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SPECIAL DOCUMENT

THE 1953 QIBYA RAID REVISITED: EXCERPTS FROM MOSHE SHARETT'S DIARIES

INTRODUCED BY WALID KHALIDI AND

ANNOTATED BY NEIL CAPLAN

Moshe Sharett (1894–1965), Israeli Mapai leader, was the second head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency (1933–48), Israel's first foreign minister (1948–56), and Israel's second prime minister (January 1954–June 1956). His Personal Diary, Yoman Ishi¹ covers the period from 9 October 1953 to November 1957, or the crucial years leading to the invasion of Egypt by Britain, France, and Israel in October 1956 and the year after it.

The diary has been available since 1978 in an unabridged eight-volume Hebrew edition of some 2,500 pages.² It was published by Sharett's son Yaakov over the objections of a special committee formed to supervise the publication of his father's works.³ With the approval of the Sharett family, Yaakov decided to bypass the committee to ensure that the diary was published unexpurgated.⁴

Selections from the diary were published by Yaakov in the Israeli daily Ma'ariv on the first anniversary of Moshe Sharett's death, creating a sensation in Israeli political circles.⁵ In 1980 Livia Rokach published a booklet of selections in English,⁶ and in 1996 the Institute of Palestine Studies in Beirut published 650 pages of

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1. Sharett's diaries of the Mandate period were entitled *Yoman Medini* (Political diary).
2. Moshe Sharett, *Yoman Ishi* (Personal diary), ed. Yaakov Sharett, 8 vols. (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Ma'ariv, 1978).
3. Established after Sharett's death, the committee comprised mainly representatives of bodies he had headed, such as the Jewish Agency, Foreign Ministry, and Am Oved; most were Mapai members.
4. *Yoman Ishi*, introduction by Yaakov Sharett.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Livia Rokach (with an introduction by Noam Chomsky), *Israel's Sacred Terrorism: A Study Based on Moshe Sharett's Personal Diary and Other Documents* (Belmont, MA: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1980).

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excerpts superbly translated into Arabic from the original Hebrew by Ahmad Khalifeh.⁷

The excerpts reproduced here, with permission, are from the long-awaited first extensive English edition, forthcoming, prepared by Neil Caplan and Yaakov Sharett, the latter of the Society to Commemorate Moshe Sharett, Tel Aviv.⁸ The entries run from 13 October 1953 to 21 December 1953 and pertain exclusively to the 14–15 October raid by the Israeli army's Unit 101 against the village of Qibya in the West Bank, then under Jordanian rule. The raid was conceived and planned by a twenty-five-year-old Israeli major, Ariel Scheinerman (later Sharon), creator and commander of Unit 101. The first entry of the diary below is dated 13 October 1953, the day before Sharon's raid.

The general context of the raid was framed by the aftermath of the 1948 war. Some 750,000 Palestinian refugees had fled in panic or been forced out of the some dozen Palestinian and mixed towns and some 500 Palestinian villages incorporated into Israel during the war. About a third of these refugees now lived in the West Bank. The 1949 armistice line between Jordan and Israel was some 400 miles long. More than 100 Palestinian farming villages in the foothills just inside the West Bank had lost most of their fertile lands in the plains below to Israel, just over the border. But because the village buildings remained standing, the inhabitants did not qualify as refugees under the newly established UNRWA regime, which required loss of both homes and means of livelihood in order to grant the refugee status necessary for receiving relief. Infiltrators from these now impoverished border villages, as well as from refugee camps farther inland, crossed over into Israel to harvest their erstwhile fields or in search of food, water, or revenge. Israeli casualties fell as a result of infiltrator attacks, while Palestinian casualties were inflicted by Israeli army raids across the border into the West Bank.

The political scene inside Israel during the period covered by these excerpts was unusually uncertain. David Ben-Gurion, the paramount Israeli leader and first prime minister, had already decided to take an indefinite leave from office. His twin mantle of prime minister and defense minister was expected to fall on Moshe Sharett and Pinhas Lavon, respectively. Ben-Gurion's formal leave did not start until 8 December 1953, and his prolonged transitional disengagement from his posts coincided with the weeks that preceded and followed Sharon's raid on Qibya.

For some time the Israeli leadership had been grappling with how best to counter the Palestinian border infiltrations. Among the loudest and most persistent voices advocating escalation and aggressive reprisals was that of Ariel Sharon, who, though unmentioned in Sharett's Qibya entries, had already established a reputation in Israeli military circles with such exploits on the Jordan border as the killing of peasant women on their way to wells just inside Israel and the seizure of Arab Legionnaires as hostages from the Jordanian side of the border.⁹

In 1953, Sharon was commissioned to train a special unit in the regular army, which he himself named Unit 101, to implement the tactics he preached. By the

7. Moshe Sharett, *Yaumiyyat Shakhsiyya*, trans. Ahmad Khalifeh (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996).

8. The work is translated by Reuven Danieli and Yaakov Sharett.

9. Uzi Benziman, *Sharon: An Israeli Caesar* (New York: Adama Books, 1985), pp. 39–40 and p. 36, respectively.

autumn of that year, he was ready and led his troops across the armistice lines against al-Burj refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, then under Egyptian administration, killing twenty inhabitants,¹⁰ including women and children. This elicited protests even from his (thoroughly indoctrinated) men against his targeting of women, to which he had replied that the women were the “whores of the Arab infiltrators.”¹¹

On the night of 14–15 October 1953, Sharon led his men against Qibya, a village of some 2,000 inhabitants. This was in retaliation for an attack the night before by infiltrators from the West Bank (though not from Qibya) in which a woman and her two children were killed in the Israeli settlement of Yabud. The decision to retaliate for Yabud “in the firmest possible manner” was taken collectively at a meeting attended by Defense Minister Lavon, Chief of General Staff Mordechai Makleff, Chief Operations Officer Moshe Dayan, and Ben-Gurion.¹²

For the two months prior to the Yabud incident, conditions had been relatively quiet along the Jordanian-Israeli border, with no casualties reported by either side since August. But earlier, between 1 January and August 1953, three Israelis had been killed and twelve wounded by infiltrators, and eleven Palestinians had been killed and seventeen wounded by Israeli army actions in mostly small-scale incidents in the West Bank.¹³ What was novel about the Qibya raid was its scale and savagery. The “daring and ambitious” plan of the raid was outlined by Sharon and developed at army headquarters into two alternatives. The first involved a temporary occupation of the village, blowing up mainly of its public buildings, and forcing the inhabitants to flee. The second involved the “total destruction of the village and maximum harm to the villagers, again forcing them to flee.”¹⁴ Sharon was authorized by Dayan to choose between the two options, and there was little doubt as to which he would settle upon.¹⁵ His orders to his men—103 from a paratroop battalion and twenty from Unit 101—included the transport of 1,300 pounds of explosives.¹⁶ According to General John Bagot Glubb, the head of the Arab Legion, the explosive charges were made into packets to fit on a man’s back, and each sapper placed his charge against a house.¹⁷ Forty-five houses were blown up, and sixty-nine villagers were killed.¹⁸ All the victims were civilians, three-quarters of them women and children.¹⁹ The number of Qibya’s victims was four

10. Benny Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars, 1949–1956* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 242–43.

11. Benziman, *Sharon: An Israeli Caesar*, pp. 49–50.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

13. “Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine, Major General Vagn Bennike Before the Security Council,” 27 October 1953, appendix B (hereafter The Bennike Report), in E. H. Hutchison, *Violent Truce: A Military Observer Looks at the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1956), pp. 154–56.

14. Benziman, *Sharon: An Israeli Caesar*, p. 52.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

17. John Bagot Glubb, *A Soldier with the Arabs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957), p. 310.

18. Benziman, *Sharon: An Israeli Caesar*, p. 53.

19. Glubb, *A Soldier with the Arabs*, p. 313. Glubb gives the number of killed as sixty-six. He also notes (p. 315) that none of the paramilitary National Guard stationed in Qibya was killed or wounded.

times the total number of Israelis and Palestinians killed on the Israeli-Jordanian border in the previous ten months.

In his report to the UN Security Council, Major General Vagn Bennike, chief of staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which supervised the armistice regime on the Israeli-Jordanian border, described the raid as follows:

*Bullet-ridden bodies near the doorways and multiple bits in the doors of the demolished homes indicated that the inhabitants had been forced to remain inside while their homes were blown up over them.*²⁰

Qibya won Sharon the adulation of Israel's political and military hawks and greatly advanced his professional career. Even Ben-Gurion, no Gandhi, was favorably awed, believing at first that the leader of the operation must have had an Irgunist or Lehi background rather than a Laborite moshav and Haganah one.²¹ To the school of the "only language the Arabs understand is force," Qibya was at once an inspiration and a prototype, and its imprint is unmistakable in many Israeli military operations since. Fifty years after Qibya, Sharon's frame of mind is firmly moored in that dawn of 14–15 October 1953, and for him Beirut in 1982 and Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 are but grandiose elaborations of the same rationale.

If Sharon stands out in the light of Qibya as the Ugly Israeli, it is Sharett who is unquestionably the obverse persona, with little competition from the Shimon Peres of today. Sharett had been informed in general terms that a reprisal was in preparation and had opposed even the "routine" form he assumed it would take. His opposition was neutralized by Ben-Gurion and Lavon. When he learned the details of Qibya, he said he would have "raised hell" had he had reason to fear "such slaughter." Sharett was thus deeply and palpably shaken by Qibya, not only because as head of the Foreign Ministry he was at the receiving end of a "deluge" of bitter international condemnation, or even because, in that capacity, he had to lead the shovel brigade in the tracks of Qibya's sponsors: Ben-Gurion, Dayan, and Lavon.

Fundamentally, Qibya was an affront to Sharett's deepest human instincts, his worldview, his vision of Israel and its future locus in the Middle East—a light at the end of the tunnel for Arabs to keep in mind. But Sharett also stands as a tragic, almost Hamlet-like figure, torn in opposite directions: his abhorrence of the deed as a man of decency and his stoic sense of duty to his country—hence his collusion with Ben-Gurion in the fabrication, in the full awareness of its preposterousness, of the lie that the perpetrators of Qibya were not members of Israel's regular army but border vigilantes.

Particularly intriguing about these excerpts, apart from Sharett's personal drama, are the effort and time invested by the inner Israeli establishment, political and military, in trying through spin and subterfuge to disassociate itself from its

20. The Bennike Report.

21. Benziman, *Sharon: An Israeli Caesar*, p. 54.

patent responsibility for Qibya. Indeed, the bulk of Sharett's entries are taken up with this issue.

What this reflects is the prevalence at the time of a climate of opinion in the major Western countries, including Jewish opinion, intolerant of excessive Israeli military action, as exemplified in the UN Security Council resolution of 24 November 1953 expressing the "strongest censure"²² of Qibya as well as in Winston Churchill's outburst of moral outrage, despite his historic championship of Zionism, as reported by Sharett in the Diary.

Reflecting on all this, one cannot help pondering how far Israel has since traveled in anesthetizing this climate of opinion—to such a degree that Qibya's author (then generally unknown) could be hailed today, at the very height of Operation Defensive Shield, his most recent magnification of the relatively modest Qibya prototype, as a "man of peace" by the incumbent of the Oval Office.

TUESDAY, 13 OCTOBER 1953

. . . As I was leaving the conference hall where the Political Committee had convened, [Acting Minister of Defense Pinhas] Lavon joined me and told me that a retaliation operation is about to be mounted in response to the recent incidents in the Jordan border area. These reached a climax with the killing of a woman and her two children in Yahud late the previous night. . . .

WEDNESDAY, 14 OCTOBER 1953

. . . Gideon [Rafael] came in. He knows that a retaliation is planned for the killing of the woman and children in Yahud. But only today there was a meeting of the Israel-Jordan Mixed Armistice Commission [IJMAC] at which a forceful denunciation of the act was adopted. Jordan's representative in the IJMAC also voted in favor of the resolution and said his government took it upon herself to do everything to prevent such atrocities in the future. Under these circumstances, is it wise to retaliate, even more so when we are already in conflict with the UN in the north and south?¹ . . .

I telephoned Lavon and gave him my opinion. He said he'd consult with B.G. [Ben-Gurion] . . .

[Later,] in the middle of [an interdepartmental] consultation [Lieutenant Colonel Aryeh] Shalev [IDF liaison for armistice affairs] handed Lavon a letter from [Major General Vagn] Bennike, [chief of staff of the UN Truce Supervision Organization, reporting that] General [Sir John Bagot] Glubb, commander of the Arab Legion, has addressed a message to our chief of staff [Mordechai Makleff] stating that he is willing to accept the help of an Israeli bloodhound to track down the murderers of the family from Yahud inside Jordanian territory. The announcement also stated that Glubb has resolved to uproot this evil.

Shalev asked if under the circumstances there was "any change." Pinhas replied: "No change." I interrupted the meeting and called Pinhas out into the corridor. I asked

22. George J. Tomeh, ed., *United Nations Resolutions on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, vol. 1, 1947–74 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1975), UNSC Resolution no. 101 (1953) of 24 November 1953, p. 135.

him if they were indeed about to take [military] action. He said yes. I said it was a serious mistake and explained my view. I also relied on precedents. After all, it has never been proven that retaliatory action helps in curbing terroristic infiltration in the final balance. Pinhas characteristically smiled. He didn't try to contradict my remarks in any way, but he remained unmoved. It seems that the acting minister of defense feels obliged to provide satisfaction to his people. B.G., he said, hadn't agreed with me—that means it's two against one. We went back into the room and I wrote him a note: "One day there's going to be a resignation over this." We did not return to the subject.

When the meeting ended I took paper in hand and wrote B.G. asking him to take over the reins of government immediately. Next Sunday I will no longer chair the cabinet meeting as acting P.M. I reminded him that I had already explained the peculiarity of my position to him during [the Jewish festival of] Sukkot. Since then the situation had become unbearable. . . . And now, this decision in favor of retaliation was just too much. I was against it, but B.G. thought otherwise, and the decision has gone his way. There is no disputing his moral authority, but I am, after all, officially responsible at the moment, and why should I take the responsibility for an action to which I had objected as acting P.M., even though my opinion was not accepted? I entrusted the letter to Pinhas who returned to Tel Aviv, where B.G. today conferred with the General Zionist cabinet ministers. . . .

THURSDAY, 15 OCTOBER 1953

. . . Arrived at the F.M. Gideon told me about the events of the night. According to the first reports from the other side, over thirty houses were destroyed in one village alone—Qibya. There has never been a retaliation of such size or force.

I paced back and forth in my room at a loss what to do and utterly depressed by this feeling of impotence. Finally I decided to propose at the next cabinet meeting that any decision regarding retaliatory action be subject to confirmation in advance by the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense. . . .

Horror gripped me upon hearing the Jordanian Radio Ramallah's description of the devastation in that village of Qibya.² Dozens of houses destroyed and dozens of people killed. I can just imagine the commotion in Arab capitals and those of the West tomorrow. . . .

FRIDAY, 16 OCTOBER 1953

. . . As I left my home after the meal, two envelopes were brought to me—one from the American embassy and one from the British. . . . Sir Francis Evans, the British ambassador, conveys in the name of Her Majesty's Government a scathing and most severe denunciation of the dreadful act in the village of Qibya.³

. . . During a phone call to Washington, I also talked to Reuven Shiloah, who was eager to know the background to B.G.'s resignation. I promised to write it up. I found that Reuven well understands my position in the complications of the last few days, especially in regard to Qibya. I told him the matter had been decided by B.G. and Lavon against me and that I had not known about the nature or extent of the operation until afterwards.

Indeed, it should be stressed that when I opposed the retaliatory action I did not imagine there would be such bloodshed. I was thinking of a retaliatory action of the earlier variety, which had become routine, and even to that I objected. If I had had any reason to fear such a slaughter, I would have raised hell.

Telephone conversations with Walter [Eytan, director-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] and [ministry spokesman] Michael Elizur regarding our portrayal in the press of the attack on Qibya. The IDF has carefully considered this question, was searching for a plausible public explanation, and wanted to know how we intended to explain it. During an IDF consultation with our people, Shmuel Bendor suggested maintaining that the army had had no part in the operation; that border area residents, incensed at the recent murders and thirsting for vengeance, had risen as one and slaughtered their neighbors. This is a completely implausible story which would make us a laughingstock. It is clear to any observer that the IDF had a hand in the matter. The army itself rejected this tactic and came to the conclusion that the IDF's role could not be covered up. I told Walter and instructed Elizur that the Foreign Ministry spokesman should say nothing about the reprisal, except for stressing the murders that had preceded it. Best let the IDF spokesman wiggle out of the predicament as best he could. I do not see why the Foreign Ministry should assume any explicit responsibility for something that took place despite its objection.

SATURDAY, 17 OCTOBER 1953

At 10:00 Walter, Gideon, Tekoah, Katriel Katz, and Moshe Yuval for a consultation. Before we started Fati [Yehoshafat Harkabi, deputy chief of Military Intelligence] dropped in on his way to a meeting at the General Staff, and asked to know the contents of the British letter and if we had received any more protests. I emphasized the letter's sting—its reference to the Tripartite Declaration⁴ and the Anglo-Jordanian Defense Treaty. I asked Fati how yesterday's deliberation had ended in regard to the phrasing of the IDF spokesman's announcement about Qibya: whether to admit that the army had a hand in the matter or to deny any connection. His answer was that it had been decided to make no response at all. The formula I had heard, claiming that the army knew nothing, was not publicized. He told me about movements of Arab Legion units from across the Jordan River to the West Bank in two spearheads— from Irbid to the Nablus district and from Amman to Jerusalem. I did not consider these movements to be preparations for an attack, but merely vigilance against aggression on our part. They could not have failed to be impressed by the assault on Qibya as part of a calculated plan to spark a war, or at least a willingness to accept war as a repercussion of the operation. Fati reported that according to Radio Ramallah fifty-six bodies had already been removed from the piles of rubble. . . .

A number of telegrams from Eliahu Elath, our ambassador to London, were brought to me. The most important dealt with his conversation with Selwyn Lloyd, minister of state for foreign affairs, which included a demand that we pay compensation for the destruction and killings in Qibya and similar delicacies of the kind. Elath answered well enough, but to us he addresses most pertinent questions with regard to the logic of our action.⁵

At 3:00 [Chargé d'Affaires Francis H.] Russell and Milton Fried, an attaché at the American embassy, appeared. With me was Gideon. Russell's face was gloomy. Qibya hung in the air. I began by expressing my satisfaction at Eric Johnston's coming, and I

promised any and all assistance to help him carry out his mission of defusing the tension in the region. . . . Then I went on to events on the Jordanian border. I said I would not say a word in justification of the attack on Qibya, but I must warn against any detaching of this action from the chain of events. I announced our willingness for a high-level meeting to get the situation under control and laid the blame for the restive situation on Jordan's impotence or lack of goodwill. From this point on I conducted an offensive against U.S. policy as one of the elements in the encouragement of the Arabs and the isolation of Israel. . . .

When they left I had a short farewell talk with Katriel Salomon, who is returning to his post in London as our military attaché. . . . Katriel tells me that Rosser, the chief [British] military attaché [in Israel], had talked to him in an agitated mood about the impression in England made by events. There they understand an eye for an eye, but definitely not fifty eyes for an eye; an outburst for an outburst, but not a planned military response for the rampage of a gang. . . .

I arrived home at 8:30. Aubrey [Abba Eban] called to report that the three Great Powers were prosecuting us before the Security Council for our action at Qibya. We have certainly prepared ourselves a pretty pudding. Who's going to eat it now? . . .

SUNDAY, 18 OCTOBER 1953

This was an excruciating day, grating the nerves and exhausting the spirit.

At 8:00 I left for the office. I readied myself for the detailed report I shall give this morning to the cabinet meeting: the conflict over the Jordan [waters diversion] my last conversation with the Dane [Bennike]; its repercussions in Washington; the serious crises caused by the Qibya operation.

Walter, Gideon, and Joe came in and we reviewed the panorama, which had changed altogether since last evening. The three Western powers' decision to convene the Security Council to discuss the tension in the Middle East in light of the recent complications—i.e., those which can be ascribed to us—constitutes a serious turn which threatens us with severe damage. It is clear that we face one of our most perilous campaigns since the establishment of the state—perhaps the most serious since the War of Independence, at any rate much more serious than our struggles over the Huleh drainage and the Suez Canal closure to our shipping. We must meet this new trial neither defensively nor apologetically, but in a spirit of rebuke and on the offensive. . . . Accordingly we can now widen it even more and make an effort to shift the weight from complaints against us to our complaints against the Arab states. . . .

The cabinet meeting opened in an atmosphere of unusual gravity and tension. Everyone was enveloped in a feeling that this was an hour of crisis and trial. My report lasted an hour and forty minutes. I spoke quietly, in an effort to suppress my inner turmoil and not spoil the factual account with polemics. I strove to confront my colleagues with the gravity of the present imbroglio and the harsh possibility of international complications in store for us if we do not wisely take steps to relieve the tension. I concluded with three proposals: to submit to the Security Council a severe indictment of the Arab states, especially Jordan; to stop work in the north pending the Security Council debate; to issue a statement in regard to Qibya expressing regret for what had happened while laying the blame squarely on Jordan. . . .

Moshe Shapira . . . focused all his moral fervor on condemning the harshness of the Qibya operation. During the course of his remarks he asked me if I, as foreign minister, had known about this action in advance. I sent B.G. a note and asked his opinion. Could I abstain from replying? B.G. had earlier remarked that he had not been asked about the Qibya action, for he was on vacation, but if he had been asked he would have approved it. This was a rather peculiar articulation of the facts. He had definitely been asked [by Lavon], even if he seemingly was on vacation, and had not only expressed his opinion, but his opinion had tilted the decision against mine [by a majority of two to one]. Now, when I asked him, he replied with a question: Had I known about the matter in advance? This too was peculiar, for Pinhas Lavon had specifically told him that I was opposed to the action. I pointed out the facts by way of reply— all this in an exchange of notes. He wrote that Pinhas would soon be speaking. No doubt he would report my opposition himself.

But this was not the case. Lavon's chivalry did not extend to such heights. He focused on the fundamental political aspect of both our confrontation with the UN in the north and the explosive retaliatory action. It is interesting and most enlightening to witness the metamorphosis taking place in the thinking and entire disposition of this intelligent and talented man, who also evidently possesses strong control over his inner brakes— to release or block them as necessary— now that he has tasted control over the mightiest machine in the country: the Israel Defense Forces. How much had his adaptation to the prevailing atmosphere within the officers' corps transported him beyond previous political principles and the basic values to which he had always adhered. He spoke in favor of "stiff-neckedness," not worrying about transitory difficulties, not losing one's nerve, and so on and so forth. Both Golda Myerson and Dov Joseph followed suit in the same vein.

The debate went on for hour after hour. B.G. sent me a note at one point saying he was already totally exhausted as a result of this one meeting. Fatigue spread among other ministers as well, and as the discussion continued some ministers left for the adjoining room to smoke or talk. When my turn came to reply everyone reconvened and rapt attention once again held sway. I spoke at length again, no longer to report the facts, but to get at the root of the problems at hand and clarify basic conceptions. I made a supreme effort to subdue my agitation, but it burst out. I warned against the glaring contradiction between our objective, concrete total dependency on the help and sympathy of the world and our subjective mental isolation from the world, insulating ourselves in complete numbness toward the response of world public opinion to our actions and behavior. I condemned our narrow-mindedness in obstinately refusing to budge from a position taken along one section of the front while at the same time endangering all other sections and risking utter defeat. I brought up B.G.'s attitude in the morning as an example, when he had not seen any need at all to devote this meeting to a review of our relations with the UN and Great Powers, as if nothing had happened and business was as usual. I rejected the strictly formal and cerebral approach to the problem of the work stoppage and protested the lack of any practical sensibility and psychological understanding of the straits we had entered by defying the authority of the UN. . . . I replied to Shapira's question by relating the story in its entirety, and I denounced the Qibya affair, which had presented us to the entire world as bloodthirsty bandits capable of large-scale slaughter, who did not care, evidently, if it led to an outbreak of war. I warned that the stain that was cast on us in the eyes of the world would not be washed away for many years. . . .

It was decided that a statement concerning Qibya be issued, and B.G. was entrusted with its composition. I again demanded some expression of regret. B.G. strongly insisted on not admitting the army's responsibility for the action. Border area inhabitants, whose patience in the face of unceasing murder had been exhausted, had taken the law into their own hands in retribution. All of the frontier settlements were, after all, rich in arms and many of the settlers are ex-soldiers. Is it any wonder they had arisen and done what they did? I said that no one in the world would believe us and that we were showing ourselves as prevaricators and deceivers. But I could not seriously demand a statement that the IDF had done the deed, for such a statement would in no way allow any self-condemnation and would have only shown our defiant support of this monstrous bloodshed. . . .

The meeting ended at 3:30. In other words, it had lasted five and a half hours.⁶ A second meeting was scheduled for tomorrow morning to hear B.G.'s survey of the IDF. At the end of the meeting B.G. showed me a letter with a proposal that Moshe Dayan fly to New York as well. He asked for my assent and I gave it readily. No doubt he will be helpful there while our case is deliberated in the UN. Meanwhile, he would not be causing any damage here and may well gain some wisdom there, and when standing at the very front of our international struggle he might learn something of the harsh realities of our political position. (While still at the meeting, I had sent a message to the ministry that Gideon was to fly this evening.) . . .

I dictated to Walter the draft of a briefing to all the overseas legations regarding the Qibya action. At long last, three days after the event, an official version has been formulated which can be wired to our people in foreign capitals.⁷

At 8:00 I went by foot to the P.M.O. The time had come to deliberate in an intimate party forum the question of the decision-making process concerning retaliation operations, which I raised following the Qibya raid. Coming in I found Gideon there, who had come to take leave of B.G. and be briefed by him. Earlier I had summoned Tsvi Maimon, the cabinet stenographer, for the purpose of reading out to Gideon from today's cabinet minutes the remarks of Lavon and Golda as well as my concluding oration. Afterwards he said that the speech was "vibrant with pathos, and heroic."

We were eight for the consultation. In addition to our five *baverim* [colleagues, party members] in the cabinet [B.G., Eshkol, Joseph, Lavon, Myerson], Meir Argov, chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and Mapai secretary-general, as well as Knesset members Ziaman Aranne and Mordechai Namir had also been invited. So much the better. I opened the discussion by presenting the problem. . . . The cabinet's procedural routine was right now of a more pressing nature. As things stand, authority rests with the minister of defense. If I am informed beforehand of a retaliatory raid, I may at times appeal against it. If the matter seems serious to me, I may demand that the cabinet be convened. But this is not always possible, and in such a case my appeal remains ineffective. This means that concrete facts—in my view, malignant facts—are established in the field of foreign policy, for which and for the results of which I am held accountable, though I myself have opposed their creation at the outset. Therefore a change must be made. The minister of defense must be stripped of his authority as sole arbiter, and that authority must be entrusted to a committee. To avoid the complication of establishing a special committee, it may be best to place the authority with the Cabinet Committee for Foreign Affairs and Defense, on which our party has a majority (4 out of 7).

B.G. objected to this proposal. He claimed it would ensure a lack of responsiveness and perhaps abandonment of military reprisals. He maintained that he himself

had always been careful to inform me in advance, and he had agreed to a resolution of the matter by the cabinet if I appealed against taking action. At times he himself had chosen to ask the cabinet's opinion beforehand. Other *haverim* were also opposed to having the committee put in charge of the matter. Finally it was agreed that when the subject is brought before the cabinet, we must insist upon placing the authority for a decision with the prime minister, minister of defense and foreign minister. If the latter should appeal, the matter will be brought before the entire cabinet.

In the midst of all this the issue of Qibya came up. Eshkol criticized the needless dimensions of the operation. Pinhas hinted that the raid had unexpectedly exceeded its original plan (it is not yet clear to me how this developed; I have asked for the operation report and it remains to be seen if it will be given to me). Since other *haverim* expressed their opinions regarding the deed itself, I saw fit to state my opinion as well, and I told of my opposition which had not been heeded. Pinhas affirmed at this point that he had consulted B.G. He mentioned Glubb's message but did not reveal all its contents. I filled in the gaps. . . .

MONDAY, 19 OCTOBER 1953

At the F.M. I consulted with the director-general [Walter Eytan] over the organization of an information campaign⁸ throughout the world in light of the nightmare of the Qibya raid, in order to counterattack and shift the focus from defense and apology to attack and indictment.

An idea came to my mind, and I wired Elath to present the following version in his talks: The very fact that during the first two days we had been unable to define clearly what had happened in that village testifies better than a hundred witnesses that we had been taken by surprise and needed time to properly investigate the matter. Had it truly been an officially planned operation, we would have prepared a version for disclosure in advance as well. Katriel Katz thought it was a brilliant argument.

On the other hand, I was depressed by Ze'ev Shek's report on Walter's morning conference. The "brilliant" idea had been expounded that if the official version held that the attackers at Qibya had been frontier settlers, then this disclosure must be accompanied by real action to convince everybody of its veracity. Shabtai Rosenne, the dear man, for example, suggested that we apply the Collective Punishment Law to the frontier settlements or at least make a show of such action. Even Katriel argued that the police had to conduct some investigation in the area, if only for the sake of appearances. This detachment from the psychological and concrete reality of the matter aroused my concern. . . .

The cabinet meeting was at 10:00 A.M. B.G. lectured at length on the IDF deployment to meet the danger of a "second round" of an Arab-Israeli war. He spoke for two and a half hours. The lecture contained a keen analysis—more profound than any appraisal of military matters I had ever heard from his lips—concerning the problem of defending the state against a renewed Arab attack. He cited detailed, precise, and worrying numbers regarding the Arab states' growing military strength and pointed to three trends in their preparations for an attack against Israel: the improvement of training, sophistication of equipment, and unification of command. Continuing in these directions, the Arabs were due to reach their aspired target in 1956. He stressed our principal advantages—professional ability and morale—and outlined the central

problem in furthering our military might, which lies in improving its quality, in all respects, to the greatest extent possible.

While listening to B.G.'s analysis I pondered anew that we must consider how to combat the danger with nonmilitary measures: implementing solutions to the refugee problem by a daring and realistic proposal on our part to pay compensation; the improvement of relations with the Western powers; a constant, determined effort to reach an understanding with Egypt. Each of these courses of action may lead us into some dead ends, but nevertheless we may not be excused from trying.

The meeting was adjourned before B.G. could finish his lecture—due to the funeral of Supreme Court Justice Rabbi Simcha Assaf, who died last night. B.G. read out to us the draft of a statement he had composed for publication. It was a long document with many redundancies, but containing some pertinent phrases about Qibya, based on the version of the raid that we had adopted. [Later,] I spoke with Walter about the need for additional ammunition for our legations in the information campaign. Meanwhile telegrams arrived from Berne, Brussels, Paris, Rio, Buenos Aires, and Rome— all testifying to nervousness and discomfort in all corners [concerning the Qibya affair]. We shall have to supply them with additional argumentation.

At 4:30 I was summoned by B.G. to come to his office to go over the revised version of the government statement. He informed me that he had decided to turn it into a radio broadcast, which he himself would read. I wholeheartedly agreed with this. I found him with a shortened and better honed text, but not quite enough. I could not change the structure, nor replace some slack and badly constructed turns of phrases, which serve the purpose of emotional release more than that of clarity in the delineation of the political facts, but I did insert many linguistic corrections for the sake of clarification and precision. He accepted them all. I summoned Walter to the P.M.O. to help Moshe Perlman translate the statement into English and went home. . . .

[Evening visit to President Yitzhak and Rachel Ben-Zvi.] We listened to the news broadcast at the president's residence. We heard only the tail end of B.G.'s speech. His reading was listless, and he stumbled and misread text several times— a sure sign of fatigue.⁹

TUESDAY, 20 OCTOBER 1953

. . . I prepared a new briefing for all our legations as to why they must reject any idea of punishing the frontier settlements which allegedly participated in the Qibya operation.¹⁰ I am completely engrossed in justifying an action to which I objected from the start and which infuriated me, heart and soul, after the deed was done. The telegram was sent to all the capitals. . . .

The Dutch consul, who has returned from a two-month vacation in Europe, visited at 9:30. He displayed a remarkable understanding of and complete sympathy with our position on the question of the [water diversion project at the] B'not Yaacov Bridge Canal. . . . On the other hand, he condemned the Qibya operation mercilessly and said, albeit with friendship, that we could not be forgiven such a thing. He hinted that it resembled Dayr Yasin. . . .

At 10:00, a meeting of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee . . . Lavon reported on the Qibya affair. I was impressed— amazed, more properly— by the icy calm with which he repeated the version of the raid having been carried out by frontier vigilantes. Colonel Meir Amit reported on movements of the Arab Legion, for

the most part to stake defensive positions against all possible points of attack on our part. The up-to-date expertise of our military intelligence regarding developments around us in the field of military deployment could not help but make a great impression.

A debate began. . . . I was discomfited by my complete agreement with Yaacov Riftin—a most leftist MK of the Mapam Party—in his repudiation of the Qibya raid specifically and in his outlook regarding the retaliatory policy in general. . . .

Stayed up until after midnight writing the diary and reading papers. . . . I told Ziporah that I would resign outright if I were forced to stand before the microphone and address the people in the Land of Zion and the entire world with a fabricated description of an actual event. Alas, B.G. himself initiated this fabrication and its public broadcast and did so with confidence in the justice and inherent inner truth of the matter. Man's conscience is indeed a thing of wonder! . . .

SATURDAY, 24 OCTOBER 1953

. . . My brother-in-law Shaul Avigur dropped by. . . . He asked if I was aware of the details of the Qibya action, and why the women and children had not been evacuated from the buildings. I said no, I was not. I had asked the chief of staff, Mordechai Makleff, for the operational report. He had promised to send it to me, but had not done so. After a day or two I had had the opportunity of asking Nehemiah Argov if there were any of "my people"—that is, in the private secretariat—in the P.M.O. He'd become angry and protested: "We are all yours!" I told him: "My people means that when I ask for a report on something they deliver it immediately. Now I have asked for an operation report on Qibya and I have yet to be given it. Can you get it for me?" He said: "Of course! You'll get it immediately!" To this day I have not received it. . . .

WEDNESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 1953

. . . I hurried to the Kirya [the compound where the Foreign Ministry is housed] for a meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. . . . The meeting lasted more than three hours. I reported on developments over the past few days up to the opening deliberations of the Security Council. . . . There was a lively debate. Eliezer Livneh made a rare discovery and proposed a new and refurbished idea: an extensive peace offensive against the Arab states. The Qibya affair was the hinge of the argument, and Livneh forcefully disapproved of it. Ziama Aranne termed it a stain that would not be quickly erased. . . .

At the end of the debate, I spoke my mind about Qibya for the first time (at the previous meeting I hadn't touched this open and bleeding wound and had allowed Lavon to find shelter behind the official version). I said that as a representative of the cabinet I had nothing to add to that version. Personally I could state that the slaughter had caused a shift from quantity to quality concerning the moral nature of the act in the eyes of the rest of the world. I described the uproar everywhere and the strong echo of outrage and condemnation we had received. I also pointed to the political significance and possible consequences of the raid. It must appear that whoever carried it out was ready for war, and from there it was but a step toward the presumption that the instigator desired war and was deliberately provoking it. If that was the case, we had to take into account the certainty that any repetition of such an act on our part

would involve military intervention by Britain on Jordan's side against us and that such an intervention might also take the form of a blockade by sea. I did not relate that I knew, all too well, that these possibilities had been discussed in certain quarters. . . .

MONDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 1953

. . . A telegram arrived from Elath to say that he is meeting with British foreign secretary Anthony Eden today. I replied immediately that on his own accord he ought to be the first to bring up the Qibya affair. He should say that it has shocked the Israeli public and evoked profound regret for the innocent blood shed; but that it has, at the same time, united the public in the awareness that a one-sided string of murders can no longer be tolerated and that continued turmoil may lead to unforeseeable consequences. I also requested that he confront Eden with the responsibility Britain would bear for further encouraging warlike sentiment in the Arab states should it proceed with its design not to support a Security Council resolution calling on both sides to make peace. According to our information, France is willing to vote in favor of such a resolution, the United States is wavering, while England is determined to defeat it. . . .

MONDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 1953

. . . Samuel Watson of the British Labour Party and his wife came to visit at the office. . . . It is Watson's second visit here. Since his first one three years ago, when he was chairman of the party, he has become a true friend of Israel and its staunch supporter within his party. He tried to allay my fears regarding Qibya. The initial disclosure had indeed been most damaging, but when reports concerning the chain of events leading up to the operation appeared, things were seen in a different light and the storm abated. He faithfully assures me that the entire matter has been forgotten, and we should have no fear of it. At any rate, that is how he feels. He added that, as a miner, he knew that when fifty men die in a cave-in disaster, the public is shocked. At the same time, nobody pays any attention to the death of the same number of men from coal-related diseases. Was this not the same thing? The example proved exactly the opposite of what Watson wished to demonstrate. The main thing in public life is not the fact in itself, but the impression it makes. The slaughter of fifty souls at a stroke produces a shock ten times more powerful than the killing of the same number, one by one, over a period of time. . . .

TUESDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 1953

. . . Among the morning telegrams at the office there was Elath's report on Liberal leader Clement Davis's talk with Churchill.¹¹ The old man was furious over Qibya. Since the murder of Lord Moyne, British minister of state to the Middle East, in Cairo in 1944 by two Stern Gang operatives, Israel had not aroused such outrage in him. Had Weizmann been alive such a thing would never have happened. As a Zionist he has been hurt to the depths of his soul, etc. I'm afraid this reaction outweighs Watson's.

. . . Shmuel Bendor reported on his conversation with Francis Russell of the U.S. Embassy, who made the following observations on Qibya: If Israel had meant to scut-

tle Britain's standing in Jordan, it could not have chosen a more effective way. For the Qibya action had struck Britain with a lethal blow and destroyed all trust in her. The attack on Qibya would have been logical if the goal had been to undermine the current regime in Amman. This regime is barely managing to survive anyway, and an atrocity like Qibya destroys its ability to serve as a shield against the total anarchy that could ensue in the wake of an outburst of Palestinian rage against the government in Amman. A third consequence which may arise is the renewal of political conflicts and the first victim should then be General Glubb. . . .

WEDNESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 1953

. . . I found an important and urgent telegram from Aubrey about Qibya.¹² He isn't satisfied with a reiteration of the expression of regret which was included in the P.M.'s broadcast, but is asking for permission to make some blunter and more far-reaching statements. These statements would in effect imply a disavowal of the Qibya action and would be construed as a commitment not to resort to retaliatory action at all in future. In the same telegram Aubrey makes so bold as to note that the P.M.'s announcement excelled in neither courage nor candor and that few accepted his explanations as the truth. He contends that a harsh condemnation of the Qibya action may be a serious impediment to our future international standing. The only way to soften the resolution that will be adopted is to expedite our efforts and be first to make a statement that would not only express regret over Qibya, but repudiate the action altogether.

I saw that we could not grant him the authority to make such a statement so long as the cabinet's policy concerning retaliatory action in general remained in force. When B.G. arrived at the meeting, I sent him the telegram with a note attached. In it I asked him not to fly into a rage at Aubrey, who was in a dire situation. On the other hand, he ought to compose an acceptable statement, since it would be improper to approve the text of the statement which Aubrey proposes to deliver.

B.G.'s reactions, written in the margins of the encoded telegram, came in a series of explosions. Regarding the assumption that a more vigorous repudiation on our part could soften the condemnation, B.G. wrote, "Eban is a child if he thinks so"; "the Great Powers' political interests lie in humiliating us, and no repudiation on our part can help here." Regarding the criticism of his own statement—Eban must be notified that Bennike's version (that the attack was carried out by regular army troops) is a "fantastic lie."(!) On the other hand, regarding the text proposed by Eban, he had no objection to these things being said.¹³

To all appearances, I could have immediately telegraphed Eban authorization for the proposed statement. I had the P.M.'s consent to it, written in his own hand on the telegram slip containing the wording of the statement. But in his consent, too, I saw a singularly strange conception of the principle of moral and political consistency such as was manifested in his definition of Bennike's statement as a "fantastic lie"! I called Lavon over to me and showed him the telegram and the remarks I'd exchanged with B.G. He immediately realized that Eban's wording was entirely out of the question. He went over to B.G. and presented it to him . . . and finally came back to me and said that B.G. simply hadn't read the statement thoroughly. We consulted over the wording to be used and worked something out. I asked Lavon what meaning he, who was acquainted with the details of the matter, might ascribe to "fantastic lie," but he only

shrugged his shoulders. Clearly enough, B.G. was simply infuriated by the expression of a lack of confidence in his statement. In his usual way he exploded in wrath.

I toiled long until I formulated a telegram to Eban with firm instructions not to employ the text he had proposed but to say such and such. I also specifically added that he must by no means say anything that may be taken to mean the repudiation of any retaliatory policy in advance. Be that as it may, this was the first time I included in an official statement words of my choice expressing disavowal of the Qibya action as it had in fact transpired. . . .

WEDNESDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 1953

. . . The reverberations from New York are worrying. There are signs that [Security Council] resolutions against us would be adopted regarding both Qibya and the B'not Yaacov Canal. . . . I was still being deluged by an unending stream of very bitter reactions to the Qibya action. . . . Two reports came in today. One was from Elath about his talk with [Sir William] Haley, the editor of *The Times*, a true friend who has been a bulwark toward the outside world for us during these days of chill. The other one was from Rehavam [Michael] Amir, our consul in The Hague, about his talk with Dutch foreign minister [Joseph] Luns. He too is a loyal friend. They were both severely critical.¹⁴

I wrote B.G. to remind him that at the last meeting of the Central Committee I had shown him a telegram which had arrived from Ambassador Eban and he'd written some remarks in the margins. At the time, I'd been involved in formulating a directive to Eban regarding the way in which to express regret over the Qibya action and was not free to reply to his remarks, it being all the more difficult to do so on the spot. Even though several days had since passed, I expressed my wish to expose my mind to him on one point he'd touched upon, lest my silence be taken for an assent. Eban had contended that a clear-cut expression of regret over what had happened at Qibya, which would imply moral disapproval of the act, might soften the resolution of condemnation that the Security Council adopted against us. He had expressed the fear that a harsh and unqualified resolution of condemnation might brand Israel as an international outlaw and that such a shameful verdict would be harmful to our future international relations. For this reason, he had thought it vital to make a vigorous effort to persuade the council of the sincerity of our regret for the act. This, he hoped, would take the wind out of the sails of those eager for the condemnation. B.G. had written that Eban was wrong here and that he didn't understand what underlay Britain's and its allies' espousal of this condemnation. If I had understood him right, he meant to say that Britain was resolved to bolster the Arabs come what may, and it especially desired to strengthen its position in Jordan which was seriously undermined by the Qibya raid. It was therefore unlikely that Britain would be influenced by this or that version of our declarations.

I disagreed with B.G. In my opinion he had been quite right in his assumption that we were speaking of a political or diplomatic step which Britain—or the United States—was about to take against us directly in order to publicize it later, or at least to inform Jordan of it. But this wasn't true of the adoption of a resolution by an international institution, formulated after open deliberations to which several other countries—apart from Britain and the United States—were party. Our experience of UN institutions—in both the General Assembly and the Security Council—showed that in

most cases (certainly not all!) the United States did succeed in turning the scales in its favor regarding the substance of the position it would like to impart to the international body. Regarding the form of any specific resolution, its wording and details, the picture was quite different. There the United States felt obliged to consider public opinion, which was formed during the course of the debate, and the sensitivities of the different delegations whose votes are needed to obtain the required majority.

In other words, a Great Power acting on its own does not wield the same measure of independence when it seeks to activate an international institution which, at least formally, practises equality among its members. In the case in question it was entirely possible— although certainly not guaranteed— that a more vigorous and explicit statement on our part, with the intention of weakening the brunt of those interested in a severe condemnation, may help those advocating moderation or willing to take the sting out of the condemnation by broadening the scope of the resolution to include the issue of peace. The candidates for applying such pressure to Britain are France, maybe one of the Latin American countries, and even the United States itself, at least as it is represented in the Security Council in the person of [Henry] Cabot Lodge. I ended by stressing that, while there was no prior guarantee of softening the verdict, one could not rule out entirely such an outcome. . . .

THURSDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 1953

. . . Lord [Harry Louis] Nathan from London came by. . . . Regarding Qibya, he proposed mitigation rather than vindication. He confessed that when he heard of the matter he had been unable to muster within himself the same bitter acrimony that had erupted around him. Now he believed that, as time goes by, the matter will be dropped from the public's interest and eventually will not weigh upon us as it did at first. I said that, to my mind, the Qibya action contained one element that will remain fixed and constant: the fact that we are capable of such killing has been deeply engraved upon the memory and will not be erased. This fact cannot be excised. Here too Nathan begged to alleviate matters. In the annals of every nation there were acts of horror; over time they ceased to shape outside attitudes toward it. . . .

FRIDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 1953

The morning's newspapers were foreboding. The draft resolution concerning Qibya and the situation along the borders submitted to the Security Council by the three Great Powers was made public. It is worse than anything we had expected. It contains an explicit condemnation of Israel. Such a condemnation was never leveled against the Arab states during the War of Independence when they mounted an invasion expressly to defeat a UN resolution. The passage concerning the infiltrations is quite harmless, and rather than berate Jordan and denounce its responsibility, it implies a justification of Jordan, saying that it has already implemented measures to stop infiltration and cannot but continue. Most poignant is the absence of a call for peace and a demand to enter into negotiations.¹⁵ Our delegation has already issued a harsh reaction to this slanted verdict and emphasized the falsification it contains. . . .

[After dinner at the French ambassador's residence, in a conversation with British ambassador Evans,] I turned to the draft resolution in the Security Council. I said that if such a resolution should be adopted, it would be a very serious matter as regards

the UN's moral standing in Israel. The resolution would also cast a heavy pall over our relations with the Great Powers. We would have to respond harshly. Among other things we would contend that, despite our denial concerning the participation of regular forces in the attack on Qibya, and with complete disregard for our expression of regret over the action, they had found it possible to pass an unprecedented shameful, slanted verdict upon us. In that case we were free to point out that none of the three powers responsible for the wording of the resolution had abstained in certain cases in the past from recourse to indiscriminate mass killings, that such activities were going on at this very time. He was very hurt, and said that if what I had said had been done, then it was not under similar circumstances. I said: "Why are the circumstances not similar? The thing is always done either as a response to, or in the face of, an unruly situation which seemingly could not be controlled otherwise." He argued that the Qibya action was of a special nature and that it had been necessary to deal with it specially apart from the rest. In reply, I spared no words to express my shock at the act itself, but I added that I could see no sense or show of responsibility in this compulsive picking at this specific action without keeping in view the developments preceding it and the results which must stem from its one-sided condemnation. With this he ostensibly agreed. . . .

SUNDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 1953

. . . The [cabinet] meeting began with my review of the situation in the Security Council debate. The review and the ensuing discussion lasted the entire three hours and we did not get to any other item on the agenda. The first and main argument concerned the government statement in response to the resolution about to be adopted by the Security Council.

To my great distress I clashed with B.G. at every point. He subscribed to an immediate statement in response to the three powers' draft resolution, while I favored a statement following the adoption of the resolution. My contention was that we had already responded to the draft in New York and had nothing new to offer. He wanted to condemn England in particular, but I objected. All three powers were officially responsible for the wording, so why should the other two be given preferential treatment? By all means, let them all feel our anger for having been swayed by the British. He forcefully demanded that we condemn the Bennike Report as a libelous document, while I viewed such a condemnation as damaging to us rather than to Bennike, all the more so when our own statement had not been a model of truth. B.G. demanded that we conclude the statement with a proclamation of our right to self-defense, while I said that this could only be detrimental. To expand my point: if this truly meant self-defense, then we were not saying anything new. Would anybody deny our right to defense? Something else might be read into it, a hidden hint that we would repeat the Qibya action if we thought it necessary. This would constitute an open provocation of the Security Council and an arrogant declaration. It was bound to lead the Council to adopt the present wording in order to teach us a harsh lesson, rather than to produce a willingness to soften it. Regarding most of the points in contention, the decisive majority was on my side. But it suddenly emerged that B.G. had not meant a simple statement by the government spokesman, but a personal statement by himself to be delivered in the name of the government. When I saw that he had an

emotional need to close this account before retiring, I could not oppose it, and thus the way was cleared for a not large majority in favor of his proposal.

B.G. immediately stepped out to the adjacent room to draft the wording and asked me to conduct the meeting in his stead. . . . At the end of the meeting B.G. summoned me to go over the draft he'd composed. It did not appeal to me at all. I made a few small changes in phrasing; to repair its defects was beyond my powers. [In the afternoon,] B.G. presented the wording of his statement for confirmation by the entire cabinet. Many grappled with him and succeeded in persuading him to accept a few corrections. In the end there emerged a statement marred by careless wording and superfluous repetitions, with a few forceful passages, but with others that lacked logic.

I returned to the task of editing it after the meeting, experiencing for the 101st time the sad lot befalling anyone called upon to be the editor of B.G. or, for that matter, to be edited by him. . . . At home [in the evening] Yaacov Herzog came by with the translation of B.G.'s statement into English. I revised it thoroughly from top to bottom, in many places straying from the original in order to tighten the logic, blunt the sharp edges, and improve the style. . . .

MONDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 1953

. . . At the end of the meeting [of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee] the discussion focused on the question of a debate on these subjects in the Knesset. I announced that the government opposed any open debate while the Security Council was in session. I explained that any talk about Qibya at this stage could only be detrimental. Making allowances for Qibya would serve as a provocation and toughen the resolve of the draft resolution's composers not to soften it. Condemnation of Qibya would achieve exactly the same end. In conclusion, our activity in the Security Council would work for us, while our debate in the Knesset would do the contrary.

During the first part of the debate, Yaacov Rifin noted the differences in the wording of Eban's speech in the Security Council as opposed to the P.M.'s radio broadcast concerning the expression of regret over the shedding of innocent blood. Eban had expressed explicit regret over Qibya, while the P.M. had spoken in general and vaguely about all innocent bloodshed. Wouldn't a plain renunciation of Qibya have strengthened our position? In replying, I recalled that in his first broadcast, the P.M. had announced that the government regretted the shedding of blood in Qibya and in every other case. I added that the paragraph about Qibya in Eban's superb speech had been dictated from here, after consultation with the P.M. . . .

The Herut representative kept on asking why Eban had condemned the Qibya action in his speech. He didn't stop pressing the issue even after I denied it. To put him in his place I took the speech out of my briefcase and read out the passage for all to hear. It contained a vigorous expression of regret, but no condemnation. On the contrary, it voiced certain justification of the outburst in view of the background. . . .

SUNDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 1953

. . . At the cabinet meeting I began with the coming political debate in the Knesset. I said that I wished to bring to the cabinet's attention in advance what I was planning to say on one issue alone— Qibya. I wanted to clarify three points: (a) it had been a deep shock for public opinion; (b) it had put certain friendly circles toward us in an

agonizing position; (c) it had led to our complete isolation in the Security Council. A storm broke out immediately. Golda was furious. After such a resolution, we should go and rebuke ourselves? Had anybody decided to condemn us out of [genuine] moral outrage? Why, it was only because of political exigencies, etc. Rokach also argued against “self-flagellation.” Serlin and Joseph sided with him. B.G. announced: (a)— yes, (b) and (c)— no. I said that I had no choice but to side with the majority, but I had not changed my mind that my duty was to apprise the Knesset and the public of the true situation lest we become victims of a delusion. The fact that the three powers acted in their own interests does not remove one iota of the genuineness of public opinion’s moral outrage. People in the Land of Zion should be well aware of this. It was the duty of the foreign minister, who stands on the lookout, to act in this manner— all the more so in a speech which will settle accounts with the Security Council resolution and its true motives.

Thus did I pour out my dismay, but the conclusion remained in force. This session was most illuminating. . . .

FRIDAY, 4 DECEMBER 1953

Walter [Eytan] told me this morning that he had dined last night with French ambassador Gilbert at his residence in Jaffa. The latter told him that he had already almost maneuvered the Quay d’Orsay into giving him liberty regarding a visit to Jerusalem [implying diplomatic recognition of Israel’s capital], when along came the Qibya affair and set him back to square one. The diplomatic corps view the change of the chief of staff as Makleff paying the price for Qibya. How naïve of them! Had Dayan been chief of staff at the time of Qibya and been replaced after that action, then there would have been logic to their version. . . .

MONDAY, 7 DECEMBER 1953

. . . At the opening of the Knesset at 4:00, I delivered the announcement of B.G.’s resignation, which had been submitted to the president this morning. Immediately after the announcement I began my speech in response to the political debate, which lasted an hour and a half. I made a few incisive remarks on the reaction of the Jewish public abroad to the Qibya action, which must have angered many. Upon stepping down from the lectern I wondered how my *haverim* had reacted to the speech.

When I went into the adjoining room, Lavon and Golda met me with resentful faces. Lavon assailed me as to why I had said things about Qibya which I was not authorized to say. Golda fumed in his wake. I confronted them with the cabinet resolution which allowed me to report on the shock the act had evoked abroad. There was a short, acerbic, and most annoying confrontation. I contended that our public is blinded and its eyes must be opened. They stuck to their position, and we left with a residue of bitterness. . . .

TUESDAY, 8 DECEMBER 1953

. . . Since today marks the start of B.G.’s “vacation” and my incumbency as acting P.M., I made it a point to visit the said office. I found B.G. still in his room. I took issue with him regarding the improper use of a certain verb (“*le-ratzot*”) he had used in his broadcast of last night. . . . He too took issue with me over a word I had used in my

speech of response in the Knesset. Why had I termed the Qibya action a “horror” (“*zva’a*”)? I said this had been my definition of Jewish public response abroad to the Qibya action. He contended that the cabinet had expressed a negative attitude to the line I had proposed to take in my speech. I reminded him that he himself had concluded that I could speak about the shock which the Qibya action had engendered abroad. He began objecting to the very nature of the response abroad and remonstrating against Eban and Elath. I said that the matter had nothing to do with our ambassadors’ response, but with the obvious phenomenon of outrage in Jewish public opinion, whether expressed or muted. In vain should we try to ignore and obscure it. He disagreed with me and I disagreed with him, and he left the room holding back his anger. . . .

Walter came by for a moment. He said he had heard from journalists present at the Knesset many praises for my reply speech, together with a critical note that I had not dared to say what I had to concerning Qibya. There, you have it! . . .

SUNDAY, 13 DECEMBER 1953

. . . Teddy [Kollek, director-general of the P.M.O.] told me that he’d begun talks with Dayan and his colleagues on the infiltration problem in an effort to explain once and for all the ruinous political consequences of our reprisals and also the need to consult over preventive measures. I told him that a Foreign Ministry research project had prepared a special paper on this question, pointing to a whole list of possible measures which the army, adhering to its routine of reprisals, had disqualified as impractical. In my opinion, it was shunted aside without proper study of the problem. . . .

WEDNESDAY, 16 DECEMBER 1953

. . . Gideon Rafael came for a long talk on our future policy in view of the lessons of Qibya and the Security Council. He came all charged up and was sure that in one smashing attack he could capture fortresses and topple towers. “The cabinet must decide once and for all that the army will not cross the border to operate on the other side under any circumstances.” I rejected the wisdom of proposing such a wholesale and unrealistic principle to the government. I also rejected the practical possibility of tying our hands like that in advance of any eventuality. . . .

MONDAY, 21 DECEMBER 1953

. . . Teddy came by in the afternoon. We had a long talk. The most important problem on the state’s agenda was Arab infiltration. He had read the F.M. memorandum on this subject, written by Yael Vered of the ministry’s Intelligence Department, and found himself in total agreement with it. He told me he had been continuing his discussions with Dayan, who was ready to admit before his IDF officers that Qibya’s negative results clearly outweighed the positive ones. Ostensibly, Dayan seemed to be nearing the conclusion that different methods to stop infiltration should be tried. Teddy and I discussed the subject of preventive measures to be taken against infiltration and I concluded that we should consult Ezra Danin on this issue. . . .

The above marks the last discussion of the Qibya raid in Sharett’s diary.

NOTES

1. In the north, General Bennike, in his capacity as chairman of the Israel-Syria Mixed Armistice Commission, had called for a halt to Israel's plans for a water diversion project that involved dredging at the B'not Yaacov Bridge (Jisr Banat Yakub) in the Israel-Syria Demilitarized Zone. Israel chose to proceed with the dredging in defiance of mounting criticism from UN quarters but agreed to suspend work on the canal in late October when faced with an imminent cut in American foreign aid. Meanwhile, Israel's southern border with Egypt had been heating up during the summer, culminating in late August in an attack on the Palestinian refugee camp at al-Burj near Gaza. The Israeli raiders—Ariel Sharon's Unit 101—killed twenty refugees (including seven women and five children) and wounded twenty-two others, prompting a vote of censure in the EIMAC and stern condemnation from British and American diplomats. For details of the B'not Yaacov episode, see Avraham Ben-Zvi, *The United States and Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 39–48. On the attack on al-Burj, see Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949–1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to Suez* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 242–43.

2. Sharett was in the habit of listening to Arab radio broadcasts.

3. Evans to Sharett, 16 October 1953, *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel* (hereafter *DFPI*), vol. 8, 1953, ed. Yemima Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 1995), pp. 756–57, doc. 433.

4. Under the Tripartite Declaration of 25 May 1950, the governments of the United Kingdom, France, and the United States reaffirmed their opposition to the development of an arms race between the Arab states and Israel, declared their assumption that arms acquisitions would not be used “to undertake any act of aggression against any other state,” and announced “their unalterable opposition to the use of force or threat of force between any of the states in the area. The three Governments, should they find that any of these states was preparing to violate frontiers or armistice lines, would,

consistent with their obligations as members of the United Nations, immediately take action, both within and outside the United Nations, to prevent such violation.” Full text in Neil Caplan, *Futile Diplomacy*, vol. 3, *The United Nations, the Great Powers and Middle East Peacemaking, 1948–1954* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 297–98, doc. 10.

5. The Elath-Lloyd conversation is reported in *DFPI* 8: 757–59, doc. 434.

6. For a summary of the cabinet debates, see *DFPI* 8: 769–71, doc. 433; English translation in the *Companion Volume* to volume 8, pp. 368–71.

7. “The border settlements, which have many weapons and ex-soldiers, lost their patience. They organized and carried out the assault on Qibya after the Jordanians had killed a woman and two children in Yahud—the last link in an unbroken chain of nighttime murders, shootings at vehicles, and other disturbances, without any serious attempt by the Jordanian government to control the situation along the frontier. The Government and Israeli public greatly regret that matters reached such a point, for which Jordan is to blame, and the loss of the lives of many innocent people.” *DFPI* 8: 772, doc. 446.

8. The commonly used Hebrew term *basbara*, literally “explanation,” is sometimes understood in the sense of “information” or “propaganda.”

9. For the text of the broadcast, see *DFPI* 8: 774–76, doc. 449; official English translation in the *Companion Volume* to volume 8, pp. 374–76.

10. *DFPI* 8: 780, doc. 453.

11. Elath to Eytan, 5 November 1953, in *DFPI* 8: 839, doc. 495.

12. Eban to Sharett, 10 November 1953, *DFPI* 8: 844–45, doc. 500.

13. Ben-Gurion's marginal notes are given in endnotes to doc. 500, *DFPI* 8: 844–45.

14. Amir's meeting with Luns is reported in Amir to Najar, 12 November 1953, *DFPI* 8: 849–51, doc. 504.

15. The draft resolution would be adopted on 24 November without amendment. The text is given in *DFPI* 8: 900–1, doc. 534.