

ARAB NATIONALISM AND ISRAEL

By Walter Zander

IN THE forty years since the dissolution of the Ottoman empire, the Middle East has been in an almost perpetual state of crisis. Far from involving purely local issues, this crisis is part of a general revolutionary change, during the same period, that has affected the basic relations between Europe and the peoples of Asia and Africa. And it is perhaps natural that such a change should manifest itself with particular intensity in the border regions of these continents, where so many civilizations met, fought, and influenced each other in the past.

At the end of the First World War, the West stood at the summit of its power, its dominion extending apparently unchallenged over the greater part of the globe. Today the case is much changed. Now the West is in retreat almost everywhere before resurgent colonial peoples.

The rise of the Asian and African peoples is probably the dominating event of our time, and is likely to have even greater repercussions in history than the October Revolution—which, after all, produced no basic change in Russian foreign policy. Although the center of Western power has shifted to the United States, and Russian power now stretches from the Oder to the Pacific, the issue between Russia and the Western world remains essentially what it was when the Czars were trying to extend their power through the Balkans and reach the Mediterranean.

The awakening of the colonial peoples, however, has created a truly new situation. Whereas the struggle in the past between Russia and the West was largely an internal conflict within Europe and within Christendom, the West has now to face up seriously to the peoples of a world outside: a situation that has not confronted it since the Crusades, when Arab power reached over North Africa into Sicily and Spain. (Some observers maintain that the present tug-of-war in the Middle East is actually a continuation, in modern terms, of the medieval wars between Christendom and Islam.)

It is in this context that the Arab-Israeli conflict must be viewed. Its earlier stages were dominated by the West, but now the rising power of nations that were formerly, or are still today, in tutelage to the West is not only an important factor in the background, but also one of the forces shaping the course of the Arab-Israeli struggle.

DURING and immediately after the First World War, British imperial interests happened to coincide with the ancient Jewish longing for restoration in the Holy Land. India was, at that time, still the center of Britain's Asian empire. The wartime Turko-German alliance had brought the strategic importance of Egypt and the Suez Canal to the forefront, and in order to safeguard the approach to both, the British wished to extend their control into Mesopotamia and Syria. No one, perhaps, put the case for this more convincingly than an English publicist, Herbert Sidebotham, who in a series of articles published subsequently as a book, *England and Palestine* (1918), suggested that Egypt be protected by a new buffer state in Palestine under the British Crown. He saw that such a state would be immensely strengthened by colonization and realized that its only possible colonizers could be Jews. "Only they can build up in the Mediterranean a new dominion associated with this country from the outset in Imperial work, at once a protection against the alien East and a mediator between it and us, a civilization distinct from ours, yet imbued with our political ideas, at the same stage of political development."

Similar thoughts had been put forward by Englishmen decades before. Laurence Oliphant, in his book *The Land of Gilead* (1880), had pointed out that the Berlin Conference in 1876 'had in effect brought about a European alliance to stop Russian expansion towards the Balkans, and that Russia, deflected from that region, might turn due south and attempt the conquest of Asiatic Turkey, in which case she would certainly not stop short of Palestine. Oliphant proposed to strengthen Turkey against these dangers by a Jewish colony, especially in the provinces east of the River Jordan, and he felt certain of Jewish sympathy and 'help for such a project. Still earlier, Sir Edward Cazalet and Lord Shaftesbury had expressed similar ideas, the latter motivated by an appreciation of the increased importance Syria and Palestine had acquired for Britain's imperial interests by the opening of the Suez Canal.

Strategic interests, of course, were only one among the manifold considerations which ultimately led to British recognition of the Jewish national movement. There was sincere sympathy with Jewish homelessness, the wish to help an ancient race rebuild its own national life; there was the voice of conscience in view of the wrongs Jews had suffered at Christian hands; and there were even religious

IN ADVOCATING a re-orientation of Israel's foreign policy towards Asian and African nationalism, WALTER ZANDER speaks for an important body of Jewish opinion that sees no other way out of the Arab-Israeli impasse. Born in Germany (in 1898) and now a resident of London, Mr. Zander is an authority on Zionism and the Middle East. Since 1944 he has been secretary of the Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Great Britain.

expectations that Israel's restoration would contribute to the salvation of mankind. All these motives worked together.

Jews on their side promised gratitude and support for the help given to them. At a great meeting in London in July 1920, the Zionist leaders, in the presence of Lord Balfour, Lord Cecil, and other British statesmen, pledged "*Loyalty for Loyalty and Fulfilment for Fulfilment.*"

Very few realized at the time that the days of Western supremacy were numbered. But a movement for independence - visible only to the penetrating eye - was then already beginning to sweep through Asia and Africa. Within a generation India was to be free and sovereign. Demanded without violence and surrendered without coercion, Indian independence formed a turning point in the relations between Europe and Asia, and gave an irresistible impetus to anti-colonial movements everywhere. All over Asia new states free from Western domination sprang up, and the anti-colonial movement began to spread through Africa as well.

Arab nationalism is part of this great inter-continental movement, and it, too, was born in response to Western influences. It was on the model of European nationalism that in 1847, in Beirut, a society, now commonly considered the germ of the Arab national movement, was founded under the patronage of American missionaries by Arab intellectuals to foster interest in Arab literature and history. But just as Italian nationalism was in that same period fired by opposition to Austria, and German nationalism by resentment against France, so Arab nationalism was mainly inspired in the beginning by opposition to Turkish rule.

When Turkish domination in the Middle East was replaced after 1918 by Western spheres of influence, Arab nationalism found new targets. In the 1920's it was incited against the West by Russian and, in the 1930's, by Nazi propaganda, as well as being further inflamed by the Zionist issue. The fall of France in the Second World War, and the subsequent reduction of British strength in Asia, gave it additional strength both as a positive and a negative force. An entirely new era in the development of Arab nationalism began, however, with the Arab-Jewish war.

The defeat and the humiliation which that war brought the Arabs can be seen as playing a part in their history similar to that played in Russian history by the Japanese victory over the Czar's army and navy in 1904. In both cases the defeat was administered by an adversary who had until then not been taken seriously, and in both cases the consequences for the defeated country were revolutionary. And among the Arabs as among the Russians, the intellectuals were the first to respond. With Israel providing it with an immediate issue on which to concentrate its energies, the Arab national movement acquired a sense of unity for the first time.

But Arab nationalism is founded on much more than

enmity to Israel, and harbors complex and often contradictory forces.

Its Pan-Islamic religious element, represented both by the revolutionary Moslem Brotherhood and by conservative groups for whom the Crusades and the centuries-old struggle with Christianity are a living reality, is united in looking to a religious revival to bring about the political union of all Islamic peoples. Fascism, too, which greatly impressed the Arab mind in the thirties, still has some influence, although in more advanced Lebanon, and among many Arab students abroad, the ideals of an enlightened Western socialism are popular. More important, however, is Communism, for which social conditions throughout the Middle East provide an almost ideal breeding ground. And joined to Communism is the fact itself of the Soviet Union, which not only everywhere claims to be champion of the cause of backward peoples and associates herself with the aspirations of oppressed classes, if only in opposition to the West with its "*colonial and imperialist policies,*" but has by her own example shown that a backward and largely illiterate country could transform itself within a single generation into a global and industrial power.

The part played by Communist and Soviet influence in Arab nationalism should not be exaggerated, however. It is true that no national movement in Asia and Africa can hope to succeed in the long run unless it brings about far-reaching social reforms, and that if these are not achieved sooner or later, Communism may well become an unavoidable reality. Nonetheless the main and fundamental goal of Asian and African nationalism is still national-perhaps even continental independence, and this still precedes all other questions. As President Sukarno of Indonesia said recently in Washington, "*Nationalism may be an out-of-date doctrine for many in this world; for us of Asia and Africa it is the mainspring of our efforts.*"

What Arab nationalism today aims at first and foremost is self-assertion and the elimination of the last vestiges of foreign rule and influence. This is why Pan-Arabism is stronger than Pan-Islamism. And this, too, is why the actual political leadership in most Arab countries has now passed into the hands of military leaders, whether they are allied with conservative forces as in Iraq, or with revolutionary ones as in Egypt.

As was pointed out in these pages by Walter Z. Laqueur ("*The Moscow-Cairo Axis*" May 1956), Arab nationalism is quite different from the nationalism of Pakistan, India, or Burma: countries that, once their independence was achieved, applied themselves immediately to domestic reform. Arab nationalism pursues political and military ends in the main, and still faces outward. Part of this difference may be explained by the character and history of the peoples concerned-Gandhi and Nasser represent very different kinds of men-but it has to be remembered, above all, that India,

Pakistan, and Burma were granted their independence peacefully, whereas the Arabs have had to fight for sovereignty-in the Suez, in North Africa, in Jordan, and elsewhere. For them the atmosphere of the “*resistance*” and its aftermath is still alive, and although the ultimate fate of the Arab peoples will depend on their ability to solve their social problems, this last is still considered by many Arabs to be a matter exclusively of the future which can be faced only after full independence and union have been won.

The decisive fact remains that Arab nationalism is no longer an isolated phenomenon, but part of a great revolutionary movement embracing the continents of Asia and Africa whose members draw strength and inspiration from their solidarity. This very solidarity can have an enlightening influence on some elements of Arab nationalism.* It does, at any rate, inspire its adherents with the conviction that they are engaged in an enterprise of historic significance.

ISRAEL appears to the Arabs to be linked at bottom with the West. The existence of the Jewish National Home, protected in its beginnings by British might and later supported by the United States, is regarded by them as forming part of a general settlement that the West imposed on the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean without their consent, and even against their will. In Arab eyes, this makes Israel a vestige of that “*hateful system of colonialism which it is the duty of every Arab patriot to shake off,*” from the West Coast of Africa to the borders of Iran.

This view is shared by many peoples in both Asia and Africa, non-Arab as well as Arab. Gandhi had written: “*The Jews erred grievously in seeking to impose themselves on Palestine with the aid of America and Britain.*” In 1947, when the United Nations decided on partition and the establishment of the Jewish state, all peoples who ever had been directly or indirectly subjected to colonialism voted against the proposal; and in 1955, when representatives of most of the Asian and African peoples gathered in Bandung to solidarize themselves with the anti-colonial struggle, Israel was not invited. Her representatives were likewise excluded From a recent conference of Afro-Asian students.

To readjust their policy to the new situation in Asia and Africa has now become a major task, both for Israel and the Western powers. Western policy towards the Middle East was hitherto embodied in the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 guaranteeing the Arab-Israeli status quo. At the time it was issued the Declaration seemed to dominate the scene-to the same extent that Western strength did. But conditions in the Middle East today are very different from those prevailing in 1950, and the fate of the Declaration has become a symbol of

the shrinking influence of Britain, France, and the United States in that area. The many doubts expressed and changes made in its interpretation in the years since its issuance reflect this shifting of power.

The Declaration had two aims: first, to keep the supply of arms to Arabs and Israelis low; and second, to avert a new outbreak of hostilities, should one threaten, by immediate joint action of the Western powers “*both within and without the United Nations.*”

At that time, the achievement of these aims was within reach of the three governments concerned. The authority and special position of the Western countries in the Middle East were then still generally recognized, and strong forces were available on the spot to deal immediately with any emergency. Today this situation no longer obtains. The rationing of arms introduced by the West has been rendered ineffective by the Soviet bloc’s offer of a virtually free supply to the Arab side. Thus the West’s monopoly in arms supply, which was the very foundation of its control of the Middle East, no longer exists. As matters now stand, rejection of Israel’s plea for arms can no longer be based on a Tripartite Declaration which is incapable of preventing the Arab side from arming itself to the teeth with Soviet weapons.

As regards the prevention of hostilities, the Declaration distinguished between action within and without the United Nations. For the former, easily applicable rules of procedure were laid down in the Charter. Nor were there any difficulties to be foreseen in taking diplomatic and economic action, as distinct from military, in case of need. Nonetheless, the real problem all the time was that of unilateral military intervention by the Western powers. And there is where the whole problem has come to a head.

Obviously, the question of such intervention was left open in order to adjust action to changing circumstances-and these have changed indeed! British soldiers no longer guard Suez. Farouk has been replaced by a revolutionary government. Abdullah is dead and the British position in Jordan shaken. Abadan has been evacuated. Cyprus is the scene of bitter strife. France has suffered grievous injury in Indo-China and is deeply engaged in North Africa. The Korean War - not yet begun when the Declaration was issued - has led to an international stalemate. Nationalist forces are in the ascendant in Africa and Asia, and the Arab and Asian countries have won much new influence in the United Nations. Unilateral military intervention by the West against the Arab states would under these new conditions be hedged round by many problems-quite apart from the question of where the armed forces necessary for immediate action could be obtained.

* *It is noteworthy that Arab students in Great Britain have rejected the help that British fascists and anti-Semites have been persistently offering them in their anti-Israeli propaganda. They consider such allies incompatible with the revolutionary and progressive character of their movement, and fear that help from such a quarter might even destroy the springs of its strength.*

Would Iraq remain inactive in case of Western intervention, or would she join with the other Arabs, and thus bring down the Baghdad Pact? What would be the effect of intervention on Pakistan and North Africa? Moreover, Russia has formally announced that the dispatch of troops to the Middle East would concern her interests and security and, if undertaken without the consent of the Security Council, would be “*gross violation of the United Nations Charter.*” The Security Council could not sanction unilateral military intervention against a Russian veto.

All these questions must have been carefully considered in the deliberations between the Western governments that have been going on since Eden’s visit to Eisenhower earlier this year, and it is most significant that, presumably as a result of these deliberations, the United States decided to bring the issue before the Security Council again and thus shift the locus of initiative from the Western powers to the United Nations—a step that tacitly acknowledges the changed conditions which prevent both the West and the Soviets from undertaking unilateral military action in the Middle East, and which throws the issue of power once more in the balance.

On the Jewish side, great efforts are being made to find a new political orientation for Israel in the Middle East. It has recently been suggested in the United States that Israel should proclaim herself a “*bulwark of anti-Communism*” in order to identify her cause with American anti-Communism, and thus secure a greater measure of American sympathy and support. One of the weaknesses of this proposal is that it approaches the problem from too exclusively an American point of view, and Israel’s policy must be shaped in Jerusalem, not New York. Even more important, it is wrong to assume that the world is divided between two power blocs alone. The American proposal overlooks the importance of the independence movements in Asia and Africa. Although these have frequently been exploited as well as supported by the Soviet Union, they obey their own laws and are essentially free agents.

The roots of the yearning for liberation among the colonial peoples are older than the Russian Revolution. Arab nationalism can be traced back to the 19th century, and the Indian movement for independence (if we discount the Mutiny of 1857-58) at least to the beginning of this century. Were all consequences of the Russian Revolution undone, it would still not be possible to restore Western domination over Africa and Asia: the national movements of the Asian and Arab peoples would survive the fall of Communism as they survived that of Nazi Germany, which likewise tried to exploit them for her own purposes.

It may be expected that once national independence has been fully established, passions will quiet down, but until then the national issue will certainly remain the most urgent concern of the peoples of the Middle East. Compared with this, Russian Communism is for them remote and of

secondary importance. Thus anti-Communism has a different meaning in the Orient than in the West, where national aspirations have been fulfilled for generations. In the West it means the preservation of an established, cherished, independent way of life; in the East anti-Communism is suspected first and foremost of being a device to obstruct national liberation and, possibly, to restore Western privileges.

An Israel that was a “*bulwark against Communism*” would, to her neighbors, and indeed to many others, mean: an Israel bent on the restoration of that Western supremacy which protected her in the past and may protect her again in the future. This would earn her the hostility of all those everywhere who fight the colonial system.

At the same time the fact that the Soviet Union encourages their national movements does not make the colonial peoples any the more eager to identify themselves with her. Of the many newly established “native” states from Indonesia to Morocco, hardly a one has entered the Soviet camp so far. Instead, they have joined the neutralist bloc, refusing to pledge allegiance to either side in the cold war. Meanwhile the West has carefully avoided any step that might have irrevocable consequences, and Israel herself has certainly been right not to rush in where the West itself fears to tread.

The prospects of peace between Israel and the Arabs are remote at present. The Arab peoples do not accept Israel’s existence in their midst; they see in her an alien body that has been forced upon them much like the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem was at the time of the Crusades. Just as they were able to destroy that Christian enclave after a century of bitter struggle, they hope ultimately to eliminate the State, if not the people, of Israel. It was of symbolic significance that King Hussein of Jordan and President Kuwatli of Syria met recently at the tomb of Saladin the Great, “*who defended the Holy Land and purged it of intruders,*” to promise solemnly to “defend” Palestine and the Arab dominions.

Arab unwillingness to recognize Israel does not spring solely from a psychological refusal to accept military defeat, or from feelings of grievance at a moral wrong done the Arabs. It is linked with the conviction that the wrong was inflicted upon them with the help of the colonial powers, and that therefore to recognize Israel would be tantamount to accepting the results of colonial policy. This is why recognition is the decisive issue in obstructing Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. But only if Arab recognition of Israel is obtained, and only if a basis for Arab-Israeli co-existence is found on the level of human relationships, can the other problems outstanding between them be solved.

At the moment, reasonable hope exists that at least the state of truce will continue. Israel will no doubt do her utmost in the meantime to strengthen her defenses—more than once

small nations have prevailed against overwhelming odds. But defense alone is not enough: a political solution must be sought, and the breathing space granted by the truce may afford a favorable opportunity to reflect on Israel's position in a changing world.

The first job will be to re-think her relations with the West. There can, of course, be no question of changing sides and going over to the Soviet camp. Israel's links of friendship with the West are established beyond doubt, and some of the highest values of Western civilization are integral to Israeli life. Nevertheless, Israel may have to dissociate herself from aspects of Western policy which have an imperial or colonial character and are therefore bound to rouse the hostility of her neighbors. Since the Western powers themselves are anxious for improved relations between Israel and her neighbors, they may be expected to understand the necessity of Israel's remaining neutral and unpartisan in such matters as the Franco-Algerian conflict and the

British difficulties on the Persian Gulf.

Another job will be to break down the belief in the minds of the Arabs, and indeed of all Asian and African peoples, that Israel is an outpost of Western policy and power. In his opening speech at the World Zionist Congress held in Jerusalem in May, Dr. Nahum Goldmann complained that "Zionism has been defamed, distorted, and misrepresented." This is certainly true, but Zionism's alliance over many years with Western imperial policy has greatly contributed to this. Seen in the right historical perspective, however, Israel's association with Western material interests is but a passing episode. Her ties with the Holy Land date back beyond the very beginnings of the Western states and are rooted in immemorial history. And the Jewish national movement itself is every bit as genuine and legitimate as that of the Arabs.

In the same speech, Dr. Goldmann added that "*Israel can understand some of the motives of Arab behavior.*" Nothing is more necessary than such understanding. Failure to understand the Arab and lack of regard for his feelings, as manifested by the greater part of the Jewish people, have been among the main factors in bringing about the present situation. Two generations ago Ahad I la'am, in his famous essay, "*The Truth from Palestine*" warned against this, and in the course of thirty years repeated the warning again and again. Surveying his life's work in 1920, he declared that "*from the beginning of the Palestinian colonization we have always considered the Arab people as non-existent.*"

With the first disturbances between Arabs and Jews in 1920 and 1921, and then the riots of 1929, and again in the revolt in 1936-39, we tried, and continue to try, to persuade ourselves and the rest of the world that Arab resistance to Zionist colonization was artificially stimulated and not

sincere. As late as the summer of 1947, a few months before the outbreak of the Arab-Jewish war, the leaders of the rightist Irgun Zvai Leumi explained in all seriousness to the UN Commission that "*there was no such a phenomenon as independent Arab opposition and that all Arab opposition was instigated by the British themselves.*" This opinion was more or less shared by a majority of Jews. "*Arab absentee landlords,*" "*Moslem religious fanatics,*" "*fascist and Nazi agents,*" "*British imperialists and anti-Semites,*" and lastly "*Russian Communists*" - all have been blamed in turn. That Arab opposition to Jewish mass immigration to a country they considered their own was natural - and what people would have reacted differently in such conditions? - was fervently denied, so fervently that to insist on the simple fact among Jews took on almost the character of a revolutionary thesis.

The refusal to recognize the authenticity of Arab resistance and its naturalness was not only a political mistake of the first magnitude, but a wrong done to Arab self esteem. It constitutes the one fundamental failure in the building of the Jewish National Home; it mars an otherwise glorious record of devotion, courage, and sacrifice.

Though nationalism is today the overriding issue in the Middle East, it may be useful to look beyond the present crisis to a time when national ambitions have been fulfilled and passions calmed. At present the minds of the Oriental peoples are filled with the desire for liberation from Western influence, and even where that has been achieved the after-effects of the struggle for it still linger on. Full independence will have been achieved only when the problem itself of independence no longer monopolizes attention. Only then will real independence begin, and at that time, with both imperialism and nationalism overcome, new relations with the West may develop in which the heritage of Western influence will be freshly and more positively assessed by the onetime colonial peoples. Here, Israeli and Western interests will again join, not to seek the restoration of Western supremacy, but to try to create conditions for co-existence with the Orient that will assure equal benefits to all concerned. The future of Israel may well depend on the success of this enterprise.

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