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## THE MIDDLE EAST IN 1939 AND IN 1944

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**M**Y subject is the impact of the second world war on the countries of the Near and Middle East. Although Turkey belongs geographically to this area, I shall confine my remarks to Egypt, the Arab countries in Asia together with the Jewish National Home, and Persia. There, as elsewhere, the conditions of war have created a new sense of urgency in the treatment of peace-time problems. To some extent the war will be found to have changed the very nature of these problems, or some of them, and perhaps even to have assisted directly in their solution, but its principal effect has been to stimulate the feeling that they must be grappled with in the future with a greater sense of urgency than in the past.

The problems that I have in mind are three: the social problem, the constitutional problem, and the problem of external relations. Each of these, the first and second no less than the third, is a product of contact between Oriental social systems and Western influences. This, the fundamental process, is usually spoken of as "Westernization," a word which is, in my view, dangerous, because it implies that the West is the only active partner in the relationship and that the final goal is the assimilation of Western Asia and North Africa to Europe. It is enough to consider for a moment the depth and firmness of the foundations laid by the history of Islam, and also the complex origins of our own Western civilization, to see at once the arrogance and the historical improbability of this assumption that the destiny of the Near and Middle East is absorption into Europe. Nevertheless, the most important factor in the present phase of this region's history is unquestionably its exposure to Western influences.

The study of this contact between two civilizations is one of the functions of the Royal Central Asian Society, and there are many in my audience who understand it far better than I do. Happily it is not my task this afternoon to delve into its profounder and more elusive aspects, and I shall confine myself only to some of its relatively superficial consequences.

The influence of one society upon another is exercised, in its early

*NOTE.—The first five lectures reported in this Journal attempt to give some idea of the effect of the past five years, when war has raged in Europe, on Asiatic countries. Three are notes only of informal addresses of members home on short leave who have been good enough to speak. The Far East and Netherlands East Indies have been left for a later date, when fact can take the place of conjecture. Of the five given here, the authors of three have spent the whole five years in the countries in which they speak, while the other two have been in very close touch with them*



stages at any rate, through certain limited and specialized groups in the latter. Among such groups in the Near East I would draw attention to three. In the first place, there are the larger landowners and merchants, whose wealth enables them to acquire the material comforts and make use of the technical achievements of the West. But since a transformation in the material way of life is bound to bring in its train changes of outlook and interest, the effect of this kind of external approximation to the West is to increase the tensions in Eastern society. The rich become more remote from the poor, are felt to be more alien, and so are viewed with a more critical eye.

Therefore there occurs a loosening in the texture of society, which opens the way to economic and social discontents of a modern and Western character. At the same time, other groups are emerging with the capacity to express and exploit these discontents. And these groups, which may in time threaten the privileges of the wealthy, have largely been created on their initiative. A Western education for the sons of a family is, after all, along with luxurious cars and well-appointed houses, one of the new advantages that money can buy in the modern world. But a Western education produces, in small though growing numbers, critics of extreme disparities of wealth and advocates of social reforms which would involve an appreciable redistribution of income. Their reformist tendency is strengthened by nationalistic motives, for they feel that their countries cannot claim equality with the West unless they are prepared to sweep away social habits and structures which the West has long ago condemned. The wealthy classes, with the increasing complexity of their economic demand and their ambition to satisfy it so far as possible by building factories at home instead of by imports, have also helped in the formation of a characteristically modern proletariat, small and scattered hitherto but already a portent.

There is a possibility that these two groups, the reformist intellectuals and the embryonic proletariat, may in time form the nucleus of a revolutionary social movement, which would attain its objectives by rousing the peasant masses from their inertia and leading them against the ruling powers. This is what happened in Russia as the result of contact with ideas, institutions and techniques coming from the West. I think, though one must not press the analogy too far, there is some parallel between the situation in Russia fifty years ago and the situation in the Middle East to-day. In both you find an urban population, relatively small but growing, and underneath that a great peasant mass. The people are predominantly devoted to agricultural pursuits, and not only agricultural but pastoral pursuits as well: a great peasant mass, and behind that again in the scale of economic evolution a large nomadic population. The social structure of the Middle East to-day is not so very different, therefore, from the social structure of Russia half a century ago.

But we must be cautious in applying analogies drawn from Europe to the very different conditions of the Near and Middle East. It is still too early to assert dogmatically that these Eastern societies will be disintegrated to the same extent that Russian society was before they crystallize into their new forms. In addition to the universal conservative forces—

established interests, dislike of change, persistence of traditional relationships and allegiances—we have to take into account others which may not operate in a wholly conservative way but which are at least hostile to change along Western lines. There is a tendency to react against the West and to reject its ideas as alien and unassimilable. This tendency finds expression on the one hand (more particularly in Syria and Palestine) in a nostalgic regret for the greater stability and familiarity of Ottoman days, on the other hand (particularly in Egypt) in equally vague hopes that revolution may take a specifically Eastern and Moslem form. Given the importance of Western influences in the pattern of social change which the Russian analogy seems to indicate, this emotional xenophobia must be regarded as a powerful cross-current, making prediction hazardous.

There can be no doubt, however, that the immediate effect of the present war has been to enlarge the penetration of Western social concepts into the Near East, and to stimulate the desire both for economic development and for radical reform. The most obvious element in the impact of war on the social life and economy of this area has been the presence of Allied troops. Not only have British and Imperial forces been there in greater numbers than ever before, but there have also been Polish, French, Greek, American and other contingents of varying sizes, widely scattered over the area. The result has been an immense extension of the range and diversity of social contacts, continuing over a long period of time and therefore not to be dismissed as ephemeral in its effects.

Furthermore, the Allied troops have spent large sums of money both individually and through military contracts—sums which in 1942 and 1943 exceeded, in some countries greatly exceeded, the figures of the national budgets. A great part of this additional currency has found its way into the pockets of shopkeepers, merchants and landowners both large and small. The last have been further enriched by the curtailment of supplies from overseas and the consequent necessity both of enlarging the local production of foodstuffs and of offering high prices to bring it on to the market. On the whole, the beneficiaries of this flow of new wealth have preferred to use it for the purchase of commodities or other solid advantages rather than to hoard it in the form of currency. Many small proprietors have freed themselves from debt, and there has been a significant widening of the market for imported articles of various kinds which symbolize a rising standard of living. This in turn has accelerated the rise in prices and brought still further wealth to a restricted class of merchants.

The other side of this picture is the hardship which other classes have suffered through high prices and shortages of goods. All those social groups whose incomes are relatively fixed—wage-earners not in military employment, landless peasants, civil servants and other salary-earners—have been impoverished by the fall in the value of money. The Governments have tried, through control of the distribution of foodstuffs and in some cases through price subsidies, to prevent actual starvation, and have succeeded in the main, though the recent epidemic of malaria in Upper Egypt seems to have been largely caused by the prevalence of serious malnutrition. These measures, however, have not been comprehensive or effective enough to counteract the tendency for extremes of wealth and

poverty to be more sharply observed and resented than at any previous time.

Labour troubles in the form of strikes and demonstrations have been unimportant except in Persia, but there have been numerous industrial disputes in Palestine, and trade unionism in Egypt is evidently regarded as an ally worth courting by the country's political leaders. Everywhere the conscience of the intelligentsia has become more sensitive to the claims of social justice. It is clear from the accounts of well-informed observers returning to this country that social problems are arousing unprecedented interest, in Egypt and Persia especially. The articulate opinion of the Northern Arab countries is absorbed to a greater degree in the issues of political nationalism, but there too the stirring of social unrest is evident.

Closely connected with these social developments are the purely economic consequences of the war. While in one sense, through the presence of large Allied forces and the multiplication of official contacts between the major Allies and the local governments, the war has increased the range of the Middle East's relationships with the outside world, it has at the same time thrown the area back upon its own economic resources. Trade routes have been cut, foreign sources of supply lost, overseas markets closed; there is a large measure of enforced regional autarchy. But it is a fact of great importance that the reaction to this abrupt and isolating break in the continuity of economic life has not been a wholly indigenous one. The necessary adjustments have been guided and coordinated by a regional organization under Anglo-American direction—the Middle East Supply Centre in Cairo.

This organization was established in the first instance to ensure that the limited amount of United National tonnage which could be spared for the shipment of supplies for the civilian populations of the area was used in the most rational and generally beneficial way. But control of imports could not be divorced from consideration of the best use of local resources, and M.E.S.C. has therefore acted as a stimulus to the expansion of production and to new departures and experiments.

These activities cover so wide a field that I can only mention, in passing, one or two examples—the extension in suitable areas of mechanized agriculture, the adoption of regional measures for the control of locusts, the local manufacture of farmers' requirements which were previously imported (such as superphosphates and jute sacks), and the exploitation of Lebanese deposits of lignite. Meanwhile the Centre has also smoothed the way, so far as its help was necessary, for a considerable variety of local industrial enterprises, particularly in Egypt and in the Jewish sector of Palestine. And at the same time the Allied military authorities have, in the course of their professional activity, made certain permanent additions to the economic equipment of the region, of which the most notable is the new railway from Haifa to Tripoli, linking the standard-gauge systems in Egypt and Palestine with the great trunk line from Baghdad to Europe. The combined effect of these developments has been to increase the economic efficiency of the area and to widen the range of its products, both agricultural and industrial.

Over and above its contribution to these specific war-time achievements,

the Middle East Supply Centre has enlarged the economic vision of many influential groups in the Middle East. Its work has encouraged belief in the practicability of plans for raising the standard of living; it has demonstrated the value of regional collaboration; and it has helped to focus attention on the future prospects for large-scale capital investment—in irrigation, for example.

Some at least of the Near and Middle Eastern Governments should be in a position to finance works of this kind from their own resources. For, in common with other countries which as a result of the war have imported less while supplying the Allies with goods and services, they have become international creditors. Egypt, to take the most striking example, now owns sterling balances amounting to more than £250,000,000, and the Minister of Finance has recently suggested that this figure may eventually rise to £400,000,000. Iraq and Persia also have assets of the same kind though in smaller volume. These balances could be used, not only to augment the capital equipment of the countries which possess them, but at the same time to avoid serious economic dislocation during the transition from war to peace. This will be a critical period for the Middle East. The incomes of large classes, including farmers and workers on military contracts, are bound to fall, and, unless great care is taken to avoid it, there will be a good deal of unemployment. These conditions might bring to a head the social unrest which the war itself has stimulated. The strain which will inevitably be imposed on the social fabric by the process of returning from an inflationary war-time situation to more normal price and wage levels could be relieved by the immediate undertaking of large-scale capital developments, for which in many cases plans are ready. That this precautionary measure will in fact be taken with sufficient speed and imagination seems, however, unlikely for two reasons: the social composition of the local Governments and Parliaments, and the strong desire of the wealthy classes to be rid of irksome restrictions on their economic activity.

These restrictions would have been resented in any case. But the fact that they have been imposed after consultation with British and later with Anglo-American authorities, and that their ultimate sanction is the almost absolute control over world shipping exercised on behalf of the United Nations, enables the interests affected by them to appeal to nationalist sentiment. As soon as a moderate tonnage of free shipping is again available, we must expect a strong demand for the full recovery, by the independent States of the Near and Middle East, of autonomy in their economic life. That this is a reasonable and indeed necessary aim can hardly be disputed, but it is to be hoped that the transfer of responsibility will not be carried out so impatiently as to sweep away all the machinery of M.E.S.C. along with its present title and constitution. It is here, perhaps, that the undercurrent of xenophobia will have its most damaging effects.

To summarize the impact of the war in the economic and social fields: it has been a period of expanding and more efficient production, accompanied by a clearer vision of future possibilities which may in the long run lead to a more satisfactory standard of living for that great majority of the

population which is engaged in pastoral and agricultural work; meanwhile, however, the contrast of wealth and poverty has been more nakedly revealed, and the war years may be followed by a period of exceptional social fluidity and maladjustment; these changes have been accompanied by a noteworthy increase in the range and intimacy of contact between the Middle Eastern populations and representatives of a Western outlook. How Middle Eastern society will settle down after this jolt will depend to a considerable extent on political developments, and to these we must now turn.

What I have called the constitutional problem may be divided into two—the problem of forms of government in the existing States, and the problem of the relationship of the Arab States with one another.

In the light of experience between the two wars, it is evident that the attempt to transplant Western constitutional forms into the Near and Middle Eastern environment has not been an unqualified success. The influence of Britain and France in this area, and the prestige which Parliamentary democracy derived from the result of the first world war, led to the adoption of that system in Egypt (where, however, it was not entirely new), in Iraq, in Lebanon and in Syria. But the lack of adjustment between constitutional forms borrowed from Europe and indigenous social habits and traditions quickly made itself felt, producing unanticipated difficulties. Except in Egypt, where the Wafd was already a power when the Constitution of 1923 came into operation, strong party organizations have not emerged. Governments have therefore been chronically unstable, and Ministers have been compelled to devote more energy to keeping rivals out of their offices than to working in them themselves. There were seventeen new Governments in Iraq between 1924 and 1935. This constant procession of ephemeral Ministries was a serious impediment to the initiation of and perseverance in positive policies. On the other hand, the necessary minimum of continuity in the administration of the State was supplied, not in Iraq only but elsewhere, by the social homogeneity of successive Ministries and of their Parliamentary supporters. Of the present Persian Majlis, for example, more than half the members are landowners, and a high proportion of the remainder are either large merchants or lawyers and other dependants of the landowning and commercial groups. And if the composition of elected chambers in neighbouring countries were examined, I think the results would not be very different. In short, the system has produced Governments without adequate authority, representing a restricted section of the community and exposed to an increasing volume of criticism which tends to be directed against Parliamentary democracy as such. When war broke out in 1939, the democratic experiment in the Near East may well have been on the verge of a collapse similar to those which had swallowed it up in other parts of the world.

During the last five years, however, the prestige of democracy has again revived. The one dictatorship which had been successfully established, that of Reza Shah in Persia, has disappeared. The Iraqi army, which had been trying with increasing boldness to fill the vacuum of authority in Baghdad, made its most ambitious *coup d'état* in co-operation with Rashid

Ali three years ago and succeeded in discrediting itself as a political force. In Egypt the situation is less simple. The Wafd has held office for a longer period than ever before, and the Wafd can reasonably claim to be the most democratic force in Egyptian politics. On the other hand, its rule during the last two and a half years has shown some of the characteristics of government in a one-party State, and it does not appear to be certain that it will emerge from the war with enhanced prestige or that the new respect for democracy will advance its interests.

What the war has given to democracy in these countries is, I would suggest, no more than a breathing space. If this breathing space is not used to adjust the Parliamentary system more closely to local needs and possibilities, it will again be confronted, after a short interval, with a rising tide of dissatisfaction and a demand for short cuts to reform and to a sense of national vitality. At the moment there is an evident desire, in many Arab and Persian circles, to make democracy work, coupled with a healthy readiness to criticize its existing forms. I take, more or less at random, a recent extract from an Iraqi newspaper, according to which there is now "a general awareness in the country that things are not going here as they should in a Parliamentary democracy." In this critical time, the writer adds, "it is the duty of every loyal Iraqi to serve his people through an efficient political system," and he suggests as a basic reform the organization of stable parties with clearly defined programmes and membership. Similar comment is current in Persia, and in Egypt there is some awareness of the need for an effective Parliamentary counterweight to the Wafd.

So much has been written lately on the background of the movement for Arab union that I need say only a few words by way of introduction. The liberation of the Arab peoples in Asia from Ottoman rule occurred at too early a stage in the history of their *risorgimento* to be followed by their political unification in a single independent State or Federation. And in some ways the inter-war years have added to the number of obstacles hindering the advance towards this objective. The new States of Arab Asia, and still more Egypt with her longer national tradition, have developed attitudes to their neighbours and general external policies which are rooted in their individual needs and interests. The concept of Arab unity, therefore, presents a different aspect to each of the interested Governments, which accordingly work for its realization with a variety of motives and along lines which sometimes conflict. Consideration of these divergences should not be permitted to obscure the underlying realities of a common language, common historical memories and the consciousness of corporate life which is manifested by the sensitivity of the whole Arab world to events in any part of it. This sensitivity was shown by the reactions of Arab opinion to successive crises in Palestine between the two wars, and more recently to events in Lebanon. We should be surprised neither by the vehemence of these reactions on the one hand, nor on the other by the fact that the approaches made by the various Governments to the problem of their mutual relationships do not always converge.

It does not seem to me that the balance between these contrasting

tendencies—the tendency to national consolidation within existing frontiers and the tendency towards organization on pan-Arab lines—has been upset in the course of the present war. Partial economic isolation from the outer world did not produce, as many people hoped that it would, a greater disposition to co-operate in regional exchanges, but rather a tighter and more exclusive organization of the separate economies. And the change in the status of Syria and Lebanon has added to the number of independent centres of power and influence. On the other hand the war, by emphasizing in so startling a way the military helplessness of small States, has indicated the desirability of their coalition into larger blocs even where there is not, as there is in the Arab East, a historical and cultural foundation for such formations. Furthermore, this line of thought among Arab statesmen has been encouraged by the two declarations of sympathy with it which Mr. Eden has made on behalf of His Majesty's Government.

Even now a preliminary conference is meeting in Alexandria, attended by delegations from seven Arab States, together with an observer to represent the views of the Palestinian Arabs. Its task is to prepare the agenda for a future congress, at which, according to the plan, decisions will be taken about the future relations of the Arab States with one another. The information so far available about the deliberations at Alexandria is insufficient for an accurate estimate of the progress made or likely to be made, but the field which they are probably covering can be inferred from reports of the inter-Governmental conversations which preceded them and from the comments of the Arabic Press.

There will be little support, outside the delegations from Iraq and Transjordan, for the establishment of any form of federal government. Federation may be the final goal, but it will not be reached without a long period of collaboration for limited purposes, during which the necessary foundations of habit, confidence and mutual dependence can be laid down. This and the subsequent conference would be rightly regarded as successful if they did no more than inaugurate this period of practical co-operation. Much might be done in the cultural field, by bringing educational curricula into line with one another and by exchanges of teachers and students. The standardization of legal codes, of nationality laws and passport regulations would remove fruitful causes of misunderstanding and friction.

On the economic side, the possibilities are more momentous. Already the Middle East Supply Centre has called into being one organization which, being dependent not on the Centre but on the local governments, might form a model for additional institutions of a similar kind. This is the Middle East Council of Agriculture, the function of which is to provide a forum for discussion of the technical problems connected with agricultural development. Industrial development might be assisted in the same way, so that all national policies of economic expansion could be initiated with a full knowledge of their bearing on the economy of the area as a whole. A more ambitious step would be the formation of a regional development board, examining and initiating projects for irrigation, power transmission and the like without regard to political boundaries. Tariffs and currencies offer a more obvious field for common agreements.



Another problem, social and political as much as economic, which would gain from unified treatment, is that of the desert or semi-desert lands—particularly the central area enclosed by the Fertile Crescent—and their Beduin populations.

Politically, there is a good deal of support for the co-ordination of external policies by means of periodic meetings of Foreign Ministers. A decision to adopt this device might indeed be more popular than any other outcome of the conferences, since it would indicate the desire of the Arab Governments to present a united front on some at least of the issues which are thought likely to arise during the post-war negotiations affecting the Middle East. Combined arrangements for defence may also be proposed, though this subject cannot perhaps be dealt with adequately until it is known what contribution to the post-war defensive plans of the United Nations will be asked from the States of the Middle East.

The scope and character of such inter-State agreements as may be arrived at within the region will depend to some extent on the future character of the links between its component States and other members of the United Nations. It is already clear that the war has vitally affected these relations, and with them the international status of certain of the Arab countries. Disappointment with the last peace settlement, for which Britain and France were held responsible, the continuing presence of these two Powers in the Near East as mandatories, and differences of opinion over the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, led to deep cleavages in Arab opinion during the early stages of the war. Saudi Arabia, it is true, followed the lead of its King, whose unswerving support of Great Britain and her Allies was an immense moral influence throughout the Arab world. The Amir Abdullah of Transjordan has also supported the Allied cause unhesitatingly from the beginning. The doubts of some Egyptian politicians as to the right course for their country to pursue were never of sufficient weight to deflect Egypt's rulers from the fulfilment of her obligations as a non-belligerent ally. But in Syria and Lebanon, among the Arabs of Palestine, and in Iraq, where there was widespread sympathy with the grievances of the Arab populations under mandatory rule, attitudes were more complicated and Axis propaganda more fruitful.

The same was true of Persia, where fear of Britain and Russia had sunk deep into the national outlook. The change of feeling in these countries since 1941 has been cynically but inadequately explained as a consequence of Germany's declining military prospects. There were other reasons: the proclamations of Syrian and Lebanese independence; our immediate restoration of friendly relations with the constitutional authorities in Iraq after the defeat of the revolutionary and anti-British Government in the spring of 1941; and the relief of the Persians at the collapse of Reza Shah's dictatorship on the entry of British and Russian troops. The improvement in relations is not merely a dividend of victory, but is also an indication of an increased confidence in the justice and future intentions of the United Nations.

The extent of this growth in confidence, however, should not be exaggerated or misunderstood. It is not so much a tacit vote of confidence

in individual Powers as a rather tentative and precarious belief that the major Allies as a group intend to establish an international order in which the Near and Middle East can find freedom, security and well-being.

This hope has been strengthened as a result of the noteworthy growth of interest in the Near and Middle East on the part of both the United States of America and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Government has for the first time established diplomatic relations with Arab Governments—Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The United States have participated in the work of the Middle East Supply Centre, sent an important agricultural mission into Saudi Arabia, supplied advisers to the Persian Government, brought the greater part of the area within the scope of lease-lend, and recognized the independence of Syria and Lebanon. There is no need to stress, before this audience, the interest of many American citizens in the future of Palestine and of their Government in the petroleum fields of Arabia.

Largely as a result of these more intimate contacts with the two great Powers which before 1939 appeared to be only remotely interested in the affairs of the Near East, the relationships between the local States and the outer world have become appreciably more complex. This change can be seen most clearly in Syria and Lebanon, to whose Governments representatives of Powers other than France are now accredited. Finding themselves in this new international situation, the two Republics would evidently prefer to obtain guarantees of their future security from the Great Powers in concert rather than from France alone. Similar inclinations clearly exist in Egypt, where the Press has recently been showing considerable interest in a proposal that the country should be neutralized and placed under the collective guarantee of the Powers. The Persian Press, likewise, was enthusiastic in its welcome of the American signature to a tripartite declaration issued after the Teheran conference, in which the assurances already given to the Persian Government by Britain and Russia were solemnly reaffirmed. The same point was made by a Zionist leader in an article published two months ago. "The essential point at issue," Mr. Shertok wrote, "is whether the decision [on the future of Palestine] is to be a British one or an international one. . . . It is our duty to insist on the international character of our demands and to work for them by approaching every Power that is concerned with the question . . . particularly the Big Three."

These are natural symptoms of the fuller and more direct participation of the Middle East in international affairs. Already two of the conferences convened for the discussion of problems of post-war reconstruction have been attended by delegations from Egypt, Iraq and Persia—the Food Conference at Hot Springs in May, 1943, and the Financial Conference at Bretton Woods in July, 1944. The succession of similar gatherings, to which we may presumably look forward in the next few years, will help to launch these States, and perhaps some of their neighbours, into the main stream of world politics.

This new situation is not wholly free from danger. No longer insulated, as it were, from the full force of power politics by the mediating influence of either Britain or France, the Arab countries, and with them Persia,

might in certain circumstances be tempted to fall into the unhappy condition of the Balkan States before 1914, each seeking to advance its interests by encouraging the competition of Great Powers for its favour. In fact, there will be little chance of avoiding Balkanization in this sense of the word if the four interested Powers—Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and France—are themselves not working harmoniously together. The tranquillity and stability of the Near and Middle East, therefore, must in future depend on the mutual confidence and collaboration of these Powers both in their general policy and in relation to their particular Middle Eastern interests.

As far as Great Britain is concerned, the events of the war have emphatically confirmed the view that the security of this region is a fundamental requirement of imperial strategy, and that its internal stability and welfare are therefore not only desirable in themselves, but also among the essentials of British policy. Accepting this as axiomatic, and observing the tendencies I have just mentioned, I am led to hope for the establishment of some specialized machinery to which the future international authority would delegate its responsibilities in the Middle East. This would at once accord with the present inclinations of responsible opinion in the area, so long as it allowed for the effective partnership of the local States, and at the same time provide a framework within which Britain's interests and obligations could be harmonized with those of her allies.

The war has not only brought home to us the reality of British interests in Egypt, Arab Asia and the Persian Gulf. It has also increased British prestige in this region, as a result not only of the achievements of British arms but also of the many occasions which have arisen for practical demonstration of Britain's care for the welfare of its peoples. It is a fact of more than sentimental importance that, not only during the war but for many years past, Britain has sunk a great moral capital in the Middle East, in the shape of the advice, co-operation, understanding and friendship for its peoples of individual Britishers engaged there in a variety of occupations, official and unofficial. An investment of this kind soon becomes a wasting asset if it is not replenished; but there can be little doubt that some of those to whom the war has given an introduction to the Middle East and an interest in its intricate and fascinating problems will return there later.

In this connection, one last change may be noted, though it is not strictly a part of the war's impact on the Arab and Persian lands. On the contrary, it arises from the direct impact of the Middle East on a limited but appreciable proportion of the British electorate—the troops and officials who have been stationed there. It may be objected that the same thing happened last time, without producing any noticeable enlightenment of public opinion; but the Middle Eastern scene was so radically transformed between 1918 and 1922 that the brief experiences of the war years offered little guidance to its subsequent problems. It is unlikely that this will happen again, and therefore I think it not unreasonable to expect that public opinion in this country may be influenced to a greater extent than previously by just and sympathetic views on the Middle East, and may have a more sensitive appreciation of its past and future importance.

Finally, one situation to which the war has made no essential difference

is that of Palestine. So long as this problem continues to be a source of inflammation, the relationship of Great Britain with the Middle East can never be altogether healthy.

I have tried to indicate, from a somewhat distant and abstract point of view, the direction in which the peoples of the Near and Middle East have travelled during the past five years. They have reached the early stages of an economic revolution which will lead to the diversification of their agriculture, the development of light industries, the fuller exploitation of mineral resources, the improvement of internal transport and a greater complexity of commercial exchanges, both internally and with other countries. This process cannot fail to modify the structure of their society and thereby affect the forms of political organization, though the exact nature of these changes is not yet predictable.

As a consequence both of this internal evolution and of an important external factor in the situation—the growing interest of our major allies in this region—the independent Arab States are beginning to find their feet as active participants in international politics. At first sight paradoxically, the war has at once intensified their desire to lead a less sheltered diplomatic life and demonstrated the inability of small States anywhere to ensure their own security. They are feeling for a solution of this contradiction along two lines. In the first place, they hope by means of a developing mutual association to create a Middle Eastern bloc which will not be an entirely negligible factor in the international distribution of power. Secondly, the more far-sighted among their leaders hope that the Great Powers will not lend themselves to a process of diplomatic Balkanization, but will reach agreement on measures for the security of the region calculated to reduce friction between them to a minimum. This second hope is shared, from their different points of view, by the Persians and the Zionists.

Against this background, there would seem to be a good prospect for the maintenance of friendly relations between the British people and the peoples of the Middle East, and even for a growing intimacy in their various fields of contact. Much will depend on what happens in Palestine after the war. But if that nettle were once resolutely grasped, the basic interdependence of the interests of the British Empire and of the Middle East as a whole would make itself felt with growing effect, and the two partners would be drawn steadily together. The future is strewn with hazards, no doubt, but also it is rich in opportunities.

The CHAIRMAN : Mr. Beeley in his lecture certainly gave us a great deal to think about. I should now like to invite Members to express their views or ask any questions.

A MEMBER : About seven or eight years ago in Palestine there was a certain amount of disturbance from the Arabs. I gather that the disturbance now comes from the Jewish revolutionary movement. Can you tell us anything about that?

Mr. BEELEY : The reason, I think, why the disturbances now come from the Jewish rather than the Arab side is that the last statement of policy made by H.M. Government on the subject of Palestine—in May, 1939—

was regarded by the Arabs as fairly though not wholly satisfactory, and by the Jews as wholly unsatisfactory. They hope (when I say "they" I must explain a little further: the present disturbances in Palestine are the work not of the Jewish Agency but of small extremist bodies, the extreme nationalistic wing of the Zionists)—they hope to convince H.M. Government, by taking action of this kind, that unless they reverse their policy in Palestine they will be in for very serious trouble when the war ends.

A MEMBER: Do you consider, with regard to the action taken by the Iraqi army, that the responsibility is on the Iraqi army or on certain politicians who misled this army and are responsible for the action?

Mr. BEELEY: I think it will be impossible, until the history of these events is written, to assign responsibility among individuals. When I spoke of the army as attempting to become a political force in Iraq, I spoke, of course, of a part of the army's leadership only and not of the army in general. Certain ambitious generals or others in the higher ranks of the army had political ambitions and used the army, which tends to follow them, as an instrument of their purposes; whether those generals captured and made use of Rashid Ali and other politicians, or whether the politicians made use of the generals, is a question I would not like to try to answer on the evidence we now have.

Sir PERCY SYKES congratulated the lecturer. "As regards the countries I am particularly interested in, the outlook has changed enormously in various ways. For instance, the Qashgais, whose head man fought us so violently; I think the Shah put him out of the way, but his sons are now the chiefs, and entertained my son in most luxurious tents. The New Order in that way has certainly come. The very nice thing was that, though I had in the course of duty killed a considerable number of the troops, they showed my son the greatest friendship and expressed the opinion that they had not the least ill-will against me."

Admiral Sir HOWARD KELLY: I would like to second what Sir Percy Sykes has said about the interest of this lecture. It is particularly interesting to me as I have just come back from four years in that part of the world.

This question of the immense riches that have been acquired by these countries in the Middle East, and the immense amount of land put under cultivation, and the way that everybody could sell anything, it did not matter what—that is all very well as long as the war lasts; but the economic confusion out there will be desperate unless we can get some extraordinary programme of works to get rid of all these surpluses that they have acquired.

Another thing the lecturer said, which has always struck me very much, is the distance that separates the educated classes and the peasants in all those countries in the Middle East. The black-coated classes have absolutely no contact at all with the peasants in any of those countries. That is the foundation of the social revolution. It may come about gradually by a process of Acts of Parliament, but you cannot go on having this immense remoteness of the black-coated politicians, a great many of whom know nothing about the actual life of the peasants in the various parts of the country. That is another very great problem.

As regards Palestine, I think from what I have heard there in the last

month or so that we are in for a terrible time. No one can control these violent extremists.

A MEMBER: I gather that you rather deplore the fact that in the legislatures the senators and so on come almost exclusively from the landowning and the commercial classes. It is not very clear to me from what other classes they can come, conditions being such as they are. You may say that one could have senators and deputies from the professional classes. But the reputation of owning land is such that practically everyone wishes to be an owner of land, and you will find very often important professional men, such as would make good legislators, are in their spare time also landowners and interested in the working of land.

Therefore, if I take you correctly, that you deplore that landowners and commercial interests have the majority of seats in this Parliament, I should be glad to know from what other source you would replace them.

Mr. BEELEY: You have put your finger on an almost unanswerable question. It is fair, I think, to deplore a thing without necessarily suggesting any method of reforming it. The only thing I can think of as an immediate measure is the nomination in those countries which have senates (and the formation of senates for this purpose in those countries which have not) of a certain proportion of senators representing classes which do not come to the front by ordinary electoral processes. You might have a proportion of the senate in each country chosen from certain social groups, so that at any rate they can express their views and have some influence on the legislative process, even if the amount of power they thus acquire is not very great.

Education sufficiently widespread to create an effective check on the political power of the landowning class can only come as a result of a long process of social change.

A MEMBER: With regard to the flow of wealth into the pockets of shopkeepers, merchants and landowners, can you say whether or not that wealth has flowed on into the purchase of land by those classes, or has the money that has come into the pockets of other classes flowed into the purchase of land, so that there has come about a dispossession of small landowners?

Mr. BEELEY: I have no figures with which to supply a really accurate answer to that question. Increased wealth among any classes in Middle Eastern countries almost inevitably leads to an increase in the price of land, land being the most obvious form of investment. But although that has no doubt been going on, I am pretty sure it has not resulted in the expropriation of small landowners.

It is the landless peasant who has suffered from the rise in prices, but the small landed proprietor has, certainly in Palestine and Syria, been able to free himself from a large burden of debt as a result of his enrichment during the war and has probably acquired more land. There has not been a shift at all from large to small landowning as a result of this development.

Mr. MUSTAPHA WAHBA: How do you think the Zionists will view a future Arab union?

Mr. BEELEY: I do not know. The usual Zionist view, I think, on Arab union is that they welcome it so long as their own position within it or

alongside it is one which satisfies them. Their political aims remain the same whether the Arab countries are united or not, and they do not feel bound to oppose Arab union because of their own political aspirations.

MR. WAHBA : Would it, in your opinion, be possible to make an Arab union without the inclusion of Palestine?

MR. BEELEY : Yes. It would not be so satisfactory a union.

Captain SCHAEFFER : The lecturer referred to the importance of the impression gained in these countries as the result of contact with the different Allied armies. I have travelled in most of these countries, also in the interior, and came across people who were in contact with different Allied troops. The prestige of this great country in the Near East has had an enormous increase in the judgment of the people as a result of contact with British troops.

I also have seen the immense work done by the Middle East Supply Centre, and I must say that it is probably thanks to that organization that in some places at least starvation was prevented. The people there all agreed too that this organization was a success.

I think the lecturer said there is a danger that such a mechanism, once created and running, would be neglected after the war, and there would be again great disorder in economic affairs. That may be, but if these countries develop disinterested leaders and political figures the Supply Centre could continue and would then certainly be able to play in peace-time the rôle it has played during the war. It is to be hoped that they will introduce in time people from Syria, Palestine, Iraq and so on. To train them in responsibility would be a precaution against disorder after the war.

A MEMBER : I have just come from India, and one of the things in which we have been interested is the very genuine enthusiasm amongst the student class and other people for Communism. They are willing to work for it. I would like to ask the lecturer whether, as a result of the war, there is a corresponding enthusiasm for Communism among that particular class in the countries of which he has been speaking?

MR. BEELEY : Yes, undoubtedly there is an increase of what is called loosely Communism in parts of Syria and Lebanon. Perhaps in Lebanon you would expect it because you have a large and vigorous student intelligentsia there.

I think Communism is a rather inaccurate word for their aspirations. The programmes of these movements in black and white are very similar to the programmes of the older movements led by the older generation. The difference is rather one of mood. They pursue the same objectives in a more radical spirit, and there is a larger infusion of social reform into their basically nationalistic aims, but they call it Communism.

A MEMBER : In India it is Trade Unionism and Socialism rather than Communism.

A MEMBER : Would it be correct to say that the problems which the Russian Revolution solved are the problems which await solution in the East and Middle East?

MR. BEELEY : I think there is an analogy between the Russian situation before 1917 and the situation now presented in the Middle East. One must remember, in justice to the Russians, that Russia was at war in 1917,

and that the revolutionary process was very greatly complicated by that factor. We hope that these changes will take place in the Middle East during a period of international peace.

A MEMBER: I did not hear any mention of the attitude to events in India or in Turkey.

Mr. BEELEY: I am not competent to say anything about India. So far as Turkey is concerned, there was a great deal of suspicion of Turkey after the last war because the Turks had been the rulers of the Arab world, and there were anti-Turkish feelings left over from the years before 1918. There was a sort of spiritual isolation from Turkey as a result of that. The fear and suspicion of Turkey were revived in the Arab countries just before the present war by the transfer of sovereignty over Alexandretta and Antioch. But I think that is weakening to some extent now, and there has been a good deal of interest, in Iraq particularly, but I think elsewhere too, in the efforts made by Turkey to tackle her internal problems.

