

Report from the Middle East
by
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Palestine is no new interest for me. For years I have studied the questions that center round it, particularly Jewish nationalism as a political movement, and its influence on the life of American Jews. I opposed the establishment of the State of Israel. History rendered a contradictory verdict. Israel is a fact.

But it is also a fact that the creation of Israel has raised problems for the state itself and for Jewish people everywhere.

Therefore when the American Friends of the Middle East invited me to go there with Dr. Harold Fey and Mr. John Cogley, on a mission of study, observation and report, I accepted. It was made clear to us that we were free to speak or write without restraint, limitation or censorship. I went as a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the Jewish Newsletter. I was a journalist only by courtesy. I am glad to have gone in this capacity, not only because of the splendid traveling companions, but because the distinguished Editor of the Jewish Newsletter, Mr. William Zukerman, has laid all American Christians and Jews under a burden of obligation to him. His knowledge of events is equaled only by his personal integrity and his outstanding moral courage in expressing his penetrating observations on the situation.

We visited Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. From Beirut my associates went to Jordan. I was not permitted to enter Jordan, whose government regretfully refused me a visa on the ground that, because of the intense feelings roused by Kibya, it could not guarantee my personal safety. I flew to Cyprus and several days later joined my companions in Israel.

We were fortunate in the contacts made for us and which we made for ourselves. Everywhere we were received with the utmost courtesy and given singular opportunities to study conditions. We met and talked with heads of government everywhere, with cabinet ministers, leaders of religious groups -- Catholic, Protestant, Muslim and Jewish -- with editors, educators, leaders of opposition parties, with the man in the street; with our ambassadors and embassy personnel, with representatives of the United Nations Relief Organization and Friends' Service groups working among the refugees. I made it a point to speak with rabbis and heads of Jewish communities in all the Arab nations. In Israel I talked not only with government people but with leaders of the Arab, Muslim and Christian communities, including the Qadi of Nazareth and with Arab and Israeli leaders of the Ichud, an organization formed by the late Judah Leon Magnes. The Ichud's aim was and now is to bring about some reconciliation between Arabs and Israeli and to build a state on solid foundations of democracy, justice and brotherhood.

One cannot get a detailed knowledge in a five-week tour and I tell you whom we met and with whom we spoke only to let you see the variety and breadth of our observation.

I did not want any misunderstanding of my own position. I knew that both Arab and Israeli might suspect my motives -- the Arabs might consider me a spy and the Israeli an enemy. Therefore, to the Arabs, I made it clear that I did not want to see Israel destroyed; that the fall of Israel would be one of the saddest tragedies of history. To the Israeli, I made it clear that I had not come to hurt but to help. Such was the spirit in which I went. I came home deeply troubled and with the fear that the intransigence of both sides may bring catastrophe and throw the entire Middle East into an upheaval whose dimensions no one can foresee.

What I have to say will not be new or particularly startling. It is but one man's impressions, which each who reads must evaluate, according to his own knowledge or convictions.

In order to understand the situation, we have to look at the Middle East as a whole and as a vitally important area in our divided world. We cannot regard the Arab states alone nor Israel alone. And furthermore we have to look at Israel in the setting of the Arab-Muslim world. We have to appreciate the psychological realities, the passionate emotional drives on both sides, and the factors which charge Arabs and Israeli with an inflexible determination to give no ground, make no concessions and offer no compromise. It will take the patience of Job, the statesmanship of Disraeli, the knowledge of Melancthon, the craft of Machiavelli and the strength of Atlas, to which must be added the disciplines of Moses and the insights of Jesus -- it will take all these things -- and then we may begin to find an approach to solution.

I should like to interpret first the Israeli and then the Arab position.

Israel says: Our title to the land is written in the Bible itself. Up to Partition, land owned by Jews was bought at high prices from Arabs who voluntarily sold it. The Partition Resolution gave us legal title to larger areas. The Arab states attacked us and in a successful war we won more land. But the boundaries of our state are fantastic frontiers, an open invitation to infiltrators who destroy property and murder our settlers.

The refugee problem was not of our making. Arab leaders called upon Palestine Arabs to leave, in many cases even threatening them and certainly frightening them, in the belief that after a few weeks of fighting, Israel would be defeated and the fleeing Arabs could return. The Jews brought into Palestine were victims of Nazi persecution. All the world closed its doors to Jews. Palestine was their only haven. Israel feels it deserves the world's gratitude for having rescued nearly a million people and having given them homes and work and hope. The Israeli say: We admitted them to Israel in approximately the same number as the Palestine Arabs who left. Nearly 80,000 of these Jewish refugees are still living in temporary camps but we are trying to build permanent homes for all of them. They have been clearing the rock-ribbed, eroded hills. We have been teaching them to farm and trying to absorb them usefully into our economy.

As for the Arab refugees, we cannot in self-defense accept any considerable number for we would be admitting a fifth column, which, in the event of a renewal of war, would weaken and might destroy us. No state can be expected to admit its enemies and the Arabs have vowed vengeance and a blood-feud against us. We have offered to take in some refugees. We have many times proposed to sit down and negotiate all questions at issue between us. The Arabs refuse to do this. We believe they want to destroy us.

For this reason it is understandable that we must maintain an army, even though it drains our resources to the breaking point. We are trying to develop industry and promote trade but at every point we are hindered by the economic boycott with which the Arab nations hope to strangle us into compliance.

Water is a vital necessity for us if we are to reclaim the lands they neglected, irrigate them, plant forests and develop a self-sustaining agricultural program. We have been forced to suspend the work in the Huleh, which would have given not only water, but electric power which we desperately need. We would in no way deprive the Arabs of either water or power which rightfully belong to them. We are willing to share both with them.

The political parties in Israel are divided on internal issues. They are united when it comes to questions they deem vital to the continued existence of the state. The vast majority of the newly arrived population, who, after wandering over Europe, having been saved from the gas chambers, are determined, come what may, to make their stand in Israel, even if it cost their lives. "We'd rather be slaughtered here in our own land, than move again! There must be some place in the world the Jew can call his own; some place where he can find peace. This, our Israel, is that place."

Israel is invincibly determined to maintain its integrity and secure its future. Israel is guided by a young leadership, utterly devoted to the national welfare, unselfishly laboring to put the nation on a stable foundation. People and leaders are making heroic efforts against almost overwhelming odds to absorb the different types of Jew who came to Israel and weld them into national unity. The leaders say: "We know we have made mistakes; we are making mistakes. But give us time and peace. Israel is here to stay."

This is the Israeli position.

To understand the Arab position one must try to have some understanding of Arab psychology. The Arabs and Muslims are proud people, with a rich culture and majestic traditions. They are perhaps prouder of the cultural heritage of Islam than of the conquering armies of Saladin. Their philosophers preserved and gave to the West the liberating stimulus of Greek philosophy which led to the glories of the Renaissance. They feel the western world passed them by as backward peoples and exploited them in successive imperialisms. They are determined to throw off those imperialisms, to catch up with the West, to win their independence in fact, as well as on paper. They are stirring in a great revival, to cultivate their own natural resources, to reclaim their lands, suffering from centuries of neglect, to stand on their own feet as equals with the western nations. One feels a sense of vitality, of renewal everywhere, as these gifted people rouse themselves from their long sleep. Behind their intense nationalism, their resentment of the West, behind their distrust of Israel and fear of Israel and giving that distrust and fear a philosophic motivation, there is, in reality, a Kulturkampf.

Israel, they believe, is an alien element in an area of the world which has been Arab and Muslim for centuries. They are afraid that a vast tide, flowing out of the West, foreign to Islamic tradition and culture, symbolized and epitomized and dynamized in Israel, may overcome them, not only militarily but swamp them culturally, so that their time-honored folkways and traditions may become but another stone of memory in the graveyards of history. Their resentments, suspicions, prejudices and fears center on Israel, which, in their eyes, seems to embody the spirit of the imperialisms whose dominance they are in process of throwing off, and the threat to their cultural integrity which they are vehemently determined to preserve.

Muslim, Christian and Jew, they declare, got along very well together, until the emergence of Zionism as a political force, November 1917, when the Balfour Declaration was made. The Zionists regarded the Balfour Declaration as a title gift to lands which had been cultivated for generations by the native population. They ignored the provision in the Balfour Declaration "that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine." The Zionists came in as conquerors and with truculence.

The Arabs understand that under the terms of the Partition Resolution, two states were to be set up, an Arab and a Hebrew state. But, they say, in the interim between 1917 and the Partition Resolution, Jews had developed a government within a government and a military machine and were prepared to declare Israel a sovereign state immediately on termination of the Mandate. In the war which followed, say the Arab leaders, who deny the legality of the Partition Resolution under which Israel was created, Israeli acts of terrorism caused the Arab population to flee and as a result, 900,000 of the native population are refugees, displaced persons, living in squalid camps along the borders, even in sight of their old homes, longing to return to the groves and fields they once tended.

Moreover Arab property amounting to vast sums has been taken over by Israel. Ninety percent of Israeli territory is still legally owned by Arab Christians and Muslims who have been dispossessed. Worst of all, the Israelis come across our border and perpetrate horrible murders as at Kibya.

The Arab minority still remaining in Israel, numbering about 180,000, is treated as second-class citizens, with stern restrictions against their free movement within Israel's borders. Even a short journey of a few kilometers from one village or town to another, is so hedged about by rules, procedures and delays as to make it virtually impossible, even when a son or daughter or parent is ill, or when important matters demand a journey. The Arab-Muslim minorities are so discriminated against that they believe it is the conscious purpose of the Israel government to drive them all out.

Israel must win back that confidence we had in them and which it has destroyed. To do that, first of all the principle of repatriation must be recognized. Then boundaries must be defined; some restitution of property and compensation must be made and finally, the Government of Israel must accept the resolutions of the United Nations, governing the situation. If the Resolution under which Israel was created is held to be valid by Israel, then surely the other Resolutions of the United Nations should be accepted by Israel.

Our position is this: Until Israel accepts these conditions, these resolutions involving refugees, boundaries, compensation and the internationalization of Jerusalem, we shall not make peace with her.

This is the Arab-Muslim position.

The situation has reached a deadlock. Any Arab leader who favored compromise would be opposed and perhaps killed as King Abdullah was assassinated because he tried to reach some agreement with Israel. No leader in Israel would last long if he favored compromise. His life too might be endangered as the terrorist gangs of the Irgun still lurk in the background.

When one sees this tragic impasse, feels it at first hand, it breaks the heart with anguish. One feels for the Arab refugees, so recently displaced; and for the Israeli refugees who have settled in Palestine, cruel victims of history. One feels for all of them, Arab and Israeli alike.

The Arab states are not united. Jealousies among political leaders and political corruption are not infrequent. The ruling classes fear upheaval in which they will lose all to the impoverished masses. Each Arab state seeks to develop its own resources and, for the most part, confines itself primarily within its own borders. But all fear Israeli expansion. And the only weapon on which thus far they are united is the economic boycott against Israel. The Arabs believe with it they can sit the thing out and wait for Israel's fall. And Israel knows this.

The Arabs feel injured and injured nations will fight. The Israeli feel cornered and cornered nations will fight. There is a real possibility of renewal of war in the Middle East from which neither side would profit and which would not settle any issue. War in the Middle East may well bring intervention from the north. Though the Communist parties in the Arab nations are small, Communists are quietly busy everywhere, particularly among the refugees. They take advantage of every opportunity to stir up trouble among the masses and resentment against the West playing upon the chords of discontent, like some satanic conductor leading an orchestra of hellish instruments. But the Arabs are not too concerned about the Communist danger. "If they come, the West will fight them. Israel is our immediate enemy!"

The Communist party in Israel is likewise small. But Israel recently opened diplomatic relations with Russia and the Roumanian consulate is accepting applications of Israeli who wish to emigrate. Russia will sell to both sides and play them against each other. Anything goes that will keep the pot boiling.

Thus it is evident that Israel occupies a key position in the critical international situation. Of equal importance is the attitude of American Jews vis-a-vis Israel. Israel and Israel's friends, Christian and Jew, do Israel no service if they shut their eyes to unpleasant facts or rationalize, excuse or deny them. Both the Israeli and the Arabs seem to want to force us to take an "either-or" position. If one says something appreciative of Israel, the Arabs often feel one is anti-Arab. If one says something appreciative of the Arab situation or something critical of Israel, the Zionists -- particularly the American Zionists -- rise up in righteous indignation and declare one to be anti-Israel or even anti-Semitic. I refuse to be put in that position. I am not anti-Israel because I see that the Arabs have a case. I am not an enemy of Israel because I see that all is not well either within or without Israel.

I say, regretfully but frankly, I found in Israel a singular disregard of many of its obligations to the nations whose support brought it into being; a fateful concentration upon its own concerns; a failure to consider the effects of its internal and external policies upon American Jewry to whom it owes so much; and above all, a blindness to the psychological, political and economic realities, inherent in its own position.

Only a change in Israel's attitude to itself, to its neighbors and to the United Nations, and only a change in the intransigent attitude of the Arab states can break the deadlock.

I offer no blueprint. I am neither a political economist nor a professional sociologist. What suggestions I do offer are made with hesitation and with the full knowledge of their inadequacies. They are offered however as a human being, who sees a situation in which other human beings are trapped; who feels their anguish, who senses possibly greater tragedy.

The Arab population of Israel not only suffers restriction of movement but is also discriminated against in employment, in holding administrative positions or public office and in the education of their children. The reason given is that the security of the nation makes this necessary. The military forces at times ignore even the decisions of the highest Israeli courts. For instance, an Arab takes his claim to home or land to court. The court confirms his claim and orders his property restored. The military destroy the property on grounds of "security" and no one does anything about it.

The state has taken over the property of the Wakfs, the Muslim institutions of charity. Surely the administration and control of such properties should be in Muslim hands. The liason between the Muslim communities and the state is in the hands of a government official who is not a Muslim but an Israeli Jew. Surely the Muslims should have the basic right to appoint one of their own faith as liason officer in dealing with the government and the right also to administer such affairs as their charity and philanthropy. No question of security is involved.

Israel has not been sensitive to the Arab and Muslim traditions. All Arab communities are under military government and only Arab communities are. Even a village like Abu Gosh whose men fought with Israel and opened the way to Jerusalem is subject to discrimination. Most of its citizens were forced to leave their ancestral holdings and move to Nazareth. The minorities in Israel number only about 12% of the entire population. If Israel really wants to make a beginning of reconciliation, a change in her attitude to her minorities might well be the place to begin. They should be given full and equal rights in any state claiming to be a "bastion of democracy" in the Middle East.

Israel is confident in her military strength. But Israel is weak economically. It is a subsidized state. It has little it can sell now in the markets of the world and the proceeds from what it can sell even in the reasonable future and even if the Arab boycott were lifted, may not provide a self-sufficient economy. Israel at the moment is supported almost entirely from four sources: "grants in aid," the sale of Bonds, German reparations payments, contributions from American Jews. What obtains really is the old Halukah system. Can any nation long survive on such a foundation? The government is behind in its payment of salaries to officials, employees and teachers. Its shaky economy hangs by a thread. This is the reason for the recurrent frantic appeals, because its existence depends upon the flow of outside money from the above sources. If this flow were lessened, the survival of the state would be precarious. These are economic realities and no "miracles" can change them.

Our tortured world has many problems. Most of them are larger than that involved in Arab-Israeli relations. The Arab-Israeli dilemma must be resolved. We need all our energies to get on with the basic job -- the defense of the free world. There may be a limit to the patience of the nations with a state five and a half years old, with only a million and a half people, set in a vitally strategic area inhabited by 40,000,000 restive native population. Time runs out in this embittered situation.

All the points at issue are complex. Many of them are technical. Every one of them is passion-ridden. But conversations about them -- unofficial conversation and not on government level -- between well-informed, objectively minded and compassionate men, committed to neither side and beyond the glare of publicity, might reveal many things. Such conversations would reveal I know that a number of responsible Arab-Muslim leaders do not desire the destruction of Israel; that Israel's fear of a fifth column might be groundless; that few Arabs would return and those that did, only to sell their property and get out. They might reveal that the principle of repatriation could be recognized with safety. They might reveal that recompense, while a complex problem might not be so difficult a problem, because the value of Israeli property held by Arabs represents very substantial sums. They might reveal that Israel could remove discriminations against her minorities with complete security and grant equal rights to all; that borders can be defined, with certain adjustments, which would not materially injure either side, especially if there were a guarantee to both sides against aggression from the other.

Thus Arab fears of an expanding Israel might be removed and Israeli fears of a renewal of war be dissipated. ~~If all these questions could be explored in patient and, I suggest -- unofficial -- conversation, it is quite possible that an equitable solution may be achieved over a period of time and finally Arab and Israeli could work together on water, power and other projects under United Nations auspices as confidence is gradually restored. There is still a reservoir of good-will among all groups which might be tapped for the blessing of all.~~

And now I turn to a consideration of American Jews in relation to Israel. Important as the security of Israel is, I venture to suggest that the safety, security and welfare of the United States take first place. American Jews must look this situation squarely in the face. Where are we heading? We must keep the major issues in view. Indeed that is the only way Israel itself can be saved. We American Jews have a responsibility to Israel. But we have a responsibility to ourselves, our children and to our government. We have never shirked our responsibility as citizens. We shall not shirk it now.

I suggest in all earnestness that the time has come for us to give serious consideration to what steps are advisable, practical and wise for us to take. Someone put it to me in Israel, an ardent Jewish nationalist, resident in Palestine for twenty years, yet sincerely critical of the Israeli government: "If Israel continues to treat its minorities as it does, what is to prevent other nations where Jews live from treating their Jewish minorities in the same way? The attitude of the Israeli government plays into the hands of the anti-Semite." And, I add, alienates those who are our friends.

For instance church groups have been working in the Middle East and Palestine for generations. They see the possibility of their work being hindered or limited. What is involved for them are not only the large investments in religious and educational institutions, but the social, philanthropic and religious advances they have made, and their opportunities for usefulness. Friendly American Christians fear that all this may be lost. Up to now they have refrained from criticism. They did not want to be called anti-Semites. But they are deeply concerned at the present situation in Israel and here.

Our responsibility to our government is clear. The grievous weight of world leadership has been thrust upon America, sometimes, I fear, before we were prepared to assume it. Whether it is pleasant for Zionists to recognize or not, it is a fact that our government's sponsorship of Israel has lost for the American people, temporarily at least, much of the friendship of the Arab-Muslim world. The United States and the free world cannot afford this loss. Should not American Jews and Christians earnestly consider how best we can help our government recapture that friendship? To take this position does not imply enmity to Israel. On the contrary, it is a step necessary to peace for Israel.

American Jewish national organizations, especially religious organizations should be the last to throw stumbling blocks of biased criticism, or the meddling of group pressures into a situation in which the United States government, their own government, is trying so hard to work out a solution which shall be fair to all concerned. Unfortunately perhaps, without realizing the implications of their conduct, this is just what practically every American Jewish national organization and some Christian organizations have done.

By their uncritical following of Zionist leadership, the American Jews and some Christians have put themselves in an indefensible position in relation to their own government. In Israel there is more difference of opinion, more dissent, more freedom and moral courage to express difference and criticism of the State of Israel than there is among American Jews.

Zionism has some splendid achievements to its credit. But there is a debit side when the balance is taken. For instance consider Zionist propaganda methods. The Zionist propaganda machine is ruthless and unscrupulous in the pressures it exerts on Jews and Gentiles. What it cannot achieve by character assassination, false report and threat, it tries to achieve by cajolery and chicanery. It seeks to win adherents by offering support for high office in Jewish affairs to those men and women who play ball with it. Some politicians, with an eye to an alleged Jewish vote, play Charlie McCarthy to Zionist Bergens who write their speeches for them.

How long shall American Jews and Christians be satisfied with colored, one-sided reports which Zionists choose to give us? When shall we begin demanding that all sides of the picture be presented? How long shall we put up with a situation which stigmatizes every news-item that does not glorify Israel, every individual who points out the dangers in the situation, as anti-Semitic, pro-Arab or anti-Israel? Must we have one party, one voice speak for all American Jews and one voice only? That is the very thing we abhor in Russia. It is not anti-Semitic to summon the Israeli to show the compassion enjoined by Judaism and to show a decent regard for the opinion of mankind. It is not pro-Arab to tell the side of the story that the American people have a right to hear. It is not anti-Israel to point out the injustices, the undemocratic and dangerous tendencies at work in Israel.

It will be interesting to see what happens during this session of Congress; to see what Jewish religious organizations and Zionist front Christian organizations do and what Christian and Jewish politicians do, when the Zionist juggernaut starts rolling.

I pray that American Jews, lay and rabbinical, keep open mind, be not moved by unworthy pride that, having taken a position, they cannot change it. Our government has declared it will deal impartially with the Arab nations and Israel. I am confident it will. It remains for American Christians and Jews to deal with the Zionist propaganda machine. We must refuse to be intimidated by it. We must expose its threats of economic or political boycott. We must, all of us, seek the facts and have the moral courage to face the facts. In that way only, shall we serve the cause of justice, our own country and world peace.

Above all, ethical and religious values are involved in this grim situation, which are at the basis of our Judaism. The moral authority of Judaism as one of the world's universal religious insights may be irretrievably lost. How can we, how dare we ignore those prophetic visions of justice and brotherhood which are our magna charta, those life-giving sanctities which illuminate our traditional teaching, and which, more than anything else, sustained us in all the years of our wandering?

Our attitude is an act of faith in the Christian world. Whether that faith be justified or not, only the Christian world can answer. When the American Jew rejects Jewish political nationalism in America, he does so in the belief that there is a deathless bond between him and his non-Jewish neighbor. It is a bond of mutual devotion to decency, kindness and brotherhood. The bond of obligation works both ways. When discriminated against, the Jew rightly expects the Christian world to

rise to his defense. When extravagances of Jewish nationalism result in a Kibya, the Christian and Muslim world expect the Jew to yield to the moral imperatives of his faith, to condemn unqualifiedly such brutality. It expects Israel to find and punish its transgressors. "Thou shalt not kill" may have been spoken in Hebrew but its injunction is a holy obligation on all mankind. We are all soldiers in the struggle for the freedom of man's mind and body and spirit. Therefore the attitude of the Jew is an act of faith in the sincerity and integrity of the non-Jewish, especially the Christian world.

In Arnold Toynbee's last book he makes the point that the West moved into the East twice and failed. It moved into the East nearly 800 years ago with the sword and conquest of the Crusades, and, though it carried the cross in its hands, it failed. The West moved into the East again, nearly 200 years ago, with its technological revolution, but the East rejected the West a second time. It wants something more than western technology to satisfy the profound craving of its spirit, which, for so many centuries has wrestled with the problems of human life and destiny. The East said: Our miserable, hungering millions must be fed and clothed and housed and educated, but not at the expense of the mysterious and compelling claims of the human soul. We cannot trade or barter our empire of the spirit for your washing machines and electric gadgets.

Until the West goes into the East with some synthesis of ideals and practice, of faith and conduct, the East will refuse what the West has to offer.

Judaism and the Jew came out of the East and, after nearly 2000 years of experience, the circumstances of history have brought a return migration to the East. But what has this eastern migration of the Jew brought to the East? The last quarter century tells a story only half good and part glorious. Is not this the time of opportunity for the Jew to take into the East, wrought out of his long anabasis, his sojourn, his experience in the West, the very synthesis of dream and actuality, of faith and works, of technological advance, permeated with the prophetic spirit of Justice?

Israel in Palestine may well become the advance guard of an army that will bring not division but co-operation, not prejudice but compassion, not conquest but justice, not war but peace! I should like to see the first step taken by the people upon whom has been enjoined: "Remember ye were strangers in the land of Egypt;" by the people who gave Isaiah and Jesus to the world; by the people who are taught, "Not by might, not by power but by my spirit Saith the Lord." Then indeed would the word of prophecy come true and the word of God and godliness go forth from a redeemed Jerusalem, through the descendants of the prophets, who by their spiritual integrity and obedience to the law of righteousness and kindness, shall have fulfilled the command of their faith "Go forth and be a blessing!"