

Extract from a radio and television report by Pres Eisenhower, 31 October 1956

I now turn to that other part of the world where, at this moment, the situation is sombre. It is not a situation that calls for extravagant fear or hysteria. But it invites our most serious concern.

I speak, of course, of the Middle East. This ancient crossroads of the world was, as we all know, an area long subject to colonial rule. This rule ended after World War II, when all countries there won full independence. Out of the Palestinian mandated territory was born the new State of Israel.

These historic changes could not, however, instantly banish animosities born of the ages. Israel and her Arab neighbours soon found themselves at war with one another. And the Arab nations showed continuing anger towards their former colonial rulers, notably France and Great Britain.

The United States-through all the years since the close of World War II-has laboured tirelessly to bring peace and stability to this area.

We have considered it a basic matter of United States policy to support the new State of Israel and at the same time-to strengthen our bonds both with Israel and with the Arab countries. But, unfortunately through all these years, passion in the area threatened to prevail over peaceful purposes, and in one form or another, there has been almost continuous fighting.

This situation recently was aggravated by Egyptian policy including rearmament with Communist weapons. We felt this to be a misguided policy on the part of the Government of Egypt. The state of Israel, at the same time, felt increasing anxiety for its safety. And Great Britain and France feared more and more that Egyptian policies threatened their 'life line' of the Suez Canal.

These matters came to a crisis on 26 July of this year, when the Egyptian Government seized the Universal Suez Company. For ninety years-ever since the inauguration of the Canal-that Company has operated the Canal, largely under British and French technical supervision.

Now there were some among our allies who urged an immediate reaction to this event by the use of force. We insistently urged otherwise, and our wish prevailed-through a long succession of conferences and negotiations for weeks and months-with participation by the United Nations. And there, in the United Nations, only a short while ago, on the basis of agreed principles, it seemed that an acceptable accord was within our reach.

But the direct relations of Egypt with both Israel and France kept worsening to a point at which first Israel-then France-and Great Britain also determined that, in their judgement, there could be no protection of their vital interests without resort to force.

Upon this decision events followed swiftly. On Sunday the Israeli Government ordered total mobilisation. On Monday, their armed forces penetrated deeply into Egypt and to the vicinity of the Suez Canal, nearly one hundred miles away. And on Tuesday, the British and French Governments delivered a twelve-hour ultimatum to Israel and Egypt-now followed up by armed attack against Egypt.

The United States was not consulted in any way about any phase of these actions. Nor were we informed of them in advance.

As it is the manifest right of any of these nations to take such decisions and actions, it is likewise our right-if our judgement so dictates-to dissent. We believe these actions to have been taken in error. For we do not accept the use of force as a wise and proper instrument for the settlement of international disputes.

We took our first measure in this action yesterday. We went to the United Nations with a request that the forces of Israel return to their own land and that hostilities in the area be brought to a close. The proposal was not adopted-because it was vetoed by Great Britain and France.

The processes of the United Nations, however, are not exhausted. It is our hope and intent that this matter will be brought before the United Nations General Assembly. There-with no veto operating the opinion of the world can be brought to bear in our quest for a just end to this tormenting problem.

I am ever more deeply convinced that the processes of the United Nations represent the soundest hope for peace in the world. For this very reason, I believe that the processes of the United Nations need further to be developed and strengthened. I speak particularly of increasing its ability to secure justice under international law.