

July 31, 1958

PERSONAL

Dear Dr. Elson:

Since my first note to you on the subject, I have been pondering carefully the interesting letter you left with Jim Hagerty. Because of the earnest thought you have devoted to Mid East problems and your personal acquaintance with the region, I am stealing the time to write you again, at greater length than normally I could do. Even so I can do no more than to set out, in random fashion, a few of the factors in these problems.

First of all, as I said in my previous letter, I find myself in general agreement with your conclusions. I concur in the advice, "Keep Israel out of this crisis completely. If possible do not even mention the word." The difficulty here is that in any conversation with an Arab, he is the one that brings up the subject of Israel. Underlying all Arab thought is resentment toward the existence of Israel and an underlying determination, some day, to get rid of it. So while I agree that in this crisis we should try to prevent Israel from being a principal subject in our discussions and planning, yet it is necessary to remember that it is antipathy against that State, practically universal among all Arabs, that provides fertile ground for Nasser's hate propaganda.

I assure you that I never fall in any communication with Arab leaders, oral or written, to stress the importance of the spiritual factor in our relationships. I have argued that belief in God should create between them and us the common purpose of opposing atheistic communism. However, in a conversation of this kind with King Saud, he remarked that while it was well to remember that the Communists are no friends of ours, yet Arabs are forced to realize that Communism is a long ways off, Israel is a bitter enemy in



our own back yard. But the religious approach offers, I agree, a direct path to Arab interest.

Next, this Administration has never been antagonistic to Arab nationalism. Our own history as well as our sense of justice impel us to support peoples to achieve their own legitimate nationalistic aspirations. I think that possibly we have failed to make this clearly apparent to our Arab friends. The Cairo and Moscow radios have too long been falsely drumming in their ears the charge of Western imperialism and the clear purpose of Western nations, including the United States, to dominate all Arabs.

This brings to mind the need for a better and more consistent operation of our information services throughout the Arab region and indeed, through all the Muslim countries. George V. Allen, now in charge of our information services, is the most capable and knowledgeable man we have yet had in that post. He is struggling hard to find the facilities and the techniques whereby we, through friendly Arab spokesmen, can reach over good communications, the entire populations with the message of truth and fact about the West.

You refer to "a position of strength." I agree that we can be successful only when we operate from such a position. But we know that strength comprehends far more than military power.

For instance: There is an old military saying that "Nothing positive can be accomplished except from a strong base." So our position of strength must comprise not only the necessary military force in critical spots with proper support and reserves behind it, but the United States must itself be a "strong base" out of which positive action can be projected as necessary.

I want to pursue this thought a moment. The real strength of America must be described in values that are intangible. It is a truism to say that the strength of democracy is public



PERSONAL

opinion. When there is a truly unified public opinion there is a tremendous power generated by our free people. Further, when that public opinion is based upon knowledge and real understanding of the issues involved, then this tremendous power can produce and sustain constructive action, almost without limit.



But the prerequisite for such strength, I repeat, is knowledge and understanding. An important element is such an understanding that purely military defenses, no matter how powerful, can never insure any nation's security. Aggression that is political, psychological and economic can outflank military forces because of our failure to provide the necessary counter measures in those fields. The problem then is to create in the United States a true understanding of our proper relationship to the less developed countries, including the Mid East, as well as the measures necessary to keep those relationships healthy. I do not need to recite to you the efforts that have been made in this direction. That effort has been focussed, in late months, primarily upon the Mutual Security Program. To inform the country on the essentials of this program there was organized under Eric Johnston a bipartisan army of crusaders. There has been a very great deal of gratifying evidence that this message has reached a vast portion of our population; but there is still a serious question that the resulting understanding has been forcefully communicated, in turn, to the members of the Congress. Indeed, it is clear that there has not yet been created the determined, unified, aroused public opinion that would demand from the Congress the kind of support and action for these programs which must be carried out effectively, imaginatively and honestly if we are to preserve the peace and lead the world to a better life.

By and large you are well aware of the basic purposes, hopes and efforts of the American government in the foreign field. Those efforts in the Mid East are based upon convictions that largely parallel your own. Yet I feel that all of us must do

PERSONAL

more, here at home, if we are to be successful abroad. I have made speeches on this subject, three or four of them on nation-wide television. But I believe teachers, business leaders, labor leaders and, indeed, including and especially the clergy, ought to be active in this work.

If all of us are to be active and effective, it must be on the basis that we have studied the problem realistically. Our purposes must be lofty and we must demand from ourselves a full measure of dedication to the principles that have inspired this nation in the great moments of its history. We may, and probably should, be emotional and sentimental in the proper sense, but we must come right down to earth if our conclusions are to be realistic and our efforts productive.



Even among some of our very able friends we apparently have not had this kind of thinking and conclusion. Just recently I had a letter from your close associate, Dr. Lowry, a man whom I respect and like. But I cite some of his words, in communications he has sent to me, to support my belief that while his purposes are correct, some of his analyses and conclusions are wide of the mark.

I send along to you an article he wrote in which I have marked one paragraph.

The charge he makes in that paragraph against three Presidents is, to my mind, completely unsupportable. He notes that in certain periods our military strength has been so great as to be awesome. Yet he deplores the fact that, possessing this strength, America has not so used it when needed, even though "No enemy would have dared stand against it."

The meaning that I get from this paragraph is that he believes that preventive war should either have been waged or at least

threatened upon a number of occasions in the past two decades.

He ignores the fact that no Congress could ever have been induced to declare such a war. But his failure to ponder what such a venture would have brought about is mystifying. War is war, no matter by what adjective it is described. His idea is that all of these Presidents quailed before heavy responsibility. No matter what else might be said of President Roosevelt or of President Truman, I think that no one properly could charge them with being cowardly either in the physical or in the moral sense. Truman in standing firmly against Soviet intentions in Iran in 1946, his pronouncements on Turkey and Greece in 1947, and his reaction to the Korea invasion, even if that invasion came about as a result of our own neglect, were all examples of courageous action. It seems to me that for a man who has never had the responsibility of conducting America's relationships with the remainder of the world to take it upon himself to make this sweeping criticism rather destroys my confidence in his judgment. This I say with some sadness because in his personal letter to me he expresses some thoughts that are more than appealing. They are in some instances very penetrating.



Incidentally he expressed some approbation concerning a column that I also enclose for you. You will note that this column makes the charge that the sending of troops into Lebanon signified a complete turn-about in American policy. Actually it did nothing of the kind. The Lebanon incident was the natural outcome of doctrines, beliefs, convictions and policies that have been upheld by this Government, in every kind of situation through a number of years.

I think I need not recite them for you. You know of the Formosa, Viet Nam, Guatemala and Iran incidents. In the solution of them real risks were run.

So what I am saying is that we cannot reach proper conclusions in these matters by thinking only with the top of our minds. We must get down to the fundamentals of human behavior, values and aspirations. We must be true to our religious heritage in recognizing clearly the basic principles by which we must attempt to guide our nation's destiny. But we must not fail to recognize that it is humans who must make temporal decisions. If those decisions are to conform to fundamental convictions, are to be logical and timely, there must be earnest and deep study and contemplation not only by officials, but by the people who produce the power through which such important projects are implemented.

The phrase "Will to Greatness" is an expression of a noble ideal; it will be achieved only if all of us, leaders and followers, each in his own sphere, uses his heart, his brain and his body to make it so.

With warm regard,

Sincerely,



Reverend Edward L. R. Elson, D. D.
The National Presbyterian Church
1764 N Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

PERSONAL

P.S.: I repeat that I very much liked your succinct, logical presentation of your ideas.