Breathing Spell
New York Times (1857-Current file); Jun 13, 1948; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2002)
pg. E1

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New Try on Palestine

At 10 A. M. Palestine time last Friday morning an Israeli GI, carrying a walkie-talkie, paced a front-line trench near Ras el Ein on the Jerusalem road twenty miles from Tel Aviv. Into the mike he repeated the staccato phrase *Hafakit esh* (cease fire).

At the same moment on the Arab side an Arab major passed the order *Waqf en nar* to the Trans-Jordan Legion's command posts scattered through the Holy City. Arab runners spread the word across the front.

There were a few stray spatters of machine-gun fire. Then silence settled over the battlefront. At hundreds of points all over Palestine these scenes were repeated.

The cease-fire brought a truce to the Holy Land after four weeks of bitter international war—a truce during which the United Nations and its great power members will make a new effort to find a permanent solution for the problem that has perplexed the world for a generation.

Last Friday's cease fire came twelve days after the U. N. Security Council ordered both sides in the Palestine dispute to halt the fighting or face the threat of possible action against them as aggressors under the U. N. Charter. The Security Council's order contained provisions to which both the State of Israel and the Arabs objected. The job of working out the actual terms was given to Count Folke Bernadotte, member of the Swedish royal family and the U. N. Mediator for Palestine.

In ten days Count Bernadotte flew 3,000 miles—in hops of 50 to 380 miles—to confer with Israeli and Arab officials. Operating out of a temporary headquarters in Cairo, he made several visits to Tel Aviv and Haifa in Israel, Amman in Trans-Jordan, Cairo in Egypt, Beirut in Lebanon.

Middle East Impressed

Count Bernadotte's energy and conviction of urgency seemed to impress both the Arabs and Israel. The mediator was firm and insistent. One story has it that when he tried to contact one Middle Eastern ruler, the Count was told over the telephone that the ruler was extremely busy and would try to find time to see him. Bernadotte is said to have replied, "The rest can wait. I will arrive this afternoon and expect to see him at four." He saw him.

Last Monday the Mediator submitted his plan for a truce to Israel and to the seven Arab League states. The key provisions were these:

Military Status Quo: All military fronts to be stabilized with no increase in fighting strength for the four-week truce period.

War Materials: All shipments of materials to Israel or to the Arab League members to be halted for the truce period.

Immigration: No fighting personnel to be admitted for the period of the truce. The Mediator to "use his discretion" in determining whether immigration into Israel would give one side a military advantage. If so, he could halt it.

Immigration was the big issue. Israel has insisted upon its sovereign right to control immigration. (Since May 15 4,839 European Jews have entered Israel.) The original U. N. truce order had specified that Jews of military age could enter Israel so long as they were not assigned to military forces or given military training. The Arabs objected strongly; they wanted all immigration halted. The Israeli Government insisted on adherence to the U. N. order. Count Bernadotte's plan was a compromise.

Both sides voiced grave misgivings over the truce terms. Abdul Rahman Azzam Pasha, secretary-general of the Arab League, said, "The Arabs are convinced of Zionist ill-will in the application of the truce." Moshe Shertok, the Foreign Minister of Israel, said the terms "are distasteful to us."

Nevertheless, both sides accepted the terms and at the Friday 10 A. M. deadline the truce went into effect.

Eleventh-Hour Battle

Both sides fought major engagements right up to the last hour to gain the most advantageous positions. In Jerusalem just before the cease-fire went into effect, Col. David Marcus, a West Pointer and former New York City Commissioner of Correction, was killed while leading Haganah forces. Along the vital Tel Aviv-Jerusalem highway Israeli forces scored some victories. In the south Egyptian tanks broke through an Israeli cordon that had surrounded 2,000 Egyptian troops.

Trygve Lie, Secretary General of U. N. hailed the truce. He said, "This is a great day for the U. N." But in U. N. circles grave fears were expressed on two counts: first, that Israeli or Arab forces would break the truce—already each side has accused the other of violating it; second, that the four weeks of negotiations would fail to find a solution.

The job of observing the truce was assigned to a team of sixty-nine military observers—supplied principally by the U. S., Belgium and France. These are the member nations of the Palestine Truce Commission set up last month by the Security Council. Six other observers—to be assigned to Count Bernadotte's personal staff—were supplied by Sweden. On Friday in the Security Council Andrei A. Gromyko protested bitterly because Russia was not allowed to send observers.

The truce teams are to function out of Cairo. A small fleet of boats will patrol the coastlines of the Arab states and Israel to watch for violations of the arms embargo. Groups of two or three observers will take up strategic positions in the now-quiet battlefronts to see that the truce is carried out.

Danger From Extremists

For the moment, at least, the chief danger of violations seemed to lie in "extremist" groups on both sides.

So far as the long-term solution is concerned, the actual negotiation is a job for the Mediator. On Friday, Count Bernadotte moved his headquarters to the Hotel of Roses in Rhodes to begin direct talks with Arab and Israeli leaders.

The one key issue in those talks is this: Will the Arabs recognize the State of Israel? Unless they do a renewal of the war is certain on July 9.

Last week Mr. Shertok said: "The Jewish state is spreading its roots fast and deep. There is no question of compromise, legal or otherwise." King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan said: "We will never, under any circumstances, recognize a Jewish state."

Despite the seeming finality of these statements, there were hopes that

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the Arabs might accept the fact of Israel in return for some face-saving concession on the other side.

The solution, it is suggested, with assists from the United States and Britain, might be worked out, along these lines:

Britain, which has strong ties with the Arab countries, could bring pressure on the Arabs. Britain's word carries particular weight with Abdullah, whose army—the only effective Arab force in the Palestine fighting—is supported by the British Exchequer and officered by Britons. Abdullah could be urged to recognize Israel and to assume the rule of most of Arab Palestine. If Abdullah agreed, smaller slices of Arab Palestine could be offered to Egypt and, perhaps, to Syria, to win their acquiescense.

American Pressure

The United States, meanwhile, could bring pressure on Israel to make some concessions. These might include the surrender of some territory in the southern desert, the Negeb, and perhaps to grant Abdullah rights to cross the Negeb to a Mediterranean port. Under such an agreement Britain might be granted air bases in the Negeb from which to defend the vital Suez Canal link in her lifeline.

Whatever the basis of this speculation, there were signs last week that the United States and Britain were drawing closer together on the Palestine question after weeks of wide divergencies. The impetus was seen in their common policy with regard to Russia. Both want to keep the Soviet out of the Middle East.

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