

Armistice Agreements with the Arab Countries

Introduction

On 24 February 1949, ten days after the First Knesset was convened for its opening sitting in Jerusalem, Israel signed its first Armistice Agreement, with Egypt, on the island of Rhodes. Its preamble stated that it should constitute a step towards peace. It determined armistice lines which, except in the Gaza Strip, were to coincide with the international boundary of the former Mandatory Territory of Palestine and Egypt, provided for demilitarized areas and areas where only limited military forces were permitted, and established a Mixed Armistice Commission, headed by a U.N. military representative, to supervise implementation and decide on mutual complaints. The Egyptian Brigade surrounded in the Faluja Pocket was to be permitted to return to Egypt. About two weeks later, on March 10, Israeli troops reached the southern tip of the Negev at Eilat, an area allocated to the Jewish state under the Partition Resolution. On 23 March 1949, a second General armistice agreement was signed, this time with Lebanon. Here, too, the armistice line was to coincide with the previous international boundary. Although Syrian troops had operated during the war from Lebanese territory, it was decided to separate the two, and the IDF evacuated the Lebanese villages captured in the course of the fighting at the end of October without insisting on the reciprocal withdrawal of Syrian troops from the Mishmar Hayarden salient. The Agreement with Transjordan (now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan)—far more complicated because of the nature of the armistice line, and its political implications—was signed on 3 April. On the following day Ben-Gurion presented all three Agreements to the Knesset for debate.

Sitting 20 of the First Knesset

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The Prime Minister, D. Ben-Gurion: Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a short statement to the Knesset about the agreement signed last night in Rhodes, as well as about those which preceded it and those which may follow it. As you know, to date we have signed agreements...with Egypt...Lebanon...and Transjordan in response to the Security Coun-

cil's resolution of 16 November asking the sides to sign Armistice Agreements instead of a ceasefire, as a step towards peace.

The Provisional Government agreed to this, as did Egypt in principle, though in practice it refused, justifying this by pointing to Israel's refusal to...withdraw its troops from the Negev and return to its position of October 12....We then informed the U.N. observers that we reserved the right to act in order to protect our territory and to bring peace nearer...and the ensuing battle in the Negev brought the Egyptians to the negotiating table....

The agreement determines...nothing in political or territorial terms, being solely military...and replacing the ceasefire agreement with one of greater validity. The area where the fighting took place is divided into two, and in half of it each side may maintain only defensive forces....Thus, Israel may maintain assault forces in the eastern half of the border, and the Negev is divided into western and eastern parts between the Egyptian and Transjordanian borders. In the east there is no limitation on the quantity, equipment or movement of our forces, while in the west, on the Egyptian border, we may keep only defensive forces, as laid down in the agreement.

This agreement served as a model for those which followed it. I will only add in connection with the Egyptian agreement...that we see two positive aspects in it. One is that it constitutes a political and moral achievement: two neighboring countries, between which there are no real historic disputes, were able for the first time to sit down as equals and find their way to an agreement, albeit not yet a political one, but at least one that ends the armed struggle. We attach particular importance to this because Egypt is the largest Arab country, and undoubtedly the most independent among them.

The second positive aspect, which I was unable to mention at the time, having to wait until the last agreement with Transjordan had been signed, was that the agreement with Egypt concerns the total cessation of all hostilities, the withdrawal of all Egyptian forces to the border—apart from certain defensive forces on the Rafah-Gaza axis—and Egypt's agreement that we may maintain all the forces we require in the eastern part of the Negev. This affords greater freedom of movement to our army, which was deployed throughout most of our Negev but whose mobility was restricted to a considerable extent. Anyone who remembers the map of the Negev knows that it is a triangle which narrows towards its southern tip, at the Red Sea, and the rest of Israel's Negev is not only on the sea, which is totally controlled by hostile countries—Egypt, Transjordan and Saudi Arabia—but the entry to the Red Sea is in England's hands, and entry into the tip of this triangle by Jewish forces could mean entering a death trap....

The agreement with Egypt accorded our forces far greater freedom of movement, and this helped us to fortify the positions we controlled

and to expel all the foreign forces there without a war, since they quite rightly found themselves unsafe there and withdrew of their own accord. They realized that not only does Israel's army have the right to move freely there, but that it also knows how to use its rights effectively.

This constituted a reverse example of what had happened previously in the Negev. Formerly there had been two instances in which military action paved the way for a political achievement. This time...the agreement signed in Rhodes gave us an extremely important military and settlement achievement.

After the agreement with Egypt, which to some extent allayed the fears of the other Arab countries of negotiating with us—if the largest and most independent country could do so, the smaller ones could follow suit—the agreements with Lebanon and, yesterday, Transjordan, were achieved.

This agreement, like those with Egypt and Lebanon, is purely military. It does not determine anything political or territorial for the moment. It merely fixes a certain line, extending from Eilat to the southern end of Lake Tiberias, from there via the Gilboa and Samaria mountain ridges to the mountain ridges of Judea and thence to Jerusalem, on either side of which the military forces of both sides can move under certain conditions. These negotiations were perhaps the hardest of those we have conducted to date, even though they were limited solely to military matters. The problem is that this embodies all the problems of Jerusalem, and not only of the city itself but of the road leading to it. The second problem is the Negev.

Transjordan, which is far less independent than Egypt (from the floor: Not Transjordan—the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), as well as England, to which it is subservient to some extent, demanded important sections of the Negev.

The third problem is the Triangle. As you know, till now there were Iraqi forces in the Triangle. Iraq...refuses to accept the Security Council resolution and will not conduct armistice talks with Israel. The Iraqi foreign minister recently informed the U.N. representative, Ralph Bunche, that Iraq has authorized Transjordan to conduct negotiations on its behalf, and that it will withdraw from the positions it has occupied in the Triangle.

The problem in the Negev was overcome by Transjordan's agreement that the armistice line between our countries will be the international border which existed under the Mandate, along the Arava and down to Eilat, crossing the Dead Sea in the middle, and reaching Ein Gedi.

Regarding the problems surrounding Jerusalem, it was agreed that for the moment we would discuss the determining of the border only on the basis of the current situation, and that special negotiations would be held by the two sides alone—without the mediation of the U.N.—about all

the complex issues, including both the military ones and the political-territorial ones of free access to Mount Scopus, the Mount of Olives and the Latrun road.

The subject of the Triangle was eased primarily by the fact that Iraq informed Dr. Bunche that Jordan could act on its behalf, and that it was prepared to withdraw....As you know, in the last few hours before the final ceasefire in July, the Iraqis seized positions within Israel, at an intersection of our settlements. The situation there was extremely bad, and was less safe than anywhere in Israel. I would like to give credit to the other side, which realized that the border could not remain as it was, and in return for our concession in the Hebron region in the south, gave up an area in the center, from Kfar Kassem near Bakka and Jaljulya in the north, to the Wadi Ara road and Gilboa ridges in the south. Thus, the border of the Armistice Agreement is not the one which existed between the Iraqis and us till now, being five kilometers to the east in the center, apart from two points: at Kalkilya and Tulkarm, which constitute a bulge, as it were. The same applies along Wadi Ara, which passes into our military control, without determining finally what its political and territorial fate will be. The same applies to our border in the Jezreel Valley, which shifts to the south between it and the Jordan Valley, on the other side of the Gilboa ridges. As far as the railway line from Lod to Haifa is concerned, apart from the two points at Kalkilya and Tulkarm...it is entirely under our military control...The entire Wadi Ara road is also in our hands, and the border will pass to the south of Wadi Ara so that the journey to the Jezreel Valley and Afula will be shorter, as it was in times of peace.

We have also made a concession, which is military, since nothing territorial has yet been fixed, in the Hebron region. Transjordan's military border near Hebron, where there will be free passage, will be slightly more to the west than it was before.

I would like the Knesset to be aware of the fact that...these Armistice Agreements are not yet peace...nor are we even near to making peace with the Arab countries. Neither have we determined stability and security for all the areas covered by the agreements, particularly in and around Jerusalem...regarding which negotiations will still be held between us and Transjordan, without the participation of the U.N. Negotiations will also still be held about assuring free access to Mount Scopus, enabling work to continue at the Hebrew University and Hadasah and renewing the railway connecting Tel Aviv-Jaffa with Jerusalem and Haifa....

Nevertheless, we think that the effort was worthwhile. It is an important step towards peace and stability, and when we use the term peace we are not referring to something dictated to one side by the other. We want peace with the Arab countries which is based on trust and common interests. We think that every step which brings peace nearer liberates

the Arab countries from bondage to foreign empires and increases their independence. We think that it is in Israel's interest that the neighboring countries should be as independent as possible...since this will facilitate internal social and economic progress....

In this sense we regard these agreements as an important step towards peace, and towards reinforcing Israel's position in a large part of the world which till now was in the thrall of the anti-Jewish propaganda of the British Foreign Ministry, which represented us as the enemy of the Asian, and particularly the Moslem, nations. If the first breach has been made in the attitude of a great Moslem country towards the State of Israel and Turkey has accorded us its recognition, there is no doubt that these agreements played a part. They were not the sole reason, however, because Turkey had no interest in standing aloof from Israel, quite the contrary.

...Finally, I would like to thank the U.N. Mediator, Dr. Bunche, who assisted greatly in bringing these three agreements to a successful conclusion. Our representatives did not always agree with him, and maybe those of the other side did not either. But we always knew that we were dealing with a man who had no other objective than to bring peace to this part of the world. He fulfilled this task with great skill and success, and on behalf of the Cabinet I would like to thank him.

M. Begin (Herut): Distinguished Speaker and House, before this sitting began I submitted the following proposal in writing to the Speaker, which I now have the honor of reading out to the House: We ask the Knesset to place on its agenda forthwith a debate expressing no confidence in Mr. Ben-Gurion's Cabinet, in view of the fact that it has signed an enslaving agreement with Britain's vassal, with the ruler of a country which calls itself—and to our great shame this name appears on an official document signed by the Government of Israel—"The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan," which exists on both sides of the Jordan, with the tacit assent of the Government of Israel. By doing this, the Government of Israel has handed a huge portion of the western part of our homeland to that monarch, abandoning it not to him but to his British masters, since the Government of Israel knew that that kingdom...has an agreement with Britain whereby the latter may maintain whatever military forces it deems necessary in the territory of the former.

That agreement means that the British may return to the western part of the Land of Israel and establish their military bases there. The significance of this agreement is political, not military. It means that, in effect, we have enslaved our state today to Bevin, after fighting a war of independence against the enslaver.

The Prime Minister himself apparently felt that this agreement was very different from those signed with Egypt and Lebanon. That is why he found it necessary to make an announcement to the Knesset which

hardly explained anything, because we had read all the details in the papers. Yet he nevertheless stressed that an agreement had been signed with a country which is less independent than the other Arab countries. I do not know if slavery can be more or less independent. The Prime Minister is trying to mislead the Knesset and the nation, claiming that a step has been made towards peace. A step has been made towards slavery! The blood that has been shed has been betrayed! We demand a free homeland and true independence! The step the Government has taken leads us into bondage. This agreement is very different from the previous ones. It is a more serious step towards slavery. The time has come for the Knesset to express its lack of confidence in the Government which is leading the nation towards bondage to the enemy.

...

Y. Riftin (Mapam): Distinguished Knesset, the armistice agreements signed by Israel with the neighboring Arab countries contain no clause stating when the peace conference will be held, although a general trend towards peace is mentioned....Was not the Government of Israel prepared, after an extended period of a de facto armistice and U.N.-imposed ceasefires, to embark independently on negotiations for a stable peace? I assume that the Government of Israel was prepared to do this, but apparently the other side was not. The behavior of some of the Arab governments with which armistice agreements have been signed is interesting. In an international forum, in the institutions of the U.N., at international conferences, they conduct an extensive diplomatic war against us, as if as far as they are concerned the Armistice Agreement is not a step towards peace.

The question is whether we should suspect that they still intend to continue the war against Israel. The question is whether those forces which decide matters in the Arab capitals are still playing a diplomatic game which indicates that they do not genuinely want peace. Because these are the countries which in one way or another are pushing the world towards a new war, and have perhaps not given up the idea of reviving the war here. I would like to draw the Knesset's attention to the fact that these agreements make no mention of...peace between those countries and Israel...and even contain a formal recognition on Israel's part of countries which invaded Israel as being a party to resolving the problem of the Land of Israel.

This is written in all the Armistice Agreements, and it is not merely a formal issue....The invading armies will remain in the Land of Israel....The strip of land which will remain in Egypt's hands is undoubtedly of no value for it, but it constitutes a threat to the Land of Israel, a threat of invasion, a threat of the establishment of foreign bases. More than constituting an Egyptian threat it is an American-British threat....

Gentlemen, I am sure that not only the Jewish population of the country, but the Jewish nation and the world Zionist movement have not abandoned the chance of attaining the entire Land of Israel, and regard a possible treaty between Israel and a democratic, independent Arab country as a chance of restoring the integrity of the country. But the democratic Arab countries which are our true allies, the forces of socialist revolt, those who are in prisons today and tomorrow will rule Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Transjordan, are as interested as we are in preserving the chance of restoring the integrity of the Land of Israel, and consequently are not interested in annexing part of the Land of Israel to those prison-states whose political independence is a fiction and with which we have signed agreements.

Distinguished Knesset, the Government was not empowered to make such a crucial decision without holding a democratic debate and obtaining the Knesset's assent. None of us ignores the partial value of the territorial improvements regarding border settlements and transportation, but it is not the partial consideration which counts. I conclude by calling on the Knesset not to regard this debate as enabling it, by the formal decision based on the coalition's raised hands, to continue as before. We demand a penetrating discussion. These Armistice Agreements with Abdullah cannot be binding on the Knesset, the Jewish people, the State of Israel or the democratic forces of Israel and of the entire Middle East.

Z. Warhaftig (Religious Front): Distinguished Knesset, regarding the Cabinet's authority to conduct negotiations and sign this agreement, this matter was discussed several times in the Provisional Council of State and in its Foreign Affairs Committee. It was Mapam which proposed that the agreement should not be signed until the Council of State had determined its rules and principles. That proposal was rejected...several times....Thus, as long as no change has been made, the Cabinet is authorized to conduct the negotiations and sign this agreement.

What in fact is new in these negotiations? I can understand Herut's opposition, but it is a little difficult to understand Mapam's. This agreement actually goes towards Partition...which was accepted by Mapam...although not willingly....It was also accepted by us, the Executive of the Jewish Agency, the Zionist Executive, and all those bodies in which Mapam participated, and they did not vote against it....The only thing that is new in this agreement is that they claimed in the Council of State, in the Foreign Affairs Committee, that they accepted Partition, and that one had to accept it, but that they wanted an independent Arab state, not the Transjordanian government, to have a share in it. Our reply to this in the Foreign Affairs Committee was that we wanted the same thing, but none of us wanted to shed blood in order to establish an Arab state by force in a so-called Arab part of the Land of Is-

rael. If we have to shed blood, then let us act on Mr. Begin's suggestion and do so in order to obtain control of the Triangle.

That is why I cannot accept Mr. Riftin's contention that we agree to this partition but fight to ensure that this king rather than that one rules there. The Mapam representative acknowledged that there are some territorial improvements...because this...is merely a ceasefire...and does not determine anything in principle....Incidentally, in addition to the "Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan," the Agreement also mentions the "State of Israel," so that there is reciprocity. They received our recognition of their name, and we received the enemy's recognition of the state's existence. That is why I do not regard this agreement as being a danger, or a deviation from the Cabinet's authority.

On the other hand, I do regard this Armistice Agreement as fixing the ceasefire which existed till now on a more permanent basis. I also believe that this debate should be a far-reaching one, dealing with our relations with the government of Transjordan and the entire subject of our foreign relations. That is why I propose that...the entire topic be transferred to the Foreign Affairs Committee for a far-reaching discussion. Matters of this kind cannot be conducted on the basis of a casual discussion, nor can they be debated in an open session. I propose that we accept the Cabinet's position forthwith, and ask the Speaker to maintain contact with the Cabinet so that the Knesset can hold a far-reaching discussion of these political problems.

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Y. Harari (Progressive Party): It is to be regretted that such an important and grave problem was not brought before the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, and instead there is a debate in the Knesset, where the things that are said, by both sides, are not always useful for our political situation. The considerations connected with signing this agreement are national, political and military. As regards the national considerations, in his heart of hearts every Knesset Member has not only never given up the Triangle, neither has he abandoned a single inch of land of Transjordan to our east. What we are discussing is not what is in our hearts but what are the practical considerations of a realistic Zionist policy, and how to achieve them. The Herut faction in the Knesset claims the credit for driving the British occupier out of the country. Its internal political balance is decidedly negative; on the external level I am prepared to recognize its share in repelling the British conqueror to some extent, but we would never have attained the State of Israel if the responsible majority in Israel had not given its political support to establishing a Jewish state in part of the Land of Israel. If we had continued to maintain that we were prepared to accept a Jewish state only in the entire Land of Israel, there would have been no State of Israel. The binding resolutions of the Zionist movement, declaring that we were prepared to accept a viable state in part of the Land of Israel, are

what have brought us the State of Israel today in a large and important part of the Land of Israel.

As for the political considerations, some people think that we should...aspire to the establishment of an Arab state in those parts of the Land of Israel which are not ours. I do not agree with this. I would be glad if the entire Land of Israel were in our hands. But if we have to choose between establishing an independent Arab state in part of the Land of Israel or diminishing the other parts of the Land of Israel and dividing them up between the Arab countries, I choose the latter...for Zionist and political reasons. This is not the place to expand on this subject. I think it is also for the benefit of the Arabs living in part of the Land of Israel. And if I sign an agreement with a country which is a fiction, a desert, it is precisely because it is a fiction and a desert. I prefer that it should rule the Triangle, and not some other country, which is neither fiction nor desert....We are told that we brought the British into the Triangle. Firstly, it has already been said here that in modern warfare it is doubtful whether it makes any difference if the aerodromes are at el-Salt or in the Triangle.

But what guarantee do those Knesset Members have that if a different state had been established in the Triangle the British or some other foreign power would not have gained control over it? We are told that we have signed an agreement with a slave, a puppet, but what state would have arisen in the Triangle instead of it? Og, King of Bashan? Is it better, for the sake of improved relations with the countries around us, to have eight Arab countries, or can we manage with seven? I maintain that the fewer hostile Arab countries there are, the safer we are.

It has been claimed that the British are gaining control of the Triangle, and that from now on, according to this agreement, British cannon will be 15 miles from Tel Aviv. At this very moment they are 15 miles away from those people who close their minds and turn their backs to the sea. But they are there, and at any moment the British cannon out at sea can be much nearer than 15 miles. So why mislead the public...and claim that the British cannon are only 15 miles from Tel Aviv when those selfsame cannon, plus warships...can at any moment be half a mile away from Tel Aviv? Is this a reason not to sign the agreement? If we were being asked to sign a peace treaty stating that that part of the Land of Israel belongs to Transjordan and that Israel has waived all rights to it forever I would oppose it. But what has been brought before us is an armistice agreement, fixing permanent ceasefire lines. I don't know for how long. I'm not a great believer in agreements; they exist as long as it suits the parties involved, and apparently it suited that ruler, that vassal, as he has been called here, to sign an agreement with us, while that agreement enables us to build up the country. The Armistice Agreement with Lebanon and the Transjordanian ruler contains something else which we have completely forgot-

ten. Where is Western Galilee? Has any country recognized that it belongs to us? We conquered it, we will not give it up! Two Arab countries which could lay claim to Western Galilee on the basis of international resolutions abandoned borders based on these resolutions regarding Western Galilee, and no foreign power can tell us...that we still owe something to the Arab countries. As regards the area around Jerusalem and in the Negev up to Eilat, I don't know whether the border in the Negev was determined with Bevin's agreement or not; in both areas the Transjordanian ruler accepted the border, and no foreign power may intervene against it.

We achieved this because the Arab countries themselves came and fixed different borders. (From the floor: These are Armistice Agreements.) Correct, these are only Armistice Agreements, leaving Western Galilee in our hands so that we may settle, build and develop it, and so that we may build fortified settlements there which cannot be conquered and taken from us. Consequently, I propose that the Knesset express its confidence in the Government.

J. Sapir (General Zionists): Distinguished Knesset, we are now discussing matters of foreign policy...without having precise and thorough information, and consequently it is difficult to adopt a position and an opinion, particularly in matters which should be considered very carefully, such as the one on the agenda today. For this reason it is greatly to be regretted—and I would like to register my protest at this—that the draft agreement was not brought before the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and the Knesset before it was signed. Had this been done we would have been able to obtain precise and detailed information not only about the conditions of the agreement but also about all the factors which led the Cabinet to sign it. At times like these we should be careful not only concerning the Opposition factions but also as regards the procedure of the House, and this situation should not recur. In particular, matters as crucial as our foreign policy regarding the neighboring countries, which may determine our fate, should be discussed carefully. Care should be taken to avoid a situation in which these matters are brought before us through parliamentary questions.

To the extent that it is possible to discuss the actual subject on an informed basis and with the appropriate gravity, it should be said that if we regard all the Armistice Agreements signed to date as aspiring towards stability for a certain period of time in which we can build up the country and absorb immigrants, this agreement is part of that political approach. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the agreement with the Transjordanian or Hashemite or Abdullah's government is completely different from the other ones. As far as our national and political future is concerned, it is extremely important that in that part of the country where an Arab state should be established according to the U.N. resolution, an independent Arab country should arise.

In my view an independent Arab state would have been far better for us in several respects than the annexation of that part by Transjordan. Even if we do not want to assume that the Armistice Agreement does not determine certain political facts, we cannot ignore the fact that since the agreement accepts Transjordan's existence within the Triangle...this constitutes our recognition of it. The Prime Minister...did not make it sufficiently clear as to what the fundamental motives were which led the Cabinet to agree to those conditions at this time.

The question is whether as regards certain lacunae and dangers...it was necessary to alter the status quo...which afforded some extent of military calm....Since the defense and practical value...of the border adjustments in our central area can be questioned, I would like to ask whether the railway line from Rosh Ha'ayin to Hadera is useful to us when foreign forces are a few hundred yards from the border and the road. If we regard that as an achievement...it is not, because we will be able to use that line only when the other side permits it....

The achievement regarding...Wadi Ara is slightly different, since the slight adjustment of the border enables traffic to reach the Jezreel Valley. But here, too, the moment the other side wishes to disrupt this, no large military forces will be needed....Thus, the gains in both instances where the borders were adjusted constitute political, military and organizational but not practical achievements....

Consequently, it is doubtful whether, despite our basic considerations in...recognizing a foreign country within our borders, this does not constitute waiving all possibility of establishing an independent Arab country in that area. And anyone who thinks that an independent Arab country is...better for us than the annexation of that area by a foreign country...will regard this as abandoning positions which we believed in the past were better for us. I suppose that some people think otherwise, but anyone who thought that an independent Arab country would be better for us cannot but regard the existence of the Transjordanian force as a failure....

I am not ignoring the fact that there may be arguments for and against the agreement...leading us to conclude that, insofar as we regard political stability in the region as a cornerstone of our policy, this agreement continues that trend. From our own point of view, we should attach great importance to creating stability for our young country at the present time, in the current political conditions, so that we may undertake the work of construction which is needed so badly. Thus, we must weigh the positive and negative aspects very carefully. We are not ignoring the negative aspects of the Armistice Agreement, but taking into account the need for stability in the region, we are not opposing it. We do not disregard the dangers it embodies, as regards both our internal and external policy guidelines. Consequently, we will not express our lack

of confidence in the Government, but in view of the ideas I have outlined, neither will we express our confidence in it.

E. Levenstein (Mapai): ...I will go straight to the point. What is it that we all want? It is overcoming Partition and its disadvantages...which separate the area of the State of Israel from that of the national home. In moral terms we are all committed to two documents—the decision of the Zionist movement known as the “Biltmore Program,” and the Weizmann-Feisal agreement made at Aqaba. There can be no long-term, peaceful existence between Arabs and Jews unless it is based on the agreement Chaim Weizmann signed with Emir Feisal thirty years ago, and there is no basis for the State of Israel without the decision passed by a large majority of the Zionist Organization. Everything else is merely a different way of attaining the objective which we all desire.

The question is, what are the ways?...The true content of the political and military campaign conducted during the last few months can be divided into two categories. First, the combination of operations and agreements. That was the way we operated vis-à-vis Egypt...Lebanon and...Transjordan. Anyone who has been reading the newspapers will be able to remember examples. There is no agreement without operations, and there are no fruitful operations which do not need to end in an agreement. This method has brought us many successes....The second category is negotiations with each Arab country separately, not with all of them together. That is what we did with Egypt, Lebanon and Transjordan, and that is what we also intend to do with Syria. We have also achieved a great deal in this way.

...What have we achieved in this way beyond the borders of November 29? Those borders are not sacred. No political resolution of the U.N. has been implemented. We have become the sole implementors of the U.N. resolution, and so we are obliged to interpret it....In addition to the borders of November 29 we attained Upper Western Galilee, the Western Negev, the extensive area between the Coastal Plain and Jerusalem, and the Southern Coastal Plain, apart from the Gaza-Rafah “tongue.” I am convinced that the Egyptians do not intend to retain this “tongue,” and it will come into our hands in due course. We recently attained the passes from Samaria to the Jezreel Valley. I am surprised that MK Sapir, who appreciates strategic and military matters, attaches so little importance to the Wadi Ara pass, for which powers and countries have fought, from the kings of Egypt to General Allenby. And we attained it by peaceful means.

We received all this beyond the borders of the “original” Partition. Some members of the Opposition and the semi-Opposition have said here that the armistice lines constitute a political fact. There is some truth in that. But it is not a final political fact...the matter is not yet concluded, the nature of the Jewish state has not yet been molded. But what have we achieved in political terms through these negotiations?

We obtained an indication from the invading force which achieved the most in territorial terms that it has given up the borders of 29 November 1947, at least as far as the armistice is concerned. Is this not worth something for those who wish to overthrow the Partition Plan? They say that Britain is behind King Abdullah. Does not this make it more difficult for those of our enemies who supported the “original” Partition Plan to defend those borders?

Certain Knesset Members have said here that the negotiations with Transjordan are invalid because that country is a satellite and a reactionary, “feudal” kingdom. I would call it “patriarchal,” rather than “feudal.” But if we accept the rule that negotiations may only be conducted with “progressive” countries...we will reach very strange conclusions. Is Ibn-Saud more progressive than Abdullah? Is the current Syrian government more progressive, or more stable, or less dependent, than Abdullah's? Will we refuse to negotiate with Syria this week for that reason? If we accept the doctrine that we must not negotiate with “satellites,” with whom may we negotiate?...I read...that Iraq is a satellite of Great Britain, and that Persia is a satellite of both Britain and America. Being a double satellite is doubtless no better than being a regular one. If we go that way we won't be able to negotiate with anyone except Moscow and Washington.

...The question is not whether we achieved all we wanted through these negotiations. We did not. Nor is it whether we achieved the minimum necessary for the State of Israel's existence. We have not attained that yet either. The question is quite different: would it have been possible, compared with the method of combining operations with negotiations, to achieve more by negotiations alone? And did we attain something important? I think that we reached not inconsiderable achievements, even in comparison with what other nations, ourselves included, have achieved in war. If you look at the map you will realize this.

The question is not whether the war has ended. I do not know if it has. We all, like MK Sapir, want peace in order to build. I do not know if peace is guaranteed. But there is no doubt that what we achieved through these negotiations is important as regards all future developments. Now we will be stronger and better able to face whatever the future holds.

M. Wilner (Maki): Today we are discussing what may be the most crucial issue of Israel's foreign policy. Those who spoke on behalf of the Government did its work, which was easy. I think that, with perhaps the exception of one Opposition faction, the rest want peace and an end to the bloodshed between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East.

The problem is really—how does one guarantee peace? How can one ensure that there will not be another war in six months' time? Therefore, the problem is: does the agreement with Abdullah bring a stable

peace between Israel and its neighbors nearer or not? That is the issue, and do not make your task easier by turning it on its head.

As far as peace and stability in the Middle East are concerned, this agreement is a step backwards....This agreement reinforces, extends and establishes the positions of the principal warmonger in the Middle East—British and American imperialism. This agreement enhances the ability of British and American imperialism to prepare a war against Israel and other peace-loving countries.

This agreement accords the recognition of the Israel Government (and there is a difference if the British army is in Nablus with or without our political recognition of this fact in an international document) to Abdullah, as Bevin's appointed ruler over part of the Land of Israel. That is what we have achieved. This is an international political fact which the Government of Israel created with its own hands.

Gentlemen, in my view it is demagoguery to ask what difference does it make if the British are not in the Land of Israel, because they are anyway nearby, in Transjordan. Is there really no difference? This cynical statement wounds our sense of national honor! If this is the case, why should the colonial peoples, the enslaved nations, fight for their freedom? Anyone can say cynically—whatever happens, an imperialist army will remain nearby; I can't liberate the whole world. Colleagues, this is demagoguery, because every nation in its land must fight to free itself of the foreign ruler, for its own independence and for peace.

The agreement with Abdullah is a political one because it recognizes the "Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan," which name was given for political reasons in order to demonstrate the rule of Abdullah-Bevin on the western side of the Jordan. The cabinet is ignoring the issue and demonstrating its unwillingness to admit the fact that the government of Israel has made a political agreement with Britain or what is known as Transjordan.

As I said before, an attempt is being made to convince the nation and the Knesset that this thing was advisable as a step towards peace. In my opinion this is peace in the Chamberlain style. Chamberlain used similar arguments—what does it matter, another piece of land, whatever happens, Hitler exists, whatever happens, we cannot change things; a little bit of Czechoslovakia here, a small piece of Europe there—what difference does it make?

Will this bring peace? No, distinguished Knesset Members! We must not—even to the smallest possible extent—aid and abet the heirs of Hitler and Mussolini who are preparing another world war. If it is of no importance, why is Bevin fighting for all that area? It would seem to be very important to him as regards his plans against the State of Israel and world peace.

The cabinet has also turned the problem of the independent Arab state in the other part of the Land of Israel upside down. No one has said that Jewish soldiers—to put matters starkly—should shed their blood so that the Arabs can have a state....The real problem is that the Arabs are fighting with ever-increasing power for their state in the other part of the Land of Israel. The State of Israel—and this is our gravest fault—has done everything it could during the past year to foil the efforts of those Arab forces fighting for an independent Arab state. The problem was not and is not that blood has to be shed for someone else; the problem is that the government of Israel has disturbed, repressed and created a situation in which freedom fighters opposing the Arab invaders had to risk their lives twice in crossing the border: once on the Israeli side and once on the side of the invader, the enemy. It is an unprecedented absurdity, that a government disturbs and represses, rather than aiding, those forces fighting alongside it against the invaders!

We should have assisted the democratic Arab forces. A democratic and friendly independent Arab state would be our best safety cordon...and, in accordance with the current agreements with Abdullah-Bevin, we will have to be in a state of constant readiness for war, and we can expect Israel to be in constant and direct danger.

The government recoiled from cooperating with democratic Arab forces. The Prime Minister informed us a week ago in this forum that he in fact opposed the establishment of the independent Arab state because he does not want Tewfik Toubi's friends to rule the other part of the Land of Israel. I know that other statements have been made, but that one is very important because it reveals the motives underlying the bourgeois Jewish policy, and of the government which represents its interests. The object of this policy is to prevent the establishment of strong, progressive forces in the Middle East, and particularly in the vicinity of the State of Israel. Instead of aiding the progressive forces the government cooperated with and encouraged feudal, fascist and anti-Israel forces. There are friendly relations with Victor Hyat—Franco's fascist agent—as well as with people like Bishop Hakim, while the forces of freedom are repressed and kept in prison camps till this day! That is the government's policy! A policy according to which President Weizmann goes to Washington without consulting the Knesset...according to which our Foreign Minister is in Washington...according to which an enslaving loan is taken from America...according to which the orientation is towards Anglo-American imperialism...endangering Israel's independence! This policy was recently expressed, amongst other things, by the fact that members of the coalition factions who are members of the World Jewish Congress in Israel, voted against the participation of this Congress in the World Peace Conference—where the best of mankind will be assembled—due to be held in Paris. The true intentions underlying these agreements with Abdullah are Israel's ap-

proval of the expansion of British and American imperialism in the Middle East.

The Prime Minister, D. Ben-Gurion: Mr. Speaker, although this is not on the agenda, and the Knesset is concerned with practical matters, I am glad that we have had this debate, because it would have been held anyway, had we discussed the loan or any other law. It would have been held in the press and at meetings, and if everyone speaks out as he pleases there, at least here all the nation hears every side of the issue, all the arguments and claims....

As regards the agreement...I have already said that it does not guarantee peace. And if someone asks me if there will be war in another six months I won't say that there won't, because that is not dependent on Israel. Whether we were glad about the U.N. resolution or not, we did not make war on it. Others did. The question is whether this agreement strengthens them and advances war, or strengthens us and keeps war at bay, to the extent that it has any influence at all. There may be war, although I do not accept the contention that all the states except for two or three are puppets. It is obvious that there is no absolute independence in this world, not even for the Great Powers; because there is mutual dependence. Naturally, small states and small nations are more dependent than others. But even poor, wild, desert nations desire a certain amount of independence. The things I have heard here about the Arabs remind me of what I heard said about the Jews, because, after all, who are they and what are they? Even when we were not a state we were something, we had a certain strength, we were not a puppet. But there are not only puppet states, there are also puppet parties, and I heard the voices of puppets too much here. Because if another country is a puppet, what business is it of mine?...But in the State of Israel there are parties which are puppets. Many of the contentions raised here are not those of Israeli parties, but of puppets, which do not interest us. They might interest someone, or the puppets might think they interest someone, but not the State of Israel. Let's take, for example...the war against imperialism. It is not Israel's concern to fight against imperialism. Its concern is to fight for its independence and strength, but it is not going to fight for or against imperialism. If some of those here want to fight, good luck to them. Though I rather doubt it, because the great fighters who have appeared this year went to America rather than the U.S.S.R. I fear that this is because they are more attached to America and American imperialism, but this is not Israel's concern.

I am concerned about the freedom of nations. The task of this government is to see to our state and our independence, to our growth, to our Jewish and Arab citizens, to Jewish immigration and absorption and to the development of the country. So that we may live here respectably, and so that the state may be the homeland of the nation that dwells in it. We believe...that we can influence the situation in the world, but it is

better for us, for a small nation, which is struggling to survive, to be modest. Those who fight imperialism would do well to consider the work that needs to be done here. I am very sorry about this debate concerning the agreement with Egypt, Transjordan and Lebanon. Some people try to censure the State of Israel in foreign forums, whether in the press or at assemblies, and we cannot do anything about it. But why does this have to be done here? The tiny state of Israel is making immense efforts—which may not be successful—but it is doing all it can to be friends with all the large and small nations of the world. It does not scrutinize them closely. And anyone who accuses the State of Israel of supporting a certain side does not speak the truth and does not serve the State of Israel by doing so, nor do I know who they serve.

We also signed these agreements in order to...uphold the principles of the U.N., which is one of the major aspects of this government's policy. This is not the sole criterion, although it is also in Israel's interests. Because we are convinced that whatever is good for the U.N. is good for us....Although if the worst should happen and the U.N. seeks to impose upon us something which is not in our favor, we will not obey....We want peace in the world, and the U.N. is one of the bastions of peace, although perhaps not the strongest....

I heard something strange from MK Sapir, namely, that Wadi Ara is not important, because it continues to the border, from where it is possible to fire. Nowhere on this earth is there a place from which it is impossible to fire....Mr. Sapir also tells us that he does not want to give up an independent Arab state. This agreement says nothing about an independent Arab state, but I would like to explain that I tried to do this in the debate on the cabinet's program, on behalf of this government. It is not our task to mold an independent Arab state. We think that this is something for the Arabs themselves to do. We think that if the land belongs to the Arabs, they should do what they want with it. (M. Wilner: The government shouldn't hinder this.) We are living in a regime where one person may speak against another. But why does MK Wilner have to say things which do not accord with the truth, claiming that I said here that we do not want an Arab state in Nablus because Tewfik Toubi will rule it? Why put words in my mouth? (M. Wilner: there are minutes.) I know. Of course there are. Why should one fear Toubi's rule in a country which doesn't exist? There are Arab countries—Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria—and I don't see Toubi ruling them. So why put words I didn't say into my mouth? I said that it is not our concern to set him to rule an Arab country, just as we do not make him our ruler here, "Don't do to others as you would not have them do to you." (A. Ben Eliezer: This isn't an Arab country, it's part of the Land of Israel.)

And now to the main point, which is not an international orientation. I know that for some people here, perhaps not so many, the only

thing in their lives is their international orientation, and they fight for or against a given side. They claim that we want war with the Arab countries surrounding us, and with the Arabs which really exist, not with those who are in someone's imagination. It could be that in Wilner's or Ben Aharon's imagination there are other Arabs, but we are not interested in imaginary Arabs, just as we are not interested in imaginary Jews. The only thing that interests us is reality. And as I have already said, we did not want this war. We did not declare war upon hearing the U.N. resolution. Not us. When we were attacked, we fought back. And when one fights, one crushes the enemy.

But our role and desire in the Arab world was not Dir Yassin. Our task was not to destroy the Arab nation....We will do our best to destroy those who fight us, but the aim of our war was not to destroy the Arab countries....

Well, people tell us that we should have fought until—and this is where the coalition and the opposition part ways. Herut says: until the Jewish state exists on both sides of the Jordan; while Sapir says, if I understand him correctly: until we establish an independent Arab state; while Ben Aharon says: until we attain the entire Land of Israel.

I'll start from the last one: a Jewish state or the entire Land of Israel. What does the latter mean? Both sides of the Jordan or this side of the Jordan? The part that is still being negotiated, or not? A Jewish state without (the events of) Dir Yassin can exist only by the dictatorship of the minority. (From the Mapam benches: With or without Galilee?) I'll come to that in a minute....A Jewish state, in the existing situation, even only in the western part of the Land of Israel, without Dir Yassin (events), is incompatible with democracy, because the number of Arabs in the western part of the Land of Israel is greater than the number of Jews. And Dir Yassin is not our program! Although acts of that kind were not their sole prerogative, we condemned that kind of thing!...Talking about the entire Land of Israel, if it is not merely an empty phrase, if the meaning behind the words is understood, and not in the distant future but now, can mean only one thing—there was once someone in that faction who had the courage to say it—it means an international mandate for the Land of Israel. If all the Land of Israel is a Jewish state, and we did not want that it should be an Arab state, we will be told that if they are in the majority, it is an Arab state, and then only an international mandate or trusteeship or some such device is possible. We did not want that. That was what the argument between us was about all the years. And we thought that the time had come for some of you who opposed it to realize their mistake. So if you are reviving that argument, do it openly! Have the courage to say what you want. Do you want there to be a democratic State of Israel throughout the Land of Israel in 1949, or do you want a Jewish state throughout the Land of Israel and

that we should drive the Arabs out, or do you want democracy within that state? How can that be a Jewish state?

We want a Jewish state, even if not in the whole country. Who is "we"? The Zionist movement and the vast majority of the Jewish population, as well as most of the pioneering movement and the soldiers and those who shed their blood! They fought for it!

The question of the Triangle and Hebron has arisen....Let us say, as has been claimed here, that from a military viewpoint we could have conquered it....But one must look ahead before one does things. If there is a war, and there may be a war, despite this recognition, and if there is, we will not only be on the defensive...what will happen? The Mandatory authorities told us that in this area there are 500,000...or 800,000 Arabs. So it is obvious that in the entire western part of the Land of Israel there would be slightly more Arabs than Jews. And let's assume that we could conquer all the western part of the Land of Israel by military means, and I'm also sure we could. What would happen then? We'd form one state. But that state would want to be democratic, there would be general elections—and we'd be in a minority. (From the floor: There are Jews in the world.) Yes, but meanwhile the majority would pass a law preventing Jews from coming here, as it has done in other countries.

So, when the choice was between the whole of the country without a Jewish state or a Jewish state without the whole of the country, we chose the latter. (From the Mapam benches: Why did you demand a Jewish state in the entire Land of Israel?) We demanded a Jewish state in the entire Land of Israel, and it would have been possible if the Mandatory authorities had kept their word and allowed a million Jews to come here, and that could have been done within two years. We don't want to take the initiative of waging war on the Arabs. I want that to be clear, and I want you to say clearly if you want us to take that initiative or not? I won't even make things difficult for you by reminding you that you claimed to uphold the brotherhood of mankind. There are many things one upholds which one later abandons. But kindly clarify the matter for yourselves first: do you want us to take the initiative of waging war on the Arabs? This government has said no. And it continues to say no. If we are forced to, we will fight, and this government has shown that it can fight.

This is the issue of the Triangle, of Hebron and, if anyone wants to go on, of Transjordan. We do not accept your program. We were not elected on the basis of that program, nor did we believe in it....We think that the establishment of the state, albeit not in the entire Land of Israel, was the greatest event in Jewish history, without mentioning previous eras, about which we are ignorant. This increased Israel's importance and enabled Jews to be saved, to immigrate to Israel, build their independence and fulfill the vision of redemption, more than any of the sin-

cerest prayers uttered throughout the generations. The sincere prayers were undoubtedly a factor, more than all your declamations. But the greatest undertaking of our time is the establishment of the Jewish state. And it could only have been established in this way. (From the floor: Only in this way! Hear, hear!)

As for the future, we always preferred deeds to empty phrases. I don't know if these agreements will bring a stable peace between us and the Arabs, because it also depends on the other side. We want it, and this is a step towards it. We do not regard the Arabs as being inferior to us because they are different from us. We rejected that approach when the world regarded us as being inferior because we were different. The Arabs are entitled to be different from us. I believe in the forces of progress in the world, and Arab progress will come from within and not from outside....We want peace with this Arab world both because we want peace and because it is vital for us.

We want the country to be filled with Jews, but not at the expense of the Arabs who dwell among us. Those Arabs who live in our midst are citizens with equal rights to the Jews. But we established the state—and I want the three Arab representatives here to be aware of this—not only for its current inhabitants. And immigration is not achieved solely by declamations....Enabling Jews to immigrate to Israel is one of the fundamental purposes for which this state exists. Immigrating to Israel does not mean that one takes a trip from the concentration camps of Germany to Tel Aviv or Haifa, but that one puts down roots here. And that is not achieved by fine declarations about the other side of the Jordan.

We think that peace, even if only for six months, is better than no peace for six months. Because that will enable us to bring more Jews here. We fear for our safety. We also know that even if one signs a peace treaty war can still break out. But we regard our security as being bound up with increasing the Jewish population of this state. And that requires a stable regime, even if it is only temporary. The sole criterion for us for this agreement and others is not how it will affect other countries (we are not their puppets), it is our task to look after our own interests. We are not so short-sighted. A Jew cannot help thinking about the whole world, that is his nature, his tradition. But there is no one in the world who will look after us....The countries of the world can manage without us, even if all the Jews are wiped off the face of the earth. There will be the "forces of yesterday" and the "forces of today," but there will be no Jewish nation. So we must look after ourselves. We measure and will continue to measure every political step by only one yardstick: if it enhances the state's ability to survive and absorb immigrants, strengthens its security, aids in enhancing the standard of living of its inhabitants and brings it nearer to fulfilling the historical vision of the Jewish nation.

Don't these agreements do just that? We don't have to recognize Transjordan. People played that silly game with us, refusing to recognize us when we already existed....We don't care if people recognize us or not. When I was asked in the summer: "What price are you prepared to pay to be accepted into the U.N.?" I replied: "The membership fee. No more." Because we are interested in existing. If something exists and it has life, it is recognized. And so, if we recognize Transjordan or not, it exists. MK Begin has made fun of it...but the reality exists.

Transjordan has soldiers, and they were here. They are in Latrun and Jerusalem and they tried to cut off the road to Eilat. That is reality. I don't say that this reality will endure forever, but that is reality. We had to fight them, and some of our boys were killed. In some cases we incurred losses but won, and in others we incurred losses and lost against this force. And there are other forces. They don't need our recognition. They didn't ask it of us, nor did we give it.

There are two ways open to us: either we fight them and they destroy us, or we destroy them. We say: we don't want to fight them if they don't fight us. So we made a military agreement which says: you mustn't move beyond this point, and for our part we promise not to move beyond that point. But there has been a change in the borders. Beforehand the border was more to the west, towards the sea, and further north of the Jezreel Valley. Now that border has shifted further east of Tulkarm, and further south of Wadi Ara.

What happened? Do you want to make an impression on people? Do you really think the public is so naive?...Is it so bad that we established something without bloodshed for once?

If bloodshed is an ideal then a tragedy really has happened. But if the objective can be achieved without bloodshed, we are content. We are glad we reached Eilat without shedding blood, thanks to the agreement, and we are proud of it! (A. Ben Aharon: Without shedding blood!) Yes, we reached Eilat without shedding blood; trust me, I know at least as much as you and your colleagues in these matters! (From the Mapam benches: It's quite ridiculous to say that we reached Eilat without shedding blood!) Please don't interrupt me! I didn't interrupt you! There is freedom of speech here!

It was our objective to reach Eilat. We reached Eilat by peaceful means, through an agreement with Egypt, and we reinforced our positions there through it. There is no such thing as getting things safely and easily. We were in Eilat once and were forced to leave it. We were in the entire country once and were driven out of it. But today we are safer and better entrenched in Eilat than we were before the agreement was signed, and we are to be congratulated for it.

As to the matter of the railway line, which Mr. Sapir dismisses so lightly for some reason, I don't know if the railway will remain there, but in my opinion it is preferable for a railway which is not being used to

be within the sphere where our army operates and not in that of another army. That's the difference. I don't think that Transjordan wanted it, but I think that what is good for us is also good for the other side. Others might disagree with me, but we don't think that what is good for us must be bad for the Arabs and vice versa. There is someone in the world who wants us to be constantly at odds with the Arabs. But we will try to minimize this tendency as far as we can.

The sole criterion for all these agreements is are they preferable to not having an agreement, not whether they are better than miracles. If a miracle occurs and the Messiah comes—and those who believe are convinced that this will happen—there will be peace in the world...but we have to save the Jewish people by natural means until this miracle happens. And as far as natural means go, these three agreements have advanced our interests, established our position, increased immigration possibilities and the chances for life, peace and friendship with the Arabs. Nothing is guaranteed, nor will it be, even if the entire Land of Israel is in our hands. But this step has brought us forward, and that is the only criterion. We don't accept any other criterion of puppet-parties. We are also convinced that if it is good for us, it is good for the world, because we are a new nation and have no pretensions to ruling the world. What is essential for us is peace...and that the the differences between countries do not lead to war. We believe that it is possible for two regimes to live in peace. But that criterion is enough for us, and in this respect we have defended the interests of the Jewish nation, of this country, of the U.N. and of all the parties to the U.N.

The Knesset shall say whether it regards this as furthering our interests, though not the final redemption or the ultimate aim. This government and this Knesset have not undertaken to achieve that. They undertook only a partial role for a period of no more than four years, during which time full redemption cannot be achieved....The Knesset must decide whether...the agreements we have signed with the Arab countries are really a step towards what we want to achieve, as we presented in our election program, and as most of the population and, I'm sure, most of the world approved.

D.Z. Pinkas (Religious Front): I would like to suggest, as a point of order...that the House decide whether...to accept Mr. Begin's proposal...or transfer the matter to the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee. Naturally, a no-confidence motion cannot be transferred to the Committee....

(The House votes in favor of transferring the matter to the Committee, rather than accepting Mr. Begin's motion of no confidence.)