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THURSDAY MORNING SESSION

JANUARY 27, 1955

Jerusalem

(THE OPENING SESSION OF THE TALKS BETWEEN AMBASSADOR JOHNSTON AND HIS PARTY AND THE MEMBERS OF THE ISRAEL GOVERNMENT, CONVENED AT 11:15 A.M., PRIME MINISTER MOSHE SHARETT PRESIDING)

PRESENT:

PRIME MINISTER SHARETT:

Ambassador Johnston, Ambassador Lawson, gentlemen: It gives my friends and me a very great pleasure to welcome you again, Ambassador Johnston, you and your companions, also Ambassador Lawson and Mr. White. We deeply appreciate the enlightened determination manifested by your presence in seeking a solution to the problems which forms the subject of our discussions. We are also full of admiration for your own personal tenacity. We very much hope that your present determination and tenacity will be duly rewarded by the attainment of practical results after this long, drawn effort of negotiation and mediation. We really are very much interested in getting to the stage of definite conclusions so that a real start can be made toward a peaceful and coordinated utilization of at least a part of the water resources of the area, and in any case in order that we should know where we stand and what we have to face.

There has been a great deal of public discussion and public speculation centering around your mission to the Middle East, and as time goes on the interest and the element of speculation arising therefrom far from abating is increasing and is causing a certain amount of tension which is mounting. I have already mentioned to you in the other room that we are now fairly close to the next spring; spring and summer are to us a crucial season. You know that certain works of development to which we attach very importance and priority were interrupted. It will have been interrupted two years next spring or summer, and we are very anxious to achieve an agreement on our problems before that season is down upon us., because we do not intend, if we can only help it, to delay the resumption of the work any further .

In a more general sense, the whole matter is to us historically urgent. You know the importance Israel attached to water. As our settlement, I mean settlement on the land, is progressing the situation is becoming more and more tight, tense and even critical. Regions are now fighting each other; each fighting for its future; each fighting for its dear life as to how much water it will get out of any available total to be allocated.

The tension and nervousness underlying this discussion is arising from the general realization that we have more land to irrigate than we have water to irrigate it with, and that is one of the reasons ~~WHY~~ why we insisted so much on the inclusion of the Litani River in the general scheme. It is one reason why the exclusion of the Litani for the time being is to us such a disappointment in the whole outlook. Incidentally, I was wondering whether you could enlighten us as to what is happening to the Litani. We hear about negotiations concerning the Litani and we would very much like to have assurances that whatever is being done is not in the nature of precluding the eventual joining of the huge surplus of the Litani waters to the general pool for inter-state distribution in the future.

When we parted last time, there was a considerable gap between the data of our respective groups of experts. We understand that a more thorough survey has been undertaken since then on your side, and I was wondering whether you could enlighten on the findings of that survey; whether that will not lead to the narrowing of the gap, and in general, what new light the results of that survey have thrown on this whole situation. We are very eager to hear then your message to us at this time and shall listen with the most absorbing interest, and we hope you will bring us forward to an agreed solution of the problem.

AMBASSADOR JOHNSTON:

Thank you very much Mr. Prime Minister. I can say in return that we are very happy to be back. Not only have you greeted us in a very friendly way, but you have given us excellent weather as well. I think that the weather that you have here would make an anemic introvert ~~out~~ out of a member of a southern Californian member of the Chamber of Commerce. It is so delightful. No smog, and this nice sunlight and invigorating coolness. It is also pleasant to come back and see our friends. I have grown to have real friendship for you here and for many of your people, and it is like coming home and meeting old friends to be able to come back. It is a friendship that I hope will continue to develop and grow, irrespective of what may or may not happen to the water project. I want you to know that sincerely.

We have delayed in coming back, Mr. Prime Minister, a considerable length of time because we wanted complete engineering data before we returned. You posed certain problems to us when ^{we} were here last time, made certain suggestions to us, and we wanted to explore those fully. It has been almost seven months since we were here last and I am delighted to hear you speak about the urgency of it; that spring is coming on and that is important for you. It is equally urgent for us, too, Mr. Prime Minister, for two reasons. When we talked to you originally, we had in mind the completion of this project in some eight or ten years. We now have in mind the completi

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of the project in some three or four years. It is urgent because we want to get it done, and we want any corollary or cooperative ventures that may flow from it to come into fruition at the earliest possible opportunity.

In addition to that, there is another factor which is important to us. I came out here originally and offered this program as a grant or a gift from the United Nations and the people of the United States. There is a good deal of change of sentiment now in America to the fact that any money that we spend for purposes of this kind, the Tennessee Valley and the Jordan, should be a loan and not a grant. It is going to cost a good deal of money, a good deal more than we originally contemplated when we originally talked to you for various reasons, and I was asked to come out here and talk to you about a loan rather than a grant this time. That I refused to do. I had previously come out and talked about a grant and I did not want to come out and change my position and talk about a loan. I am fearful, as is the President of the United States, that if something isn't done in the near future and some settlement isn't reached, and should at some future time we desire to continue to help with this project that Congress will insist that it be a loan and not a grant.

I am sure that you were informed from your Embassy in Washington adequately about the political situation in America, and that ~~XXXXXX~~ what I am telling you is merely a confirmation of what you know. So now we are anxious to proceed with the problem at the earliest opportunity.

When we were here last time, you presented some engineering suggestions ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ to us which we have carefully studied, and we are glad to tell you that we have incorporated some of your suggestions into our program. We think they are better than what we suggested. We think they are more feasible and will work better than what we originally suggested. We wanted to be sure of that because we not only have to sell a program of this kind to you, but we have to sell it to the other side. We want to be sure

that it is engineeringly sound without any question before we go to the other side for discussion.

I think that the main problems involved, Mr. Prime Minister—you correct me if you think I am wrong—when we left here last time were four in number, one not applying to you whatsoever, but three did. One was the question of taking the water out of the basin/^{to}which the Arabs objected, and still strenuously object to. That did not apply to you, but we have always taken the position that when once the water would be allocated to a nation, they could^{do} what they wished, but that is still a serious problem. The second problem is the exact amount of allocation of water between the various states. We narrowed the gap but there was still a gap between us. The third was the question of the use of Lake Tiberias as storage, and the fourth was the water administrator who would see that the water itself was delivered as per agreement to both sides.

I want to ~~discuss~~ discuss ~~it~~ briefly with you those three programs. The first I will not discuss because ^{we} you already ^{agree} with us that you should do with the waters as you see fit after it is once allocated. But the other three are important.

When we were here before, under the ~~main~~ ^{main} plan we allocated out of the River, 346 million cubic meters of water. It was your contention that you felt that you wanted 462 million cubic meters of water out of the River. You felt at that time that perhaps too much water was going to Jordan and that water might be wasted on the soil because the soil could not absorb it. Mr. Eshkol made a strong point on that, and we always like to take Mr. Eshkol's remarks into due consideration, and so we have made a survey of the problem by a competent group of engineers on the other side and Mr. Criddle, who is here and who is, I think, a recognized international expert on what is known as "water duty", what water is necessary for cropping on certain types of soil. We feel that perhaps ^{to such} water was given to ~~EM~~ Jordan under this program. We feel that the cropping matter which we proposed for the land, which may be a little different than they had proposed

on which we can save some money.

So we are prepared to discuss and offer you today about 90% of what you requested. In other words, we are prepared to offer you instead of 346, to offer you 446 million cubic meters of water, or within 10% of your 462 million cubic meters of water out of the River. But to do that, to offer that much water out of the River, it is essential that we take into consideration all of the possible storage involved in order to save the flood waters of the Jordan and Tiberias so that none of that precious water is wasted or none of it is wasted at flood in the Dead Sea. Therefore, we must use Lake Tiberias as storage, as part of the storage. We will also ^{erect some storage on} ~~XXXXXX~~ the Yarmuk ~~to~~. We need it for other purposes. We need to control the salinity of the waters, which is very essential from an engineering point of view. On all of these remarks we are prepared to go into detail with your engineers if you desire to have us do so to prove what is our contention. So that Lake Tiberias, as far as our engineering program is concerned, ~~EX~~ must be used as a part of the storage of the River. All of the storage possible must be saved.

The third is the question of some type of neutral water administrator. We discussed when I was here the term "water master". We feel that that should be as loose an organization as possible. It should interfere in ~~EX~~ no way with the sovereignty of either nation, except to control the valve, to see that the water is delivered as per the agreement. We have in mind the type and kind of organization which could be set up. We would be happy to hear from you as to your ideas on that also.

It appears to us, in conclusion, that the first thing that we must determine is that amount of water. There is not much use talking about the storage of water or who is going ^{to} administrate, if we can't agree on the amount of water. So we think the first thing to discuss is the amount of water which, as we have suggested, comes to within 90% of the figure suggested by you or put forward by you

out of your requirement when we were here before. So we feel that we have gone almost all the way, as far as can possibly be gone.

Incidentally, I don't need to remind you of the difficulty there will be in trying to sell Jordan and the other countries into taking this amount of water away from them and in using it over here. You know the difficulties involved.

So that, gentlemen, is the program we are coming forward with. We think that time is of the essence. We think we should make as much speed as possible, and we want to start the project at the earliest possible time. A project on which so much engineering has been done, which is so near to starting, could be started within a very short time after agreement has been reached.

Lastly, we have abandoned the dam on the Hisbani at the moment and the high level canal leading down from the Lebanon in favor of the engineering project which you have suggested, and that is the one at Banat Ya'acov. We have used that project instead of the other, allowing - not allowing - suggesting that you generate your own power there as you suggested. We think it is the better engineering program, better than the one we put forward, and although it does make a material change in the engineering, a change which will shorten the time involved in construction materially, it will be in our opinion a better job all the way around. So we will adopt your program at Banat Ya'acov.

Mr. Prime Minister, I think that is, in general, and rather briefly the position which we are coming forward to you with. We hope it is a position which you will be able to accept. We will be glad to discuss it either with your engineers or have Mr. Criddle discuss it with them or in whatever way you prefer.

(Whereupon the meeting recessed at which time a subcommittee met.)