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PRIME MINISTER'S INTERVIEW WITH DAVID SCHOENBRUN

QUESTION 1: Mr. P.M., the Pope will arrive across the border from your country in Jordan tomorrow. He will be here in Israel on Sunday. As Chief of Government of the Jewish State, what is the significance of his visit?

ANSWER : The Pope has said that this is purely a religious pilgrimage. The Government and people of Israel respect the Pope's wishes in this connection. Naturally the Pope is not an ordinary pilgrim, and we shall greet him with all the honour due to his status as the supreme head of the Catholic Church and the spiritual father of over half-a-billion people. The people of Israel appreciate the efforts of the Supreme Pontiff for peace... Our area indeed needs peace.

QUESTION 2: Mr. P.M., at this very moment, the Arab States are preparing a meeting and renewing threats of war against Israel. You are the Defence Minister as well as P.M. - How seriously do you view this threat?

ANSWER : Threats are threats, and no responsible government can treat them lightly. We hope, however, that there is no imminent danger of war in the Middle East. For the past 7 years, with the exception of a number of frontier incidents, particularly on the Syrian border, there has been relative tranquillity in contrast with the situation prior to 1957. However, we cannot ignore the fact that, at the same time not only has the arms race not diminished, but it has escalated to very grave proportions.

While President Nasser says that Egypt is not yet ready to unleash war against Israel, he has not, in any form, disavowed his aggressive

intentions, to be implemented when, in his view, the time would be ripe. I cannot divine his intentions or assessments. I do know, however, that the Egyptian war machine is being developed intensively and on a very large scale, and this has particular significance in a country under totalitarian rule.

Q 3. Mr. P.M., just what do you feel Israel can do about this.
A. We feel that if Israel's deterrent capacity is maintained in the coming years, war will be avoided and the prospect of an ultimate settlement enhanced. It is vital that the Middle East be included in the general movement towards relaxation of world tensions.

We reject the fatalistic assessment that tension must be the lasting pattern in the Middle East. On the contrary, we feel that there are possibilities for international statesmanship to encourage positive trends in the area - provided it be clear to Arab leadership that there is no practical possibility of overwhelming Israel by force. In this connection I again emphasize the crucial importance of Israel's deterrent capacity being maintained on an adequate level.

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QUESTION 4: To maintain ~~this policy~~ must place a great burden upon Israel - what is the weight of this burden?

ANSWER : In fact, it is almost overwhelming. You have toured the country and yourself felt the pace of development. In terms of immigration, absorption of newcomers, building, agricultural and industrial development, irrigation, education, health and so on, we can point to achievements. These could be far greater, if we did not have to divert such vast sums to maintain our military deterrent capacity. I believe

we spend much more on defence - proportionately - than most European countries.

The entire Middle East would benefit if the Arabs devoted their energies to raising their standard of living, and to providing health, education and other social services for their tens of millions of impoverished citizens. I have suggested that the ruler of Egypt engage in a peaceful competition in constructive development. With this in mind, time and again, we have suggested total disarmament in the Arab countries and Israel under mutual inspection. In reply we ^{are} hear incessant threats of aggression from Arab capitals.

QUESTION 4 : Major internal problems.

ANSWER : Israel exists in order to provide a home for the hundreds of thousands of Jews who need to come here or who want to come. Our major internal problem is therefore immigration and its economic, cultural and social absorption, as well as industrial and agricultural development. Year in, year out, tens of thousands of new immigrants reach our shores, largely from the lands of distress and persecution. The process of rehabilitation and integration remains a primary function and privilege of statehood.

We must bridge the gap between immigrants of diverse cultural backgrounds. We must provide basic knowledge and education for all. In order to do this, and to prepare the scientists and technologists for the world of tomorrow, to maintain the intellectual tradition of the People of the Book, we must provide our youngsters with free primary education, and

broaden the framework of secondary and higher education. Our universities and research institutes too must absorb more and more students each year. For the development of the spiritual and intellectual pattern of life of our adult population, we are constantly adding community centres, museums, centres of art and culture, music and theatre - as well as new synagogues and houses of religious thought.

You have seen our work to reclaim and settle the land and build farm villages and new towns and cities. Further agricultural development will depend on the completion of our national irrigation project. There is also the prospect of using desalinated water for irrigation, *and we*
are now in the first 40 use it.
In the field of industrial development, our production increases at an average rate of about 14-15 percent a year. In spite of this, we still face a considerable gap between imports and exports, which we must continue to reduce.

All this work: absorbing immigrants, providing employment, building factories and irrigation networks, naturally requires great investments, *and* a major part of this now comes from our own earnings and labour. We are now on the highroad of economic progress. Our exports are increasing annually, and we hope that in the not-too-distant future we will no longer be dependent on outside aid. However, for the time being, this aid is crucial if our onward progress is not to be seriously impeded.

We are deeply conscious of our great historic responsibility in not only building an economy, but building a nation. And in building our restored nationhood, we are always alive to our traditions, to the definitive course of our people in history and to the fact that we have returned to the Land of the Bible.

In striving to create a society based on the vision of the Prophets of Israel, we link hands with men of goodwill in every country who share with us their dream of universal peace and the brotherhood of all mankind.

On the spiritual plane, we are proud of our affinity with our millions of brethren throughout the world, who are linked with us in deep ties of religious, cultural and historical involvement.

QUESTION 5: Almost every nation has some sort of identification with regional, religious or language groups larger than themselves. What about the State of Israel? What larger identification can you have?

ANSWER : ~~It is a mistake to consider that Israel lives in isolation.~~
Apart from the wide network of friendship with countries on the American continents, in Europe and elsewhere, we have laid particular stress on deepening our ties with the non-Arab Moslem states of the Middle East and with many countries in Africa and Asia. Large-scale cooperation in the economic and technical fields in Africa, in Asia and the Middle East have provided a framework of understanding and I would even say a sense of common destiny with newly independent and resurgent nations in this revolutionary period in human history.

With the advent of peace, cooperation between the Arab States and Israel in a regional framework will be assured, for the benefit of all.