

Anti-Semitism, Anti-Revolution, Anti-Philosophy: U.S. and Russia Enter Middle East Cockpit

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The barbaric act of hanging 14 men from their necks in the public square in Baghdad has riveted attention, not so much on the alleged "Israeli spies," as on the degeneracy of the Iraq revolution. A decade ago it seemed to herald a new world. Today it has nothing to hang on to, except enmity to Israel. And even this "unifying force" failed to unify the Arab world.

IRAQ, EGYPT, AND NIXON TOO

The present Iraq government, the newest in a series of military coups and counter-coups, embarked upon the "discovery of Israeli spy rings" soon after it came to power "to clean up corruption." Obviously it was harder to achieve clean government than to unleash propaganda against the remaining 2,500 Jews in the country whom it promptly designated as "Fifth Columnists." Although other Arab countries, especially Egypt and Syria, suspected the virulent anti-Semitism was but a coverup to move against "Arab socialists," they at first could say little against the military junta headed by General Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr because they themselves held most adult Jewish males in prisons, and find anti-Israel propaganda almost the only unifying cement of their crisis-ridden countries.

After two months of "interrogations" and trials, however, one former high official of the Iraq Government, a left Ba'athist, was declared dead "while undergoing interrogation." Others, still held in jail, are feared to be among those marked for future hangings. Even foreign diplomats were not exempt from violent physical attacks. Indeed, on the very day of the hanging of "Israeli spies," a Syrian diplomat was wounded on a street in Baghdad.

The last straw, insofar as Egypt was concerned, was thrown by al-Bakr, a notorious anti-Nasserist, when he demanded that the Arab press laud his actions "for the Arab cause." The main Egyptian daily wrote that the gory spectacle was "not a heart-warming sight nor is it the occasion for organizing a festival and issuing invitations."

Consider, then, the sensitivity of the new Nixon Administration which announced that the President was looking for "new approaches" to the Middle East turmoil "insulated from decisions on the untidy rush of events in Iraq". All this is preparatory to plunging into a "Big Four" conference which will attempt to impose

"peace" on the Middle East without either Arab or Israeli having a say in the determination of their own fate. It is not hard to imagine the "objectivity" which will result from his Westernization of the Middle East crisis.

TWO OF A KIND: RUSSIA & THE U.S.

Russia stood altogether mute during the savage executions. No doubt, part of the reason is the spontaneous affinity it feels for Iraqi anti-Semitism. But that is only part of the story. A more important reason for the lack of criticism, at a time when Egypt and Syria did attack the hangings, is the orientation of the Iraq military junta's questioning of the granting of concessions by the former administration to France to exploit 10,000 square kilometers of Iraq territory for oil development. Russia's interest in the same project overshadows the inclination to go along with De Gaulle's proposal for "Middle East peace," or to line up with "Arab socialists."

Outweighing both considerations is the possibility of the U.S.-Russia "détente," that is to say, U.S. recognition that Russia is in the Middle East to stay.

This doesn't mean that Nixon is walking into a "trap." On the contrary. Precisely because the U.S. does see further Russian expansion in that strategic area as signifying a shift in the world balance of power, it is anxious to re-establish its own role in the Arab Middle East before a confrontation with Russia. The U.S. sees as one with Russia—little powers must not be allowed to set the time for the nuclear titans, even if it is the lives of the little ones that are at stake. In a word, the seelikes consider the Middle East an arena for a world power struggle, not for an Arab-Israeli confrontation "ahead of time."

Before the Arab-Israeli War in 1967, when both Russia and the U.S. thought they could control their "spheres of influence," the two super-powers could disregard the French proposal for a "Big Four" conference. They now know differently. Hence the present readiness to accept the junior partnerships of France and Britain and even the "world body, the UN" to dictate a "settlement."

The stage is all set for the deal: The substitute actors are in their respective places. But what about the real actors, the peoples whose lives are at stake? What has happened to that new, third world that it can now be ignored?

THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS

There was a time when getting rid of Western imperialism and internal feudalism in the Arab Middle East took priority over an Arab-Israeli confrontation. It is true that the setting up of the independent state of Israel in what was formerly Palestine brought about the first Arab-Israeli war. But the very success of Palestine's freedom from British imperialism set in motion truly independent Arab national revolutions. A dimension other than oil, a new human dimension—freedom—entered the Middle East.

By 1958, when the Iraq revolution overthrew the Hashemite monarchy, the whole Dulles strategy of anti-national revolutions, for a new type of colonialism, and the creation of SEATO, a euphemism for American imperialism, fell apart. By knocking the kingpin out from under neo-colonialism in the Middle East, it became possible to start on an independent road.

Iraqi nationalism refused also to follow either Nasserism or the bastard socialism called the Ba'ath Party* in Syria. As against the tendency to single party rule, Kassim, who headed the first republic of Iraq, allowed the activities of political parties, from moderate to Communist. (Now only in Israel is the Communist Party a legal party.) The unfinished state of the revolution, narrowness of mass base, however, made it impossible to fight the entrenched feudal landlords. The agricultural reforms were not implemented and when the Kurds demanded autonomy, the revolt was bloodily put down. A further political vacuum was created with Kasim outlawing all parties. The isolation from the masses was completed with the increase in unemployment and poverty. By 1963 Kassim rule was bloodily overthrown by a Ba'athist led military coup.

The most recent two-stage coup—on July 17 and again on July 30—brought to power a right-wing Ba'athist retired army general. The young colonels who aided the coup were soon scuttled. The new junta moved against the "French faction" but did nothing to get the country out of the deep economic crisis into which it had been plunged by the disastrous Arab-Israeli war in 1967.

The country is in chaos, and yet it is, precisely, the total disarray of the ruling classes and the military, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the dissatisfaction of the great masses, (rural and urban,) with their conditions of life as well as the armed resistance of the Kurds that has compelled the al-Bakr clique to rely solely on the enmity to Israel and pure anti-Semitism to get it out of the ever-deepening crisis.

It is this which discloses yet another aspect of anti-Semitism—especially Russian anti-Semitism.

RUSSIAN ANTI-SEMITISM, ANTI-REVOLUTION

Had it not been for the hangings in Iraq and the Russian silence about them in face of the attacks on them by the Arab countries closest to Russia, one may not have felt compelled to take a second look at the existence of anti-Semitism in the Russian orbit, dating back to Stalin's reign. Because, in theory, Communism stands opposed to anti-Semitism, it was so shocking to find it in existence that it was all too easy to attribute it to Stalin's paranoia, rather than to the objective conditions which had produced the transformation of a workers' state into its opposite—a state-capitalist society. Inside Russia the opposition to Stalin's rule could be seen even as the people defeated Nazism.

For one thing, the heroic Russian masses refused to labor under the same exploitative conditions as they had done during the war. To get a sufficient labor force, all penalties for violations of Stalin's Draconian "labor laws," were cancelled.

Secondly, there were the returning veterans who had seen "the West" and failed to bow to the "superiority" of Russian "socialism." The youth and intellectual opposition grew.

It is because the revolutionary opponents grew, that Stalin unleashed the anti-Semitic campaign that he euphemistically called the struggle against "rootless cosmopolitans." Anti-Semitism had nothing to do with the birth of Israel (which, at first, Stalin voted for, as none but the Jews had then successfully fought British imperialism). It had everything to do with internal conditions in Russia—the restlessness of the Russian masses with Stalinism.

Anti-Semitism had nothing to do with "rootless cosmopolitanism." It had everything to do with stifling the emergence of new revolutionary forces that were struggling to come to power and be independent of Russian domination, be that in Yugoslavia or France. The notorious "Doctors Plot" was not a struggle against "Zionism" in Israel but against revolutionary opponents in Russia and in the satellites. How quickly old radical forget, once a new situation arises and a "new" enemy is discovered.

Of course, imperialism, whether Western or Zionist—or, for that matter, Communist of either the Russian or Chinese variety—has to be fought and destroyed. But how does that excuse the Left (from all the varieties of Trotskyism to the most "non-ideological" would-be revolutionary) for designating all the Arab lands, including even the feudal monarchies, as "representing the progressive forces"? What accounts for the designation of Israel, from its birth to its most persistent anti-Zionist manifestation, as representing "Western imperialism"?

Of course, internationalism must replace narrow nationalisms, but how does that get to equal "the annihilation of Israel?" Shouldn't self-determination guarantee Israel's right to exist even as it holds for all sovereign nations? Marxist-Humanists refuse not only "to take sides" in Big Power deals but categorically refuse to violate proletarian internationalism and the class struggle within each existing power on the dictates of the Stalinist-Maoist-Castroite "two camp" theory of the world. There has to be an independent way out. There is.

Of course, anti-Semitism is but one manifestation of capitalism. But when a "socialist" country like Poland in 1968 carries on so virulent an anti-Semitic campaign against its revolutionary opponents as to ape the Nazis in establishing a special "Jewish Department," it is high time both to recognize the class nature of present-day Communism, which is but a euphemism for state-capitalism, and to recognize that, in this epoch, it signifies anti-revolution as well.

To the extent that Israel is now an occupying force, resistance against it will, and is, emerging. It is this, and not commandos from without that serve as a beacon also for the Jews who are opposing Zionism. It was the threat of genocide that unified the nation. Commandos from without, let by exhorters of the "annihilation of Israel" cannot, however, be anointed as a "revolutionary force," not even when Mao* adds his blessing to those of the fascist Al-Shukary.

In any case, the new mass dissatisfaction in Arab lands, disclosed in Iraq, is against their ruling classes, not against Israel. It is this the Left is in danger of strangling by tailending Communism.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION

The danger now is to force a false "Arab unity" against Israel, or "Zionist unity" against Arabs, thereby

not only giving the Big Powers an excuse for intervention, but actually stifling the new emergent revolutionary forces throughout the Middle East even as Stalin crushed every revolution in the path of the Red Army as well as every revolutionary movement that dared aspire to power outside of the Red Army orbit.

We have seen the same role reenacted in Paris last Spring. Are we now to have it reappear in the Middle East? That would be the greatest crime any revolutionary could commit. For, note this, the restlessness of the Iraq masses and the demand of the Kurds for autonomy there is directed, not at Israel, but Iraq. The opponents in the jails in Syria oppose Ba'ath rule; the very narrow mass base speaks loudly enough of the Ba'athist leaders' total isolation from the masses. And the student demonstrations in Egypt, as all over the world, are directed, not against a "foreign" enemy, but against the native rulers.

Nationalism is not the beacon it was a decade ago when it seemed to be the way to fight both imperialism and the native class exploitation. New forces are emerging who are searching for a more comprehensive theory of liberation that would release these new revolutionary passions and transform the pre-revolutionary situations into social revolutions.

This is no longer a question of pointing to a theoretical void. The practical consequences of the void cry out loud for a philosophy of social revolution. If we only open our eyes, we will see new forces of liberation emerging. Do not stifle them.

* For an analysis of the Ba'ath Party, as well as of Mao's ventures into the Middle East, see "The Arab-Israeli Collision", A Political-Philosophic Letter, June 1967, *News & Letters*.