

FOR A JUST AND DURABLE PEACE IN THE MID-EAST

by Herbert Aptheker

We are gathered together to gain an understanding of the path towards a lasting and secure peace in the Mid-East; and then, based upon that understanding, to act so as to help bring about such a peace.

To help achieve peace in the Mid-East one must comprehend the sources of war. They are three-fold: feudalism, Zionism, imperialism, and these are inter-related. Let us examine each briefly:

I. The dominant socio-economic system in the Mid-East, until the revolutions in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Yemen, Libya, and the Sudan commencing in the mid-1950's and continuing to the present, was a feudal one and that system still predominates in those Arab countries where revolutions have not yet matured, as in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Tunisia. But especially since World War II, the Arab masses have become persuaded that their misery and poverty are social phenomena, that they can be eliminated and that their own strength is decisive in eliminating them. Of the Mid-East, T. Cuyler Young, chairman of the Department of Oriental Languages at Princeton, wrote, back in 1955:*

*In: S.N.Fisher, ed., Social Forces in the Middle East, Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca, 1955, p. 253. For much additional material, see chapter XV in my American Foreign Policy and the Cold War, New Century Publishers, New York, 1962.

One of the paramount changes in the area is the conviction of the masses that an economy of scarcity and their own poverty are no longer necessary nor inevitable, but rather it is possible--and their right--to share in the world's plenty.

This is a source of conflict in the Mid-East because the local feudalists violently suppress the masses and because they sell out the resources of their own country to metropolitan imperialist powers--Britain, France and especially the United States--which then actively and forcibly intervene to maintain the status quo and to suppress or subvert anti-colonial movements and/or governments.

II. Zionism begins as an anti-socialist and anti-Marxist movement; it accepts basic postulates of anti-Semitic concepts; it makes alliances with reactionary forces from the Kaiser of the 19th century to the British Prime Minister of World War I to President Nixon of today. It commences with the idea that Palestine is a land without people and that Jews are a people without land and that the obvious, ordained solution is to turn over that land without people to the people without land. This was false geography and chauvinist historiography. Zionism began as an ecclesiastical, chauvinistic, anti-socialist and pro-imperialist concept; it has functioned in accordance with those roots and its policies in Israel have been racist (not only against Arabs but against darker peoples in general, including darker Jews), anti-secular, anti-socialist and so, naturally, in basic alliance with reactionary and colonialist and imperialist forces everywhere in the world--from West Germany to South Africa to the United States. Placing such a force, with the economic, financial and military support of Washington in the center of the Mid-East--when that region's masses were in the midst of an anti-feudal and anti-colonial renaissance--meant to exacerbate the likelihood of armed conflict.

III. The Mid-East has been a center of imperialist exploitation for one hundred years. One source for this was geographic. This area lies at the hub of three continents and astride several strategic bodies of water. Another was economic, especially in terms of oil. With the end of World War I, the significance of oil and the great oil corporations to the economies and governments of the capitalist powers was enhanced. Today in the United States oil, not steel, is king. From 1901 through 1953 steel production in the U. S. increased 7 1/2 times; oil production 34 times. Today the oil companies in the U. S. have greater assets than those of all companies in the three next largest industries; oil tycoons control also enormous reservoirs of credit.

Today, oil leads in U. S. foreign investments; so great are they that more than half of the industry's total profits come from overseas investments. In fact, the rate of return from foreign investments in oil was six times greater than from domestic!

Some years ago, Karl E. Meyer, after studying the matter, concluded:

The American oil industry is one of the towering giants of the national economy. Its resources and profits are prodigious; its special tax privileges have no parallel in the business community; its impact on domestic political life is felt on every level of government; its influence in the field of foreign policy is often decisive. (The Progressive, May, 1957.)

As the late Senator Kefauver said, after chairing an investigation of the activities of the oil cartel: "What the oil companies want, the oil companies get."

That oil cartel is the greatest in the world. In it are seven companies, of which five are American--Standard Oil of New Jersey, Standard Oil of California, Standard Oil of New York, Gulf and Texas. Of the remaining two, one is British and one is Dutch. It controls 55% of oil production, 65% of oil reserves, 57% of oil refining capacity, 66% of oil tankers in what is quaintly called the "free world." What is involved may be indicated with just one set of figures--in one year (1956) the American-Arabian Oil Company (Aramco) reported a net profit of \$280 millions, on which it paid, as income tax, exactly one percent!

To preserve the geographic-naval position, to retain possession of these huge resources, and to guard these colossal profits, the governments of the imperialist powers will do anything and have been guilty of every crime--including inciting, supporting and waging war.

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Each of these Mid-East realities--feudalism, Zionism, imperialism--are interpenetrating. Zionism prefers backward neighbors chained by feudal orders; feudal overlords sell their countries to imperialists who in turn help the feudalists stay in power; Zionists serve imperialists for they hate socialism, they foster chauvinism, and they serve as fronts for their masters. And behind it all stands the system of imperialism--especially the oil cartel--heating up the witches' brew, dividing and distorting, corrupting and killing--and prolonging its life and reaping its crops of gold from the tormented bodies of scores of millions of men, women and children.

These are the sources of war in the Mid-East. What do they tell us as to the means towards a lasting and just peace in that area? In a strategic sense the necessary conclusions are the following:

I. The way to a lasting peace in the Mid-East is via the struggle against the imperialist center-pin. The struggle for peace in

the Mid-East cannot be conducted with Tel Aviv-Washington against the Arab peoples but must rather be with the Arab peoples against imperialism.

II. When the ruling circles in Israel--the Meir-Dayan government--tie Tel Aviv's policy to Washington, they tie the future of Israel to a foul, crisis-ridden and doomed partner. The biggest threat to the existence of Israel lies in the pro-imperialist, aggressive and expansionist policy of the Meir-Dayan government; if that policy is not substantially altered, Israel is doomed and quite possibly World War III is assured.

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Tactically, the necessary conclusions are:

I. It is necessary that it be made perfectly clear that the question before us is not one of Arabs versus Jews. On the contrary, the question before us is one of imperialism and colonialism and feudalism versus national liberation and social progress. It is one of the effort by imperialism to maintain the exploitative relationship with the so-called underdeveloped countries, many of whose inhabitants are "colored" peoples, especially in the Mid-East, an area which includes, let it never be forgotten, a large part of Africa.

II. It is necessary that it be made perfectly clear that what is involved here is in no way anti-Semitism, this being absurd as the Arab peoples themselves are, of course, Semitic. But it is necessary also to affirm clearly that it is not a matter of anti-Jewishness. This should be done with vigor, clearly denouncing anti-Jewishness as the poison it is and affirming the knowledge of the age-old use of that poison as the handmaiden of the worst forms of reaction. Simultaneously, denunciation must be made of all forms of chauvinism, and certainly the chauvinism directed against the Arab peoples which in the main communications media of the U. S. has reached scandalous and barbaric proportions.

III. Israel's right to existence, as created by the United Nations, is not in question as has been affirmed repeatedly, not only by the U.S.S.R. but also by the U.A.R. The greatest threat to Israel's existence comes from the present ruling circles in Israel itself, who have made of it a handmaiden of imperialism and expansionism.

IV. The U. S. government supports not only the reactionary government of Israel but also reactionary Arab governments. Thus, Washington has supplied Saudi Arabia with more arms than it has Israel; thus, Washington stood ready in the Fall of 1970 to intervene militarily on the side of King Hussein. Demonstrating this helps expose the imperialist essence of the Mid-East question rather than its being one of Jews vs. Arabs.

V. It is necessary to reiterate that the Israeli government and the U. S. government, in the months and days prior to the June 1967 aggression, solemnly affirmed the absence of any intention, so far as Israel was concerned, of territorial aggrandizement and, so far as Washington was concerned, of its commitment to the unimpaired sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the Mid-East. As events have demonstrated without any ambiguity, both were lying; at any rate it is clear that Tel Aviv has appropriated enormous territory from its neighbors and has pursued a policy of occupation and exploitation of that territory and that Washington has done all in its power to make possible the retention of the fruits of that ravishment.

VI. The so-called "preventive war" argument of Israel must be fully exposed for the falsehood it is. Here two main points must be made: (a) the Israeli action in 1967 was aggressive and pre-meditated and not preventive; and (b) in any case, in the age of thermonuclear weapons and the existence of the United Nations, such "justification" (which is exactly the "justification" of the U. S. in its atrocious war against the Vietnamese people) is absolutely impermissible. It returns us to the unimpeded power politics which produced World Wars I and II and will, if not halted, produce World War III.

VII. Exposure and denunciation of the atrocious behavior of the Israeli occupiers--forced exile, destruction of homes, preventive arrests, clubbing of girls and women, torturing of prisoners, wholesale punishment of districts and entire villages, prolonged incarceration of political prisoners--must be vigorously conducted.

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Within Israel war-weariness grows. The class struggle intensifies. The Communist Party of Vilner and Toubi--the only genuine Communist Party of Israel--increases its membership, with 80% of the active Party before the split with the Mikunis-Sneh group in its ranks. Its vote increases 35%; its YCL flourishes; and its Arab-Jewish unity is firmer than ever. That Party, too, now is invited by non-Party groups to present its case and its opposition to the policy of the government. Nationally, there are growing demands for an end to occupation and for a change in a government policy bringing something over 10% of the adult population into the army, spending well over 50% of the budget for war, creating inflation and a mounting national debt that is astronomical, causing mounting daily casualties, and providing no vista for any sort of peace and decent life.*

*The eye-witness reports from Israel by Hyman Lumer, published in several issues of the Daily World in October, 1970 document all these assertions.

The apparent unanimity of nationalistic madness among the Jewish population in the United States is declining also; and this will continue to decline. It is necessary that Jews in this country know that there is no such unanimity inside Israel itself and that on every hand Tel Aviv's policy is being challenged there and that the opposition to the war and occupation policy is growing inside Israel.

The world-wide isolation of the present Israeli government is a fact; its only ally is Iran and it remains a client of Washington, not its ally. It is a pariah in the world community of nations.

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A change for the better is therefore altogether possible. And the specifics of that change are before us and already have been unanimously approved by the Security Council and have been accepted by the U.A.R., Lebanon and Jordan. I refer, of course, to the U.N. Resolution of 1967.

To secure peace in the Middle East and the future of Israel, a reversal of the present Israeli policies is required. The Israeli government must accept the U.N. Resolution in its entirety and agree to proceed on its basis--this means, of course, abandoning the phony and calculatedly impossible idea of "direct negotiations" with particular Arab countries while Israeli troops occupy their territory and Tel Aviv annexes all Jerusalem and actively settles the newly-gained territory and exploits their resources.

To accept the 1967 Resolution means and requires, of course, abandoning the policy of annexation. It means accepting a just solution to the refugee question--again as recommended first by the U.N. in 1948 and reiterated every year since. Fundamentally it means a turn in the government of Israel--a policy of alliance with the Arab peoples against imperialism and not an alliance with imperialism against the Arab peoples.

This means now, at this moment, Israel's agreement, without preconditions, to negotiations with Ambassador Jarring of the U.N. The talk of "violations" of the cease-fire is propaganda; in any case both sides have accused the other and furthermore, both sides of the cease-fire line are Egyptian territory! Finally, missiles are defensive weapons, as the whole world knows, and bombers are offensive weapons and it was Israel which was regularly bombing deep inside Egypt--to Cairo's outskirts--and not Cairo that was bombing inside Israel.

The cease-fire must be maintained and the U.N.-sponsored negotiations must now be pursued. With that, and with Israel agreeing to the main element in the 1967 Resolution--withdrawal of troops from occupied territory together with fully secure borders for all States--peace can be obtained in the Mid-East.

To fight against imperialism is to fight for democracy. Hence to support the Arab peoples in their struggle for social progress, for national independence, for territorial integrity and sovereignty, is to support the forces of democracy, of justice, and of peace. Such an effort is the only one worthy of a human being; this effort simply cannot be permitted to fail, and it will triumph everywhere, including in the United States.

Ultra-Left and ultra-Right always and everywhere in fact work together. So in the present case, those who in the name of some mythical radicalism or some fanatical nationalism demand an end to Israel are exactly the ones who must strengthen the extreme Right forces in Israel and in Saudi Arabia and in the United States.

No, the survival of Israel is a matter of grave concern for all enlightened mankind; but the survival of a racist, expansionist, aggressive tool of oil cartels and of Nixon is not the same as the survival of Israel!

The line of reaction and aggression is the line of national catastrophe for Israel. The policy of justice and compassion, of brotherhood and decency, the creativity of peace are the means towards the securing and the flowering of Israel. This is as it should be for it is at the heart of the great teachings of the two ancient peoples whose fate is bound together inside Israel and in the Middle East--the Jewish people and the Arab people.