

## On the Israeli—Arab War

*As an introduction, could you sum up your general view of the Israeli-Arab war?*

The war and the ‘miracle’ of Israel’s victory have, in my view, solved none of the problems that confront Israel and the Arab states. They have, on the contrary, aggravated all the old issues and created new, more dangerous ones. They have not increased Israel’s security, but rendered it more vulnerable than it had been. I am convinced that the latest, all-too-easy triumph of Israeli arms will be seen one day, in a not very remote future, to have been a disaster in the first instance for Israel itself.

Let us consider the international background of the events. We have to relate this war to the world-wide power struggle and ideological conflicts which form its context. In these last years American imperialism, and the forces associated with it and supported by it, have been engaged in a tremendous political, ideological, economic, and military offensive over a vast area of Asia and Africa; while the forces opposed to them, the Soviet Union in the first instance, have barely held their ground or have been in retreat. This trend emerges from a long series of occurrences: the Ghanaian upheaval, in which Nkrumah's government was overthrown; the growth of reaction in various Afro-Asian countries; the bloody triumph of anti-Communism in Indonesia, which was a huge victory for counter-revolution in Asia; the escalation of the American war in Vietnam; and the 'marginal' right-wing military coup in Greece. The Arab-Israeli war was not an isolated affair; it belongs to this category of events. The counter-trend has manifested itself in revolutionary ferment in various parts of India, the radicalization of the political mood in Arab countries, the effective struggle of the National Front of Liberation in Vietnam; and the world-wide growth of opposition to American intervention. The advance of American imperialism and of Afro-Asian counter-revolution has not gone unopposed, but its success everywhere outside Vietnam has been evident.

In the Middle East the American forward push has been of relatively recent date. During the Suez war, the United States still adopted an 'anti-colonialist' stance. It acted, in seeming accord with the Soviet Union, to bring about the British and French withdrawal. The logic of American policy was still the same as in the late 1940's, when the State of Israel was in the making. As long as the American ruling class was interested primarily in squeezing out the old colonial Powers from Africa and Asia, the White House was a mainstay of 'anti-colonialism'. But having contributed to the debacle of the old Empires, the United States took fright at the 'power vacuum' that might be filled by native revolutionary forces or the Soviet Union or a combination of both. Yankee anti-colonialism faded out, and America 'stepped in'. In the Middle East this happened during the period between the Suez crisis and the last Israeli war. The American landings in Lebanon in 1958 were designed to stem a high tide of revolution in that area, especially in Iraq. Since then the United States, no doubt relying to some extent on Soviet 'moderation', has avoided open and direct military involvement in the Middle East and maintained a posture of detachment. This does not make the American presence any less real.

*How would you situate Israel's policy in this perspective?*

The Israelis have, of course, acted on their own motives, and not merely to suit the convenience of American policy. That the great mass of Israelis believe themselves to be menaced by Arab hostility need not be doubted. That some 'bloodthirsty' Arab declarations about 'wiping Israel off the map' made Israeli flesh creep is evident. Haunted by the memories of the Jewish tragedy in Europe, the Israelis feel isolated and encircled by the 'teeming' millions of a hostile Arab world. Nothing was easier for their own propagandists, aided by Arab verbal

threats, than to play up the fear of another 'final solution' threatening the Jews, this time in Asia. Conjuring up Biblical myths and all the ancient religious-national symbols of Jewish history, the propagandists whipped up that frenzy of belligerence, arrogance, and fanaticism, of which the Israelis gave such startling displays as they rushed to Sinai and the Wailing Wall and to Jordan and the walls of Jericho. Behind the frenzy and arrogance there lay Israel's suppressed sense of guilt towards the Arabs, the feeling that the Arabs would never forget or forgive the blows Israel had inflicted on them: the seizure of their land, the fate of a million or more refugees, and repeated military defeats and humiliations. Driven half-mad by fear of Arab revenge, the Israelis have, in their overwhelming majority, accepted the 'doctrine' behind their government's policy, the 'doctrine' that holds that Israel's security lies in periodic warfare which every few years must reduce the Arab states to impotence.

Yet whatever their own motives and fears, the Israelis are not independent agents. The factors of Israel's dependence were to some extent 'built in' in its history over two decades. All Israeli governments have staked Israel's existence on the 'Western orientation'. This alone would have sufficed to turn Israel into a Western outpost in the Middle East, and so to involve it in the great conflict between imperialism (or neo-colonialism) and the Arab peoples struggling for their emancipation. Other factors have been at play as well. Israel's economy has depended for its tenuous balance and growth on foreign Zionist financial aid, especially on American donations. These donations have been a curse in disguise for the new state. They have enabled the government to manage its balance of payments in a way in which no country in the world can do without engaging in any trade with its neighbours. It has distorted Israel's economic structure by encouraging the growth of a large, unproductive sector and a standard of living which is not related to the country's own productivity and earnings. Israel has in effect lived well above its means. Over many years nearly half of Israel's food was imported from the West. As the American Administration exempts from taxation the earnings and profits earmarked as donations for Israel, Washington has held its hand on the purses on which Israel's economy depends. Washington could at any time hit Israel by refusing the tax exemption (even though this would lose it the Jewish vote in elections). The threat of such a sanction, never uttered but always present, and occasionally hinted at, has been enough to align Israeli policy firmly with the United States.

Years ago, when I visited Israel, a high Israeli official listed to me the factories that they could not build because of American objections—among them steel mills and plants producing agricultural machinery. On the other hand, there was a list of virtually useless factories turning out fantastic amounts of plastic kitchen utensils, toys, etc. Nor could any Israeli administration ever feel free to consider seriously Israel's vital, long-term need for trade and close economic ties with its Arab neighbours or for improving economic relations with the USSR and Eastern Europe.

Economic dependence has affected Israel's domestic policy and 'cultural

atmosphere' in other ways as well. The American donor is the most important foreign investor operating in the Holy Land. A wealthy American Jew, a 'worldly businessman' among his gentile associates and friends in New York, Philadelphia or Detroit, he is at heart proud to be a member of the Chosen People, and in Israel exercises his influence in favour of religious obscurantism and reaction. A fervent believer in free enterprise, he views with a hostile eye even the mild 'socialism' of the Histadrut and the Kibbutzim, and has done his bit in taming it. Above all, he has helped the rabbis to maintain their stranglehold on legislation and much of the education; and so to keep alive the spirit of racial-talmudic exclusiveness and superiority. All this has fed and inflamed the antagonism towards the Arabs.

The cold war imparted great momentum to the reactionary trends and exacerbated the Arab-Jewish conflict. Israel was firmly committed to anti-communism. True, Stalin's policy in his last years, outbreaks of anti-semitism in the USSR, anti-Jewish *motifs* in the trials of Slansky, Rajk and Kostov, and Soviet encouragement of even the most irrational forms of Arab nationalism, all bore their share of responsibility for Israel's attitude. Yet it should not be forgotten that Stalin had been Israel's godfather; that it was with Czechoslovak munitions, supplied on Stalin's orders, that the Jews had fought the British occupation army—and the Arabs—in 1947–48; and that the Soviet envoy was the first to vote for the recognition of the State of Israel by the United Nations. It may be argued that Stalin's change of attitude towards Israel was itself a reaction to Israel's alignment with the West. And in the post-Stalin era the Israeli governments have persisted in this alignment.

Irreconcilable hostility to Arab aspirations for emancipation from the West thus became *the* axiom of Israeli policy. Hence Israel's role in 1956, in the Suez war. Israel's Social Democratic ministers, no less than Western colonialists, have embraced a *raison d'état* which sees its highest wisdom in keeping the Arabs backward and divided and playing their reactionary Hashemite and other feudal elements against the Republican, national-revolutionary forces. Early this year, when it seemed that a republican uprising or *coup* might overthrow King Hussein, Mr. Eshkol's government made no bones about it that in case of a 'Nasserite coup' in Amman, Israeli troops would march into Jordan. And the prelude to the events of last June was provided by Israel's adoption of a menacing attitude towards Syria's new régime which it denounced as 'Nasserite' or even 'ultra-Nasserite', (for Syria's government appeared to be a shade more anti-imperialist and radical than Egypt's).

Did Israel, in fact, plan to attack Syria some time in May, as Soviet Intelligence Services believed and as Moscow warned Nasser? We do not know. It was as a result of this warning, and with Soviet encouragement, that Nasser ordered mobilization and concentration of troops on the Sinai frontier. If Israel had such a plan, Nasser's move may have delayed the attack on Syria by a few weeks. If Israel had no such plan, its behaviour gave to its anti-Syrian threats the kind of plausibility that Arab threats had in Israeli eyes. In any case, Israel's rulers were quite confident that their aggressiveness *vis-à-vis* either Syria or Egypt

would meet with Western sympathy and bring them reward. This calculation underlay their decision to strike the pre-emptive blow on June 5th. They were absolutely sure of American, and to some extent British, moral, political, and economic support. They knew that no matter how far they went in attacking the Arabs, they could count on American diplomatic protection or, at the very least, on American official indulgence. And they were not mistaken. The White House and the Pentagon could not fail to appreciate men who for their own reasons, were out to put down the Arab enemies of American neo-colonialism. General Dayan acted as a kind of Marshal Ky for the Middle East and appeared to be doing his job with startling speed, efficiency and ruthlessness. He was, and is, a much cheaper and far less embarrassing ally than Ky.

*Could we now turn to the Arab side of the picture, and their behaviour on the eve of the crisis?*

The Arab behaviour, especially Nasser's divided mind and hesitation on the eve of hostilities, present indeed a striking contrast to Israel's determination and uninhibited aggressiveness. Having, with Soviet encouragement, moved his troops to the Sinai frontier, and even put his Russian-made missiles in position, Nasser then, without consulting Moscow, proclaimed the blockade of the Straits of Tiran. This was a provocative move, though practically of very limited significance. The western powers did not consider it important enough to try and 'test' the blockade. It provided Nasser with a prestige gain and enabled him to claim that he had wrested from Israel the last fruit of their 1956 victory. (Before the Suez war Israeli ships could not pass these Straits.) The Israelis played up the blockade as a mortal danger to their economy, which it was not; and they replied by mobilizing their forces and moving them to the frontiers.

Soviet propaganda still continued to encourage the Arabs in public. However a conference of Middle Eastern Communist Parties held in May (its resolutions were summarized in *Pravda*) was strangely reticent about the crisis and allusively critical of Nasser. What was more important were curious diplomatic manoeuvres behind the scenes. On May 26th, in the dead of night (at 2.30 a.m.) the Soviet Ambassador woke up Nasser to give him a grave warning that the Egyptian army must not be the first to open fire. Nasser complied. The compliance was so thorough that he not only refrained from starting hostilities, but took no precautions whatsoever against the possibility of an Israeli attack: he left his airfields undefended and his planes grounded and uncamouflaged. He did not even bother to mine the Tiran Straits or to place a few guns on their shores (as the Israelis found out to their surprise when they came there).

All this suggests hopeless bungling on Nasser's part and on the part of the Egyptian Command. But the real bunglers sat in the Kremlin. Brezhnev's and Kosygin's behaviour during these events was reminiscent of Khrushchev's during the Cuban crisis, though it was even more muddle-headed. The pattern was the same. In the first phase there was needless provocation of the other side and a reckless move towards the 'brink'; in the next sudden panic and a hasty retreat; and then followed

frantic attempts to save face and cover up the traces. Having excited Arab fears, encouraged them to risky moves, promised to stand by them, and having brought out their own naval units into the Mediterranean, to counter the moves of the American Sixth Fleet, the Russians then tied Nasser hand and foot.

Why did they do it? As the tension was mounting, the 'hot line' between the Kremlin and the White House went into action. The two super-powers agreed to avoid direct intervention and to curb the parties to the conflict. If the Americans went through the motions of curbing the Israelis, they must have done it so perfunctorily, or with so many winks that the Israelis felt, in fact, encouraged to go ahead with their plan for the pre-emptive blow. (We have, at any rate, not heard of the American Ambassador waking up the Israeli Prime Minister to warn him that the Israelis must not be the first to open fire.) The Soviet curb on Nasser was heavy, rude, and effective. Even so, Nasser's failure to take elementary military precautions remains something of a puzzle. Did the Soviet Ambassador in the course of his nocturnal visit tell Nasser that Moscow was sure that the Israelis would not strike first? Had Washington given Moscow such an assurance? And was Moscow so gullible as to take it at face value and act on it? It seems almost incredible that this should have been so. But only some such version of the events can account for Nasser's inactivity and for Moscow's stunned surprise at the outbreak of hostilities.

Behind all this bungling there loomed the central contradiction of Soviet policy. On the one hand the Soviet leaders see in the preservation of the international *status quo*, including the social *status quo*, the the essential condition of their national security and of 'peaceful co-existence'. They are therefore anxious to keep at a 'safe distance' from storm centres of class conflict in the world and to avoid dangerous foreign entanglements. On the other hand, they cannot, for ideological and power-political reasons, avoid altogether dangerous entanglements. They cannot quite keep at a safe distance when American neo-colonialism clashed directly or indirectly with its Afro-Asian and Latin-American enemies, who look to Moscow as their friend and protector. In normal times this contradiction is only latent, Moscow works for *détente* and *rapprochement* with the USA; and it cautiously aids and arms its Afro-Asian or Cuban friends. But sooner or later the moment of crisis comes and the contradiction explodes in Moscow's face. Soviet policy must then choose between its allies and protégés working against the *status quo*, and its own commitment to the *status quo*. When the choice is pressing and ineluctable, it opts for the *status quo*.

The dilemma is real and in the nuclear age dangerous enough. But it confronts the USA as well, for the USA is just as much interested as is the USSR in avoiding world war and nuclear conflict. This, however, limits its freedom of action and of political-ideological offensive far less than it restricts Soviet freedom. Washington is far less afraid of the possibility that some move by one of its protégés, or its own military intervention might lead to a direct confrontation of the super-

powers. After the Cuban crisis and the war in Vietnam, the Arab-Israeli war has once again sharply illuminated the difference.

*One critical problem is obviously whether the Israelis have ever had any chance of establishing normal or merely tolerable relations with the Arabs? Did they ever have any option at all? To what extent was the last war the outcome of a long chain of irreversible events?*

Yes, to some extent the present situation has been determined by the whole course of Arab-Israeli relations since the Second World War and even since the First. Yet I believe that some options were open to the Israelis. Allow me to quote to you a parable with the help of which I once tried to present this problem to an Israeli audience:

A man once jumped from the top floor of a burning house in which many members of his family had already perished. He managed to save his life; but as he was falling to the ground, he hit a person standing down below and broke that person's legs and arms. The jumping man had no choice; yet to the man with the broken limbs he was the cause of his misfortune. If both behaved rationally, they would not become enemies. The man who escaped from the blazing house, having recovered, would have tried to help and console the other sufferer; and the latter who might have realized that he was the victim of circumstances over which neither of them had control. But look what happens when these people behave irrationally. The injured man blames the other for his misery and swears to make him pay for it. The other one, afraid of the crippled man's revenge, insults him, kicks him and beats him up whenever they meet. The kicked man again swears revenge and is again punched and punished. The bitter enmity, so whimsical at first, hardens and comes to overshadow the whole existence of both men and to poison their minds.

You will, I am sure, recognize yourselves (I said to my Israeli audience), the Israeli remnants of European Jewry, in the man who jumped from the blazing house. The other character represents, of course, the Palestine Arabs, more than a million of them, who have lost their lands and their homes. They are resentful; they gaze from across the frontiers on their old native places; they raid you stealthily, and swear revenge. You punch and kick them mercilessly; you have shown that you know how to do it. But what is the sense of it? And what is the prospect?

The responsibility for the tragedy of European Jews, for Auschwitz, Majdanek, and the slaughters in the ghetto, rests entirely on our western bourgeois 'civilization', of which Nazism was the legitimate, even though degenerate, offspring. Yet it was the Arabs who were made to pay the price for the crimes the West committed towards the Jews. They are still made to pay it, for the 'guilty conscience' of the West is, of course, pro-Israeli and anti-Arab. And how easily Israel has allowed itself to be bribed and fooled by the false 'conscience money'.

A rational relationship between Israelis and Arabs might have been possible if Israel had at least attempted to establish it, if the man who

jumped from the burning house had tried to make friends with the innocent victim of his descent and compensate him. This did not happen. Israel never even recognized the Arab grievance. From the outset Zionism worked towards the creation of a purely Jewish state and was glad to rid the country of its Arab inhabitants. No Israeli government has ever seriously looked for any opportunity to remove or assuage the grievance. They refused even to consider the fate of the huge mass of refugees unless the Arab states first recognized Israel, unless, that is, the Arabs surrendered politically before starting negotiations. Perhaps this might still be excused as bargaining tactics. The disastrous aggravation of Arab-Israeli relations was brought about by the Suez war, when Israel unashamedly acted as the spearhead of the old bankrupt European imperialisms in their last common stand in the Middle East, in their last attempt to maintain their grip on Egypt. The Israelis did not have to align themselves with the shareholders of the Suez Canal Company. The pros and cons were clear; there was no question of any mixture of rights and wrongs on either side. The Israelis put themselves totally in the wrong, morally and politically.

On the face of it, the Arab-Israeli conflict is only a clash of two rival nationalisms, each moving within the vicious circle of its self-righteous and inflated ambitions. From the viewpoint of an abstract internationalism nothing would be easier than to dismiss both as equally worthless and reactionary. However, such a view would ignore the social and political realities of the situation. The nationalism of the people in semi-colonial or colonial countries, fighting for their independence must not be put on the same moral-political level as the nationalism of conquerors and oppressors. The former has its historic justification and progressive aspect which the latter has not. Clearly, Arab nationalism, unlike the Israeli, still belongs to the former category.

Yet, even the nationalism of the exploited and oppressed should not be viewed uncritically, for there are various phases in its development. In one phase the progressive aspirations prevail; in another reactionary tendencies come to the surface. From the moment when independence is won or nearly won, nationalism tends to shed its revolutionary aspect altogether and turns into a retrograde ideology. We have seen this happening in India, Indonesia, Israel, and to some extent even in China. And even in the revolutionary phase each nationalism has its streak of irrationality, an inclination to exclusiveness, national egoism and racism. Arab nationalism despite all its historic merits and progressive functions, also contains such ingredients.

The June crisis has revealed some of the basic weaknesses of Arab political thought and action: the lack of political strategy; a proneness to emotional self-intoxication; and an excessive reliance on nationalist demagoguery. These weaknesses were among the decisive causes of the Arab defeat. By indulging in threats of the destruction of Israel and even of 'extermination'—and how empty these threats were has been amply demonstrated by the Arabs' utter military unpreparedness—some of Egypt's and Jordan's propagandists provided plenty of grist to Israeli chauvinism, and enabled Israel's government to work up the



mass of its people into the paroxysm of fear and ferocious aggressiveness which then burst upon Arab heads.

It is a truism that war is a continuation of policy. The six days' war has shown up the relative immaturity of the present Arab régimes. The Israelis owe their triumph not merely to the pre-emptive blow, but also to a more modern economic, political, and military organization. To some extent the war drew a balance on the decade of Arab development since the Suez war and has revealed its grave inadequacies. The modernization of the socio-economic structures of Egypt and the other Arab states and of Arab political thinking has proceeded far more slowly than people inclined to idealize the present Arab régimes have assumed.

The persisting backwardness is, of course, rooted in socio-economic conditions. But ideology and methods of organization are in themselves factors of weakness. I have in mind the single party system, the cult of Nasserism, and the absence of free discussion. All this has greatly hampered the political education of the masses and the work of socialist enlightenment. The negative results have made themselves felt on various levels. When major decisions of policy depend on a more or less autocratic Leader, there is in normal times no genuine popular participation in the political processes, no vigilant and active consciousness, no initiative from below. This has had many consequences, even military ones. The Israeli pre-emptive blow, delivered with conventional weapons, would not have had such devastating impact if Egypt's armed forces had been accustomed to rely on the initiative of individual officers and soldiers. Local commanders would then have taken the elementary defensive precautions without waiting for orders from above. Military inefficiency reflected here a wider and deeper, social-political weakness. The military-bureaucratic methods of Nasserism hamper also the political integration of the Arab movement of liberation. Nationalist demagoguery flourishes only all too easily; but it is no substitute for a real impulse to national unity and for a real mobilization of popular forces against the divisive, feudal and reactionary elements. We have seen how, during the emergency, excessive reliance on a single Leader made the fate of the Arab states dependent in fact on great Power intervention and accidents of diplomatic manoeuvre.

*To return to Israel, what use is it going to make of victory? How do the Israelis visualize their further role in that part of the world?*

Paradoxically and grotesquely, the Israelis appear now in the role of the Prussians of the Middle East. They have now won three wars against their Arab neighbours. Just so did the Prussians a century ago defeat all their neighbours within a few years, the Danes, the Austrians, and the French. The succession of victories bred in them an absolute confidence in their own efficiency, a blind reliance on the force of their arms, chauvinistic arrogance, and contempt for other peoples. I fear that a similar degeneration—for degeneration it is—may be taking place in the political character of Israel. Yet as the Prussia of the Middle East, Israel can be only a feeble parody of the original. The Prussians

were at least able to use their victories for uniting in their Reich all German-speaking peoples living outside the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Germany's neighbours were divided among themselves by interest, history, religion, and language. Bismarck, Wilhelm II, and Hitler could play them off against one another. The Israelis are surrounded by Arabs only. Attempts to play the Arab states against one another are bound to fail in the end. The Arabs were at loggerheads with one another in 1948, when Israel waged its first war; they were far less divided in 1956, during Israel's second war; and they formed a common front in 1967. They may prove far more firmly united in any future confrontation with Israel.

The Germans have summed up their own experience in the bitter phrase: '*Man kann sich totsiegen!*' 'You can rush yourself victoriously into your grave.' This is what the Israelis have been doing. They have bitten off much more than they can swallow. In the conquered territories and in Israel there are now nearly a million and five hundred thousand Arabs, well over 40 per cent of the total population. Will the Israelis expel this mass of Arabs in order to hold 'securely' the conquered lands? This would create a new refugee problem, more dangerous and larger than the old one. Will they give up the conquered territories? No, say most of their leaders. Ben Gurion, the evil spirit of Israeli chauvinism, urges the creation of an 'Arab Palestinian State' on the Jordan, that would be an Israeli Protectorate. Can Israel expect that the Arabs will accept such a Protectorate? That they will not fight it tooth and nail? None of the Israeli parties is prepared even to contemplate a bi-national Arab-Israeli state. Meanwhile great numbers of Arabs have been 'induced' to leave their homes on the Jordan, and the treatment of those who have stayed behind is far worse than that of the Arab minority in Israel that was kept under martial law for 19 years. Yes, this victory is worse for Israel than a defeat. Far from giving Israel a higher degree of security, it has rendered it much more insecure. If Arab revenge and extermination is what the Israelis feared, they have behaved as if they were bent on turning a bogey into an actual menace.

*Did Israel's victory bring any real gain to the United States? Has it furthered the American ideological offensive in Afro-Asia?*

There was a moment, at the cease-fire, when it looked as if Egypt's defeat led to Nasser's downfall and to the undoing of the policy associated with his name. If that had happened, the Middle East would have almost certainly been brought back into the Western sphere of influence. Egypt might have become another Ghana or Indonesia. This did not happen however. The Arab masses who came out in the streets and squares of Cairo, Damascus and Beirut to demand that Nasser should stay in office, prevented it happening. This was one of those rare historic popular impulses that redress or upset a political balance within a few moments. This time, in the hour of defeat, the initiative from below worked with immediate impact. There are only very few cases in history when a people stood in this way by a defeated leader. The situation is, of course, still fluid. Reactionary influences will go on working within the Arab states to achieve something like a Ghanaian

or Indonesian coup. But for the time being neo-colonialism has been denied the fruit of Israel's 'victory'.

*Moscow's influence and prestige have, as a result of these events, suffered a grave reverse. Is this a permanent loss or a temporary one? And is it likely to have an effect on political alignments in Moscow?*

'The Russians have let us down!' was the bitter cry that came from Cairo, Damascus, and Beirut in June. And when the Arabs saw the Soviet delegate at the United Nations voting, in unison with the Americans, for a cease-fire to which no condition for a withdrawal of the Israeli troops was attached, they felt utterly betrayed. 'The Soviet Union will now sink to the rank of a second- or fourth-rate power,' Nasser was reported to have told the Soviet Ambassador. The events appeared to justify the Chinese accusation of Soviet collusion with the United States. The debacle aroused an alarm in Eastern Europe as well. 'If the Soviet Union could let down Egypt like this, may it not also let us down when we are once again confronted by German aggression?', the Poles and the Czechs wondered. The Yugoslavs, too, were outraged. Tito, Gomulka, and other leaders rushed to Moscow to demand an explanation and a rescue operation for the Arabs. This was all the more remarkable as the demand came from the 'moderates' and the 'revisionists' who normally stand for 'peaceful coexistence' and *rapprochement* with the USA. It was they who now spoke of Soviet 'collusion with American imperialism'.

The Soviet leaders had to do something. The fact that the intervention of the Arab masses had saved the Nasser régime unexpectedly provided Moscow with fresh scope for manoeuvre. After the great let down, the Soviet leaders again came to the fore as the friends and protectors of the Arab states. A few spectacular gestures, breaking off diplomatic relations with Israel, and speeches at the United Nations cost them little. Even the White House showed 'understanding' for their 'predicament' and for the 'tactical necessity' which presently brought Kosygin to the United Nations Assembly.

However, something more than gestures was required to restore the Soviet position. The Arabs demanded that the Soviet Union should at once help them to re-build their military strength, the strength they had lost through compliance with Soviet advice. They asked for new planes, new tanks, new guns, new stocks of munitions. But apart from the cost this involved—the value of the military equipment lost by Egypt alone is put at a billion pounds—the reconstitution of the Arab armed forces carries, from Moscow's viewpoint, major political risks. The Arabs refuse to negotiate with Israel; they may well afford to leave Israel to choke on its victory. Rearmament is Cairo's top priority. Israel has taught the Egyptians a lesson: next time the Egyptian air force may strike the pre-emptive blow. And Moscow has had to decide whether it will supply the weapons for the blow.

Moscow cannot favour the idea of such an Arab retaliation, but neither can it refuse to rearm Egypt. Yet Arab rearmament will almost certainly tempt Israel to interrupt the process and strike another pre-

emptive blow, in which case the Soviet Union would once again be faced with the dilemma which has worsted it in May and June. If Egypt were to strike first, the United States would almost certainly intervene. Its Sixth Fleet would not look on from the Mediterranean if the Israeli air force were knocked out and the Arabs were about to march into Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. If the USSR again kept out of the conflict, it would irretrievably destroy its international power position.

A week after the cease-fire the Soviet Chief of Staff was in Cairo; and Soviet advisers and experts crowded the hotels there, beginning to work on the reconstitution of Egypt's armed forces. Yet Moscow cannot face with equanimity the prospect of an Arab-Israeli competition in pre-emptive blows and its wider implications. Probably the Soviet experts in Cairo were making haste slowly, while Soviet diplomacy tried to 'win the peace' for the Arabs after it had lost them the war. But even the most clever playing for time cannot solve the central issue of Soviet policy. How much longer can the Soviet Union adapt itself to the American forward push? How far can it retreat before the American economic-political and military offensives across the Afro-Asian area? Not for nothing did *Krasnaya Zvezda* already in June suggest that the current Soviet conception of peaceful coexistence might be in need of some revision. The military, and not they alone, fear that Soviet retreats are increasing the dynamic of the American forward push; and that if this goes on a direct Soviet-American clash may become inevitable. If Brezhnev and Kosygin do not manage to cope with this issue, changes in leadership are quite possible. The Cuban and Vietnamese crises contributed to Khrushchev's downfall. The full consequences of the Middle Eastern crisis have yet to unfold.

*What solutions do you see to this situation? Can the Arab-Israeli conflict still be resolved in any rational manner?*

I do not believe that it can be so resolved by military means. To be sure, no one can deny the Arab states the right to reconstitute their armed forces to some extent. But what they need far more urgently is a social and political strategy and new methods in their struggle for emancipation. This cannot be a purely negative strategy dominated by the anti-Israeli obsession. They may refuse to parley with Israel as long as Israel has not given up its conquests. They will necessarily resist the occupation régime on the Jordan and in the Gaza strip. But this need not mean a renewal of war.

The strategy that can yield the Arabs far greater gain than those that can be obtained in any Holy War or through a pre-emptive blow, a strategy that would bring them real victory, a civilized victory, must be centred on the imperative and urgent need for an intensive modernization of the structure of the Arab economy and of Arab politics and on the need for a genuine integration of Arab national life, which is still broken up by the old, inherited and imperialist-sponsored frontiers and divisions. These aims can be promoted only if the revolutionary and socialist tendencies in Arab politics are strengthened and developed.

Finally, Arab nationalism will be incomparably more effective as a liberating force if it is disciplined and rationalized by an element of internationalism that will enable the Arabs to approach the problem of Israel more realistically than hitherto. They cannot go on denying Israel's right to exist and indulging in bloodthirsty rhetoric. Economic growth, industrialization, education, more efficient organization and more sober policies are bound to give the Arabs what sheer numbers and anti-Israeli fury have not been able to give them, namely an actual preponderance which should almost automatically reduce Israel to its modest proportions and its proper role in the Middle East.

This is, of course, not a short term programme. Yet its realization need not take too much time; and there is no shorter way to emancipation. The short cuts of demagoguery, revenge, and war have proved disastrous enough. Meanwhile, Arab policy should be based on a direct appeal to the Israeli people over the heads of the Israeli government, on an appeal to the workers and the *kibbutzim*. The latter should be freed from their fears by clear assurances and pledges that Israel's legitimate interests are respected and that Israel may even be welcome as member of a future Middle Eastern Federation. This would cause the orgy of Israeli chauvinism to subside and would stimulate opposition to Eshkol's and Dayan's policy of conquest and domination. The capacity of Israeli workers to respond to such an appeal should not be underrated.

More independence from the Great Power game is also necessary. That game has distorted the social-political development of the Middle East. I have shown how much American influence has done to give Israel's policy its present repulsive and reactionary character. But Russian influence has also done something to warp Arab minds by feeding them with arid slogans, and encouraging demagoguery, while Moscow's egoism and opportunism have fostered disillusionment and cynicism. If Middle East policy continues to be merely a plaything of the Great Powers, the prospect will be bleak indeed. Neither Jews nor Arabs will be able to break out of their vicious spirals. This is what we, of the Left, should be telling both the Arabs and the Jews as clearly and bluntly as we can.

*The crisis clearly caught the Left by surprise and found it disoriented and divided, both here and in France, and, it seems, in the United States as well. In the States fears have been expressed that the division over Israel might even split the movement against the war in Vietnam.*

Yes, the confusion has been undeniable and widespread. I shall not speak here of such 'friends of Israel' as Messrs Mollet and his company, who like Lord Avon and Selwyn Lloyd, saw in this war a continuation of the Suez campaign and their revenge for their discomfiture in 1956. Nor shall I waste words on the right wing Zionist lobby in the Labour Party. But even on the 'extreme Left' of that party men like Sidney Silverman behaved in a way as if designed to illustrate someone's saying: 'Scratch a Jewish left-winger and you find only a Zionist.'

But the confusion showed itself even further on the Left and affected

people with an otherwise unimpeachable record of struggle against imperialism. A French writer known for his courageous stand against the wars in Algeria and Vietnam this time called for solidarity with Israel, declaring that if Israel's survival demanded American intervention, he would favour it and even raise the cry '*Vive le Président Johnson*'. Didn't it occur to him how incongruous it was to cry '*A bas Johnson!*' in Vietnam and '*Vive!*' in Israel? Jean-Paul Sartre also called, though with reservations, for solidarity with Israel, but then spoke frankly of the confusion in his own mind and its reasons. During the Second World War, he said, as a member of the *Resistance* he learned to look upon the Jew as upon a brother to be defended in all circumstances. During the Algerian war the Arabs were his brothers, and he stood by them. The present conflict was therefore for him a fratricidal struggle in which he was unable to exercise cool judgment and was overwhelmed by conflicting emotions.

Still, we must exercise our judgment and must not allow it to be clouded by emotions and memories, however deep or haunting. We should not allow even invocations of Auschwitz to blackmail us into supporting the wrong cause. I am speaking as a Marxist of Jewish origin, whose next-of-kin perished in Auschwitz and whose relatives live in Israel. To justify or condone Israel's wars against the Arabs is to render Israel a very bad service indeed and to harm its own long term interest. Israel's security, let me repeat, was not enhanced by the wars of 1956 and 1967; it was undermined and compromised. The 'friends of Israel' have in fact abetted Israel in a ruinous course.

They have also, willy-nilly, abetted the reactionary mood that took hold of Israel during the crisis. It was only with disgust that I could watch on television the scenes from Israel in those days; the displays of the conquerors' pride and brutality; the outbursts of chauvinism; and the wild celebrations of the inglorious triumph, all contrasting sharply with the pictures of Arab suffering and desolation, the treks of Jordanian refugees and the bodies of Egyptian soldiers killed by thirst in the desert. I looked at the medieval figures of the rabbis and *khassidim* jumping with joy at the Wailing Wall; and I felt how the ghosts of Talmudic obscurantism—and I know these only too well—crowded in on the country, and how the reactionary atmosphere had grown dense and stifling. Then came the many interviews with General Dayan, the hero and saviour, with the political mind of a regimental sergeant-major, ranting about annexations and venting a raucous callousness about the fate of the Arabs in the conquered areas. ('What do they matter to me?' 'As far as I am concerned, they may stay or they may go.') Already wrapped in a phoney military legend—the legend is phoney for Dayan neither planned nor conducted the six days' campaign—he cut a rather sinister figure, suggesting the candidate to the dictator's post: the hint was conveyed that if the civilian parties get too 'soft' on the Arabs this new Joshua, this mini-de Gaulle, will teach them a lesson, himself take power, and raise Israel's 'glory' even higher. And behind Dayan there was Beigin, Minister and leader of the extreme right-wing Zionists, who had long claimed even Trans-Jordania as part of 'historic' Israel. A reactionary war inevitably breeds the heroes, the moods, and the consequences in which its character and aims are faithfully mirrored.

On a deeper historical level the Jewish tragedy finds in Israel a dismal sequel. Israel's leaders exploit in self-justification, and over-exploit Auschwitz and Treblinka; but their actions mock the real meaning of the Jewish tragedy.

European Jews paid a horrible price for the role they had played in past ages, and not of their own choosing, as representatives of a market economy, of 'money', among peoples living in a natural, money-less, agricultural economy. They were the conspicuous carriers of early capitalism, traders and money lenders, in pre-capitalist society. As modern capitalism developed, their role in it, though still conspicuous, became less than secondary. In Eastern Europe the bulk of the Jewish people consisted of poverty-stricken artisans, small traders, proletarians, semi-proletarians, and outright paupers. But the image of the rich Jewish merchant and usurer (the descendent also of Christ's crucifiers) lived on in Gentile folklore and remained engraved on the popular mind, stirring distrust and fear. The Nazis seized this image, magnified it to colossal dimensions, and constantly held it before the eyes of the masses.

August Bebel once said that anti-semitism is the 'socialism of the fools'. There was plenty of that kind of 'socialism' about, and all too little of the genuine socialism, in the era of the Great Slump, and of the mass unemployment and mass despair of the 1930's. The European working classes were unable to overthrow the bourgeois order; but the hatred of capitalism was intense and widespread enough to force an outlet for itself and focus on a scapegoat. Among the lower middle classes, the lumpenbourgeoisie, and the lumpenproletariat a frustrated anti-capitalism merged with fear of communism and neurotic xenophobia. These moods fed on crumbs of a mouldering historic reality which Nazism used to the utmost. The impact of Nazi Jew-baiting was so powerful in part because the image of the Jew as the alien and vicious 'blood-sucker' was to all too many people still an actuality. This accounted also for the relative indifference and the passivity with which so many non-Germans viewed the slaughter of the Jews. The socialism of the fools gleefully watched Shylock led to the gas chamber.

Israel promised not merely to give the survivors of the European-Jewish communities a 'National Home' but also to free them from the fatal stigma. This was the message of the *kibbutzim*, the Histadruth, and even of Zionism at large. The Jews were to cease to be unproductive elements, shopkeepers, economic and cultural interlopers, carriers of capitalism. They were to settle in 'their own land' as 'productive workers'.

Yet they now appear in the Middle East once again in the invidious role of agents not so much of their own, relatively feeble, capitalism, but of powerful western vested interests and as protégés of neo-colonialism. This is how the Arab world sees them, not without reason. Once again they arouse bitter emotions and hatreds in their neighbours, in all those who have ever been or still are victims of imperialism. What a fate it is for the Jewish people to be made to appear in this role! As agents of early capitalism they were still pioneers of progress in

feudal society; as agents of the late, over-ripe, imperialist capitalism of our days, their role is altogether lamentable; and they are placed once again in the position of potential scapegoats. Is Jewish history to come full circle in such a way? This may well be the outcome of Israel's 'victories'; and of this Israel's real friends must warn it.

The Arabs, on the other hand, need to be put on guard against the socialism or the anti-imperialism of the fools. We trust that they will not succumb to it; and that they will learn from their defeat and recover to lay the foundations of a truly progressive, a socialist Middle East.

*Interviewers: LR, TW, AC  
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