



CHESTER BOWLES  
ESSEX, CONNECTICUT

October 15, 1957

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Dear Allen:

A week or so ago a young Indian acquaintance who is doing graduate work in this country, and who has had some experience in the Middle East called to say that Salah Bitar, the Syrian Foreign Minister would like to talk with me in New York. He said that he did not know the purpose of the visit beyond Bitar's desire to acquaint more Americans with Syria's viewpoint.

I called on Bitar in his apartment at the Savoy Plaza on Thursday afternoon October 10th. A member of the Syrian diplomatic service now stationed in New Delhi, whose name I did not catch, was with him and acted as interpreter.

Bitar said that he was worried about the situation not only in the Middle East, but in his own country. He said that while there were many Soviet sympathizers in high places, the bulk of the leadership including himself was anti-Communist and very anxious to avoid being tied too closely to Moscow.

He went on to say that the policies which our government had followed had weakened the position of the non-Communist groups and that this had accelerated the drift in the wrong direction. The situation was now dangerous, but if there was a change in American emphasis and approach to the Middle East there was still time to reverse the present trend.

His principal charge was that American policy in the last few years has sought to divide the Arab nations. This has brought us into needless conflict with the basic forces which more and more will dominate the attitudes in this area.

I asked precisely what he felt we should do to recapture lost ground and reestablish our relations with the Middle Eastern nations on a more favorable footing. Although I questioned him for ten or fifteen minutes on this point, I was unable to get anything very tangible.

I then asked him what his reaction would be to an American approach along the following lines:

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1. An American proposal of a moratorium on all outside arms shipments to the Middle East presented either in the United Nations or through direct negotiations with Moscow. I said that this would cover shipments on our part to Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan, and shipments from the Soviet Union to Syria, Egypt and Yemen.

I suggested that the most difficult problem in offering such a proposal concerned Turkey which had two roles to play -- one in the Middle East and another in the Balkans. Only if the Soviet Union were prepared to release all pressure on the Turkish borders not only from the Soviet Union but from Rumania and Bulgaria, could this be worked out.

2. In order to take any hint of economic imperialism from our aid to the Middle East and also to bring the Middle Eastern nations together on a more cooperative basis, I would suggest the creation of a Middle Eastern Development Corporation with a close management link to the World Bank.

With the assurance of good management and in order to make this setup completely acceptable to the Middle Eastern nations, I suggested that the Board of Directors should be made up entirely of representatives of the Middle East countries. All outside economic aid, including aid from the United States and Russia, should be channeled through this organization. Some device should also be found to divert oil revenues through a direct tax, sale of bonds to the oil-producing nations, or otherwise to this central development organization. This I said would not only help to pull the Arab nations together but would also give the less favored Arab nations access to some of the oil income in this area.

3. These first two points would have to be predicated on some stiff guarantees as far as Israel and the Arab powers are concerned. I realized it would be politically impossible at present for the Arab nations publicly and permanently to accept Israel's present borders. However, this situation could be solved temporarily by a guarantee on the part of Israel and her Arab neighbors that no effort would be made on either side to change these borders by force.

If this question could thus be put on ice for a few years, it might be possible to deal with it on a more permanent basis sometime in the future.

Finally I said that in making any such three-point proposal I would like to see India and America working much more closely together. I agreed that this would take a most skillful and

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understanding diplomatic approach on our part, but I did not feel that it was impossible since India's real long range interest in the Middle East corresponds almost entirely with our own.

It would not be correct to say that Mr. Bitar eagerly grasped these suggestions. When I was unable to get from him either agreement or criticism, I asked if he would welcome such an approach by our own government. To this he answered that he would, although there would be a great many points that would require discussion and clarification.

After emphasizing again that I had no connection with my own government, that I was talking solely as a Democrat and a private citizen who had a long-standing interest in foreign affairs, I thanked him for the cup of tea and went on my way.

His associate from New Delhi, however, who followed me out, told me that in his opinion Bitar personally would accept this kind of approach and that my suggestions had made a real impression on him. Whether or not this is the case, I felt that you should know that this conversation took place.

As you know, I have been pleading for a whole new approach to foreign policy in this area and throughout South Asia for the last many years. In my opinion the concepts on which we have based our thinking are totally out of date. If we continue to follow them the situation will, I believe, go steadily from bad to worse.

I will be in Washington on the 6th and 7th of November. If you would like to discuss these questions, do let me know.

With my warmest regards.

Sincerely,

*Chet Bowles*

Chester Bowles

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CB:ib  
(transcribed and signed in  
Gov. Bowles' absence)

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