

The Palestine Problem:

Zionism and Imperialism in the Middle East

The Palestinian struggle can only be understood within the wider framework of the revolution in the Middle East as a whole, an area which is closely linked to the world imperialist system. It has been the fate of this part of the world to suffer from not one, but two relatively distinct yet closely inter-related forms of foreign domination: Zionist colonialism on the one hand, and western imperialism, in most of its possible varieties, on the other. The simultaneous existence of these two dominant forces, with the resulting contradictions and problems, establishes the constitutive features of the Arab Middle East as a subjugated, underdeveloped region of the world.

This article begins by defining the fundamental contradiction within the Middle East, resulting from the interaction of Zionism and imperialism upon the area. The rest of the article then aims to establish a Marxist-Leninist framework for the analysis of *one* aspect of this fundamental contradiction, namely *the Palestinian Liberation struggle*. As such it will have to analyse as well the other major aspect

of this problem, the anti-imperialist social revolution in the Arab states, but will do so only insofar as it is related to the Palestinian problem. A comprehensive treatment of the Arab revolution would involve the analysis of several other topics, which fall outside the confines of this text: such topics would include the mechanisms of imperialism in the area, the historical development of the nationalist movement, the problematic concept of the Arab 'nation', the reactionary exploitation of Islamic ideology, and the development of separate state structures within the Arab Middle East.

Conceived in this way as an introduction to the Palestinian struggle this article will concentrate on two central topics: first, the historical nature of Zionism¹ and its changing relation to imperialism; second, the Palestinian problem in Arab politics, the various forms of nationalist ideology it provoked, and the class nature of the petit-bourgeois nationalist regimes. It concludes with a brief political analysis of the June War and its consequences for the Arabs as a whole.

The Fundamental Contradiction

At present, the fundamental contradiction in the Arab Middle East can be seen as one opposing the Arab peoples—including the Palestinian people—to *both* Zionist territorial colonialism, represented by the state of Israel, *and* Western neo-imperialism, represented by the ruling Arab oligarchies. As such it is the *condensation* of the two contradictions (the national and the class contradictions) into one fundamental one. These two contradictions are:

Imperialism + Zionism *vs* the Palestinian people + the Arab masses;
Imperialism + the Arab oligarchies *vs* the Arab masses.

Condensed, but by no means abolished, the national and class contradictions alternate in occupying the *dominant* position within the fundamental contradiction. The phases of the development of the Arab revolution (as the combined anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist struggle) are determined by this *displacement* of the principal aspects of the fundamental contradiction.

But the leadership of the anti-Zionist struggle is not the same as that of the class struggle. Whereas the Arab oligarchies appear to partake in the leadership of the former, they constitute the direct target, i.e. the *internal enemy*, of the latter. Once this is established the problematic of the Arab revolution emerges immediately. The central question is: *What is the nature of the relation between the national struggle and the class struggle in the Middle East?* In other words: *How is one to think out the unity, and distinction, of the two interlocked struggles and their mutual interrelation within this unity?* A host of related questions of a theoretical and strategic order are bound to follow: *How, and to what extent, is the national struggle able to offset, mask, or—on the contrary—detonate and*

¹ A thorough analysis of Zionism would require an account of its material origins in Europe, as a response to anti-semitism, and of its role within the international working-class movement, where it was condemned by Lenin, Trotsky and Kautsky. See *The Jewish Question; A Marxist Interpretation*, by Abraham Leon, Mexico, 1950.

intensify the class struggle (and vice-versa) and in what conditions is the victory of the one a precondition for the victory of the other?

Before attempting a historical analysis of the Palestinian problem, it is essential to define the two related targets of the revolutionary struggle: Zionism, and neo-imperialism.

The Dual Nature of Zionism

The basic Zionist aim defined as early as 1897—the establishment of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine—characterizes Zionism as a specific form of foreign domination: *territorial colonialism* bent on the acquisition of land. The corollary to this aim—the establishment of a *decisive Jewish majority* on this territory—necessarily implied, at best, the reduction of the native population to a minority: the land colonized should have as few inhabitants as possible. ‘Zionism wanted not simply the resources of Palestine . . . but the country itself to serve for the creation of a new national state. The new nation was to have its own classes, including a working class. The Arabs were, therefore, not to be exploited but totally replaced.’²

The early Zionists knew this only too well.³ As early as 1854, Lord Shaftesbury formulated the slogan: ‘country without a nation, nation without a country’⁴ later to be transformed by modern Zionists into ‘a land without people for a people without land.’ The present debate inside Israel on what to do with the territories occupied during the June war of 1967 has re-introduced the notion of the ‘Jewish majority’ as the cornerstone of Zionism. Zionist opponents to annexation argue that since the Arab population is endowed with a higher birth-rate than its Israeli counterpart, annexation of the conquered territories, with their million inhabitants, will lead in due course to the Arabs becoming the majority of the population of the enlarged Israel—the very *raison d’être* of the Zionist state will disappear.⁵

² *The Other Israel*, by the Israeli Socialist Organization, p. 2.

³ Herzl wrote in his diaries:

‘When we occupy the land . . . we shall expropriate gently the private property on the estates assigned to us. We shall try to spirit out the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, and by denying it any employment in our country . . . Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.’ (*The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, vol. 1., p. 88).

⁴ see Hyanson, *Palestine Under the Mandate*, London 1950, p. 10.

⁵ Though not himself an advocate of the withdrawal from the occupied territories, Dayan gives a clear idea of what the issue is all about. In an interview on the American television programme ‘Face the Nation’ on June 11th, 1967 the following exchange took place:

Sidney Grusen (of the *New York Times*) ‘Is there any possible way that Israel could absorb the huge number of Arabs whose territory it has gained control of now?’ *Dayan*: ‘Economically we can, but I think it is not in accord with our aims for the future. It would turn Israel into either a bi-national or a poly-Jewish-Arab state and we want to have a Jewish state. We can absorb them but it would’nt be the same country.’ *Grusen*: ‘Now is it necessary, in your opinion, to maintain this as a Jewish state and a purely Jewish state?’ *Dayan*: ‘Absolutely, absolutely, we want a Jewish state like the French want a French state.’ (CBS transcript, p. 13—my italics:FT) The simile used by Dayan differs slightly from that used previously by Chaim Weizmann (‘Palestine will ultimately become as Jewish as England in English’); their content is identical.

In implementing its basic aim, the Zionist movement and later the state of Israel were to become an integral part of the imperialist camp. Emerging during the heyday of imperialism and seeking to organise Jewish emigration to a country already under foreign domination, Zionism could hope to achieve its aim only by allying itself to the imperialist power that dominated (or was likely to dominate) Palestine and the Middle East. Both the German Kaiser and the Ottoman Sultan were approached by Herzl. The latter was promised financial assistance to liquidate his debts and Herzl pledged that the Zionist settlers in Palestine would constitute a powerful rampart against the nascent Arab movement for national liberation and any other movement for independence that might threaten the interests of the Ottoman Empire in the area.⁶ In his encounter with the Ottoman Sultan, Herzl made this succinct differentiation between Zionist territorial colonialism and 'traditional imperialism': 'All that this beautiful country (i.e. Palestine) needs is the industrial activity of our people. In general, Europeans who come here enrich themselves quickly and then hasten away with their spoils. *An entrepreneur should by all means make a decent and honest profit, but he ought to remain in the country where his wealth was acquired.*'⁷ Eventually, Zionism turned to Britain once the latter seemed the most likely power to gain control over Palestine when the spoils of the First World War were divided. The alliance between the two was formally contracted in the Balfour Declaration of November 1917, termed 'the wedding ring with which Zionism was married to imperialism.' After the Second World War, it promptly allied itself to the United States, the new imperialist power seeking to gain control over the area. But this did not prevent it from joining Britain and France in their last military venture to rescue one of their imperialist strongholds in the Middle East—the Suez Canal; nor from flirtation with the new master of France, De Gaulle (an affair which earned Israel French planes and an uncontrolled atomic reactor) and with the ex-Nazi rulers of West Germany.

Zionism has at least been consistent in attributing to itself this counter-revolutionary, pre-imperialist role. Herzl viewed the Jewish state in Palestine as a European rampart against 'Asia', as an 'outpost of civilization against barbarism'. After the June war of 1967, Israel's Premier—Levi Eshkol—spoke in identical terms during a visit to Europe.

The dual nature of Zionism is, therefore, the result of its basic aim *and* of the means it adopted in implementing this aim: Zionism is a colonialist force *in its own right* (territorial colonialism) whose ultimate interest lies in the preservation of the territory it has occupied, of a decisive Jewish majority upon it and of the segregationist, racialist structure of the state of Israel; it is, at the same time, part of the imperialist camp, tied by a solid 'umbilical cord' to the power that now dominates it—US imperialism—through which it is constantly being fed with the means of its survival and growth.

Within the imperialist camp taken as a unit, Zionism and the state of

⁶ Lorand Gaspar, *Histoire de la Palestine*, Paris, 1968, p. 85.

⁷ Herzl, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

Israel enjoy a *relative autonomy* because of their specific nature as the movement and institutionalized form of territorial colonialism. This autonomy is relative because Israel lives off the imperialist camp and depends on it for the perpetuation of its domination. It possesses its relatively distinct logic bound in the last instance by the general logic that governs world imperialism. The unity cannot mask the distinction, neither can the distinction go far enough to abolish this organic unity.

Thus, Zionism has introduced into the Arab Middle East a relatively autonomous problem—endowed with its own dynamics—and took part in introducing yet another problem due to its relation to the imperialist camp and its alliance with the powers that dominate it.

As a colonizing power in its own right, Zionism has introduced into the Arab Middle East an essentially *national-patriotic* problem in this double sense of the term:

(i) Against the Palestinians, it has introduced an essentially national problem: the implementation of the Zionist aim in Palestine was bound to result in the eviction of the majority of its population. The conflict that arose stemmed from the antagonistic contradiction between the colonizing community, *as a community* and the Palestine people, *as a people*. There exists a Palestine problem because there exists an unresolved contradiction in the life of the people of Palestine between their aspiration to re-integrate their country and re-assert their national identity and the occupation of this same country by a colonizing community whose Zionist structure is diametrically opposed to their aspiration. The condition for the one necessarily implies the negation of the other.⁸ *In this respect, the Palestine problem is the direct result of the Zionist oppression of the Palestinian Arabs. That the victims of this oppression live (or used to live up to June 1967) in their majority outside the 'technical' borders of the Zionist state, does not change the nature of the problem in any significant manner. The Palestine problem was and still is the problem of the right of the Palestinian Arabs to national self-determination.*⁹

⁸ 'Once delivered from Turkish tutelage, the Palestinian Arabs desired domination neither by the British nor Israelis. . . . They wanted to keep their Arab identity, and therefore they wanted to live under the rule of an Arab state' (Maxime Rodinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 217–8).

⁹ The three meanings attributed by Lenin to the concept of 'annexation' apply in one way or another to Zionist territorial colonialism: (i) joining by means of force, (ii) oppression by another nation (the joining of 'alien' regions, etc.), (iii) the violation of the *status quo*: ' . . . annexation is *violation of the self-determination* of a nation, it is the establishment of state *frontiers contrary to the will of the population*. To be against annexations *means to be in favour of the right to self-determination*.' (Lenin, 'Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up', *Collected Works*, vol. 22, p. 328). ' . . . annexation is *a form of national oppression*.' (*ibid.*, p. 335). 'no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations' (*ibid.*, p. 343—all Lenin's italics).

Karl Kautsky had already attached Zionism on this point: 'Zionism is not a progressive movement, but a reactionary movement . . . (it) *denies the right of self-determination of nations*' (*op. cit.*, p. 207).

One could not agree more with General Dayan when he sums up the whole Palestine problem in the following terms: 'Why do the Arabs hate the Jews? Answer: They take us to be foreigners, invaders that took an Arab country and turned it into a Jewish state. And they are right about it. From their point of view, we did it. We didn't come here to contribute, or for a contribution to the Arab Countries, We came

(ii) Against the Arab peoples, Zionism has introduced a patriotic problem: being a colonialist power constantly implementing its aims by the imposition of military 'matters of fact' and hence expansionist, Zionism¹⁰ is not only a threat to the Arab peoples, but is also diametrically opposed to their struggle for national liberation and unity. It is, in this sense, one of the last pockets of 'traditional' Western colonial occupation with one radical difference: the Zionist colonizers are not here because they believe in their right to exploit the territory; they are here to stay because they believe that the country is theirs. Embedded within this wider context, the Palestine problem becomes the Arab-Israeli problem: a contradiction which has exploded up to now in three major military conflagrations.

As part of the imperialist camp, Zionism and the state of Israel are entangled in the problem of the anti-imperialist struggle in the Middle East. Their most resolute enemies, it will be seen, are the social forces and vanguards of this struggle.

Neo-Imperialism in the Middle East

Zionism and the state of Israel are a national-patriotic threat to the Arab peoples. They oppose them *en bloc*, *vertically*. Western imperialism divides the Arabs *horizontally*: the problem of achieving national liberation, unity and social and economic development puts into play the *classes* which can realize such tasks and those which stand against their realization. The problem of anti-imperialism in the Middle East is posed along essentially class lines.

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France established their joint hegemony over the area by its Balkanization into a multitude of legal entities, artificially carved up to suit the requirements of imperialist exploitation and the division of spheres of influence. *This hegemony was maintained by an alliance between the imperialist powers and indigenous classes.*

Now, after the accession of most of the countries of the region to political 'independence' and after American neo-imperialism replaced Franco-British imperialism¹¹, the alliance between US imperialism and the ruling Arab oligarchies has become the decisive factor in cementing

here to establish our State because we feel that this is our homeland.' (Speech to American business men in Tel Aviv on January 18th, 1968, *The Sunday Times* March 23rd 1969).

The question, therefore, is whether one should support the 'invaders' or their victims.

¹⁰ The (Arab-Israeli) conflict appears essentially as the struggle of an indigenous population against the occupation of part of its territory by foreigners . . .' (Rodinson, *op. cit.*, p. 219).

¹¹ A clear indication of this new balance of power is the change that occurred in the control of oil resources after the Second World War. While US firms controlled less than 10 per cent of the oil reserves in the Middle East before the war and 72 per cent was held by Britain, the positions are now reversed. The United States now controls almost 59 per cent, while Britain is left with only 29 per cent, (Harry Magdoff, 'The Age of Imperialism', in *Monthly Review*, vol. 20, no. 2, June 1968, p. 28).

the ties of dependence that bind the Middle East to the world imperialist market and perpetuate its subjugation to the laws of imperialist exploitation.

The overall importance of the Middle East for Western imperialism can hardly be overstated. In 1967, US Secretary of Defence McNamara assessed it in the following terms:

'The Near and Middle East remains of strategic significance to the United States because the area is a political, military and economic crossroads, and because the flow of Middle Eastern oil is vital to the West. We, accordingly, have a large stake in the area's stability and steady development. We also have a strong interest in maintaining our alliance relationships with Greece, Turkey and Iran, for these three countries stand between the Soviet Union and the warm water ports and oil resources of the Middle East.'¹²

If it is borne in mind that the West will depend on oil as a major source of energy at least until the last decade of this century, then the vital importance that McNamara attributes to the area is all too clear. For the Arab Middle East alone harbours more than half of the oil reserves of the world. And while the known reserves of the USA and Latin America are estimated to last no more than 10 years, the Arab reserves will last for another 75 years.¹³ Furthermore, Arab oil is by far the cheapest and the most profitable. The costs of production of Middle Eastern oil are by far the cheapest in the world: 6 cents per barrel in Kuwait and 8–9 cents in Saudi Arabia in contrast to 62 cents in Venezuela and 161 cents in the USA.¹⁴ Oil is also the raw material for one of the booming industries of the West: the value of products using oil as a raw material amounts to 60 per cent of the total value of US industrial production.¹⁵

The oil economy covers all the Middle East, either as producing or as transit countries. But it is by no means the only aspect of neo-imperialist exploitation. Suffice it to say here that political 'independence', far from severing the ties of dependence that bind the area to the Western capitalist market, has on the contrary strengthened them. In 1965, 75 per cent of the exchanges of the area were still with the advanced industrial countries. The nature of these exchanges is still the same: import of manufactured goods and export of agricultural produce, raw materials and oil. This process can only be understood as a mechanism of neo-imperialist exploitation—the unevenness of the rate of exchange between the 'Third World' and the advanced capitalist countries.

In this era of neo-imperialism, the ties of dependence that bind the Arab Middle East to the imperialist camp are preserved by the political

¹² As quoted by Magdoff, op. cit., vol. 20, no. 6, p. 23.

¹³ Lutfallah Suleiman, 'Mass-alat Al-Thawra Al-'Arabiya' in *Dirrassat 'Arabiya* (Arab Studies), vol. 4, No. 8, June 1968, pp. 9–10.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 8.

hegemony of the oligarchies of Saudi Arabia; the Gulf Emirates (mini-states that can be safely considered 'the juridical domain for the rule of the oil corporations'); the Jordanian monarchy (an artificial state living off US subsidies and aid); the parasitic military bureaucracy of Iraq which appropriates a substantial part of the oil revenue and the Lebanese commercial-financial bourgeoisie playing the role of intermediary link in the commercial and financial circuit that relates the Middle Eastern hinterland, and especially the oil-producing states, to the advanced capitalist states. *Under neo-imperialism, the problem of national and social liberation is posed along class lines precisely because the revolutionary overthrow of these oligarchies and the destruction of the state machines that perpetuate their rule has become the main task of anti-imperialism and the precondition for achieving integral national emancipation, national unity and economic and social development.*

We are faced, then, with a national patriotic problem and a social problem at one and the same time, introduced by two foreign dominant powers: Zionist territorial colonialism—embodied in the state of Israel—and Western neo-imperialism, *represented by the pro-imperialist ruling Arab oligarchies*. The two problems are *interlocked* because the powers that introduced them form part of one and the same entity. But they cannot be reduced to one another. Although the alliance with the imperialist camp is the common denominator between Zionism and the ruling Arab oligarchies, the anti-imperialist *class* struggle follows a logic relatively distinct from that of the anti-Zionist national struggle.

The Palestine problem may be seen to have passed through four phases divided by the three Arab-Israeli wars: i) 1917–48; ii) 1949–56; iii) 1957–67; iv) June 1967 and after.

The Colonization of Palestine 1917–48

The history of this period is the history of British-Zionist partnership in the colonization of Palestine and the subsequent Zionist takeover which led to the emergence of the state of Israel in May 1948. The controversial issues relevant in this period can be summed up in the following questions:

How and why did the conflict between the Zionist settlers' community and the Palestinian Arabs become a national conflict? What is the specific nature of the relation between Zionism on the one hand and British, then US, imperialism on the other? Why did the governments of the Arab League intervene militarily in May 1948? What was the nature of this war? How is the role played by the Soviet Union as 'god-parent' to the new Zionist state to be explained?

During the First World War, Britain came to realize the strategic importance of Palestine. It became interested in dominating a country which could serve as a strategic base guarding the Suez Canal and as a buffer state between French-controlled Syria and the British domains along the route to India. France had her own designs and the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 had left unsettled the question of which of the two powers would control it. Moreover, the immediate requirements of the war drove Britain to conflicting commitments as to the

future of the country. To gain the support of the Arabs in her war against Turkey, she promised Hussein of Mecca an independent Arab state in the Middle East which included Palestine. The need to use the powerful Jewish American lobby to press the US government into entering the War was one of the most important factors that led to the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 which promised the Jews a 'national home' in Palestine.

In order to divide the area between themselves after the war, Britain and France had to curb the Arab movement for independence in Syria, Iraq and Palestine. Whereas the promise to Sherif Hussein was discarded, the Balfour Declaration was put to better use: the Zionist immigrants were to reinforce Britain's domination over Palestine. Britain had no intention of setting up a Jewish state after the War. Lloyd George made it quite clear that the interests of the Empire came first. In his post-War interpretation of the Balfour Declaration, he maintained that when the time came to provide Palestine with 'representative institutions' (i.e. when Britain decided to prepare for terminating its mandate), Palestine would become an 'independent Jewish state' *if* the Zionists made use of the opportunities provided by the Balfour Declaration and managed to become the majority among the population.¹⁶ Until then, the Zionist-settlers were to play a double role in the interests of British imperialism: (i) to help 'turn the country into a suitable strategic base for British imperialism, and . . . to serve as lightning conductors against which, in case of need, British agents could direct the revolt of the Arab masses against the occupation regime,'¹⁷ in the best tradition of the imperialist policy of 'divide and rule'; (ii) to become a junior partner in economic exploitation.

Nevertheless, to establish its domination over Palestine, Britain could not rely exclusively on the Zionist settlers. She sought, and found, collaborators among the Arabs.

As far as Zionism was concerned, the enemy was obviously the Arab liberation movement. For so long as the Jews did not constitute a decisive majority in Palestine, any 'representative institutions' granted to the Palestinians would be controlled by an Arab majority which would have a say on Jewish immigration and settlement. The rights of the Arabs to self-determination, if recognized, would mean the end of Zionist colonization. Alliance with the Mandatory power became, therefore, the only guarantee for the existence of Zionism in Palestine and for the hope of ever achieving its aims. This conflict of interests is clearly spelled out in a letter by Arthur Rupin, responsible for Zionist settlement, on May 30th 1928: ' . . . all the Arabs of Eretz Israel oppose the Zionist movement, and until we are capable of suggesting a satisfactory solution to the conflict of interests they will carry on being our antagonists. If, under these circumstances, a constitution worthy of the name were granted, it would stand to reason that the Arabs would make use of the *rights* assured to them by the constitution to prevent, as a majority, all economic progress on the part of the Jewish minority.

¹⁶ Gaspar, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹⁷ *The Communist International*, vol. 3, p. 76

The meaning of this would be, quite simply, the end of the Zionist movement'¹⁸

Commenting on this text 40 years later, Moshe Dayan was even more explicit. He says: 'Every solution (to the Arab-Zionist conflict)—including the establishment of a bi-national state—faced the alternative of either making allowances for the views and desires of the Arabs and putting an end to Zionism, or carrying on with immigration, land purchase and settlement while *denying the right of the Arabs of Palestine to determine the future of the country*.'¹⁹

The last proposed 'Legislative Council' in 1935 was to be composed of 14 Arabs and 7 Jews at a time when the latter constituted no more than 25 per cent of the population. Decisions pertaining to immigration rested with the High Commissioner and the Council could only discuss them. Moreover, the Council had no right to question the validity or continuation of the Mandate. The proposal was formally rejected by the Zionists, while most Arab leaders were ready to accept it at least as an interim arrangement.²⁰

As far as the Zionists were concerned, Zionist colonization stood or fell with the British Mandate. Their attitude to the Arabs can be summed up as follows: ignore the Arabs; create and impose economic and military 'facts' and they are ultimately bound to reconcile themselves to them. The famous Kibbutzim are, of course, an ideal combination of imposed military and economic 'facts'. The creation and imposition of such 'facts' has been since the 1920's the cornerstone of Zionist and Israeli strategy.

Faced with two enemies—one coming to exploit and the other seeking to settle and expel—the Palestinian Arabs could identify with neither and they fought both. *They rejected the British Mandate both as a brutal denial of their rights to independence in an Arab State and as a vehicle for Zionist territorial colonialism which threatened to displace them or, at best, reduce them to a subjugated minority in a Jewish state.* From the outset, they refused Zionist economic and military 'facts' and raids against Jewish settlements became their typical reaction during the first decade of the Mandate. With the rapid development of Zionist settlement, the struggle of the Palestinian Arabs was directed mainly against the British: the demand for self-rule and independence became inseparable from that of putting an end to Zionist colonization. The revolt of 1938 was waged against the British forces of occupation and not one Jew was molested.²¹ Although the 1936 uprising was preceded by attacks on individual Jews, it was in the main a general strike and popular war against the British troops—mobilizing at times half of the British army. Nevertheless, the Zionists were consistently fighting hand in hand with the occupation forces until the end of the 1930's. During this 1936–39 uprising, for example, the Haganah forces were assigned the task of guarding the British pipe lines!²²

¹⁸ *The Jerusalem Post*, September 30th 1968 (my emphasis).

¹⁹ *ibid.*, (my emphasis).

²⁰ Hyamson, *op. cit.*, p. 101–2.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 131–2; 138.

²² Gaspar, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

The Palestinian Economy

The very nature of the Zionist colonial process was bound to result in a conflict between two national communities, thus excluding any possibility of extra-national class alliances between Arabs and Jews.

It has been suggested that the characteristic feature of Zionism as a political movement resides in the fact that it is a 'government which acquired a state'. At its inception, the Zionist movement set up a 'state superstructure' a Government (the Executive Committee), a House of Representatives (the Zionist Congress) and the 'Shekel' (annual taxes whose payment granted the right to vote in the elections to the Zionist Congress). The whole problem of the Zionist aim was to find the territory and people for this 'state-superstructure' to rule. Once the British Mandate was established, the Zionist Commission was officially recognized and allotted the task of advising the Mandatory Administration and co-operating with it in all matters affecting the establishment of the Jewish national home. It set out to build the local Zionist 'state-superstructure' in Palestine: land commission, defence force, judiciary, intelligence department, and education department. Soon the 'Yishuv' became a self-governing body in which the powerful Histadruth played an increasingly dominate role.

In fact, the whole process of Zionist colonization is one in which this 'state-superstructure' acquired its economic 'base' in Palestine. Here again, the Zionist aim of setting up a Jewish nation-state dictated its own means: Zionist politics were to govern the Jewish economy in Palestine.²³ The main danger to avoid was the degeneration of the Jewish community into a 'community of petty bourgeois *colons*'. And it is precisely the existence of a Jewish working class and agricultural settlers that saved the Jewish community from such a danger. The Jewish economic 'base' soon acquired the specific form of a 'closed economy' and the victory of Zionist colonization is the victory of a highly industrialized, technically advanced Jewish economic sector over a semi-feudal underdeveloped Arab economy.

Zionist economic policy, subordinated to the basic Zionist aim, was based on three principles which finally gave the Jewish economic sector the characteristic features of a 'closed economy': (i) 'Hebrew Labour' which obliged Jewish employers to dispense with Arab labour and only employ Jews—reluctant Jewish employers were paid compensations by the Jewish Agency; (ii) 'buy the produce of the land'—which boiled down to 'buy Jewish'; (iii) 'redeeming the land'—buying it mainly from absentee landlords, and settling immigrant Jewish labour on it.

There existed in Palestine, during this period, two economies. One was

²³ 'Economic policy in Palestine was subordinated to political objectives. . . . The Jews were interested in establishing as rapidly as possible a large Jewish community in Palestine, and Jewish economic policy had to serve this primary aim.' (Nadav Halevi and Ruth Klinov—Malul, *The Economic Development of Israel*, New York 1967, p. 30).

developing at the expense of the other, dislocating it and blocking its development. The basis for this process was the same as that of any colonial domination: the uneven development between the industrialized West and the underdeveloped world. But in typical colonial offensives, there is a conscious demolition of the primitive communal economy, through heavy taxation or sheer violence, in order to compel the indigenous population to sell its labour power in industry, mines and capitalist agriculture. Old relations of production are destroyed and new ones emerge. In contrast to this, Zionist economic colonization operated in such a manner as to *displace* large sectors of the working population but with no intention of re-integrating them in a new economic system. It demolished established relations of production without introducing new ones. In doing this, Zionist economic policy was merely following Herzl's advice about 'spiriting out the penniless population.' The social results of this process were as tragic and traumatic as those of typical colonialist exploitation—if not more so. Hyamson remarks '*With two largely self-contained populations . . . it happened that while one mainly prospered the other largely suffered destitution.*'²⁴ It was inscribed in the very nature of this process that the Zionist community, as a community, should clash with virtually all classes of the Palestinian people: 'Zionism brought from Europe capital, modern technological know-how and skills, Jewish capital (often backed by Zionist funds) gradually displaced the feudal element simply by buying up their lands, and Zionist regulations forbade the re-sale of land to Arabs. Possessing technological and financial advantages, the Zionist capitalist economy blocked the emergence of an Arab capitalist class. Having clashed with the Arab peasants by driving them off their land, Zionism also prevented them from becoming a proletariat in the Jewish sector of the economy. Since the Arab sector's capitalist development was retarded and hindered, the peasants (as well as the Arab intelligentsia) found it difficult to get any employment at all—except in the British Mandate administration and public services.'²⁵

As a further illustration of this point, it should be said that the educational level of the Jewish community in Palestine was 'among the highest in the world' as measured by both secondary and higher education; the level of technical skills was probably just as high (during the period 1929–47, only 13 per cent of the Jewish immigrants were unskilled labourers) and the main source of inflow of capital to Palestine was Jewish (transfer by immigrants and investments of various Jewish and Zionist firms and agencies).²⁶ Thanks to the development of the Jewish sector, the Palestine economy was no longer dominantly agricultural by 1936—measured by the share of this sector in the national income. Yet, 60 per cent of the Arab labour force was still engaged in agriculture. The industrial development that accounts for this change occurred mainly in the Jewish sector where the share of manufacturing in national income rose from 26 per cent in 1936 to 41 per cent in 1945, whereas it fell in the Arab sector from 13.6 per cent to

²⁴ Hyamson, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

²⁵ ISO, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

²⁶ Halivi and Klinov-Malul, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–20.

10.8 per cent. Finally, by the 1940's, the Jewish sector came to control at least three-quarters of Palestine's foreign trade.²⁷

Class Alliances Impossible

To view the 'unfortunate' developments of the Arab Zionist conflict during that period as the result of an 'original sin'—the non-formation of an Arab/Jewish anti-imperialist bloc—is to miss the *specificity* the Palestine problem derives from the nature of the Zionist colonizing process. Classes acquire their revolutionary (or counter-revolutionary) potential not from an inherent immutable nature, but from the concrete place they occupy within an articulated social structure in a defined period of its development. The Jewish workers and agricultural settlers were the back-bone of the Zionist colonisation; without them there would have been no hope of even establishing the Zionist state. The place they occupied within the Jewish community and Palestine as a whole determined their class role: it was inevitable that the Jewish labourer should appear to the Arab worker as the cause of his unemployment, and that the Kibbutznik should appear to the Arab peasant as responsible for his eviction from the land. Unemployment and the emergence of a class of landless peasants were the two most pronounced features of the destitution of the Arab population in Palestine.

The whole history of the CP of Palestine can be seen as the record of the impossibility of breaking through the national barrier induced by Zionist colonization to the establishment of a lasting Arab-Jewish class alliance. In all the decisive phases of the development of the Palestine problem, the Party either split or was purged because of differences in determining the main enemy or in interpreting a major political event. Prior to the 1930's, the party lived in virtual isolation from the Arab masses. In 1928–29, the question was: what is the nature of the Arab uprising,²⁸ an anti-Jewish pogrom or an Arab national uprising against imperialism and Zionism? In the early 1930's

²⁷ Ibid., p. 26. The uneven development of the Jewish and the Arab industrial sectors can be clearly demonstrated in the following tables:

	1939		1942		
	<i>Arab</i>	<i>Jewish</i>	<i>Arab</i>	<i>Jewish</i>	
No. of factories	339	872	1558	1907	
No. of workers	4117	13,678	18804	37,773	
Net produce (in Pales, pounds)	313,149	2,454,982	1,724,794	11,487,843	
<i>Share of Arab and Jewish Sectors in Palestnian Industry (1942)</i>					
	<i>No. of firms</i>	<i>No. of workers</i>	<i>wages</i>	<i>capital</i>	<i>total</i>
Jewish sector	55%	75%	85%	60%	79%
Arab Sector	44%	17%	17%	10%	15%

(The remaining percentages pertain to five British firms of which three were controlled by the Jewish sector.) *Statistical Handbook of Jewish Palestine*, Economic Department of Jewish Agency, Jerusalem, 1947, pp. 224–226.

²⁸ In October 1929 the Executive Committee of the Comintern issued a resolution characterizing the 1928–29 insurrection in Palestine as a 'national liberation movement, an anti-imperialist all-Arab movement.' The Palestine CP was criticized for ignoring the agrarian question, lack of contact with the Arab masses, and over-estimation of the influence of the reactionary bourgeoisie, large landlords and the priesthood. The Haifa section, which saw the rising as a 'pogrom', was censured as showing Zionist and imperialist influence on the communists.

the party was purged of its pro-Zionist element. More problems followed: in 1945–47, which was the main enemy, British or US imperialism? In the mid 1960's, what position should be taken on the new nationalist movement under Nasserism and the Baath?; in 1967, what was the nature of the June war, an Israeli aggression backed by US imperialism or an act of legitimate self-defence against the threat of genocide?

The clash between the Arab national bloc and the Jewish community was bound to gain dominance over the class struggle inside both. Class collaboration, consciously implemented in the Jewish economy, led to the subordination of the Palestinian Arabs to a semi-feudal and comprador leadership. Since Zionist colonization blocked the development of an Arab capitalist class, no new social forces emerged with enough force to replace this leadership. The slim choice that remained was between the pro-British Nashashibi clan and the Husseinis led by the notorious Mufti—once a British puppet who turned towards the Axis powers in the mid-'thirties. This is the leadership that sold out the 1936 uprising when, under pressure from the rulers of Iraq, Transjordan and Saudi Arabia, it called off the General Strike to negotiate with Britain. The large class of displaced landless peasants made its presence felt by the continuation of a violent guerilla war which was defeated at the outbreak of the Second World War. After that, the Palestinian Arabs—defeated, demoralized and betrayed by their leadership—awaited the outcome of the conflict between the Zionist settlers and the British.

The Zionist-British conflict; the war of 1948

Analysing these two crucial problems depends on an analysis of (i) the type of contradiction that arose between the Zionist settlers in Palestine and British imperialism; (ii) imperialist competition in the Middle East and the complexity of Britain's role; (iii) the nature of the contradiction between the Zionist settlers and the Arab countries surrounding Palestine.

The realization of the Zionist aim in establishing an independent Jewish nation-state in Palestine necessarily meant a break between the Zionist settlers and the British metropolis sooner or later. This necessity was inscribed in the very nature of the basic Zionist aim. However, it is important to understand why, and in what conditions, this break occurred at a specific period of time.

On the eve of the Second World War, Britain restricted Jewish immigration and the sale of land to the Jews. This move was partly a result of the 1936 uprising and partly an attempt by Britain to retain its hold on the Arab regimes lest they join the Axis powers or at least take a neutral attitude to the war. This decision laid the basis for its conflict with the Zionists, who, with the aggravation of Nazi persecutions against the Jews in Europe, were seeking to channel the stream of immigrants to Palestine. Here, a point should be made clear. To say that the use of Nazism in Europe, with its tragic consequences on European Jewry, provided the *opportunity for the emergence of the state of*

Israel is one thing. But to argue that Nazi massacres *proved the need for a Zionist state which would have saved most European Jewry had it been established before the Second World War* is a totally different matter, for, as the ISO correctly argued: (i) the Jews in Palestine were saved simply because the Nazis failed to conquer the Middle East; had they done so, there is no reason to believe that their attitude to Palestinian Jews would have been different from their attitude to European Jews; (ii) the interests of Zionism, in this conjuncture, were quite distinct from those of European Jewry. To Zionists, Nazi persecutions further emphasized the need for a 'territorial solution'; the main threat they faced came from non-Zionists or anti-zionist Jews whose only concern was to save the Jews from Nazi massacres.²⁹

The war postponed the British—Zionist confrontation—the fate of the Jews in Palestine depended on the victory of the allies but at the same time it helped develop the conditions for the emergence of the state of Israel. Immigration, legal or illegal, swelled the ranks of the Jewish community, which rose from 174,000 members in 1931 to 630,000 in 1947 (about a third of the population). A sizeable number of the new immigrants were rich Jews carrying not only capital and skills, but also whole industries (e.g. the diamond cutting industry leapfrogged from Holland) and numerous financial and commercial ties. Thus, the Jewish sector was able to reap most of the benefits to Palestine of the economic boom of the war years.

Why did the states of the Arab League intervene militarily in Palestine in May 1948? The prevailing interpretation among sizeable portions of the European left is still dominated by the Zionist position: '(The 1948 war) was a war of liberation by the Jewish people in Palestine against British imperialism, which used Arab armies commanded by British officers. . . . The object of this military action by British imperialism was to frustrate the implementation of the UN resolution, to hang on to the whole of Palestine, and by parcelling it among Arab stooge rulers, retain indirectly what Britain previously held directly as the mandatory power.'³⁰ This statement may not be typical, but it surely embodies most of the myths and mis-interpretations of this period. No understanding of the 1948 war is possible without a prior rejection of a Manichean and demonological conception of imperialism. The military intervention of the states of the Arab League in Palestine in 1948 hinges on a *conflict* that arose between British imperialism and its Arab allies on the Palestine problem. That this conflict did not go

²⁹ This is spelled out in a letter written by David Ben-Gurion to the Zionist executive on December 17th, 1938. 'Millions of Jews face annihilation, the refugee problem has assumed world wide proportions. Britain is trying to separate the issue of the refugees from that of Palestine. It is assisted by anti-Zionist Jews (. . .). If Jews will have to choose between the refugees—saving Jews from concentration camps—and assisting a national museum in Palestine—mercy will have the upper hand and the whole energy of the people will be channelled into saving Jews from various countries. Zionism will be struck off the agenda not only in world opinion . . . but elsewhere in Jewish public opinion. If we allow a separation between the refugee problem and the Palestine problem, we are risking the existence of Zionism.' (ISO, op. cit., p. 9.)

³⁰ Bert Ramelson. *The Middle East: Crises, Causes, Solution*. Communist Party pamphlet, London, 1967, pp. 13–14.

beyond the context of the subordination of these regimes to British hegemony is all too obvious. But this does not mean that it did not exist. We can even say that this conflict governs the relations between imperialism and its allies in the Middle East up to now.

If the beginning of Zionist colonization of Palestine coincided with the first independence movement of the Arabs against the Ottomans, the victory of this colonization coincided with the intensification of the second phase of the Arab national liberation movement—this time directed against the British and the French: the independence of Lebanon, 1943; of Syria, 1946; the intensification of the nationalist struggle in Egypt; the great patriotic uprising of the Iraqi people against the pro-British monarchy in 1948. Within this context, the emergence of the state of Israel could only be seen as a new occupation of Arab territory by foreigners at a time when the Arab movement for national liberation was at the height of its struggle against direct colonial rule.

But all the Arab régimes of the Middle East (with the exception of Saudi Arabia) were controlled by the British. And it is inside this alliance that the conflict was generated and confined. The causes for the Arab involvement in Palestine vary from one régime to the other, but they can only be understood within the following context.

The commercial-financial ruling class dominating Lebanon and the semi-feudal bourgeois alliance ruling Syria were involved basically for economic reasons. Their participation in the war was directed mainly at containing the powerful industrial and commercial potential of the Zionist state. Two points should be borne in mind here: *first*, both Syria and Lebanon had developed an enlarged industrial sector during the War which came under heavy competition from Western goods once the War ended—the resultant crippling economic crisis was further aggravated by the emergence of a powerful Jewish economy in Palestine; *second*, Palestine had been traditionally a market for Syrian agricultural produce and Haifa the port of the Hauran granary. Low tariff barriers permitted both Lebanese importers of Western manufactured goods and industrialists to sell their commodities in the Palestinian market. With the development of the Jewish economic sector Palestine was virtually lost as a market at a time when both the Syrian and Lebanese economies were in desperate need of it. Between 1932 and 1945, Palestine's exports multiplied approximately eight times (26.25 I.000 PL—211.914.000 PL) while its imports were reduced to about a fifth (15.178.000 PL—3.285.00 PL).³¹ The enormous deficit in Palestine's balance of trade with Syria (amounting to 965.980 PL in 1939) was reduced to a mere 98.607 PL in 1944.³² This can only be explained by an increase in Palestine's exports to Syria—an exchange mainly of industrial goods for agricultural goods.³³ Moreover, by the late 1930's the port of Haifa had become the main outlet for the Middle Eastern hinterland—transit and trade shifted quickly to it from the

³¹ *Statistical Handbook* . . . , op. cit., pp. 238–9.

³² Statistical Abstract of Palestine, 1944–45, Jerusalem, 1946, p. 65.

³³ *Statistical Handbook* . . . , op. cit., p. 251.

previously dominant port of Beirut. The Lebanese and Syrian military intervention in 1948 was mainly an attempt by a weak, underdeveloped industrial and comprador bourgeoisie to recuperate its Palestine market or at least *contain* the threat of a highly advanced European Jewish community—a threat which is expressed by Michel Chiha, ideologue of the Lebanese commercial and financial bourgeoisie and *eminence grise* behind the Khoury-Solh régime, in the following terms: 'Economically, Israel cannot exist without big industry. If it does industrialize its economy, drawing upon its large technical and financial resources, it will overrun all its neighbours and destroy practically everything. Israel, on the other hand, cannot live without extensive trade . . . Israeli trade in the Mediterranean East . . . will become soon a powerful challenge to all enterprises, all ports, commerce, agencies and professions that undertake the provision of one service or another.'³⁴

Of all Arab parties concerned, it was King Abdullah of Transjordan who had the biggest stake in the Palestine problem. His main concern was to seize the territory allocated by the UN to the Palestinian Arab State and annex it to his kingdom as a partial fulfillment of his dream of a Greater Syria united under the Hashemite crown. To achieve his aim, he concluded an agreement with the Zionists under British auspices and virtually pre-determined the course of the war.³⁵ Saudi Arabia's interest centered mainly around its claim over the port of Aqaba (which finally became the lot of Jordan). Farouk sent in his army to counter his traditional rivals, the Hashemites.

The motives of those individual states were articulated within the framework of the split that divided the Middle Eastern Arab régimes into two opposed camps: the Hashemite camp comprising Transjordan and Iraq with avowed claims to unite Syria, Lebanon and Palestine under its hegemony; and the other Arab régimes under the leadership of Egypt and including the Syrian and Lebanese republics in addition to Saudi-Arabia (due to the traditional enmity between the Saudi and the Hashemite dynasties). Since Abdullah made no bones about his claims to Palestine, he could not be allowed to reap the fruits of the military victory alone. Both camps were to be represented in the war, not for mutual help but rather so that each checked the other. In 1948, the Arab régimes fought in Palestine not so much the Zionist enemy, but against each other.

Having said this, all other factors acquire their importance *in perspective*. It could very well be that Iraq and Egypt were motivated by an attempt to divert popular attention from the internal struggle waged against the régimes. The element of response to popular pressure cannot be totally discarded. Yet neither factor was decisive.

Britain's role in the conflict can be defined as follows: *she was not against the emergence of the Zionist state, but refused to lose her control of the Arab regimes (especially to the US) as a price for her support for the Zionists*. This underlies all the wavering in her positions.

³⁴ Michel Chiha, *Lubnan Fi Shakhisyateh Wa Hudbureh*. Beirut, 1962, pp. 139–40.

³⁵ Rodinson op. cit., p. 54.

If we were to agree with Bert Ramelson that Britain's main concern was to maintain the Mandate or divide Palestine among its Arab stooges and thus control Palestine directly—why did she not intervene directly in the War? Why did she allow the Arab armies to be defeated? Why, to all intents and purposes, did she agree to withdraw from Palestine and put an end to her Mandate on May 14th 1948? Granted that the armies of Transjordan, Iraq and Egypt were under some British military control, for what purposes did the British manipulate those armies?

Transjordan's 'Arab Legion' was in 1948 what the Egyptian army was in June 1967: the main Arab striking force. A modern, well trained and disciplined army, commanded by British officers and financed by the British Exchequer, it was supposed to shoulder the major responsibility for the war effort. Why, during the first cease-fire of June 11th 1948, did Britain decide to withdraw its officers and experts from the Arab Legion and impose an embargo on shipment of arms and ammunitions to the Arab states?³⁶ This surely does not seem the appropriate policy for a country determined to retain its 'indirect' control over Palestine through the Arab régimes—especially if we bear in mind that the Zionists received arms from Czechoslovakia during this same cease-fire and that numerically the Zionist forces were superior to the Arab forces (60,000 Jewish soldiers facing 40,000 Arabs).³⁷

Ramelson defines the 1948 war as 'a war of liberation waged by the Jewish people in Palestine against British imperialism.' It is argued that though Zionism played a part in the formation of the state of Israel, the 'biggest single factor was the policy of British imperialism furthering its aims in the Middle East.' This policy resulted in the 'rapid growth of movements for independence among Jews and Arabs. In these circumstances, it seemed that the Palestine question could be solved only on the basis of a common struggle by Arabs and Jews against British imperialism and the establishment of a bi-national independent state'.³⁸ But, because this solution was to prove impracticable, the 1947 UN resolution was supported by the CPGB. Why was this solution impracticable? Ramelson has no answer. The Zionists have: when they were waging their 'war of liberation against British imperialism', the Palestinian Arabs were mere bystanders. True. For the simple fact that the common struggle was impossible as we tried to prove throughout this article. It was impossible because the aims of Jews and Arabs were diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive. The victory of the Zionists meant the displacement of the Arabs and their reduction to a subjugated minority. 'Independence for the Jewish people in Palestine' had only one meaning in this conjuncture: the Zionist oppression of the Palestinian Arabs and the end of any hope for their independence. On the other hand, independence as seen by the Palestinian Arabs meant the end of the Zionist aim of a Jewish nation-state. Calling for a common struggle in these circumstances was

³⁶ Gaspar, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

³⁷ Rodinson, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

³⁸ Ramelson, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

as absurd as calling for common struggle between the white minority and the black majority in Rhodesia against British imperialism. For the Africans, independence means the end of the exploitative and racist white minority rule; for the latter it means the exact opposite: perpetuating minority rule by offsetting the prospect of 'representative institutions'.

Furthermore, the Zionists' break-away from British imperialism could only be achieved by an alliance with a new imperialist force—the USA. Ramelson evades any mention of the Zionist—US relations during this period. But the relations nevertheless exist. In May 1945, when the Jewish Agency formally demanded from Britain the immediate establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, the handing over of control over immigration to the Jewish Agency itself and the entry of a million Jewish immigrants into Palestine, President Truman supported the demand; and support for the Zionist claims was backed by effective American pressure on Britain to comply with those claims. After Zionist terrorists demolished the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, the British Administration arrested the leaders of the Jewish Agency. Immediately, the US government declared that the arrests were made without consulting her and threatened to revise its policy of economic assistance to Britain.³⁹ Any one who knows how crucial US aid was to post-War Britain will recognize the exaggerated gravity of the threat in comparison with the triviality of the incident concerned.

At least one important conclusion can be inferred from the above: the organic links that bind Zionism and Israel to the world imperialist camp are neither accidental nor transient; they have been woven during a long historical process. Alliance with US imperialism after the Second World War was the pre-condition for the break with Britain and for the emergence of the state of Israel. When Israel repaid US imperialism in 1951 by backing its aggression against Korea, it was by no means missing its 'opportunity of demonstrating to the Arabs their (ie. the Israeli-Arab) common anti-imperialist interest.'⁴⁰ The relative independence that Israel enjoys *within* the imperialist camp is clearly demonstrated by changes in its alliances with various imperialist powers as best suits its basic interest: the preservation and perpetuation of its occupation of the Palestinian territory.

The Role of the USSR

How is the role played by the USSR as the god-parent of Israel to be explained? By formulating the question, we are automatically rejecting Ramelson's reasoning that one of the proofs that the 1948 war was an 'anti-imperialist war' against Britain is that it was supported by the socialist bloc and that the Soviet Union was amongst the first to recognize the new state of Israel.⁴¹ The two most likely motives behind Stalin's position have been suggested by Isaac Deutscher: (i)

³⁹ Gaspar, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

⁴⁰ Ramelson, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 14.

Inasmuch as Stalin was concerned with the Middle East at that time, he considered Britain as the main enemy there. He supported the Partition plan and later recognized the state of Israel as the first step towards the overthrow of British colonialism in the area; (ii) since the USA was backing the Zionists, a similar position taken by the Soviet Union seemed to contribute to mending the rapidly deteriorating relations between the two Great Powers.⁴² Both reasons reveal short-sightedness, opportunism and the disregard for the basic Leninist principle of national self-determination in the interests of diplomacy. The incapacity to realize that the emergence of the Zionist state was the climax of a process of colonization and oppression of the Palestinian Arabs in only matched by the cynicism implied in Stalin's sanctioning of the US imperialist involvement in the Middle East to inherit what used to be an exclusive Franco-British domain. The proof of this argument resides in Stalin's sudden change of position in the early 'fifties, after Israel's public support for the American aggression in Korea. Israel was then accused of being a US satellite and a tool of imperialism. Moreover, to justify the position of the Soviet Union in 1947–48 by arguing that the Arab régimes opposing Israel were British-dominated does not hold water for the simple reason that it did not hold once Stalin's hopes in a friendly Israel collapsed. Support for the right of the Palestinian Arabs to national self-determination did not then, and does not now, mean the acceptance of the pro-imperialist Arab oligarchic régimes.

Military Facts and Military Pacts: 1949–57

Once introduced into the wider context of Arab politics, the Palestine problem—endowed with its own dynamics—became effective on three levels: (i) the relation between the Arab régimes and the imperialist powers; (ii) the nature of the contradiction between these régimes and the state of Israel; (iii) the effect of the Palestine problem on the class struggle in each Arab country and in inter-Arab relations.

Even at that early stage, the Palestine problem had come to condense the national struggle of the Arabs. An aura of pan-Arab unanimity was woven around it, and it thus became the touchstone of any common Arab action. True, Zionist colonization antagonized virtually all classes of the surrounding countries and the Palestinian people, as a people. *Nevertheless, the reactions of each and every class to this national threat were ultimately determined by its position in society. There is no national struggle which is equally in the interests of all classes of a nation. The way in which this struggle is conceived, waged and finally resolved is governed by the nature of its class leadership. Inasmuch as the people of Palestine were under the leadership of the same classes that led the national Arab struggle, they could not escape the logic of the situation. The whole Marxist position on the national question rests on the assumption that every class has national interests different from the national interests of other classes.*⁴³

⁴² Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: Political Biography*, London, 1965, pp. 591–93.

⁴³ The different motives behind the involvement of each of the Arab states in the 1948 war is a sound proof of this point. However, inside each Arab country, different classes were affected differently by the Zionist colonization of Palestine. Lebanon is a good example. The boom of the services-based Lebanese economy

The history of the following years is the record of attempts by two *nationally-leading* classes in the Arab Middle East to cope with the Palestine problem and their subsequent failure: the oligarchies and the petit-bourgeois régimes.

The Dominant Interpretation of the Palestine Problem

It is essential to start with a reconstruction of the ideological interpretation of the Palestine problem by the Arab oligarchies; this interpretation is not only a system of ideas and concepts, but also a set of basic assumptions which underlies their political action. Inasmuch as this ideological interpretation was, and still is to a large degree, the dominant guide to Arab politics on Palestine it is of crucial importance for understanding the effect of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Arab politics.

The whole of this dominant interpretation revolves around the following problematic: how to explain the 'blunder' committed by the West in creating the state of Israel? How to convince the West of the erroneous stand it took over Palestine? The answers to these questions lie in the notion of a permanent Judeo-Zionist conspiracy to dominate the world from a temporary base: occupied Palestine. Rather than polemise against this notion, it is worthwhile to reveal the ideological and mystifying functions it performs:

(i) It explains the 'blunder' of the West and justifies it at one and the same time. In fact, the West could not do otherwise, for it is the victim of the Judeo-Zionist conspiracy as much as the Arabs are.⁴⁴ The West is therefore innocent, though duped. Consequently, there is common cause between the Arabs and the West in combatting this conspiracy. By proving the innocence of the Western powers the dominant interpretation is also proving the innocence of the régimes responsible for the military defeat of 1948. In front of the huge deployment of the forces of 'international Jewry', the Arab defeat is understandable if not totally justified.

during the last two decades in the direct result of the emergence of the state of Israel and of the economic Arab blockade against it: (i) the port of Beirut now carries all the transit that used to be carried by the port of Haifa; (ii) the oil pipelines of Iraq and Saudi Arabia now pass through Lebanon and Syria instead of Haifa; (iii) were it not for the blockade, the surplus capital that is now transited to Europe through Lebanese brokers would be handled in Israel; (iv) because Israeli aircraft are not allowed flight over any Arab country Beirut managed to become the Middle East centre of world air transport.

Thus, while Lebanon's commercial and financial bourgeoisie accumulated enormous profits, the whole economy of Southern Lebanon—once the intermediate link in the Palestinian-Syrian trade—collapsed. Tens of thousands of small artisans, traders and peasants had to emigrate either to Africa or to Beirut (where they constitute the bulk of its lumpen-proletariat). And while this commercial-financial bourgeoisie is lulling the country by Western guarantees to guard Lebanon's traditional 'neutrality', the impoverished peasantry of the south is being bombarded by Israeli guns and aircraft.

⁴⁴ 'I believe that the Arab peoples are wrong when they maintain that the West should be held primarily responsible for Zionism . . . the West has been duped as much as we have been . . .' (Kamal El-Hajj, *Hawla Falsafat Al-Subhyuniya*, pp. 127–8). 'Britain and the US are the prisoners of Israel . . .' (Michel Chiha, *Le Jour*, Beirut, November 6th 1954).

(ii) A transfer of guilt is rendered inevitable. The Judeo-Zionist world conspiracy is complementary to Communist subversion. Both aim at sapping the moral foundation on which our world rests in order to subvert it and finally dominate it. Hence the notion of 'Bolshevik Jews'. By accepting the identification between Zionist and Jew, this interpretation merely repeats one of the basic tenets of Zionist doctrine and propaganda. With the increase of Soviet involvement in the Middle East, writers and propagandists, now mainly financed by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, delved deeply into the Fascist dust-bins in search of such theoretical gems.

(iii) Nevertheless, the Palestine problem should be solved. After reducing it to the problem of the implementation of the UN resolutions (the Partition resolution of 1947, the internationalization of Jerusalem and the return of the refugees), the question is asked: who could help bring enough pressure on Israel to comply with those resolutions but the West? It follows that any antagonism of the West by the Arabs is indirectly a betrayal of the 'sacred cause of Palestine'.⁴⁵ This argument is at the base of the Arab reactionary blackmail of the anti-imperialist movement. Moreover, the unabashed vacillation between absolute *determinism* (the West is the prisoner of Israel) and absolute *voluntarism* (the West virtually controls Israel) is the exclusive trade-mark of rationalization and petty justification. In the hands of Arab reaction, the Palestine problem has one essential function: to divert attention from the class struggle; but in spite of Arab reaction, it plays the role of a catalyst of anti-imperialism and social revolution.

This dominant Arab interpretation of the Palestine problem suffers from two fatal contradictions with equally catastrophic practical results:

(i) An exaggeration of the enemy/an absurd minimization of his forces. If the notion of the world conspiracy serves to dissassociate Arab reaction from any responsibility for the military defeat of 1948, the boisterous minimization of Israel's forces serves to redeem popular faith in the ultimate victory of the Arabs under the leadership of Arab reaction. Israeli expansionism is inflated beyond the wildest stretches of the imagination. This obviously misses the contradiction inherent in Israeli life which has been amply revealed after June 1967. It is the contradiction between Israel's need for *expansion* (not only in order to accomodate new immigrants—a need ultimately determined by the conditions of anti-Semitism in Europe—but also for *politico-military*

⁴⁵ A typical argument;

'If the states of the [Arab] League make life easier for the West (starting with Britain) would they not be better equipped to solve the Palestine problem and that of the future relations with Israel?' (China, op. cit., August 18th 1951).

In one of their formal encounters after the June war, the rulers of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia declared that the cause of the Arab defeat resides in the fact that some Arab régimes (meaning Egypt and Syria) are inspired by 'imported ideologies' and in Soviet influence in the Middle East. (*Al Hayat*, Beirut, April 9th and 11th 1968).

According to primitive habits, when a warrior is wounded, the arrow should be extracted and wrapped in wet grass. It is believed that by treating the arrow, the wound will be cured of itself. This, in short, is what Arab reaction wants us to believe!

purposes: as a means of imposing Arab recognition of Israel by a policy of escalation) and its need to be *recognised* as such by the Arab states even within some modified version of the cease-fire lines of 1949.

In short, this first contradiction has two results:

—*a semi-total ignorance of the enemy*;

—*the absence of strategy*. Because of the mystificatory function of the Palestine problem at the hands of Arab reaction, the Arab-Israel conflict is lived in a contradictory manner: either permanently deferred or imminently present and begging for a solution *now*. Between now and never falls the shadow.

(ii) The second fatal contradiction is a hypocritical attitude of double talk. First language, for foreign consumption: this is extremely moderate and conciliatory merely demanding the application by Israel of the UN resolutions on Palestine. Second language, for internal consumption: extremely bellicose calling for the destruction of Israel and 'throwing the Jews into the sea'.⁴⁶

The first language reflects subservience of those who hold it to the logic of bourgeois and imperialist legality. The second reveals the demagogic manipulation of the Palestine problem in quest of popular support. Which one is the real language? In practice, it is the former. As such, it implies a refusal to recognize the right of the Palestinian Arabs to national self-determination in a de-Zionized democratic Palestine. The second language is nothing but the sublimation of the incapacity of those leaders who were the architects of three humiliating Arab defeats, their incapacity to solve the Palestine problem even along the lines of their own programme—i.e. Israel's implementation of the UN resolutions—let alone dislocating the Zionist structure imposed on Palestine.

This hypocritical double talk is grist to the mills of Zionist and Israeli propaganda. It therefore legitimizes each and every Israeli aggression in the eyes of world public opinion as an act of legitimate self-defence.

By arguing that the *only* enemy of the Arabs is the Judeo-Zionist world conspiracy, the dominant interpretation aims at abolishing the existence of the other enemy—Western imperialism. This one-sidedness is obviously not accidental. It merely reflects the class position of all those who, in the Arab Middle East, are subordinated to this second form of foreign domination and exploitation. To them, Western imperialism is not an enemy but a master.

To the Suez Aggression

After defeating the Arabs in 1948, Israel aimed to get recognition of her

⁴⁶ What is most fantastic about this double-talk is that some people believe that they can get away with it. In Nasser's press conference of May 28th 1967, he threatened that war will be total if Israel initiates a military attack. After the conference, a high ranking Egyptian official tells Eric Rouleau of *Le Monde*: 'We committed the mistake of connecting all the microphones of Cairo Broadcasting Station together, so that Nasser was addressing the [Arab] masses and world public opinion at the same time!' (Eric Rouleau, 'Le Régime Nasserien en Question,' *Le Monde*, December 27th 1967).

territorial acquisitions from the world powers and to force the Arabs into accepting the status quo. The first was a means to the second, for as long as the Arab régimes were subordinated to the West, Israel was able to impose its accomplished facts on them through the mediation of one imperialist power or the other. *To preserve and perpetuate its occupation Israel needs weak, underdeveloped Arab neighbours dominated by imperialism.* The Zionist *status quo* became inseparable from the imperialist *status quo* in the Middle East; but the attempt to preserve them simultaneously resulted in the failure of both.

Britain, France and the USA did recognize the Zionist *status quo* in the Tripartite Declaration of 1950, which sanctioned the 1949 armistice lines; but the Arabs refused to accept it unless Israel took back the Palestinian refugees. An attempt by the Israelis to reach agreement with King Abdullah of Jordan was cut short when he was assassinated by a Palestinian in 1951.

As the Israelis were trying to acquire Arab recognition the West was trying to force the Arab régimes into an anti-Soviet pact. But while the West emphasized Communism as the main enemy the Arab régimes, under pressure from growing nationalist movements, saw Israel as a greater threat. Furthermore, none of them faced any real Communist threat at home with the exception of Iraq, which had a large Communist Party and was the only Arab country to join the anti-Soviet Baghdad Pact. The existence of Israel undermined the anti-Soviet plans of Western imperialism.

The Israelis then tried to force the Arab régimes into the anti-Soviet pact by a series of 'reprisal' raids against Arab territory. The purpose of this was to force the Arabs to ask the West for arms, which they could only acquire by accepting Western hegemony; once this hegemony was cemented in an anti-Soviet pact the West would ensure Arab acceptance of Israel. But when Nasser turned to the West in 1955, after the massive February raid by Israelis on Gaza, the West imposed the condition that he join the anti-Soviet alliance. Rejecting this condition, Egypt turned to the Soviet bloc and Western control of the supply of arms was broken. Simultaneously, Israeli military superiority was challenged.

The Tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956 represented the convergence of the frustrations of Britain, France and Israel. If the Czech arms deal of 1955 put an end to Western arms blackmail, the nationalization of the Suez Canal after the refusal of Britain, the State Department and the World Bank to finance the building of the Aswan Dam put an end to Western 'economic' blackmail. Britain and France lost one of their most important economic and strategic strongholds in the area, while the Egyptians recovered a major source of national income. Thus, the Nasserite régime came to symbolise maximum defiance of imperialism.

Both Israeli and Franco-British aims failed to materialize, in spite of the military victory; Egypt, and with it petit-bourgeois nationalism in the whole area, emerged victorious. The next decade records the

struggle, achievements and limits of this new leading national class.

The Rise and Fall of Petit-Bourgeois Nationalism: 1957–67

The post-Suez situation is characterized by a clear displacement of the principal aspect of the fundamental contradiction—the class struggle gained predominance all over the Arab Middle East. The new Arab-Israeli status quo hinged on the existence of the UN troops in Sinai separating the Israeli and Egyptian armies. Thus, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and with it the Palestine problem, were relegated to the background. Until May-June 1967, it was to emerge mainly within the context of the class struggle: First, it appeared as an issue in the struggle opposing the camp of the pro-imperialist oligarchies to that of the anti-imperialist petit-bourgeois nationalist movement and régimes. While the former accused the latter of 'splitting the ranks of the Arab nation' and consequently of playing into the hands of the national enemy, Israel, the latter rebutted by claiming that Zionism and Arab reaction were, in fact, two sides of the same coin—defeating Arab reaction was the decisive step on the road to the 'liberation of Palestine'. Second, the Palestine problem also became an ideal pretext for establishing a truce between the warring Arab camps. The 1964–65 Arab summit conferences were convened to plan common Arab action against the diversion by Israel of the Jordan river waters. The result was the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)—a replica of the Arab League in the Palestine context and as inefficient—and in the Jeddah agreement between Egypt and Saudi Arabia to end the civil war in the Yemen (which failed). After all these conferences, the Arabs were worse off than if they had accepted the Johnston plan on the exploitation of the Jordan river waters. Militarily, a United Arab Command was set up (which was as united as the Arab régimes at that time—a fact to be clearly demonstrated during the June war). In fact, these conferences coincided with a stalemate in the struggle between the two Arab camps. They provided an honourable opportunity for all parties concerned to establish a truce. This stalemate signaled the undoing of the petit-bourgeoisie as the leading national class of the Arab struggle against Zionism and imperialism.

The course of the Arab Revolution during this decade is marked by the following major events: the formation of the United Arab Republic between Syria and Egypt in 1958, its dissolution in 1961 and the coming to power of a bourgeois 'money-feudal', counter-revolutionary régime, 1961–63; the Eisenhower Doctrine; the civil war in Lebanon, 1958–59; the Iraqi revolution of July 1958 (overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy and the collapse of the Baghdad Pact, later to be replaced by CENTO without Arab participation); the declaration of the Republic of Northern Yemen and the civil war in 1962 with Egyptian and Saudi military involvement; the emergence of Nasserism proper after 1961 (the nationalizations and the National Charter); the rise of the Baath to political power in Syria, 1963 (and the short-lived first Baathi régime in Iraq, 1963–64).

These developments occurred as US imperialism replaced British and French imperialism in three Arab countries: Lebanon, Jordan and

Saudi Arabia. Economically, Britain had to be content with the role of junior partner to the American giant. After the Iraqi revolution of 1958, the British domain was restricted to the Gulf and Southern Yemen, where the liberation movement scored its first victory with the emergence of the Popular Democratic Republic of Southern Yemen in 1967, and where the anti-British struggle is still going on in Oman, Muscat and Zafar. French influence in the Arab Middle East was at its lowest ebb during the Algerian war of national liberation; it started to recover its influence and contract new interests slowly after 1962 and at an astonishingly rapid pace after June 1967. Nevertheless, the three powers did not stop courting the Nasserite régime, though at different times and with uneven enthusiasm, US relations with the Nasserite régime, the Baath and the radical Arab nationalist movement as a whole may be seen to have passed through three different phases: support, co-existence and containment, and finally rejection. This final phase corresponds to the failure of the theory of the 'new middle class' according to which the armies play the role of a modernizing and unifying force, and to US imperialism's transition to an offensive phase against the régimes of the 'nationalist revolution'.

What is the nature of the opposition of this new radical Arab nationalist movement to neo-imperialism? The answer to this question resides in a characterization of the two régimes that represent it: Nasserism in Egypt and the Baath in Syria.

Both the Baath and Nasserism are predominantly the movements of the petit-bourgeoisie of the urban centres of the Middle East. When they manage to attract substantial following among the working class and the landless peasants, as is the case in Syria, those two classes join the struggle under the slogans of this petit-bourgeoisie and are subordinated to its interests. As a movement, they concretise the will to achieve the 'national-bourgeois revolution': political independence, bourgeois agrarian reform, and statism. They were in fact spurred to action by the failure of the classes that originally led the independence struggle to achieve those aims.

Instead of talking about Nasserism and the Baath, it would be more appropriate to talk about varieties of each, moulded and determined by the place they occupy within the socio-economic structure of the respective Arab countries and by the specific political conjuncture that gave rise to them. Thus, Nasserism in Syria developed mainly as a reaction against the secessionist reactionary régime of 1961–63 which de-nationalized the big capitalist enterprises and virtually sabotaged the agrarian reform. This movement attracted large sections of the merchant and artisanal middle classes which flourished during the UAR as well as workers, peasants, students and some of the remnants of the Syrian parties—the People's and the National and Baath parties. It was without doubt a mass movement, but was unorganized, spontaneous, and fragmented and relied on one means of political change—the military *coup d'état*—which virtually allocates to the masses a subsidiary role and reflects a constant feature of petit-bourgeois nationalism: the distrust of mass action as a means of social and political change. In Lebanon, the Nasserite and the Baath movements emerged

within the confines of the traditional Lebanese confessional structure; they were and still are representative of sectors of the Sunni-Moslem urban petit-bourgeoisie (the Baath commanding some following among the intelligentsia of Southern Lebanon: Shi'ite and of peasant stock). In Iraq, the Baath and the Nasserite movements emerged within a totally different conjuncture: the reaction to Communism reached its apogee in 1958–59 under Kassem. They consequently rallied, and were even led by, tribal chieftains, landlords, and capitalists. The nationalist movement in Iraq has its deep historical roots in the politico-cultural cleavage that governs Iraqi political life since the 1920's: the schism between the nationalist movement (whose base is mainly the predominantly Sunni Baghdad-based administrative strata and the commercial and landed interests of the East and North) and the social-reformist movement of a 'national bourgeoisie' and the predominantly Shi'ite South. The former movement has a long tradition of parties and political figures (Rashid 'Ali, the Istiqlal Party) and was the forerunner of the Baath and Nasseristn. While the latter produced two offshoots: the National Democratic Party of Kamel Jadirjy and the Communist Patty.

The ideology of the Baath is a function of the socially heterogenous elements that it contained, especially in its formative period in Syria. An eclectic collage of three main slogans: Unity (Arab Unity), Freedom (meaning essentially bourgeois democracy and national liberation) and Socialism (bourgeois agrarian reform, nationalization of big enterprises and respect for private property and the right of inheritance), this ideology transforms them into a typical Christian trinity: one (namely, Unity) in three and three in one. Nevertheless, all this Baathi mysticism could not obliterate the contradictions in its social composition. Whenever it was essential to make a practical choice between these three slogans, the patty split on which slogan should be given priority over the others. The recent 'revolutionary phrase' of what is called the 'left Baath' is a function of the party's acquisition of power and sudden discovery that all this body of ideas and concepts cannot be relied upon to organize society or solve its problems. Marxism was a handy choke. However, what is important for our purposes is to stress the unbridgeable gap between this 'revolutionary phrase' and Baathi practice and everyday policies.

The essence of the most recent form of Nasserist ideology is the rejection of the dictatorship of any class over society and a policy of 'peaceful abolition of class differences without bloody class struggle'.

Both the Baathi and the Nasserite régimes have this in common: they are the *regimes of an embourgeoisified privileged minority of petit-bourgeois origin which has merged with the remnants of the old social order* (bureaucrats, ex-managers of nationalized enterprises, etc.) *and which appropriates the national surplus product through its control over the bureaucratic-military machinery of the state*. Unlike the bureaucracies of the socialist countries, this privileged minority is a social class in the full sense of the term. It owns the means of production in agriculture, the building industry, small and medium industry; it owns capital in internal trade, usury and catering for public works, at the same time that it controls the public

sector through its power of economic decision over it. Unable to revolutionize the relations of production, especially in the countryside, it has failed in the task of the primitive accumulation of capital—the pre-condition for development which requires, in the underdeveloped countries, drawing upon the abundantly available human labour power (which is basically a *political* question: mobilizing the masses in whose interest socialism is built). The establishment of mainly consumer industries geared to the satisfaction of the needs of this new class, which aspires to social prestige and identifies itself with the old bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, not only retarded the process of primitive accumulation but also led to a drain of social wealth whereby remittances in hard currency flow from the country to the world capitalist market. The net result is their incapacity to sanction severe interference in the workings of this market; and they consequently remain under the economic domination of neo-imperialism. Because of this economic dependence, these régimes are incapable of waging a systematic anti-imperialist struggle (the only real meaning that the term ‘political independence’ has). When imperialism is on the offensive, they stagger and maybe fall. The only alternative to their rule is counter-revolution, a prospect which they have failed to eradicate out of fear of ‘bloody class struggle’ and the ‘dictatorship of one class over another’. *The limits of such regimes are their incapacity to give rise to anything but privileged minorities which will quickly transform themselves into new ruling classes.* In an underdeveloped society, living under the exactions of scarcity, such régimes tend to be madly jealous of their acquired political domination and the social privileges with which it endows them. ‘The specific form their class consciousness takes is police vigilance’ (Régis Debray).

Afraid lest they ‘sacrifice the present generation in the interest of the next’ (Nasser), such régimes exert fantastic exactions on the present generation while preparing hardly anything for the next. Let the statistics reveal this misery: 1 per cent of the rural population in Egypt in 1966 appropriated 25 per cent of the agricultural income, while 50 per cent did not appropriate more than 20 per cent of this income. The yearly income of the first category (those holding 20–100 feddans of land) is 718 E.P., while that of the second (the landless peasants) is 13 E.P.⁴⁷ In Syria where statistics are scarce, 50 per cent of the rural population is landless after a decade of agrarian reform. Interviewed by the magazine *At-Tali’a*, an Egyptian worker describes the situation in the following manner. ‘The most dangerous contradiction [in Egypt] is the one between the toilers on the one hand, and the head of the pyramid, i.e. the state, on the other.’⁴⁸ Theoretically, this position is impeccable. Not one word need be added.

Because of their very nature as the régimes of privileged minorities, and because of their mistrust of the masses as the lever of change, the relations of those régimes to Arab reaction has been one of wavering between open struggle and peaceful co-existence. They are bound in this instance by their relations to neo-imperialism (the specific phase

⁴⁷ Eric Rouleau, *Le Monde*, op. cit.

⁴⁸ *At-Tali’a*, vol. 4. no. 1, January 1968, p. 58.

that these relations are passing through) and their acceptance of the rules of the game that the Arab oligarchies impose upon them over Palestine.

If Arab unity requires a hegemonic class, or social bloc, that can achieve this unity, then clearly petit-bourgeois nationalism has not been, and cannot be, such a hegemonic force. For, it is based on a class without internal unity which, in control of political power tends to produce privileged minorities which detach themselves from their petit-bourgeois milieu to become a state bourgeoisie. The class itself does not rule; its embourgeoisified section re-creates new relations of production through the military and bureaucratic machine of the state. Therefore, it is bound to check the competition of the other sections of its own class which equally aspire to political power as the sole means of social promotion.

The June war revealed all the contradictions and limitations of the régimes of the state bourgeoisie in the Arab Middle East and brought the beginning of their end as nationally hegemonic régimes against Zionism and imperialism.

The June War

The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 was the product of the *condensation*, to the point of exasperation, of the national-patriotic and the class contradictions inside the fundamental contradiction of the Arab Middle East. Once again, this condensation was located at the level of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was, bound, therefore, to erupt in the form of an Arab-Israeli war.

The specific conjuncture that led to this war is the convergence of two trends: (i) US imperialism pursued an offensive against the nationalist regimes of the Third World and the underdeveloped countries of Europe; (ii) the need of Zionist territorial colonialism for weak, underdeveloped Arab régimes subordinated to imperialism was upset by the Nasserite régime in Egypt and the Baathi régime in Syria.

The US imperialist offensive of the 1960's against Vietnam, Cuba, Ghana and Indonesia reached the Eastern Mediterranean in 1967. On April 21st of that year, the army seized power in Greece in a CIA-engineered coup. It became quite clear that Syria and Egypt would be the next targets. The question was to know whether the attack would come from within or from without. On May 11th, a high-ranking Israeli officer seemed to provide the answer when he threatened military occupation of Damascus in order to put an end to the raids of Al-Fatah on Israeli territory. He was followed, on the next day, by General Rabin who declared that until the Baathi régime in Syria was overthrown, no government in the Middle East could feel safe.⁴⁹ Israel had her interests in mind: the division of the Arab states into a 'progressive' camp and an oligarchic, pro-imperialist camp offset her designs to impose her accomplished facts through the mediation of the

⁴⁹ Rodinson, *op. cit.*, p. 185-6.

imperialist powers or preserve the status quo in which she had the upper hand. Furthermore, since 1965 the Palestine commando organization Al-Fatah had started its incursions into Israel. Refusing to admit the existence of a Palestinian people, Israel considered those acts to be perpetrated by 'Arab terrorists' operating from Syria. The Israeli raids in November 1966 against the Jordanian town, Samu, and in April 1967 against Syria were considered by the Israeli official spokesmen as 'retaliation raids' against the activities of the Palestinian commandos.

The Nasserite régime in Egypt had been subjected to heavy blackmail by Arab reaction, especially Saudi Arabia and Jordan, for the passivity of its position on Palestine since 1957. The steps Nasser took in calling for the withdrawal of the UN troops from Egypt,⁵⁰ the concentration of troops on the Israeli borders and finally barring the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping (May 15–23), can only be understood within this context. In one stroke, Nasser made a move of active solidarity with threatened Syria and effaced the last sequel of the Tripartite aggression of 1956. He thus scored a double victory and proved that Egypt still set the Arab tune on Palestine.

Nasser had upset the Israeli-imposed *status quo* of 1956. The task was to turn his victory into defeat. On this both the Americans and the Israelis were agreed. Johnson told the Israeli Foreign minister on May 26th; 'If we can defeat Nasser on the question of the straits, the blockade will be lifted, all the manoeuvre will collapse and even Nasser's position at the head of Egypt will be compromised,'⁵¹ Two means of inflicting this defeat were open: forcing the blockade by means of an armada of the maritime powers including Britain and the US, or an Israeli invasion.⁵² The US government and army had no doubts whatsoever as to the outcome of this invasion. During the crisis, Johnson had asked the Pentagon twice to brief him on the balance of military power between the Arab state and Israel and twice he received the same emphatic answer: if war starts, Israel will achieve decisive victory in a few days through a

⁵⁰ To be remembered that Egypt initially called on the UN troops to evacuate their observation posts on the frontier (no mention was made of Gaza or Sharm el-sheikh) and it was only after U Thant declared that it was all or nothing that Egypt formally demanded from him on May 18th the withdrawal of UN troops from Egyptian territory. Israel never accepted the presence of UN troops on her borders, she maintained her position when asked again after the UN withdrew from Egypt.

⁵¹ Michel Bar-Zohar, *Histoire Secrète de la Guerre d'Israel*, Fayard, Paris 1968, pp. 149–50. The author—an Israeli biographer of Ben Gurion—relates that during the June war, State Department high officials used to follow Israeli diplomats with this question: 'When will you attack Syria?' (p. 305). Israeli victory will equally be a defeat for the USSR. Bar-Zohar: 'Johnson understood that if he managed to neutralize the Soviets and deter them from intervening in the conflict, the Arab defeat by Israel will be interpreted by the world as a terrible defeat of the USSR . . . *the Arab world, defeated in the war, will feel a deep bitterness against Moscow.*' (p. 255). In fact, the reactionary elements in the Arab world capitalized on this point. Part of the huge mass demonstrations in Cairo when Nasser declared his resignation on June 9th were directed against the Soviet embassy. Attempts in the same direction failed in Beirut.

⁵² The joint report of Rusk and MacNamara to Johnson on May 26th concludes with two alternatives: a multinational naval force or 'leaving Israel to act independently'. Significantly, MacNamara, Defence Secretary, was very sceptical on the naval force forcing its way through Tiran.

thrust of armour and air raids against Egypt; even if Israel did not initiate the first attack, she will still win the war.⁵³ On June 2nd, an important Israeli personality returned from a secret mission to Washington. The following day, Eshkol received a cable from Johnson with a significant omission: the solemn exhortation to Israel to renounce any unilateral military action was dropped; the American president only mentioned his diplomatic efforts. It is after the receipt of a second message from Johnson that the Israeli war cabinet met and decided to wage war.⁵⁴ US imperialism had decided to wage its war against the Arab peoples *by proxy*. Israel was given the green light to 'act independently'.

A word about the famous 'genocide threat'. We have already emphasized how the hypocritical double-talk of the Arab régimes plays into the hands of Zionist propaganda. Did this threat ever exist? In fact, the US army had a prepared plan to intervene in the Middle East in case the Arab armies managed to penetrate into Israeli territory. This plan consisted of drawing up a barrier of US troops (numbering up to 100,000) between the Israelis (who would be regrouped in the centre of Israel) and the advancing Arab armies. When Johnson received Abarbanel on May 26th and assured him that the US would honour her engagements towards Israel—in accordance with an official pledge made by Dulles in 1957 to defend the post-Suez status quo—he had this plan in mind. He might have even mentioned it to the Israeli foreign minister, or reminded him of it.⁵⁵ But, what do the Israeli leaders themselves have to say about this 'genocide threat'? In an interview to *Haaretz* (December 22nd, 1968), General Rabin, the Israeli chief of staff, admitted that Nasser did not want war, but 'had to face a situation in which he preferred war rather than retreat.' Moreover, Prime Minister Eshkol described the Egyptian military deployment in Sinai and the military activity in general in that area as one of 'defensive Egyptian military disposition on Israel's southern borders.'⁵⁶ A trapped political leadership with a defensive deployment of troops are quite a bizarre combination for the perpetration of an act of 'genocide'.

A continuation of politics by other means, the June war was the defeat of prevailing Arab politics on both anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism. It was the defeat of countries of an underdeveloped region, with equally underdeveloped régimes, by an infinitely smaller, numerically inferior state representing a technically advanced, Europeanized and militarist colonizing power enjoying the firm backing of the imperialist camp.

Israeli strategy is Zionism applied to the military realm: a disconcerting 'Blitzkrieg' aiming at the imposition of facts, more facts and ever new facts. Throughout the war, the Israeli army commanded numerical superiority over the participant Arab armies, and the strategic superiority on each and every front. It never lost the initiative once. The Arab

⁵³ *ibid.*, pp. 128, 139, 141.

⁵⁴ Uri Dan, quoted by M. Machover & M. Haneghbi in 'Lettre à tous les ex-braves Israéliens', *Rouge*, January 22nd, 1969.

⁵⁵ Bar-Zohar, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁵⁶ Machover and Haneghbi, *op. cit.*

strategy, or better its absence, reveals to the full all the contradictions and limits of the Arab régimes.

A 'defensive' war waged by regular armies, the Arab war was a parody. By accepting the cease fire after the basic Israeli thrust was over, the Arab states sanctioned their own defeat. The only alternative that could have turned the Israeli victory into a crushing defeat was a protracted popular war of defence, the only means available for poor, under-developed and subjugated peoples against an advanced and strong imperialist enemy. But this is precisely what the régimes of the state bourgeoisie could not undertake. The army was their party and the repository of their political power and social privileges. The Palestine problem served to justify their appropriation of the surplus product of the workers through this military-bureaucratic machine (the Baathi régime in Syria boasts that 60 per cent of the Syrian budget is devoted to defence expenditures!). A popular war would mean relying on the masses, organizing, politicizing and arming them. Afraid of the masses, carrying out the 'revolution' on their behalf, and deploying frantic efforts to de-politicize them, those régimes could do no such thing. A popular war would have meant enormous sacrifices, but those privileged minorities, jealous of their bureaucratic comfort and their newly acquired social privileges, wanted to have their cake and eat it. They used the Palestine problem to justify their military rule, the only source of power and privilege, and dreamt of an easy military victory, lulled by the myth of the 'hundred million Arabs against the two million Jews'.

Even by standards of classical military strategy, one can safely say that Nasser led himself into a trap. The concentration of troops in Sinai was a political, not a military, move. According to the military manual of the Egyptian General Farid Salamah, a defensive position would mean troop concentration on the Suez canal; once the Egyptian army entered Sinai, it should carry on an offensive attack into Israeli territory.⁵⁷ But this trap was also political. It clearly reveals the wavering of the Nasserite régime in its relations to imperialism and the US in particular. The whole contradiction of the stand revolves around the relation between Zionism and imperialism. In periods of struggle against local reaction, Nasser invariably 'used' the Palestine problem to demonstrate that Zionism, imperialism and Arab reaction are one and the same camp. Only a few weeks before the June war, he was repeating his famous slogan 'Israel is America and America is Israel.' But it is precisely when both those enemies converge in an onslaught against the Arab peoples, that Nasser seeks to dissassociate them. In his last press conference before the war, he used clear conciliatory language towards the US, and he even appealed to US imperialism not to intervene in the Arab-Israeli conflict in case it flared up. The last step taken before the war was the decision to send Zakaria Muhieddin, known for his pro-Western sympathies, to Washington to discuss the crisis. The war started before his departure. Moreover, the whole attitude of the petit-bourgeois régimes to imperialism is summed up in one of Nasser's interpretations of the Arab defeat. He maintained that the US duped the

⁵⁷ Rouleau, *op. cit.*

Egyptian leadership; because at the eve of the war, the American ambassador in Cairo had assured Nasser that the US guaranteed that Israel would not be the first to attack.

The Post-June Situation: Armed struggle

The military defeat of the Arab régimes from which Egypt suffered most definitely tipped the balance of power in the Middle East to the side of the pro-imperialist oligarchies. Nevertheless, the main goal of the Zionist-imperialist aggression was not achieved: the Nasserite régime did not collapse. The Egyptian masses spontaneously identified with the 'main enemy of their enemies' and forced Nasser to withdraw his resignation. The Baathi régime in Syria coldly withdrew behind the isolation of the 'revolutionary phrase'. Lebanon had carefully abstained from participating in the war. Its army was assigned the task of guarding the US and British institutions and firms against the spontaneous terrorism of the masses. Hussein had no choice but to join in the war effort: refusal to participate would have most probably led to an uprising against him; and an Arab victory would have swept his régime out of the way. Saudi Arabia managed to send her troops just in time to . . . miss the war; and most of the Iraqi troops sent to Jordan were put out of action before reaching the front.

Arab reaction once more imposed its own rules on the game of Arab politics. It gained the upper hand in the name of a common front to 'efface the sequels of the aggression'. At first, many hopes were placed on a prolonged Arab embargo on oil destined to the US and Britain which would bring about a Western pressure for a quick Israeli withdrawal. This plan was soon dropped: the régimes of the oil-producing countries of the Middle East do not control their oil. In return for allowing them to resume pumping oil to the US and Britain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya agreed to pay yearly reparations to Jordan and Egypt. Thus they bought by oil-money the patriotic, anti-imperialist positions they were unable and unwilling to prove in deeds. The summit conference in Khartoum prepared the way for the withdrawal of Egyptian troops from the Yemen, only to be followed by a large scale Saudi-backed offensive by the royalist forces to seize the republican capital.

Undoubtedly, the most important aspect of the post-June '67 situation in the Middle East is the national liberation struggle of the Palestinian people—an event that has revolutionized the whole situation in the area. In fact the major Palestinian organizations had been in existence since before the June war. The nucleus of Al-Fateh was constituted in the late 'fifties and it launched its first military operation on January 1st, 1965. The Palestine Liberation Organization was set up during the summit meetings of 1964 and 1965. Around the same time, the Palestinian branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement was building up its own military formations which later acquired the name of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (from which a Marxist-Leninist faction split in February 1969 to form the Democratic Popular Front).

This radical change in the political life of the Palestinian people re-

sulted from a combination of two factors; (i) the rise of a new generation of Palestinians who had only experienced the life of the refugee camps. Their rejection of atrocious conditions and the fact that they were relatively free from the shackles that bound the old generation forced them to pose the Palestine problem along radically different lines; (ii) the increasing disillusionment on the part of the politicized elements among the Palestinians with the leadership of the anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist struggles in the area—namely the Baath and Nasserism. The Palestinians were prominent in those movements lulled by the belief that the liberation of Palestine would come about through the liberation of the neighbouring countries from imperialism and the realization of at least the preliminary steps towards some form of Arab unity: Palestine was to be liberated for the Palestinians by the Arab armies. It is no accident then that the emergence of the armed vanguards of the Palestinian people coincides with the severe ebb in the anti-imperialist struggle in the area and with the break up of the first attempt at Arab unity between Syria and Egypt (a phase significantly characterized by shelving the Palestine problem).

Left to its own momentum, the Palestinian liberation struggle might have developed slowly. Because of the defeat of June 1967, it grew in leaps.

For the first time since 1948, the Palestinians are rapidly freeing themselves from the patronage of the various Arab régimes and have finally taken into their own hands the struggle that is primarily theirs. Amid the crushing humiliation of the third military defeat of the Arab regular armies, a people—hitherto dispersed, mystified and oppressed—is reborn. It has learnt one essential lesson: self reliance. It came to realize that the de-Zionization of Palestine is the only fulfillment of its right to national self-determination. And this right can only be enforced by one decisive means: a protracted popular war. The June war had at least revealed the incapacity of the Arab régimes, reactionary and pseudo-progressive, to impose upon Israel their own 'solution' to the Palestine problem: the implementation of the UN resolutions on the partition of Palestine, the internationalization of Jerusalem and the so-called 'human solution to the refugee problem'.

National Self-Determination

Through armed struggle and propaganda by deeds, the Palestinian people want to impress upon the Jewish community in Palestine this condition: 'if you care to remain in this land, rid yourselves of Zionism and accept to live with us as equals.' A de-Zionized, democratic Palestine would abolish the following structural characteristics of the state of Israel: (i) Jewish sovereignty over Palestine; (ii) Palestine as the state of all the Jews in the world; (iii) sequestration of Arab land and property; (iv) racial discrimination against Arabs and Oriental Jews; (v) subservience to imperialism. This solution to the Palestine problem naturally pre-supposes a revolutionary process which will overcome Israeli superiority in the relation of forces presently existing between the Arabs and Israel. It is the only fulfillment of the right of the Palestinian people to national self-determination.

The role of Israeli revolutionaries is to participate in this anti-Zionist struggle. The tradition of anti-Zionism extends from Lenin and the Comintern to the present support for the Palestinian struggle by the Cuban, Chinese and Vietnamese Parties; the enemy of the Palestinian people is the Zionist structure of Israel, and not the Jewish people themselves. The Jewish inhabitants of Israel can participate in this struggle by political work against the oppressive state of which they are citizens, because the main contradiction is the one between Zionism and the Palestinian people and not one between the Jewish and Palestinian peoples themselves. Insofar as Zionism is the structure that binds the Jewish community in Palestine, this community is objectively an *oppressing* community (in the same sense that Lenin used the term when he referred to Russia as an 'oppressing nation'). Putting the 'rights' of the two on an equal footing misses the point. It is *after* the de-Zionization of Palestine that the problem of the rights of the Jewish minority will arise, not within the context of Palestine itself (where Jews and Arabs will be institutionally equal) but within the context of a united republic of the Middle East. Here, the rights of the Jewish minority should be dealt with along the same lines as those of the other minorities (the Kurds of Iraq and Syria and the Africans of Southern Sudan).

Towards the Great Alliance

The relation between the Arab régimes and the Palestine liberation movement hinges around an inherent contradiction. When a quick Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories proved unlikely to occur, those régimes came gradually to back the Palestinian fedayeen. They saw, and still see, in them auxiliary irregular forces carrying on military operations behind enemy lines in order to pressure Israel into implementing the UN resolution of November 22nd 1967. This is as far as the Arab régimes will go in their support to the national liberation struggle of the Palestinian people. For the latter, of course, the question is also that of overthrowing Zionism in what is now called 'little Israel'. In as much as the Arab régimes come closer to the so-called 'peaceful solution' imposed by the Big Four, they will have to liquidate the Palestinian guerilla. The only apparent margin for compromise is the idea of the Palestinian, state in Gaza and the West Bank; but this idea has already been rejected by the fedayeen. The events in the Middle East during the past months all bear witness to this fact.

Put in its proper context, the revolutionizing role played by the Palestinian liberation movement in the countries surrounding Palestine can be résumé in the following: First, by taking the Palestinian problem into their own hands, the armed vanguards of the Palestinian people have *objectively* robbed the Arab régimes of the opportunity to manipulate this problem in such a way as to blur the internal class struggle waged against them. 'National Unity' against the foreign enemy (Israel) is a form of blackmail that is rapidly losing its effect: the point of reference on Palestine has become the Palestinians themselves, not the Arab régimes. Outflanked by the same people which they oppressed for years, the Arab régimes are, at best, on the defensive when it comes to Palestine. Second, the classic Israeli response to the

operations of the fedayeen is attacks against the neighbouring Arab countries. But, by so doing, Israel is in fact digging its own grave and that of the 'moderate' Arab régimes at the same time. Each Israeli raid is a new proof of the limits beyond which no present Arab régime can go in its opposition to Zionist colonization: the limits of the common allegiance of both the Arab oligarchies and Zionism to one common master—namely, US imperialism—and the limits imposed by the incapacity of the petit-bourgeois régimes of Syria and Egypt in achieving integral emancipation—political and economic—from the imperialist camp and waging a consistent anti-imperialist struggle. Third, the Palestinian liberation movement cannot be crushed now without first facing the internal anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist forces. This is the essence of the recent Lebanese events (April–May 1969), where the commercial-financial bourgeoisie's attempt to crush the Palestinian guerillas operating from southern Lebanon was foiled by the same forces that this bourgeoisie exploits: the peasants, workers, students and Palestinians in exile led by the organizations of the emerging revolutionary left.

Conclusion

The whole course of this article has shown that what is termed the Arab Revolution is *potentially* a combination of two relatively autonomous, yet dialectically interrelated struggles: the anti-imperialist class struggle and the anti-Zionist struggle. Neither can be deferred to await the outcome of the other. Neither is a substitute for the other. The question is a strategic one: which link in the Zionist-imperialist chain in the Middle East is likely to be the first to break? *The Zionist state is not likely to be the weakest link in this chain under the prevailing conditions in the area.* Furthermore, the forces of the Palestinian people are not by themselves strong enough to break it, if by this is meant defeating also the imperialist powers that sustain the state of Israel. This does not mean that the armed struggle of the Palestinian people should await the rupture of the weakest link somewhere else, or that this struggle should shift to a different front. In the present relation of forces in the area, it only means that without a safe rear, the Palestinian armed struggle cannot survive and escalate into a popular war. Faced with the imminent offensive to liquidate it, it will have to hit back. It cannot fight against two enemies indefinitely. In Jordan, the existing dual power between the Hashemite monarchy on the one hand and the Palestinian people in arms on the other cannot last long. It will have to be resolved one way or another. And it is through this, and other, confrontations that the Palestinian people will learn who are their real friends and enemies. They will have to choose between laying down their arms or definitely allying themselves to the classes and movements waging the internal anti-imperialist struggle. The anti-Zionist struggle would then merge with the class struggle. But for this to occur, the forces of the latter have to be built. The defeat of June 1967 has spurred the process of disintegration of the Arab CP's and petit-bourgeois nationalism at the same time. The latter is highlighted by the splits inside the Arab Nationalist Movement, the only organized detachment of Nasserism. The ANM is now dissolved, leaving only Marxist-Leninist groups committed to a systematic and consistent anti-

imperialist struggle in most of the countries of the Middle East, waged by the masses of workers, peasants and revolutionary intellectuals. The disintegration of the Arab CP's is best represented by the five or six splits that the Lebanese CP has witnessed since 1964, and especially by the split of the Iraqi CP in the summer of 1967, leading to the first experiment of rural guerilla warfare in Southern Iraq.

Those events do not reflect the ascendance of a new class to the stage of Arab politics so much as the crippling crisis of the existing leadership of the Arab revolution: the urban petit-bourgeoisie. The task of revolutionaries in the Middle East is to bring the workers and peasants into the political arena under their own ideology and slogans. This can only be achieved by forging the theoretical and organizational tools for the accomplishment of this great historic mission. In the process, the Great Alliance will be consolidated between the two detachments of the Arab revolution: the armed organizations of the Palestinian people and the proletarian vanguards of the Arab masses. On this victory depends.

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Postscript on Palestinian class structure

On the eve of the June war, the Palestinian people numbered around 2,350,000, broadly divided into¹:

Refugees:

(with or without UNWRA aid)	57%
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Non-Refugees:

Jordan (West Bank)	20%	43%
Gaza	6%	
Israeli Arabs	12%	
Others	5%	

The overall geographic distribution of the Palestinians was as follows¹:

Jordan	52%
Gaza	17%
Israel	12%
Lebanon and Syria	13%
Others (Arabian Gulf, US and North Africa)	6%

Any assessment of the social basis of the Palestinian liberation struggle should bear in mind the following:

1. The dispersion of the Palestinian people and the domination of the national question over its life was bound to lead to a relative confiscation of the class struggle among its various social groups. A victim of Zionist colonialist *displacement*, the Palestinian people's principal goal is the *re-integration* of its country. The positions of its various social groups are determined by, and refracted through, the national question itself.
2. Inasmuch as there exists a Palestinian bourgeoisie which is integrated into the Arab economies—as is the case in Jordan and Lebanon—the

¹ Malaff A -*Qadiya Al-Falastiniya*, Research Centre, PLO, 1968, pp. 65–66.

position of this bourgeoisie is governed by its subordination to the ruling oligarchies of the two countries. Traditionally, it was the link that subordinated the struggle of the Palestinians to the interests of the Arab régimes. Its present position cannot go beyond that of the official position of those régimes: the implementation of the UN resolution on Palestine (to be borne in mind that the Palestinian bourgeoisie in Jordan has real interest in the re-integration of the West Bank into Jordan since most of its economic interests are concentrated there).

3. The social force with the most consistent interest in the de-Zionization of Palestine as a whole is undoubtedly the refugees, workers and peasants who have nothing to lose in exile but their tents, the competition of local labour and exploitation. They have a whole country to gain. That they constitute the rank and file of the guerilla organizations is hardly surprising.

4. The Palestinian petit-bourgeoisie, which is relatively numerous, plays at present a dominant role in the leadership of the liberation struggle. The blocking of opportunity of employment for Palestinians in most countries of the Middle East, and recently in the Arabian Gulf, has driven many members of this class to join the armed struggle. But, if this class constitutes the main *political* ally of the refugees, workers and peasants, it nevertheless is their principal *ideological* enemy.

If the final victory of the Palestine liberation struggle depends on its alliance with the anti-imperialist forces of the Middle East, the precondition for this alliance is to achieve the political leadership and ideological hegemony of the refugees, workers and peasants over a wide national front of all the Palestinian patriotic forces. This requires both politico-military organization and the production of a 'national-Arab' Marxism.

Radical changes have occurred after the June war. The majority of the Palestinian people is now under Israeli occupation: 1,565,000 people or 65 per cent of the total. In Jordan, the proportion of refugees to non-refugees is 2:1.² Two pronounced characteristics emerge:

1. Occupation relies on a sizeable number of collaborators: (i) the bourgeoisie of the West Bank which undertakes the carrying trade between 'little Israel' and the West Bank itself on the one hand, and Jordan and the Middle East at large on the other; (ii) the old mainstays of the Hashemite monarchy itself (majors, mukhtars, officials, etc.); (iii) the 'labour procurers' of Gaza and the West Bank who provide the Israeli economy with cheap Arab labour from the occupied territories.

2. After June 1967, Zionist colonialism revealed its second nature—that of the domination and exploitation by a European community over the indigenous population, on the South African model. This is exemplified in Dayan's plan which calls for the *economic* integration of cheap labour into Israel, while depriving these Arabs of any *political* rights. This new policy further emphasizes that a radical solution to the Palestine problem is impossible without the destruction of Israeli 'collective' capitalism.

² Ibid., pp. 72–3.