

RUSTY LINKS IN BEVIN'S CHAIN

By I. Rennap

THE recent flare up in Iraq over the signing of the new Anglo-Iraq Treaty which brought down the pro-British puppet government of Sayid Saleh Jabr, was symptomatic of the changes taking place today in the Middle East, particularly in regard to Britain's position in this area. These changes are closely linked with the UN's decision to settle the Palestine problem by setting up independent Arab and Jewish states in Palestine after the mandate had been surrendered by Britain.

Britain is hostile to this decision. Forced to retreat from one of its advanced bases in the Middle East, the surrender of the Palestine mandate has forced her to carry out a complete strategic re-grouping of bases. British foreign policy is closely linked with America's expansionist aims in which converting the Middle East into a *place d'armes* against the Soviet Union and the world democratic movements figures prominently. But British imperialism is also desperately striving to maintain its dominant position in the Arab world in the face of increasing American penetration on the one hand and, on the other, against the growing liberation movements of which the recent Iraq incident is a typical example.

This is reflected in Bevin's plan for "a new series of treaties regulating friendship with the Arab world" of which the new Anglo-Iraq Treaty signed at Portsmouth, England, was the first. In fact, this is an attempt to dig in more firmly in the face of growing pressure from both sides, by a closer alliance with the most reactionary sections of the Arab upper strata who also fear the growing strength of the liberation movements in their countries and the growing influence of the Soviet Union. These Arab reactionaries are the most implacable opponents of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. And this is largely why Britain opposes an independent Jewish state in Palestine.

Friends of the future Jewish state and social progress in the Middle East generally, will welcome the blow struck by the Iraqi people against imperialism and its native pup-

pets in refusing to accept the new Portsmouth Treaty. But if imperialist intrigues in the Middle East against the independence and self-determination of both the Arab and Jewish peoples are to be effectively combatted, then a clear understanding of the new relation of forces in the Middle East is essential.

Britain's Vital Base

"The Middle East still remains Britain's most vital base outside the U.K.," writes the Suez Canal correspondent of the *Tory Observer* (Jan. 25, 1948), commenting on Britain's withdrawal from Palestine and future British policy in the Middle East. "Since the British left India, the presence of strong British forces to cover the eastern Mediterranean as well as the Arab countries and Persia is even more important." Disturbed by the large number of British workshops and installations concentrated in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine and Egypt, together with the vast amount of war materials and trained military personnel, he concluded significantly that it is "imperative we retain control of the short sea and air route of the Mediterranean, thus safeguarding our communications with the Far East, Australia and New Zealand. To be able to operate this route our generals believe it is necessary to retain our war time air bases in Libya—in cooperation with America" (my emphasis—I.R.).

This "co-operation with America" has cost Britain in the Middle East very much in terms of strategic and economic spheres of influence. Weakened by World War II, Britain, under a Labor government that has long turned its back on international cooperation, has become so tied up with American war aims, that it has allowed its more powerful and rapacious "ally" to follow in Hitler's and Mussolini's footsteps.

Chamberlain's anti-Soviet "appeasement" policy led to Britain surrendering strategic key points to the fascists and permitting them to extend their influence into the Middle East countries. Today that same opposition to the Soviet Union and the strengthened liberation movements in the Middle East has led to Britain surrendering to America

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"traditional" spheres of influence within her imperial lines of communication with access to the vast oil resources in that area.

America Muscles In

For over a century British eastern policy meant guarding the eastern Mediterranean approaches to the Middle East against rivals. Tsarist Russia's ambitions last century led to the Crimean War, and Kaiser Wilhelm's imperialist *Drang nach Osten* had its sequel in World War I. Today the Labor government's support for the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan has made Turkey, Greece and Italy into American colonial appendages. The eastern Mediterranean is becoming more and more an American lake with the U.S. straddling this strategic gateway. But this appears preferable to the horrible nightmare plaguing high Whitehall officials, described so succinctly by the well-informed *Observer* columnist, "Student of Europe."

Writing on Greece and the Middle East situation, he says: "With Greece in the hands of the Cominform, Turkey would be encircled, the Straits turned, Persia (Iran) all but inaccessible from the West, the Russian Navy and Air Force would dominate the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red army would be face to face with the weak Arab States and defenseless Africa. *Russia would hold the key to the Suez Canal.*" (My emphasis—I.R.) So in the name of "joint merging of British and U.S. Defense Plans," British airfields in Libya are being handed over to America. A recent Italian News Agency report reveals that American engineering troops are busily at work on these airfields.

At the other end of the Middle East, Iran, so long a "traditional" British dependency through Britain's exploitation of her oil resources, is now being converted into an American military base. The recent Soviet note to the Iranian government revealed how far the Americans had erected airfields and fortifications on the Iran-Soviet frontier. Saudi Arabia, with whom Britain has a treaty of friendship, and whose coffers have so long been filled by the British treasury, is rapidly becoming an American oil colony with ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Corporation) wielding a powerful influence over the country's economy and at the royal palace. Together with this has taken place increased American capital penetration into Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, and into Egypt.

Squeezed hard by her senior "partner" on the one hand and the growing peoples' movements in Egypt and Iraq on the other, the UN's decision on Palestine, thanks largely to the stand taken by the Soviet Union, was an additional blow which also contributed towards the new shifts being made by Britain to meet the changing pattern in the Middle East. It made no small contribution, in the words of the *Economist*, to Britain's needs to completely overhaul the chain of British treaties stretching from the Aegian to the Indian Ocean, some of whose links had become badly strained.

First link for "overhauling" was the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930 with a view, in Bevin's words, "to remove every-

thing objectionable in it." This treaty, which replaced the mandate over Iraq and gave it a semblance of sovereignty, permitted Britain to maintain two RAF bases near the Mosul-Haifa-Tripoli pipeline and to guard Britain's air and land communications with India. Britain could, during an emergency, control Iraq's airfields, ports, railways and communications generally and send in troops.

Politically, Britain ruled through her Hashimite (royal house of Iraq and Transjordan) puppets. Economically, Britain controlled the country's oil and other economic resources, railways, ports and currency. Yet according to the *London Times* editorial (Jan. 16, 1948) this treaty "did not in practice suffice to protect Britain's exceptional position in Iraq." The Portsmouth Treaty was to "rectify" this behind a facade of a Joint Defense Board with formal equality of British and American representation.

Widely trumpeted was Britain's surrender of her right to maintain troops in Iraq—but only "when the Allied forces are withdrawn from the territory of all ex-enemy states." Commenting on this the *London Daily Telegraph* reminded that "it would be pleasant but misleading to suggest that ex-enemy states were soon likely to cease to be occupied. Even on that far day however the Joint Defense Board may decide that the RAF is still required, in the common interest, *to use these bases*" (my emphasis—I.R.).

The bases referred to are the ones which Bevin made such a great show of handing back to Iraq. But the new treaty still permitted British personnel to work there with the RAF having the right to use them. The new treaty would permit Britain in an emergency to send in troops of all arms, with the Iraqi government having to provide facilities for the use of the country's airfields, railways, ports and lines of communications generally. Iraq's foreign military personnel were to be all British and her own were to receive training only in British military establishments, while her arms and equipment would be similar to the British.

Middle East Repercussions

These monstrous terms, which really tightened Britain's grip on Iraq, also had repercussions in the adjacent Arab countries. The *Manchester Guardian's* Cairo correspondent reported Egyptian newspapers stressing how the Egyptian people, too, over a year ago, exposed a similar Joint Defense Board which Britain tried to palm off on them during the negotiations then proceeding on "revising" the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, which even the reactionary Egyptian government dared not accept. These papers, says this correspondent, declared quite openly that the fate of the Portsmouth Treaty should be "a warning for Britain against persisting in such plans, especially with minority governments." He concludes significantly "that present day developments in Iraq have doomed Mr. Bevin's hope of an Anglo-Arab joint defense plan in the Middle East" (Jan. 29, 1948).

This conclusion appears to be borne out by the abortive

results of the negotiations with Transjordan, the next "link" which came up for overhauling. Granted an illusory independence under the Anglo-Transjordan Treaty of 1946 which ended the mandate and converted the country into a British garrison with nearly 150,000 troops, a Transjordan delegation, with Brigadier Glubb Pasha, Commander of the Transjordan Frontier Arab Legion, has been negotiating the "revision" of this treaty in conditions of the utmost secrecy. On Feb. 8 the negotiations ended and an official communique was issued which, strangely, the well-informed diplomatic correspondent of the London *Sunday Times* (Feb. 9, 1948) described as "uninformative." *Reynolds'* diplomatic correspondent found it not so "uninformative" by stating outrightly "that the talks with Transjordan . . . ended in deadlock last night. Having before them the example of Iraq, the Transjordan delegation refused to sign a new treaty which includes military clauses."

That the servile Abdullah should have refused to sign another treaty granting Britain additional bases in Transjordan for the reception of British troops about to pull out of Palestine, indicates that the Hashimite puppets have taken note of what happened only a few weeks ago. So the next link in Bevin's chain still remains "unoverhauled" and his plans for making Iraq and Transjordan the two advanced bases in the reorganized British "defense" set-up has received a severe blow.¹ This will not be very helpful with the work planned to proceed on the next "link," Egypt. Tass's Cairo correspondent reports that the British ambassador, who has been in London to consult on Anglo-Egyptian relations, has brought back a "recommendation" from the British government that a new Egyptian government be set up to negotiate a new Anglo-Egyptian treaty.

Another "link" long overdue for overhauling is Saudi Arabia. Reports were prevalent some weeks ago that a delegation was to arrive and negotiate a new treaty. Now it is definitely reported that the Saudi government has refused to negotiate. The American-backed opposition of Ibn Saud to the British sponsored "Greater Syria" scheme of a British-controlled Arab bloc under King Abdullah of Transjordan, Ibn Saud's hated rival, is still a very sore problem for Whitehall's "overhauled."

Bevin and the Jewish State

Verily, some of the links in Bevin's chain have become very rusty indeed. The UN decision on Palestine has thus aggravated British imperialism's difficulties in the Middle East which drive it towards closer relations with Arab reaction behind a facade of seeking new "defense" pacts.

The Soviet Union's stand at the UN proposing partition as the best solution in the present circumstances as a means of prying Palestine loose from the sphere of Anglo-American power politics in the Middle East, has been more than vindicated.

¹ Since this article was received, announcement was made that an Anglo-Transjordan "reciprocal defense" treaty was signed on March 15.—*Eds.*

Friends of the future Jewish state in Palestine cannot remain impartial to these new shifts in imperialist policies in the Middle East.

British Middle East policy today must, by its very nature, oppose independent Jewish statehood in Palestine. It cannot ignore the hostility to a Jewish state of the Arab reactionaries, who are using it as a red herring to trail across the path of the real independence struggles in their countries and to distract from growing economic difficulties. Iraq is a typical instance. Dr. Jamali, the late foreign minister, was one of the most vociferous opponents of partition at Lake Success. Neither would an independent Jewish state lend itself so easily to imperialist power politics in the Middle East, as did the *Yishuv* in the past through the policy of the dominant pro-imperialist Zionist leaders.

Bevin's "chain," which he is trying to "overhaul" with such great difficulty, means strangulation for a Jewish state, no less than it does for the independent aspirations of the Arab peoples. This is the lesson for Zionist and non-Zionist.

Jewish Leadership and Imperialism

There are today Zionist leaders who have not yet learned from the experience of the last tragic years. They still cling to the coattails of British imperialism forced to retreat from Palestine saying, in effect: The Jewish state can be a more dependable ally than the Arabs.

"We must achieve once again that cooperation between Great Britain and ourselves without which a great deal of our work in Palestine . . . could never have been done," said Dr. Weizmann in a message to the conference of the Zion Federation of Great Britain in February. And Rabbi Berlin, the Mizrahi leader, called it "stupidity" for the Jews to "break" with Britain. The "Exodus," the concentration camps for Jews in Palestine and North Africa, the emergency decrees, the curfews, have taught these Zionist bourbons nothing.

But within the *Yishuv* there is growing opposition to such a policy. It can be said quite definitely that since the historic Gromyko-Tsarapkin declarations, there has taken place a great strengthening of the anti-imperialist elements in the *Yishuv*, Zionist and non-Zionist. Every democrat has welcomed the merging of Hashomair Hatzair and Achduth Avodah Paale Zion into a united Left Labor Zionist Party in opposition to the right wing leaders of Mapai and the Histadruth, armed with a progressive program of friendship with the Arab people inside and outside the future Jewish state, opposition to imperialism and cooperation with the Soviet Union and the new democracies and the world progressive movements. Better relations have been established with the Palestine Communist Party.

The resignation of Dr. Moshe Sneh from the Jewish Agency dominated by the Weizmanns and Berlins revealed that even among the bourgeois Zionists there is a ferment going on. In Sneh's article² in *L'Achduth Avodah* (January

² This article was reprinted in *JEWISH LIFE*, March 1948.—*Eds.*

8, 1948), organ of the new left United Workers Party, he gave the main reasons for his resignation.

He showed that first and foremost it is British imperialism that is the mortal enemy of the Jewish state and that the most consistent friend of the Jewish state is the Soviet Union, determined to see its establishment through to the bitter end. America he depicts as vacillating and uncertain. But outstanding is Dr. Sneh's recognition that the Zionist movement is cutting its throat by orientating towards Anglo-American imperialism. This Zionist leader, who was so profoundly impressed by the status of the Jews in the new democracies, particularly in Rumania, and was honest enough to say this openly, declares there can only be one orientation and that is an independent international one based on the truly democratic forces in the world.

Thus has the anti-imperialist front been broadened, despite the Zionist bourbons, to an unprecedented degree. Zionists and non-Zionists have now the widest possible ground to cooperate in the struggle for the implementation of the UN decision on Palestine.

This will not be easy. Most formidable enemy is British present policy of creating in its wake when forced to retreat, a "scorched earth" of communal conflict and bloodshed, hoping thereby that it may not have to get out so quickly. By turning a blind eye to the procurement of arms by Arab bands and the infiltration into Palestine of so-called Arab "guerrillas" from the adjacent countries, while disarming

whole Haganah detachments, Britain is tipping off its Arab allies to "do their stuff." *Al Ittihad*, organ of the Arab Left and the most progressive section of the Palestine Arabs, has been banned. This paper has been appealing to the Arab people not to fall into the imperialist trap and allow itself to be incited by the Arab Higher Executive into armed attacks on Jews. It has reminded the Arabs that partition means also independence for Palestine.

Again, to deliberately keep out the UN Commission until May 1, a fortnight before the mandate is surrendered, and to refuse to open a port for the reception of Jewish immigrants in accordance with the UN decision, is typical Bevinist flaunting of all that is good and progressive. Nor does America raise a finger to stop this open treachery to UN. This American "non-intervention," writes Dr. Sneh, helps Britain in her work of sabotage in Palestine.

Thus the struggle for an independent and progressive Jewish state which will cooperate with the Arab state and the best elements in the Arab world, is the struggle today against imperialist power politics in the Middle East. Only unity can confound Bevin's "friendship pacts," which mean death to the national aspirations of Jews and Arabs alike. Real friendship can be attained only if both the Jewish and Arab states adopt such forms of cooperation which will eventually lead to their unity in a federal bi-national Palestine, the state form best suited to give the fullest freedom for the aspirations of both peoples.