

Arabs and Israelis: The Broken Peace

The Mideast war has caused a great deal of confusion in the ranks of the American Left. "Doves" (on Vietnam) justify armed aggression, preventive war, napalm, as long as the victims are Arabs. Their attitude is based on the assumption that the Israeli people have only one choice: survival or annihilation. In the name of survival, they are willing to accept as necessary any crime, atrocity, or act of war.

Fear of annihilation needs no explanation. The Jewish people bear the terrible burden of a history where their individual and collective existence was always at stake.

But the historical experience upon which that fear is based is almost entirely European. That fear is valid, but it is valid within the context of European, not Middle Eastern history.

Professor Louis Snyder, in *The Idea of Racialism*,* states: "Racialism, a relatively recent phenomenon, is historically a concomitant movement with modern nationalism and imperialism." This is also the conclusion of a group of scholars in the UNESCO survey, *The Race Question in Modern Science*.

Racialism, nationalism, and imperialism are modern European products. It was Christian Spain that expelled the Jews, Russian Tsarism that stirred up the pogroms, the French Right that persecuted Dreyfus, the German Junkers and big business who were behind the Nazis. It was, finally, European and American racist attitudes that left millions of homeless, displaced Jews with nowhere to go but Arab Palestine after 1945.

For over a century, the Middle East suffered under imperialist attack and conquest. The French, British, Italians, and Spanish drove the Arabs from their ancient lands; the British seriously considered settling the surplus population of India in Iraq; "French" settlers took over Algeria; the Italian Fascists dreamed of turning Libya into a solid Italian colony.

To most Arabs, the struggle against Israel is part of the same struggle against being displaced by European invasion and conquest.

*Louis L. Snyder, *The Idea of Racialism* (Van Nostrand-Anvil, Princeton, New Jersey), p. 25.

The Arabs know little of the Jewish experience in Europe, still less about Israeli attitudes formed by those experiences. Nationalism, primarily a post-World War II phenomenon in the Middle East, has not yet fully developed those racist overtones so characteristic of the European variety. For most Arabs, the Arab-Israeli conflict is in the main an anti-imperialist, political struggle, not a racial one.

Of course, this makes a great difference in interpreting the Arab-Israeli conflict. Politics admits of change; biology does not. The Nazi creed of racialism made them implacable enemies of the Jews. No Nazi peace gesture could possibly be sincere, since their objective was the physical annihilation of all Jews.

The Israeli and Jewish misinterpretation of the Arab attitude in terms of European racialism leads them to believe that the Israeli people face annihilation, that no Arab peace move could be sincere, and that Israel is surrounded by a solid bloc of implacable enemies. Israel equates the Arabs with the Nazis. The Israeli people treat the Arabs in the way they would have liked to have dealt with the Nazis, had they been strong and unified enough then. The Israeli people are fighting, over and over again, a war that came to an end on May 8, 1945, but continues to burn in their hearts.

A Peace That Could Have Been

If it is untrue that the Arabs are European racials, it is also untrue that the Arabs do not want peace with Israel. In fact, in the period 1952-55, there was a good possibility of this peace coming about. The 1952 Revolution in Egypt was a starting point for this.

At that time, both the Israelis and Egyptians had in common certain aspirations toward a vague "socialism." This created a bond of sympathy that might otherwise not have existed. Nasser and the Egyptian "Free Officers" maintained secret contact with Israel through Mordechai Cohen, an Israeli army officer they knew from the Palestine war. Secret Israeli-Egyptian peace talks began in 1953. Shipping bound to and from Israel was allowed to pass freely through the Suez Canal. When the Jordan Valley Authority project was brought up, Egypt established the first technical committee to study the plan. The Egyptians also pressed the other Arab states to participate in discussions about it.

In December, 1953, Ben-Gurion was replaced as Premier by the moderate, Moshe Sharett. Nasser said he knew Sharett, had "high hopes" and "lively sympathy" for him. In addition, in early 1954,

incidents on the Israeli-Jordanian border sharply diminished as regular Arab Legion forces moved in to replace "home guard" Arab refugee units.

Under Sharett, there was a growing Arab-Israeli rapprochement. It cannot be without significance in assessing this that Ben Gurion's background was European; Sharett (Shertog) was brought up in an Arab village in Palestine, knew Arabic, and fought in the Ottoman Turkish army in World War I.

What sabotaged friendly Arab-Israeli relations was the work of Israeli "activists" or "hawks," led by Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan. They operated without the knowledge or consent of the Israeli government. They carried out the policy of "massive retaliation" for Arab infiltration into Israel, basing this policy on the myth that all Arabs were alike, that all Arabs were determined to wipe out Israel, and that the only thing the Arabs understood was force.

"Activist" policy was directly contrary to the Israeli national interest. Reliance on military force in the end can only result in the annihilation of the Israeli people, thus bringing about what it is supposedly designed to prevent. Israel's most vital national interest is to live in peace with its neighbors.

This was a period when the C.I.A. was most blatantly at work in the Middle East and elsewhere; for example, the C.I.A. in Iran bought the Iranian police and military, and spent \$6 million paying the leaders of Teheran street-mobs to overthrow the nationalist regime of Premier Mosaddeq. The relation of the C.I.A. to the emergence of a secret anti-government clique of military adventurers in Israel in this same period of time cannot yet be determined, due to the lack of positive documentary evidence.

How Peace Was Sabotaged

The process of the Israeli "activist" sabotage of peace, however, can be traced very clearly through a series of incidents, 1953-55:

1) *Qibya*. On October 13, 1953, three Israelis were killed at Tirat Yahude. Tracks led to the Jordan border. The Arab Legion commander, Glubb Pasha, personally led the search in Jordan for the murderers. He begged the Israelis to hold off for a few days until they were tracked down.

On October 14, 1953, the Israeli army attacked Qibya, an Arab village in Jordan, killing 53 men, women, and children. Talks on the Jordan Valley project, which were just beginning, were almost scuttled

by the raid. The raid was planned and initiated by Moshe Dayan, soon to become the new Israeli Army Chief of Staff.

2) *Scorpion Pass*. On March 17, 1954, 11 Israelis were killed when their bus was ambushed. The Israeli army called this a deliberate Jordanian military operation. They insisted no looting had taken place, though everything of value had been stripped from the bus and the ring fingers of the slain hacked off. The survivors said the attackers were Arab Bedouins. The Israeli army ignored this testimony. Jordan sent experienced teams of trackers into Israel at UN request. The Israeli army forbade them to look anywhere except between the bus and the Jordan border.

On March 28, 1954, the Israeli army attacked the Jordanian town of Nahhalin, killing 9 and wounding 20 Arabs. This raid was undertaken without the knowledge or prior consent of the Israeli government.

When Israel occupied the Gaza Strip in 1956, two years later, considerable evidence was found that the Scorpion Pass incident was the work of Arab Bedouins from the Negev-Sinai region.

3) *Bat Galim*. Mahmoud Fawzi, Egyptian UN delegate, stated in February, 1954, that if Egypt were left alone, it would "move" toward tolerance of Israeli use of the Suez Canal. For internal political reasons, the Egyptians wanted a gradualist solution to this problem. From February to October, 1954, shipping to and from Israel passed through the Canal.

On September 28, 1954, the Israelis tried to send a wholly (and obviously) Israeli ship, the *Bat Galim*, through Suez. The ship was seized; the crew was sent back to Israel.

There is some evidence that the "activists" wanted to force a showdown with Egypt over the Canal before the Anglo-Egyptian treaty was signed.

4) *Egyptian Spy Trials*. In the Fall of 1954, Egypt hanged two Egyptian Jews for espionage. This incident caused an outburst of anti-Arab, anti-Egyptian hatred in Israel.

Criticism of Moshe Sharett and his Minister of Defense, Pinhas Lavon, became so strong that Lavon was forced to resign in favor of Ben-Gurion on February 17, 1955. At the time, the Israeli people sincerely believed the defendants in the Egyptian spy trial to be innocent. Today, we know that the "activists" set up a true espionage ring in Egypt without Lavon's knowledge. No full inquiry into this matter has ever been permitted by Ben-Gurion or others.

5) *Gaza*. Major-General Bennike (Denmark), of the UN Truce

Supervision Organization, stated in a report to the UN on October 27, 1953 that "after a long period of quiet" on the Israeli-Egyptian border, the Israeli army, using tanks and airplanes, began driving Arab nomads from the Negev across into Egypt. About 9,000 nomads were expelled into the already-smouldering Gaza Strip area with its 200,000 Arab refugees.

The nomads knew every inch of ground in the Negev-Sinai region. They recrossed the border in two's and three's to commit acts of sabotage and murder in revenge. It was undoubtedly a group of these Bedouins who were responsible for the Scorpion Pass incident described earlier. The Egyptians did not know the Gaza-Sinai area well enough to stop them.

On February 28, 1955, eleven days after Ben-Gurion became Israeli Minister of Defense, the Israeli army attacked the Gaza Strip. The Israelis overran an Egyptian military post, wiped out Egyptian reinforcements sent to it, blew up several installations, and then withdrew. Egyptian casualties were 38 dead and 30 wounded, but what mattered most to Nasser and the Egyptian military was that their soldiers had been too poorly armed to defend themselves.

The results of the Gaza raid are well known. Egypt sought modern arms in the West, then turned to the USSR and the socialist countries. The arms agreement of September, 1955, between the USSR and Egypt led to John Foster Dulles' withdrawal of American aid for the Aswan Dam on July 19, 1956. On July 26, 1956, Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal Company, hoping to use the Canal revenues to finance the dam.

But it is not so well known that the Gaza raid marked the final blow to any hope of Israeli-Egyptian peace. From this point on, the Egyptians dropped even secret, gradual steps that might have led to de-escalation of the conflict .

Israel in Collusion with Imperialism

The results on the Israeli side strengthened the "activist," Right-wing, and increasingly pro-imperialist element. In the summer of 1955, Ben-Gurion became Premier as well as Minister of Defense. Later, Sharett was forced out of the cabinet.

Ben-Gurion and Dayan led Israel into secret military alliance with Britain and France. France, with Israeli aid, hoped to crush the supposed source of the Algerian revolution by attacking Egypt. Britain, certain that the October, 1956 elections in Jordan would result in

the overthrow of King Hussein and the emergence of a pro-Nasser government, planned to destroy Jordan: Israel was to take western Jordan, Nuri al-Said's Iraq was to take the old Transjordan. In September and October of 1956, Israel launched massive raids against Jordan. Nuri al-Said begged King Hussein to take in large Iraqi units to "defend" the country. Hussein refused, not realizing how right he was to do so.

It can be seen from this that not only had the "activists" sabotaged Arab-Israeli peace efforts and taken over power in Israel by the use of "massive retaliation," but also from the time they came into full power, they began actively to cooperate with Britain, France, the U.S., and even Arab reactionaries like Nuri al-Said. If it is true that birds of a feather flock together, it can be said of this that the "hawks" were gathering to feast on the corpses of the Arabs in 1956.

Israel did not withdraw "voluntarily" from Sinai in 1956. The Israelis received no political guarantees of any kind "in return" for withdrawing. Dag Hammarskjold made this point very clear on at least a dozen occasions, most importantly in his report to the UN General Assembly of January 24, 1957, in which he roundly denounced the Israeli "interpretation" as "inadmissible." The Israelis could not ask for guarantees, since the United Nations cannot condone a change of the *status juris* resulting from military action contrary to the provisions of the Charter," *i.e.*, Israel's invasion of Sinai. Israel, condemned as an aggressor, was simply to withdraw.

The UN "presence" at Sharm el-Sheikh was less clear: that area was obviously not on the Israeli-Egyptian border. Egypt, however, agreed to the UNEF presence there in spite of this. Mahmoud Fawzi stated at the time that the continued presence of the UNEF at Sharm el-Sheikh would depend upon the Israelis agreeing to UNEF operations on Israeli territory. Israel refused. A UNEF operating on Israeli territory would mean that no sudden attack on Egypt could be mounted in the future. In other words, it would have meant peace.

In fact, it should not be forgotten that for over a decade, the "temporary, stop-gap" expedient of the UNEF kept the Israeli-Egyptian border as quiet as the Israeli-Lebanese border. It allowed Israel to build up the port of Eilat on the Gulf of Aqaba into a potential gateway to Asia and Africa; a place where oil from Iran entered a newly-constructed pipeline and was pumped to the refinery at Haifa.

To Israel, a power-deficient area, Iranian oil, 90 per cent of Israel's needs, was the motivating power for its factories and industries. The region around Eilat as well contains large deposits of phosphates.

These could be shipped to Asia and Africa for use as fertilizer. After 1956, Eilat and the southern Negev became an important economic area for Israel.

But, in addition, the Israelis boasted that Israel would become an alternative to Suez. Not only would pipelines cross Israel, but also eventually a canal. Western interests would have a "safe" and guaranteed water route through the Middle East.

Syria—the New Imperialist Target

The "sore spot" in the Middle East in 1966 was Syria: in February, 1966, the Left, progressive wing of the Ba'th (Renaissance) Party took control of the government. It was described as "a fanatical socialist party" seeking to turn Syria onto "a path of near-paranoid violence" by *Time* magazine (January 20, 1967). What the Ba'th Party had done to deserve this was to declare its undying hostility to capitalism and its support of the Arab masses.

The Ba'th government was the first in Syrian history that depended for support on the Syrian trade unions, led by Khaled el-Jundi, which were organized into workers' militia units. The Ba'th government was thus able to nationalize 80 per cent of the industry and 90 per cent of the agricultural land of Syria, and to begin turning the economy over to workers and peasants. In addition, the Syrians lifted the ban on the Syrian Communist Party.

The imperialist powers, already nervous about Syria, were horrified when on December 8, 1966, the Syrian government nationalized the oil pipelines running across Syria from Iraq to the Mediterranean.

Before 1958, Syria had been moving very rapidly toward the Left. At that time, the imperialist powers were faced with the alternatives of a "Communist" Syria or a take-over by Nasser. It was the latter which took place. Under the United Arab Republic, from 1958 to 1961, Nasser had control of the Syrian oil pipelines and the Suez Canal, and when the main "danger" had receded, the Syrian middle-class was very quick to break this connection.

But in 1966 Syria was even further to the Left than in 1958, and it was hanging or expelling C.I.A. agents with alarming efficiency. The Syrians were also allowing commando units based on their territory to threaten Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, the three Middle Eastern countries in which the United States has the greatest interest.

It is clear, then, that there was a convergence of interests between the Israeli "hawks" and their American cousins. The only difficulty was that the 47-mile-long Israeli-Syrian border was a heavily-fortified

natural defensive position. Taking it would have required a truly massive attack and a paratroop drop behind Syrian lines.

This was the reason why the Israelis attacked the Jordanian village of Es Samu, on November 13, 1966, with a 4,000-man force, using tanks and jet aircraft. In actuality, they were after Syria.

The Israeli raid on Es Samu was the biggest military operation in the Middle East since the Suez invasion of 1956. In Israel itself, it led to the first "backlash" against the whole concept of "massive retaliation." The pro-government newspaper *She'arim* commented: "It is clear that this latest raid has given an exceptional opportunity to the extremists to intensify incitement to a people's war against Israel."*

In fact, this raid led to rioting against King Hussein of Jordan and to the near-collapse of his throne. At the same time, it was clear that such a massive raid was not only in reprisal but might be the first move toward an Israeli invasion of Syria, turning Syrian defenses by going through Jordan. In November, 1966, therefore, Egypt and Syria concluded a mutual defense pact. Their military intelligence reported that Israel was planning an invasion of Syria. The date was thought to be May 17, 1967. Their fears were confirmed by the Israeli air raid on Damascus on April 7, 1967, in which ten Syrian planes were shot down, and by Premier Eshkol's remarks that even more drastic action might be taken against Syria in the future.

Aggression Disguised as a "Preventive Strike"

The Egyptians, very ostentatiously, began moving their forces into Sinai. While there were plenty of other routes, the Egyptians chose to go directly through Cairo, where they would be sure to be spotted by Western newsmen.

On May 16, the day before the supposed invasion was to have taken place against Syria, Nasser asked UNEF to leave the Israeli-Egyptian border (but not Sharm el-Sheikh). Informed by U Thant that the entire force would have to be withdrawn, or none, Nasser's hand was forced and on May 17, he ordered the entire UNEF out of Egyptian territory. On May 22, the Egyptian blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba was reimposed.**

*Quoted by Don Cook in a dispatch to the *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 1966.

** In international law, a blockade, in order to be considered an act of war, must 1) include the entire coastline of a country, 2) be effective. This is why the Cuban blockade was legally an act of war, and the Egyptian blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba was not.

U Thant's request to the Israelis that the UNEF simply be placed on the Israeli side of the border in fact might have prevented war, had the Israelis accepted it. The Egyptians were not prepared for war: their aircraft were parked wing-to-wing, and their tanks were dug in so that they could not be maneuvered in combat. No troops were withdrawn from the Egyptian force in Yemen. Hanson Baldwin of the *New York Times* reported on June 8, 1967 that "apparently the majority of the six to seven Egyptian divisions were not even in Sinai."

Once mobilized, though, the Israeli army must strike. It is an army of reserves formed out of nearly the entire working population; in 1956, the Israeli economy was beginning to break down due to lack of labor power when the campaign in Sinai came to an end. This situation would have reoccurred in 1967 as well.

Certainly, the Israeli "fear of annihilation" played a part in determining whether or not a "preventive" first strike would be launched. But for Israeli Premier Eshkol, the important considerations must have been the military need to strike, once the army was mobilized, and the clamor of the "hawks."

Eshkol had been a protege of Ben-Gurion's. Ben-Gurion evidently wanted to use Eshkol as a transition to Dayan. But in 1965, Ben-Gurion became disgusted with Eshkol's moderation, denounced him, and together with Dayan formed his own Rafi party. The Rafi party was badly defeated in the 1965 elections. Ben-Gurion seemed out of it and so did Dayan.

In the growing war crisis, Dayan had an opportunity to get back into full power once more. Eshkol held off appointing him as chief of staff. Dayan himself admitted Eshkol wanted Labor Minister Yigal Allon as defense minister. But under tremendous pressure from the "hawks," at the last possible moment, Eshkol gave in. Dayan had already decided on war, and had spent the preceding two weeks touring Israeli army bases getting ready for it.

Moshe Dayan Architect of Aggression

Dayan's "image" as the "architect of victory" and the "man who saved Israel" is being assiduously cultivated in the American press; broad hints are being dropped that Dayan will be Israel's next premier.

In 1966, Dayan was given the super, gold-plated tour of South Vietnam by the Americans. The American military fell over one another in their admiration for him. General Walt, former commander

of the US Marines in Vietnam, called Dayan a "brilliant tactician and strategist," and lately (not without reason) he has been compared to Rommel as a master of desert warfare.

If Dayan becomes premier, Israel will have as its leader the "activist" *par excellence*, the architect of the policy of massive retaliation, a man responsible for sabotaging every effort at Arab-Israeli peace, deeply involved in imperialist intrigue, and the admired friend of the American Right-wing military. The fact that Dayan has led two wars against the Arabs and is responsible for tens of thousands of Arab deaths will not go unnoticed either.

On a small scale, the Israeli "activist" policy of massive retaliation against the Arabs is guided by the same assumptions that underlie the ideology of the bigger "cold war": that the issue is survival against an implacably evil, monolithic enemy, that in the name of survival, anything is justified, and that in the end, the sole sure reliance is upon military force. American "hawks" and cold warriors have more than once clamored for a "preventive first strike" on the socialist countries, but in the United States even some of the "hawks" thought the idea of preventive war a bit too much.

In the Middle East in June, 1967, what the Israelis did to the Arabs was the equivalent of a massive American "preventive" strike on Chinese nuclear installations and cities. It would be foolhardy indeed to predict that the Arab reaction will not be more or less what one could expect of the Chinese in like circumstances.

Yet, the Israeli people and the Arabs have every reason to live together in peace.

In the Middle East, the "psychology" of Arab-Israeli conflict is not irrelevant. But there, as elsewhere, imperialism has every reason to use and exploit local animosities, to keep smaller peoples fighting one another, so that they never combine against their real enemies.

The true horror of this situation is that it is two peoples which for centuries have been treated as the scum of the earth—persecuted, attacked, slaughtered, defiled and degraded, simply for being what they were—that now are pitted against one another by the same imperialism which oppresses both.