

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER FOR THE NEWSWEEK,
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Q. By what right do you continue to occupy Arab lands?

A. We have fought three wars in our brief lifetime of twenty years. If the Arab governments had accepted, as the whole world did, the establishment of the State of Israel, this would not have happened. In fact, there would have been no need to change our borders one jot. But after the Six Day War, it is a miracle that we are still here. So why should we now crawl on our hands and knees to the Arabs and say 'Please do us a favor - forgive and take it all back.' If we had lost the last war, our lot would have been the same as the ine Iraqi Jews hanged in public last week. Our occupation is the outcome of war. In 1948, Jordan conquered the West Bank, contrary to U.N. resolution. In 1967, we conquered the West Bank.

You seem to forget that the Arabs were the first to attack.

Q. They were?

A. They closed the Straits of Tiran, moved tanks and troops into Sinai and were headed toward our borders. When they chased United Nations troops out and occupied Sharm-el-Sheikh we were faced with a blatant act of war. There was no way out for us. I tried to procrastinate, delay, hoping something would happen, something would intervene. It didn't. Guarantees proved worthless. Ten years ago

President Eisenhower pledged that the Suez Canal should be open to us and that if President Nasser tried to stop it the international community would have to deal with the situation with a firm hand. You know what happened.

Q. President Nasser is convinced that you are an expansionist power; that your objective is a greater Israel, from the Nile to the Euphrates. What can you say that would convince him this is not the case?

A. It is difficult to say anything that would convince him. During the last two decades we have repeatedly said we are ready to discuss our problems with Nasser. I am still ready to fly to Cairo tomorrow. I do not want to talk to him as a conqueror. I want him to rid his mind of the ridiculous notion of a greater Israel. He cannot base a policy on a phrase that has been uttered by individuals who represent nothing but themselves. Even the Bible does not use that phrase. 'The River of Egypt' in the Old Testament is the El-Arish River, a muddy stream a few miles inside Sinai, not the Nile. I can pledge my word to Nasser it never was and never will be our policy. I am ready to meet him anywhere, any time and I want quarrel about procedure, agenda or the shape of the table.

Q. What about your plans for new Israeli settlements on the Golan plateau in Syria, on the West Bank of the Jordan and in Egyptian Sinai?

A. You know what happened on the Golan Heights before the war. Never again. Besides, these are not settlements but military agricultural posts.

Q. But why not an agreement to demilitarize Golan rather than settle Israelis in what is part of Syria?

A. What is demilitarization? Who watches over the border? No one knows what demilitarization means. They started a war. We won it. And as long as Golan remains a dangerous spot, we have to defend it. Besides, we have no one to talk to on the Syrian side. They are not willing even to talk with Dr. Jarring.

Q. Are you prepared to give up these new settlements in occupied territories as part of a final peace settlement?

A. It is not proper to answer iffy questions today. We are flexible on everything but I do not want to get into specifics before negotiations.

Q. Right after the Six Day War Israeli leaders were telling correspondents that they would surprise the world with their magnanimity; that they would make generous offers to settle the refugee problem once and for all. What happened?

A. We were perhaps a little overoptimistic on the chances for a lasting settlement. Clearly the refugee problem can only be settled in cooperation with our neighbours. We must have a dialogue. The refugees are an international problem. We need land and water for them. We are a small nation. Jordan has ninety thousand square kilometers of land and an annual water flow of 650 million cubic meters; Lebanon, ten thousand square kilometers and three billion cubic meters of water; Syria, 185,000 square kilometers and 3.8 billion cubic meters of water and, with the Euphrates thrown in, another several billion; Egypt, one million square kilometers and 84 bi

cubic meters; Iraq, 450,000 kilometers and 60 billion. Israel with 20,000 square kilometers has 1.5 billion, largely from wells that we have dug since independence.

Q. What is your point?

A. If these countries are interested in settling the refugee problem, there is much empty territory, much wasted water. We'll pay compensation to the refugees or buy land for them to resettle in neighbouring countries.

Q. Arab leaders see no chance of peace because they are convinced you are determined to hold on to what you have conquered come what may. Can you prove this is an erroneous assumption?

A. I am sure that Nasser knows that the opposite is the case.

Q. How?

A. Through channels I cannot disclose, Arab rulers have heard interesting things from us. They know we want peace.

Q. But would you go back to your frontiers in return for peace?

A. X Let me say, clearly and unequivocally, there will be no return to the situation preceding the June war. The present cease-fire lines will not be changed except for secure and agreed lines within the framework of a final and durable peace. We must discuss new borders. New arrangements. The Armistice agreements are dead and buried. ✓

Q. You have repeatedly demanded direct negotiations with Arab governments but if part of your country were occupied by Arab armies, could you afford to sit down with them face to face before they agreed to get out?

A.

- A. Surely. No doubt whatsoever. God forbid, but if we had been the losers, and miraculously, were still alive, and they were to say 'we are ready for peace negotiations,' I cannot imagine that we would refuse. Has it ever been otherwise in history?
- Q. You insist on a permanent peace with the Arab governments as the price of withdrawal but is this possible without first finding a solution to the refugee problem?
- A. For our neighbours, the refugees are a convenient political football, not a life and death issue. / If they want to begin with the refugee problem, we are ready. We are completely flexible on the agenda. It is all a package deal so it does not matter where you start.
- Q. The United Nations called for the choice of the right to return or compensation for all refugees. Why do you object to this?
- A. I would like to remind our friend Nasser there was a time when we agreed to the return of 100,000 though I was against it as I did not believe it would work out, because Arab leaders needed them as pawns. Today the situation has changed. Any refugees returning will be a timebomb for Israel. We cannot take them back but we have agreed over the years to the return of 40,000 of them on compassionate grounds. I repeat we are ready to pay compensation.
- Q. Are you prepared to withdraw from occupied territories in return for
- 1) freedom of navigation, 2) an Arab declaration of non-belligerence,
 - 3) Arab recognition of the territorial integrity of Israel, and
 - 4) a United Nations-policed demilitarized zone along your frontiers -
- the whole package guaranteed by the powers?
- A. No.
- Q. Why not?

- A. We have learned a lesson. For example - demilitarization is a very complex problem. We must work out a viable system. Remember the U.N. Force in 1967? Nasser whistled and they packed their kit bags.
- Q. Do you still insist on a completely demilitarized Sinai and West Bank, a permanent Israeli military presence at Sharm el Sheikh, an access road to Sharm through Sinai and the continued occupation of the Golan Heights as the quid pro quo for withdrawal?
- A. We don't insist on anything. Try us out and you'll be surprised on the degree of give and take we are prepared for. We have not made any demands on the demilitarization of Sinai. At Sharm el Sheikh, however we must be in a position to defend and protect the access to the Straits of Tiran, our backyard. We cannot rely on promises or on outsiders to do it for us. We cannot live as a nation without a peace treaty. As for Golan Heights, we will quite simply never give it up. The same goes for Jerusalem.
- Q. Beyond a possible compromise on the holy places in Jerusalem, are you prepared for any give and take on the city itself?
- A. No, I regret it. I would be very happy to say yes, but every time I look at the map I shake my head because there is no possible way to compromise on Jerusalem. It is the very heart of our State.
- Q. Some Israeli leaders are now suggesting that President Nasser and King Hussein are too weak on their homefronts to be valid negotiating partners and that sooner or later you will have to settle your problem with the Palestinians directly. What do you think?

A. If those two could work together - and if Nasser did not stab the King in the back from time to time - I am quite sure they could sell a reasonable settlement to their peoples. I have met at least half a dozen times with Palestinian leaders on the West Bank. They said they would go talk to Hussein and to Nasser. They did but came back empty-handed. One million Arabs on the West Bank have now seen the Israelis with different eyes. But if Arab leaders remain intransigent, the situation will, of course, get worse.

Q. Do you see El Fatah and the fedayeen as a potentially new political factor in the Middle East?

A. I don't want to brag but the fedayeen have lost alot of people. Many are leaving the movement dispirited. I do not believe the fedayeen will become as important as some people seem to think in Western countries. But if El Fatah want to talk to us directly, we would not say no. If one day they overthrow established Arab governments, we would then have a new enemy and a new situation. But I don't believe this will happen.

Q. You call them terrorists. But didn't you carve out your own country by terror and force of arms? How does El Fatah differ from other resistance movements through history?

A. We carved our country mainly by labour, by building settlements and draining swamps. If people perpetrate terrorist acts they can, of course, call themselves a resistance movement. But what are they resisting? They cannot find shelter on the West Bank. The Arabs there are not cooperating with the fedayeen. That hardly qualifies them as resistance fighters.

Q. But in Gaza the local population is resisting? Are they not a resistance movement to Israeli occupation?

A. As a Jew I will answer with another question. What difference does it make? Why should I glorify them with their own label? But seriously, I would point out that for twenty years Gaza was occupied by the Egyptians. The Egyptian curfew there was much tougher than ours. The Palestinian refugees in Gaza resisted the Egyptians just as strongly as they resist us.

Q. Is it conceivable to you that Israelis and Palestinians may one day live together in a sort of condominium or bi-national state perhaps comparable to the way Christians and Moslems run Lebanon?

A. I would not like to be in the same position as Lebanon on a fifty-fifty basis. Lebanon could become sixty-forty one day - and then what happens to the minority?

Q. But Lebanon has worked?

A. It is very important that you and your readers should understand that for 2,000 years we were persecuted minorities around the world. Never again. We must have our own place where we are the majority. Look at Cyprus. Twenty-three percent Turks and look at what's going on. Is that what you want for us? Israel is and must remain a Jewish State.

Q. In that case how would you feel about a separate Palestinian Arab State?

A. Personally, I think Palestinian connections and ties should be with Jordan - same customs, same religion, same language. But who knows - Jordan's behaviours may face them to have a separate entity.

Q. If the Jews are entitled to a homeland in this part of the world, aren't the Palestinians similarly entitled to their own country?

A. What are Palestinians? When I came here there were 250,000 non-Jews, mainly Arabs and Bedouins. It was desert - more than underdeveloped. Nothing. It was only after we made the desert bloom and populated it that they became interested in taking it from us.

Q. You expect Arab governments to disown the fedayeen or at least to disarm them or control them. But were Jewish leaders capable of controlling Irgun and the Stern gang at the time of your own struggle for independence?

A. Yes, to a certain degree we were. But how can you compare? The Arabs have established governments with armies and police forces. We had nothing. We were just as illegal as the underground movements you just mentioned. Trying to control them we had at the same time to hide from and struggle against the British army.

Q. President Nasser told Newsweek that Egyptian representatives are prepared to sit down with Israelis in joint committees with U.N. observers as you did under the 1949 armistice agreements and until the 1956 war, an arrangement he says you yourselves ended. What are your objections to resuming such a dialogue?

A. There was always a third party in these committees - and the U.N. was the decisive party. The U.N. observer nearly always said he never saw what happened. The arrangement had

become a mockery, a travesty of justice. When Nasser launched the first fedayeen raids, he thought and acted as if he was free to do as he pleased while we were supposed to respect the armistice agreements. That's why the arrangement broke down. But if Nasser is ready to resume these joint committees, and ~~with~~ with us, why isn't he ready to sit with us under the Security Council Resolution of November 22, 1967?

Q. Hasn't the time come for some fresh thinking and new Israeli peace initiatives?

A. We feel that every day is the time for this. The question is what and how. Lets sit down and discuss it. Let's reason together. We have said and it certainly reached the ears of the Jordanian government - that if Jordan needs a Mediterranean harbor we are prepared to give them free port facilities in Haifa or Ashdod. We can embark on all sorts of joint endeavors to develop their industry and export business. Go talk to the Arab farmers on the West Bank and they will tell you what we have done in a few months to increase their productivity that had barely moved for centuries. We dug wells for them where their own people had assured them there was no water. This is what we can offer. But there is a price. Either they maintain a state of war and nothing happens or they want real peace and the hopes for the future are unlimited.

Q. If you were President Nixon trying to counteract Russian penetration of the Arab world, wouldn't you find it necessary to inch closer to the Arab view of the Israeli occupation and requisites for a settlement?

A. It's always hard to put yourself in someone else's shoes, especially those of the President of the U.S., but I am convinced that although we fought alone entirely, the Six-Day War I believe enhanced the interests of the free world in the Middle East. There is much alarm about Soviet influence. But what do Egypt and Syria have to offer the West? In the states that do have a lot to offer - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Turkey etcetera - Soviet influence is minimal. The value of Israel in this part of the world will, I predict, be out of all proportion to its size. We will be a real bridge between three continents and the free world will be very thankful not only if we survive but continue to thrive in secure and guaranteed borders.