one side and the Moslem Algerians on the other. After Algeria gained independence in 1962 most of its Jews emigrated to France, while only a tiny number immigrated to Israel.

Israel, the U.N. and the Situation on the Borders

The deterioration of the security situation on the borders between Israel and its neighbours in the period under review led to the intervention of various U.N. bodies: Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, the Security Council, the U.N. observer command in Jerusalem and the mixed armistice commissions.

The secretary-general, Dag Hammarskjöld, visited the Middle East three times: in January, April-May and in July. The first and third visits were at his initiative, whereas the second was in accordance with a Security Council resolution.⁸⁷ In his talks with the Israeli leaders, Ben-Gurion and Sharett stressed mainly the need to observe the armistice agreements to the letter and in their entirety by all the sides, while stressing the systematic Arab violation of Article I of these agreements, which forbids the planning or carrying out of hostile acts by one side against the other. They also voiced the demand for the restoration of freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and in the Straits of Tiran. The demand was also raised for the implementation of Article VIII in the armistice agreement with Jordan (freedom of access to Mount Scopus and the Holy Places, opening of the road to Jerusalem in the Latrun enclave, and so on).⁸⁸

85. See I. Harel, *Security and Democracy*, pp. 304-306 [Hebrew].

86. See *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel*, Vol. 14, Introduction, p. xli, n. 118.

87. See No. 179.

88. See No. 56.

After his second mission, Hammarskjöld presented a report to the Security Council (U.N. Document S/3596) in which he noted among other things that the Arab states and Israel had undertaken unconditionally to observe the armistice agreements, whilst reserving the right of self-defence. The Security Council decided unanimously to call upon Israel and the Arab states to comply fully with the armistice agreements and to adopt measures to ease the tension. A paragraph calling for a resolution of the Palestine problem to be agreed by all the parties was deleted under pressure from the Arab states (U.N. Document S/3605).⁸⁹

However, the contribution of the U.N. bodies to improving the situation on the borders was minimal. At the beginning of April the situation on the Gaza Strip border worsened. After several bloody incidents Israel responded by shelling the Egyptian outposts in the Strip and the city of Gaza. The Egyptians suffered heavy casualties, including 42 civilians. In response the Egyptians sent irregular forces into Israel which, among other things, killed four yeshiva students whilst they were at prayer in Moshav Shafir, near Ramle, on the night of 11-12 April. Through the mediation of Hammarskjöld, who, as mentioned above, was staying in the region at the time, a ceasefire was brokered, which came into effect on 14 April, was violated by the Egyptians, came into effect again on 19 April and was again violated by the Egyptians several days later.⁹⁰

On his third visit Hammarskjöld met on 19 and on 21 July with Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir (Myerson) and afterwards left for Jordan and Egypt.

The Israeli leaders raised with him mainly the problem of the deterioration of the situation along the border with Jordan and freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and in the Straits. Ben-Gurion said that he agreed to wait until the diplomatic efforts to stop Jordanian aggression had been exhausted, but if these proved fruitless Israel would be compelled to punish the Jordanian army forces which were organising the aggression against Israel or did not prevent it. Hammarskjöld criticised Israel's reprisal raids and declared that they were ineffective and did not produce the desired results, in addition to the moral aspect. Ben-Gurion replied that the alternative was reprisal raids by Israeli civilians. This alternative was not preferable to organised punitive raids of limited scope. Ben-Gurion also reiterated the demand to convene the special commission in order to implement Article VIII of the armistice agreement with Jordan.

89. See No. 277.

90. See Nos. 181, 184 and 232.

After his visits to Jordan and Egypt, Hammarskjöld wrote to Ben-Gurion that Egypt had promised him to exert its influence on Jordan in order to restore quiet on its border with Israel. He had received a similar promise from Jordan as well. He demanded that Israel act with restraint on the border, and Ben-Gurion protested that Hammarskjöld was treating the attacker and the attacked in equal measure.

It transpired that Hammarskjöld had arrived in Cairo on the day that the United States and Britain announced that they were backing out of their commitment to finance the construction of the Aswan Dam. It had thus not been a suitable occasion to raise the subject of the blockade on Israeli shipping in the Suez Canal.⁹¹

As we have mentioned, in the period under review there was a deterioration along the Israel-Jordan border, in large part due to the dismissal of the British commander of the Arab Legion, Lt. Gen. John B. Glubb. Both regular Jordanian forces as well as irregular forces took part in actions against Israel. There were incidents of murder, mining, provocations along the border, disturbance of land cultivation inside Israel, and also attacks initiated by the Jordanian army. In response Israel carried out reprisal raids, mainly against Jordanian police stations in the Hebron and Bethlehem areas. The most prominent of the reprisal raids was that on the Qalqiliya police station on the night of 10-11 October, an operation which went awry and almost caused a clash between the armies of Israel and Britain. Israel came to the conclusion that the system of reprisal raids was ineffective.⁹²

In general quiet prevailed on the border with Syria, apart from a serious incident on 4 March: an Israeli police boat which was on a routine patrol on the north-eastern shore of Lake Tiberias ran aground. The Syrians opened fire on the boat and on others that came to rescue it. Four Israeli policemen were wounded in the shooting. The Syrians crossed the border and dragged the boat with the wounded in it to their positions. All of them died of their wounds, and their bodies were returned to Israel several days later.⁹³

The border with Lebanon was generally quiet, apart from several attacks by gangs originating from Lebanese territory.⁹⁴

91. See Nos. 344, 348 and 357.

92. See No. 476.

93. See No. 125, n.1.

94. See *Government Year-Book, 5717* (1956), p. 238.

Israel and the Crisis over the Nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company: Towards the Sinai Campaign

On 26 July Nasser made a speech in Alexandria on the occasion of "Revolution Day." In his speech he announced his government's decision to nationalise the Suez Canal Company, and added that Egypt would use the revenue obtained to finance the construction of the Aswan Dam, after the United States had reneged on its promise to fund the construction.

Britain and France, the main victims of this step, took measures on two planes: the military and the political. The British prime minister, Eden, wanted to launch a military operation immediately, but this did not take place because of opposition from the army commanders. As an alternative, joint British-French planning began for a war against Egypt, to be limited as far as possible, in order to bring down Nasser and his regime and to bring about international control of the Suez Canal. This operation was given the code-name "Musketeer."⁹⁵

On the political plane, three conferences were convened in London (in August, September and October) to which states were invited who were liable to be harmed by the nationalisation, with the aim of establishing an international body which would coordinate their positions and create pressure to compel Nasser to retract his measure. The first conference sent a delegation to Cairo to persuade Nasser to agree to the setting up of an international agency to operate the canal, but the latter refused. The second conference decided on the setting up of the "Suez Canal Users' Association," and the third conference fixed the institutions of this body and its officials. However, Britain and France were at odds with the United States over the Association. The United States wanted it in order to thwart the bellicose intentions of France and Britain, whereas the two of them saw the political effort as part of a process whose aim was to make Nasser back down from nationalisation. From their standpoint the Association was only one of the tools in the struggle; the other was military action.⁹⁶

As a final diplomatic measure Britain and France brought the issue for debate before the Security Council. Egypt also requested such a debate. The debate began on 5 October and ended on 14 October without results.

Israel's response to the nationalisation of the Canal Company was a cautious one: its representatives abroad were instructed to avoid making public statements, and to avoid anything that might weaken a head-on collision between Egypt and the West by accentuating the Israeli factor and

95. See Golani, *Israel in Search of a War*, pp. 72-99.

96. See *ibid.*, pp. 37-56.

any nuance that might embroil Israel with the Soviet Union.⁹⁷ Israel failed in its attempts to be accepted as a partner in the first London conference, although it argued that it was situated in close proximity to the Canal, and that the Egyptian blockade reinforced the need for its participation in the conference. This was also the case with its attempts to participate in the Security Council debates.⁹⁸ In fact, the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company with regard to Israel changed nothing, since the Egyptian blockade had been in force already since its establishment. The nations of the world, which had not lifted a finger to help Israel break the blockade, were in no hurry to include it in their struggle against nationalisation, for fear that this would aggravate still further their relations with Egypt and the rest of the Arab states. However, with the failure of diplomatic efforts and the realisation that war was inevitable, Israel's name emerged as a factor capable of supplying the *casus belli*. France, whose defence establishment maintained close ties with that of Israel, decided to inform Israel what was going on. This happened (in September) at a meeting between Minister of Defence Bourguès-Maunoury and Peres, who was in Paris at that time. The French minister told Peres that his government was ready to act against Nasser, with the knowledge and agreement of the British. The French wanted Israel's cooperation, this too with British consent. He added that the latter had made their consent conditional on Israel not attacking Jordan. The minister asked that an Israeli delegation, headed by a minister, should come to France in order to discuss cooperation in the campaign. On his return to Israel Peres reported on his conversation to Ben-Gurion, who raised the subject for discussion with a group of ministers on 25 September. It was decided to send a delegation to France chaired by Golda Meir and comprising the minister of transport, Moshe Carmel, Chief of Staff Dayan, and the director-general of the Ministry of Defence, Peres.⁹⁹

Before the delegation left, Ben-Gurion gave Meir instructions whose main thrust was that Israel should not initiate action alone and that it would participate only with the consent of Britain. The latter must guarantee that Iraq and Jordan would not open a second front against Israel. Israel considered it necessary that the operation be carried out with the knowledge of the United States.¹⁰⁰

The talks with the French were conducted in St. Germain, near Paris, on 30 September and 1 October. It turned out that, contrary to Israel's desire for a simultaneous French-Israeli action, the French saw Israel's action as

97. See No. 356.

98. See Nos. 369 and 435.

99. See No. 442.

100. See *ibid.*

a pretext for their entry into battle. It also transpired that France was not willing to go to war without Britain. After lengthy discussions it was agreed that France would supply Israel with arms in addition to those it had already supplied, and that the deputy chief of staff, General Maurice Challe, would leave for Israel at the head of a delegation to examine on the spot what Israel could do to render assistance to France in the joint campaign. This delegation visited Israel on 3-4 October.¹⁰¹

After the disappointing outcome of the Security Council debates, on 16 October the heads of the British and French delegations and their ministers of foreign affairs met in Paris, and decided in principle to go to war against Egypt, with Israel supplying the pretext. Their intention was that Israel should launch a full-scale attack in the Sinai Peninsula. In response Britain and France would issue an identical ultimatum to Israel and Egypt, demanding that they retreat 10 miles from the Canal in order for the Anglo-French forces to take up positions in the region to be evacuated, to protect shipping. In the event that the Egyptians did not heed the ultimatum, the allies, after 72 hours, would launch an aerial bombardment against it. Britain demanded that Israel's action should not involve a prior agreement, in which it had a hand. In their view, it was necessary to make sure that Britain was "surprised" by Israel's initiative, in order for it to appear to the Arab world as though it was acting to counter "Israel's aggression." Britain also insisted on non-cooperation, even indirect, with Israel since the defeat of Nasser was in its eyes a necessary step towards reasserting its standing in the Middle East, and cooperation with Israel was liable to ruin this opportunity.¹⁰² French soundings of Israel revealed that the latter was not keen to take upon itself the role of aggressor and to go it alone in the battle for 72 hours.¹⁰³ Consequently, French Prime Minister Guy Mollet invited Ben-Gurion to Paris for high level talks among the parties involved.

These talks took place in Sèvres, near Paris, between 22 and 24 October. In contrast to the relations of trust and friendship prevailing between France and Israel, relations between the delegations of Britain and Israel were marked by mistrust and suspicion. A tense conversation took place between Ben-Gurion and British Foreign Minister Selwyn Lloyd, who demanded that Israel launch a full-scale military action in Sinai which would represent a real danger to the Canal, without it appearing that Britain had prompted the action or that it had been coordinated with it. Ben-Gurion rejected this

101. See Golani, pp. 77-87.

102. M. Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza*, pp. 227-229.

103. See *ibid.*, pp. 228-232

demand, and suggested action on a limited scale, a suggestion rejected by Lloyd.¹⁰⁴

After prolonged negotiations in which the French acted as mediators, a compromise was reached, as reflected in the conclusions of the meeting (the Sèvres protocol): it was decided that on 29 October the Israeli forces would launch a large-scale offensive against the Egyptian forces. After this, Britain and France would contact Egypt and Israel with a demand for a ceasefire and for the retreat of the forces to a distance of 10 miles from the Canal. If the Egyptian government refused, on 31 October the Anglo-French forces would attack the Egyptian forces. Israel also undertook not to attack Jordan during the campaign, and Britain for its part undertook not to come to the assistance of Jordan if it were to attack Israel.¹⁰⁵

Before the battle, on the night of 24-25 October, Israel began a major mobilisation of reservists. This did not escape the notice of the United States which at the time was holding a dialogue with Israel in connection with the British-Iraqi-Jordanian plan for the entry of an Iraqi army into Jordan.¹⁰⁶ On 15 October Dulles had told Eban that the dangers in the region, which had led the United States to approve the plan, still existed. The United States believed that for the good of Israel, and also United States interests, it was necessary to prevent the disintegration of Jordan and Egyptian penetration of it. Dulles delivered a message from President Eisenhower to Ben-Gurion which said, after several expressions of friendship for Israel, that the president knew that the situation in the Middle East was volatile and tense and understood that Israel was sensitive to pressure. He expressed the hope that the situation would not worsen and that action would not be taken which would put Israel in the wrong and would place the United States in a difficult position.¹⁰⁷

Ben-Gurion's reply (dated 20 October) states that he shares the president's desire for friendship between the two states and asks him to exert his influence in order to prevent the entry of an Iraqi army into Jordan, endangering Israel's security.¹⁰⁸

104. See *ibid*, pp. 235-237.

105. See No. 500.

106. Ambassador Lawson informed Ben-Gurion about this plan on 1 October. The ambassador gained the impression from his conversation with Ben-Gurion that Israel accepted the plan under certain conditions, but afterwards Israel added restrictive reservations, which meant in practice opposition to the measure. See Nos. 453 and 467.

107. See No. 491.

108. See No. 498.

In his reply of 27 October Eisenhower wrote to Ben-Gurion that an Iraqi army had not yet entered Jordan, and he hoped that Ben-Gurion would see in this a contribution to peace in the region. Referring to the large-scale mobilisation in Israel he expressed the hope that the Israeli government would not take an initiative which would endanger the peace and the friendship between the two states.¹⁰⁹

Another letter from Eisenhower to Ben-Gurion was handed to him by Ambassador Lawson at their meeting on 28 October (see below). In his letter the president expresses concern about the mobilisation of the reserves in Israel and asks its government to avoid taking steps that would endanger Middle East peace.¹¹⁰

On the same date a conversation took place between Dulles and Eban, in which the subject of the mobilisation of the reserves in Israel was raised. Eban, who was not informed about the preparations for the British-French-Israeli operation, responded in the spirit of the statement issued by the Israeli government that day, which said among other things that the resumption of the fedayeen actions by Egypt in the past two weeks, the establishing of the military pact between Egypt, Jordan and Syria, aimed against Israel,¹¹¹ the declarations by the rulers of Jordan that their major concern was war against Israel, similar declarations by the rulers of Egypt and Syria, the mobilisation of an Iraqi army on the Jordanian border make it imperative for Israel to mobilise “a number of military reserves as a precaution to ensure the security of the borders and the frontier settlements. In order that Israel should not be confronted with sudden attack without sufficient protection [...] it was necessary to mobilise several reserve regiments [...] to repulse a possible enemy attack.”¹¹²

At the same time Ambassador Lawson requested a meeting with Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion was evasive and the meeting took place only on the evening of that day, after the Israeli government had decided to go to war. At the meeting Ben-Gurion handed over his reply to President Eisenhower’s messages (cited above) and this time put the emphasis on “Egypt’s aggressive tendencies,” and disregarded the president’s request to avoid mobilisation of the reserves. When Ambassador Lawson asserted that the president was not concerned about legitimate defensive measures,

109. See No. 507.

110. See No. 508.

111. In the elections held in Jordan on 21 October, anti-Western and pro-Nasserist elements were victorious. Three days later an agreement was signed for the setting up of a joint Egyptian-led command for the armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

112. See No. 509, n. 2.

but about the possibility that non-defensive actions were being planned, Ben-Gurion said that the United States would not need to be concerned if it could succeed in persuading the Arab states to act with restraint. In his report to his superiors Lawson expressed some doubts regarding the credibility of Ben-Gurion's remarks, noting that in his opinion Ben-Gurion was purposely downplaying the size of the mobilisation in Israel. He also noted that the remarks had been very carefully formulated, and that Ben-Gurion had refused to undertake that hostilities would not erupt.¹¹³

On 29 October, as agreed at the Sèvres conference, the Israeli forces launched an offensive against Egypt which was codenamed "Mivtza [Operation] Kadesh," in contrast to the impression given that Israel's military preparations were directed against Jordan. (The documents relating to this period will be published in Volume 12.) After battles which continued until 5 November, the strength of the Egyptian army was broken, and the I.D.F. took control of all of the Sinai Peninsula (apart from a 15 kilometre wide strip east of the Suez Canal) and the Gaza Strip.

Although Israel was denied the fruits of victory through the pressures of the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Nations, it did win ten years of relative quiet until the Six Day War in 1967, a period which Israel exploited to establish itself both at home and abroad.

Baruch Gilead

113. See No. 510.