

Pres. Statement

Here is the text of President Johnson's statement on the Near East crisis:

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

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

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

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

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

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

First, we regret that the General Armistice Agreements have failed to prevent warlike acts from the territory of one against another government, or against civilians, or territory, under control of another government.

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

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



Pres. Lyndon Johnson

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

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

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

The United States has consistently sought to have good relations with all the states of the Near East. Regrettably this has not always been possible, but we are convinced that our differences with individual states of the area and their differences with each other must be worked out peacefully and in accordance with accepted international practice.

We have always opposed - and we oppose in other parts of the world at this moment - the efforts of other nations to resolve their problems with their neighbors by aggression. We shall continue to do so. And we appeal to all other peace-loving nations to do likewise.

We call upon all concerned to observe in a spirit of restraint their solemn responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and the General Armistice agreements. These provide an honorable means of preventing hostilities until, through the efforts of the international community, a peace with justice and honor can be achieved.

I have been in close contact and will in the days ahead with Ambassador Goldberg at the United Nations, where we are pursuing the matter with great vigor, and hope the Security Council can act effectively.

Mideast Background

From Israeli Consulate General

The development of recent events in the Middle East is clear:

1) Four Arab states, Egypt (the UAR), Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, signed armistice agreements with Israel in 1949 in which they undertook to move forward to peace, to forswear belligerency, to respect the borders and to undertake that no warlike act would be committed from their territories against Israel.

2) Egypt was ordered by the Security Council as far back as 1 September 1951 to cease and desist from its blockade of Israel's shipping through the Suez Canal. The Security Council specifically stated that this blockade and Egypt's contention that it is in a state of belligerence with Israel are unwarranted and should stop. Egypt stands in defiance of this order of the Security Council throughout the past 16 years and has blocked this international waterway not only to Israel shipping but to all goods consigned to or from Israel. Egypt continues to assert its belligerence.

3) Syria has blatantly violated its commitment under the Armistice Agreement: Not to allow warlike acts to be committed from its territory against Israel, particularly in the last two years. The leaders of Syria have been saying that their purpose is to have a day by day warlike confrontation with Israel designed to destroy Israel's very existence. The number of terror attacks against Israel territory, organized and stimulated from Syria, increased in the days leading up to May 8, 1967. Main roads in Israel were mined, villages were shelled and mortared.

4) The charge that the Government of Israel threatened to occupy Damascus for the purpose of overthrowing the present Government of Syria is pure fabrication. The Government of Israel has never intervened in the internal affairs of any Arab country. It did not intervene when Syria joined with Egypt to form the U.A.R. in 1958 nor did it intervene when these two countries split apart in 1961.

5) The Arab statement that on May 13, 1967 Israel massed 13 brigades on the Syrian borders is utterly false. This is what the Secretary General of the U.N. had to say on this subject in his report to the Security Council on May 19, 1967:

"There have been in the past few days reports about troop movements and concentrations, particularly on the Israel side of the Syrian border. These have caused anxiety and at times excitement. The Government of Israel very recently has assured me that there are no unusual Israel troop concentrations or movements along the Syrian line, that there will be none and that no military action will be initiated by the armed forces of Israel unless such action is forced to be taken by the other side. Reports from UNTSO observers have confirmed the absence of troop concentrations and significant troop movements on both sides of the line." During the days preceding and following U Thant's statement the Egyptian Government announced the massive buildup of strong armour, artillery, infantry and air formations in the Sinai Peninsula, close to Israel's borders.

6) On May 16, 1967 the UAR unilaterally demanded the removal of the UNEF, which was established there on the authority of the General Assembly. On May 22, 1967 Pre-

CRISIS IN MIDDLE EAST

CONGRESSMAN WALTER S. BARING today said that he fully supported the statement of President Johnson in regard to the Arab-Israel crisis.

"The President's statement that the United States strongly opposes aggression by anyone in the area, is a reiteration of the policy previously voiced by Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy as well as the policy of the political parties."

"President Nasser of the U.A.R. has gone too far with his blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba."

Baring said he was hopeful that the United Nations would be able to solve the present crisis, but added that the recent lack of action by the U.N., and the withdrawal of U.N. Troops makes such hopes very slim.

"This should open up the eyes of those who support Foreign Aid as to just how much our aid to the U.A.R. has been appreciated," Baring said. "Nasser told us to go to the devil yet the supporters of Foreign Aid who believe in adding more red ink to our national budget insist on helping Nasser."

President Nasser of the U.A.R. asserted that the Tiran Straits and the Gulf of Aqaba are the territorial waters of Egypt and that under no circumstances would he allow the Israel flag to pass through these Straits.

The Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba are international seas and are internationally recognized as such. Under international law they are freely open to innocent passage by the ships of all nations. The President of the United States of America, speaking on May 23, 1967, stated in this regard:

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

7) The very act of declaring a blockade against the passage of ships through an international waterway is an act of aggression. Murder by strangling is the same in law and in result as murder by shooting.

8) On May 23, 1967, the attitude of the Government of Israel was made clear by the Prime Ministry of Israel, Mr. Levi Eshkol, who stated:

"Every interference with the freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba and in the Straits of Tiran constitutes a gross violation of international law, an infringement of the sovereign rights of other people and an act of aggression against Israel."

9) Finally it should be stated that while a spokesman of the U.A.R. Embassy in Washington seeks to give the impression that the U.A.R. is cooling down the situation, this "coolness" is reflected in the Middle East by the massing of offensive land, sea and air forces by Egypt on Israel's borders, by the proclamation of a state of emergency in the U.A.R., by public meetings in the mosques calling for a holy war on Israel and by an unending stream of statements in the government-controlled press, radio and TV of Egypt proclaiming the national policy of destroying Israel.

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