

No. 937

984A.56/12-1754 Telegram

*The Chargé in Israel (White) to the Department of State*¹

CONFIDENTIAL

TEL AVIV, December 17, 1954—2 p. m.

514. Substance Deptel 334² was given orally to Prime Minister this morning. Sharett expressed his appreciation for the Department's message and said that he had one observation to make. If you look back at the evolution of the Suez Canal problem, you will conclude that if Israel had done nothing the result would have been a complete hardening of the Egyptian position and a complete embargo on the movement of goods between Israel and the east. Instead, Israel by recurrently raising the issue of free passage had succeeded in making some progress, as evidenced by the two-way movement of goods between Israel and East Africa, an achievement which the Egyptians in the current debate point to with pride. If the Suez Canal issue had not been raised from time to time this progress would not have been possible.

In reply I said I had been impressed by the views recently expressed by his colleagues (Lavon and Herzog) that an accommodation between Israel and Egypt was the key to an ultimate Arab-Israel settlement, but that on the other hand, I was equally impressed with the thinking of our people in Cairo and Washington that while no one could be sure that such an accommodation was possible, it was clearly impossible as long as issues between the two countries were receiving so much publicity and public attention in each country. If progress were to be made it would have to come during a time period when Israel disappeared from the headlines of the Egyptian press and vice versa.

Sharett replied that if the *Bat Galim* could proceed on through the canal, we "could be assured of a long period of lull".

In closing the Prime Minister referred to the fact that while the Department's message held out hope of the release of the *Bat Galim*, it contained no expectation that the vessel would be permitted to proceed through the canal. He then said that if nothing happened he "guessed that Israel would have to raise the case again in the Security Council next week".

He cited the reference made by the Department to arousing the emotions in Israel and said "You can imagine the emotions here

¹ Repeated to Cairo and London.

² Document 933.