

Prime Minister's Report; Declaration of a State of Emergency; Merchant Navy Flag; Stamp Ordinance; Questions and Answers

Sitting 2 of the Provisional Council of State

19 May 1948 (18 Iyar 5708)
JNF Building, Tel Aviv

The Prime Minister's Report

The Prime Minister, D. Ben-Gurion: I have been asked to give a report on our situation, although this was not on today's agenda. I am doing this on the assumption that I can rely on all those present, journalists and guests as well as Council Members. Although I am not about to reveal any secrets, these things are not for publication.

At present, our enemies have control of the skies. What this means with regard to Tel Aviv is common knowledge to everyone here. We have reason to believe that this situation will not remain static, but I cannot say when the change will occur. Superiority in the air gives the enemy a great advantage, but our public is not afraid. The Yishuv needs no compliments, but it is impossible not to note its fortitude. I was in London during the Blitz and was astonished by the heroism of the residents of the city at that fearful time. The people of the Yishuv are no less heroic. Even with my deep faith in the Yishuv, I was surprised at the self-control our public exhibited....Yesterday's tragedy has not changed anything, although it must be noted that the public does not take sufficient precautionary measures.

We are now deployed along several fronts. In the north, all Western Galilee is in our hands, including Acre; in Eastern Galilee, where we had grounds for suspecting an attack and the massing of enemy forces, our army took the initiative, crossing the border in order to attack. Further south, in the Jordan Valley, the situation is tense; there are a great many armored columns of the Arab Legion there, supported by Iraqi and Syrian troops with planes, artillery, machine guns and tanks. Reinforcements were sent there yesterday, though more are needed. The Central front appears to be quiet, but this could mean that the enemy is planning an attack. According to our information, Kaukji has been told to cross into Transjordan with his troops, to make way for the Legion, which is approaching Jerusalem and is reported to have

reached Sheikh Jarrah. Almost all of Jerusalem is in our hands, and the way to the Old City has been breached. The latest reports I have are from midday, and I cannot tell you what the situation is within the city. In the Ramle area we have captured Sarafand which, as you know, had been sold to the Jewish Agency, but was handed over to the Arabs by the British Government, which cancelled the sale. Our attack on Ramle itself is not making headway. In the south there is no change, and the situation in the Negev is tense, with substantial enemy forces facing our troops. We are mobilizing additional forces, and hope that within two weeks there will be an appreciable change in the situation of our troops and the means at our disposal....

...We have been asked, especially by America, to inform the world about our naval flag, because ships coming here want to fly Israel's flag as they approach our shores. In addition, we are about to send out our own ships, which must fly our flag. The same applies to our stamps. We must also make certain decisions about emergency matters and budget affairs, both of which are related to the Ordinance brought before you earlier. At the last sitting there was a general debate on this Ordinance and a committee was appointed to formulate a proposal. The Government has accepted that proposal, though we suggest a few minor changes....

Firstly, with regard to the subject of democracy, neither the Council of State nor the National Administration are democratic institutions established on the basis of general elections, but were set up following a national political revolution. They are not dependent on one another, both of them having received their powers from other institutions. The Council of State is the legislative institution, while the Government is the executive institution. The situation is such that the Government has not been elected by the Council of State and is therefore not dependent on it. Both bodies were established by the National Committee and the Jewish Agency...from which their powers are derived.

Secondly, we are in a state of emergency. Not only is a war being fought on the outskirts of Tel Aviv, but there is fighting everywhere. All our efforts, dispositions and measures are geared towards establishing security and independent rule in place of the chaos which the Mandate Government bequeathed us....We cannot adhere meticulously to our most important precepts if they clash in any way with those primary needs....Ensuring our security and independence must take precedence over everything else, sometimes even over the need for public clarifications. Our enemies are seeking to destroy us, and we must act.

The document brought before us today provides a legal framework for our two ruling institutions which, due to their revolutionary character, are not one hundred percent democratic. It also enables us to act immediately and without unnecessary delay in the defense of the state and the establishment of its essential services....The fact that this is not