CHAPTER III

Attempts at Reconciliation - Johnston's Shuttle Diplomacy

Ambassador Johnston received the counterproposals from both the Arab and Israeli sides through diplomatic channels, and they were worlds apart. The difficult task of reconciliation would soon commence, and it was done through more contacts, visits and more intensive diplomacy. The Arabs would not meet the Israelis face to face, because none of the Arab states recognized Israel and a state of war still prevailed since the day of Israel’s creation. A host of issues clouded the atmosphere, of which, the cause of the Palestinian refugees and their right of return ranked high. The United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 194 on 11 December 1948 asserting in paragraph 11 the right of the Palestinian refugees to repatriation or compensation. The political environment in the Middle East and the fast development of events had important impacts on Johnston's mission. A brief general overview of the situation in the region is presented below, along with a rundown on the topics of negotiations. This overview is not meant to be an academic, historical review of that era, but is meant to refer to the political events and issues that affected the mood of the peoples and governments of the region. Those, in turn, impacted the talks that Johnston conducted. It should be noted that the diplomatic skills for which Mr. Johnston was famed made a real difference. Interesting also was the moderating stand of Egypt, which helped materially in achieving substantial progress. After Mr. Johnston received the responses of the parties to the Main/TVA Plan, he set out for his second round of negotiations in the region in June 1954.

1. Negotiating with the Arab Side- Second Round

1.1 Public Mood

On the eve of Johnston's second round in June 1954, tensions between Israel and the Arab states were running high. Throughout that month, there had been numerous shooting incidents across the Israel-Jordan Armistice lines, culminating at the end of the month in the outbreak of fighting in Jerusalem. There were incidents on the Armistice lines with Syria as well, and Egypt and Israel quarreled over freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran. Moreover, Colonel Adeeb Shishakli of Syria, and General Mohammad Najib of Egypt had recently been ousted from power. “An
atmosphere of internal dissention prevailed in all the countries of the region."\textsuperscript{64}

Moreover, the general political atmosphere was not favorable to open alliance with the West. Britain and France were viewed by the Arabs as the primary parties responsible for the Arabs’ misfortunes since the departure of the Ottoman Turks from Arab lands in 1917. The immediate recognition of Israel by the United States’ and the Soviet Union in 1948 stunned the Arab public. The United States efforts in establishing UNRWA and in financing it on the one hand, and her entry in the region to help its economic and social development on the other, helped form a favorable public image of the United States. The communist party, organized in several Arab countries including the riparian parties on the Jordan and in Egypt, was spreading negative propaganda against imperialism and colonialism and was portraying the United States as the leader of the camp of imperialism. However, with Arabs being believers in God, the atheist communist party was fighting an uphill battle to gain grounds in their midst. The popular mood did not feel comfortable with atheist doctrines and favored countries whose peoples believed in God. The unqualified support that the United States gave to Israel was not made public, but the donations and assistance that she provided to the Palestinian refugees and to the Arab countries were duly publicized.

By the time of Johnston's second visit, the talks about a regional military alliance in the Middle East had intensified, accompanied by similar talk about the "vacuum" in the Middle East. Public sentiments in the Middle East were opposed to the western idea of forging a regional military alliance in the form of a "Middle East Defense Organization, MEDO" designed after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The relentless efforts of the nationalistic regimes in Syria and Egypt publicly stood firmly against that proposed alliance. Public sentiment was not ready to entertain any alliance with the West, primarily because of the West’s role in creating and supporting Israel. Public awareness of the details of the Cold War was not very deep, and the activities of the leftist political parties, overt or underground, enhanced the political momentum of anti-western sentiments.

1.2 Political Environment

The political environment in the region did not display stability. Egypt, run by a military junta since the revolution in 1952, started to witness domestic confrontations. Premier Jamal Abdul Nasser, the real leader of the revolution, had ousted the President of the new republic, General Mohammad Najib. He displayed cautious friendliness to the United States, as he conducted a campaign to have Britain evacuate the Suez Canal zone. Nasser