PRESENTED TO THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY, SIMLA

BY

AND THE MIDDLE EAST

— BICKHAM SWEET-ESCOTT

Report of a lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society on **Wednesday, April 25, 1956,** Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt, G.B.E., K.C.B., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bickham Sweet-Escott, who has kindly come to talk to us this afternoon, is well known to many here for his talks on the radio. He was in the Middle East during the last war and has travelled there considerably since. Amongst his other qualifications and talents, he has produced a book on Greece which was published by and for Chatham House. Today Mr. Bickham Sweet-Escott is going to speak about "The West and the Middle East." Mr. Bickham Sweet-Escott.

FOR the first forty years or so of this century, Central Europe and the Balkans provided the great powers with the raw materials of their principal quarrels. It is beginning to look as if during the second half of the century the Middle East is going to take the place of the Balkans in this respect. One thing at least I am sure of is that the conflict between the interests of the great powers of the West and the interests of the local people in the Middle East is at least as complicated as it was in Central Europe between the wars. What I propose to try to do today, therefore, is to set out some of the more important interests and aims of the peoples concerned, and to show how they are related to the main issues involved. This will mean a number of glimpses of the obvious—perhaps even close-ups of the obvious—but I make no apology for that, because in a situation so confused as the situation in the Middle East is today, it is very easy to lose sight of the basic facts which must determine policy. It is just as well, therefore, to remind ourselves of them from time to time. I do not pretend that a survey of this sort will point the way to any solution of the difficulties which we have to face in the Middle East. On the contrary it is as well to remember that it is not a law of nature that there is a nice, neat little solution to all the problems with which man is faced. I think, however, that my survey will not have been a complete waste of your time —at least I hope not—if it reveals some of the directions in which no solution can be found.

I will begin with the objectives of the Western Powers in the Middle East. There are two points on which, I think, all members of the Western Alliance would be agreed, but that is just about all they are agreed upon. First, they would agree, I think, that it is essential to preserve peace in the Middle East and to prevent the Middle East from going the way of Czechoslovakia or China and disappearing behind the Iron Curtain. Secondly, they would agree that the West must, if possible, continue to have access to the oil of the Middle East, and to have access to it on present terms. That mysterious character Mr. Richard Strong reminded Sir Anthony Eden in the *Evening Standard* last night, and so I hope you will not mind my reminding you today, that seventy per cent. of the world's proved reserves of oil comes from the Middle East. What is more, three-quarters of the oil that we consume in Western Europe also comes from the

Middle East. In the case of the United Kingdom 83·6 per cent. of the oil we consumed last year came from the Middle East. If that oil were denied to Western Europe and it were possible to find a substitute for it elsewhere, which personally I doubt, one thing which is practically certain is that the new suppliers of Western Europe's oil would require Europe to pay for it in dollars. This would make nonsense of the efforts which Western Europe has made since the end of the war to produce equilibrium in its balance of payments and to save dollars. And even if the oil of the Middle East is not denied to the West, it is, for the same reason, essential, as I have said, that we should continue to get it on the present terms: that is to say, for payment in sterling. So far, I think, all the Western Powers are agreed, but it is at this point that the interests of the individual Powers in the Western Alliance begin to diverge.

Take our own position first. To start with, our scope for manœuvre is limited by a network of treaties and alliances. There is, first of all, the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 by which the Americans, the French and ourselves guarantee, if that is the right word, the present frontiers of Israel. Then there is the Agreement with Egypt whereby we may re-occupy the Canal Zone if Turkey or any of the Arab States are attacked. Under the Baghdad Pact we are allied to Iraq, Persia and Pakistan, and, of course, Turkey, with which all the other members of N.A.T.O. also are allies. We are still allied to Jordan and we are still paying her a large subsidy each year. We have a similar arangement with Libya; and in the Persian Gulf we are responsible for the foreign affairs and defence of the vastly important Sheikhdoms and Principalities of Kuwait, Bahrein, Muscat, Oman, and so on, Finally, we occupy bases in Aden and Cyprus. In most of these arrangements the emphasis is on defence and on the military action which would have to be taken in certain circumstances. All these arrangements are relics of an age in which we physically dominated the whole of the Middle East. But they are survivals which mark out the British interest in the area as different in kind from that of the rest of the Western Powers.

There is another survival from the recent age of British Imperialism which differentiates our interests in the area from those of the rest of the Western Powers. Quite apart from our enormous financial investment in oil, we still possess vast investments in the area—investments in static, immovable installations and industries—for instance, the Suez Canal Company, out of which Her Majesty's Government gets an annual tax-free revenue of £3 million. There are a few French banks in the area, and recently one or two of the American banks have opened in Cairo, Beirut and elsewhere, but by far the greater part of the foreign banks operating in the Middle East are British. In some of these territories it is still the case that the only banks are British. It is the same story with the insurance companies, with most of the airlines and with many other important industries. Then again, Jordan, Iraq and the Sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf are members of the sterling area and they keep their sterling reserves in London, so that we have a vested interest in seeing that they follow a sensible monetary policy. Finally, our trade with the Middle East is immense. Last year, some £200 million worth of British exports went to the Middle East,

which is rather more than the sterling value of all our exports that year to the United States. There can be little doubt that our economic interests in the Middle East are far and away greater than those of any other Power. So we have every interest in preserving the *status quo* in the area. This is exactly the result which the unique network of treaties and alliances by which we are bound is designed to produce.

The history of American interests in the Middle East is rather different. In fact, during the war I saw an American State paper which boasted that whereas the Arabs knew all about the material interests of the British in the Middle East, and were therefore always very suspicious of British policy, they recognized that the Americans had no such interests, and accepted American help in education, technical assistance, and so on, at its face value. It is true that American institutions such as the Roberts College in Istanbul or the famous university in Beirut have done a great deal in the past to induce the people of the Middle East to believe that the American interests there are purely philanthropic and humanitarian—and, of course, to put across the better aspects of the American way of life.

But there have been a great many changes in American interests in the area during the last ten years. There was, first of all, the establishment of the State of Israel, the driving force in which was supplied by Washington, just as the finance without which the new State would have collapsed was provided by New York. Although the Arabs blame the British as well as the Americans for Israel's existence, they are all of them aware of the way in which the Jewish voter in the United States can tie the hands of the State Department, particularly in an election year. The other thing which has changed the nature of America's interests in the Middle East during the past ten years is, of course, oil. American companies have long held an interest in the Iraq Petroleum Company and in the companies operating in the Kuwait and Bahrein oilfields, and more or less the same group of companies have for a number of years controlled the Aramco concern in Saudi Arabia. In fact, the only big new investment by the Americans in the oil of the Middle East recently has been in the company formed two years ago to operate the Persian fields. What has changed the nature of American oil interests is that the United States now has to import more oil than she exports. As the result there has been an immense increase in production by Aramco, and the Americans now find themselves under the necessity of appeasing—or, at any rate, not antagonizing—King Sa'ud and his family, at a time when the policy which the family are pursuing is contrary to Western interests. These difficulties in Saudi Arabia are aggravated by the leasing of the great air base of Dharhan, the nearest American military air base to Russian territory. The lease was signed during the honeymoon period of American relations with Saudi Arabia, and it expires in a few weeks' time. American policy is, therefore, paralyzed, at any rate at present, by the need to reconcile the irreconcilable: namely, to avoid antagonizing the Jewish voter at home and at the same time to keep King Sa'ud sweet. On top of this their relations with Saudi Arabia, which is bitterly opposed to the Baghdad Pact, have prevented the Americans —at any rate, until last week—from doing anything more than holding out a rather flabby hand of welcome to the Baghdad Pact.

Finally, there are two things which make it difficult for the Americans to give British policy in the Middle East any very substantial backing. One is the traditional American inhibition about colonialism, which is inevitably aroused by the action we feel ourselves bound to take from time to time, for instance in Cyprus or Jordan or Bahrein. The other is a feeling which seems to be growing in Washington that the British are not necessarily good people to back, because in spite of all the knowledge and experience that they have of the area, they do certainly seem to make from time to time some very remarkable mistakes—as, for example, over Jordan. For all these reasons a combination between British experience and American power has so far not been practical politics.

Besides ourselves and the Americans, a number of other members of the Western Alliance also have important interests in the Middle East. But the only other countries whose interests have any practical importance are France and Germany. The French have never forgotten the special position they have occupied since the Crusades in Syria and the Lebanon, and they have never forgiven the British for the part they think we played at the end of the last war in tearing these two countries away from them and establishing them as independent States. What is more, they seem to be afraid that behind the Baghdad Pact there lurks the danger that the British intend to further the realization of Greater Syria, the federation between Iraq, Jordan and the two Levant States which the French have fought for so long, and which, if brought into being, would be yet another blow to France's special position in the Levant.

That is one of the reasons why France has refused to have anything to do with the Baghdad Pact. Another reason is certainly the very understandable obsession of the French with the desperate situation with which they are faced in North Africa. Their troubles in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria have not been created by the Egyptians, but the Egyptians are certainly doing all they can to help the people of North Africa achieve their independence from the French. It could very well be that if the French were to upset the Egyptians by joining the Pact, the Egyptians would redouble their efforts against the French in North Africa. At the same time the French have, like ourselves, important static economic interests in the Middle East—in the Suez Canal, for instance, and, of course, in the Iraq Petroleum Company—but even these interests are completely overshadowed by their preoccupations in North Africa; and it is easy to understand why in Paris at the moment North Africa should come before the Middle East.

As for the Germans, there was a time towards the end of the Wafd regime in Egypt in 1951 when there were so many Germans in Cairo in the employ of the Egyptian Government that to some of us it seemed on the cards that the Germans might be able to establish themselves very shortly as the dominant Western power in Egypt, although there was no evidence that that was ever the policy of the German Government. In any case, the Egyptian revolution of 1952 put that out of the question. Since then, however, the Western Germans have captured a very large part of the trade of Egypt and of the rest of the area, and their engineers and contractors have been particularly active and exceedingly successful in the Middle East. It is significant that, during his recent visit to London, the

West German Minister of Economics, Dr. Erhard, expressed concern at the competition which the West is meeting from Russia and her satellites in practically every market of the Middle East. He even suggested that the West should consider seriously an international effort to outbid the Russians, but nothing more was heard of the suggestion. Apart from her commercial interests in the area, Western Germany has few if any static investments such as we or the French have. It is, however, important to remember that Germany has been one of the instruments for keeping the new State of Israel alive through the enormous volume of exports she is sending to Israel under her reparations agreement with that country.

Generally speaking, therefore, it would be fair to say that the West might be reasonably happy about its interests in the Middle East if the existing order of things in the Middle East were left as it is—or let us say as it was until a few months ago. Unfortunately, there are several important reasons why the Arabs are not satisfied with things as they are. The most important is, of course, Israel. The Israelis themselves having, in the teeth of all the probabilities, succeeded in establishing their bridgehead in the Middle East eight years ago, now have one concern and one concern only: that is, to hold on to the bridgehead, threatened as it is politically by the arms which the Russians are supplying to the Egyptians, and economically by the doubts as to how long American help will continue. All that the Israelis think about is how to stop the new State of Israel from going the way of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the twelfth century, the other bridgehead which the West once established in the Middle East. In other words, unlike the Arabs, the Israelis have a vested interest in the *status quo* and it is not surprising that one of the means they have canvassed—I will not say more than that—for preserving the *status quo* is the possibility that they might join another body which has an interest in the *status quo*—namely, the Commonwealth. Obviously, that is out of the question, for the time being, at any rate, because of the vital interest which the Commonwealth has and will continue to have in getting oil from the Arab countries. But the Israelis might be forgiven for thinking that if they cannot secure their position in that way, the only other feasible way of preserving it would be to start a preventive war before the odds against them get too heavy. On top of this, it must be remembered that there is an important group of Zionists who recognize that Israel's economy would collapse at once but for the help it gets from the West and that her only hope of survival lies in territorial expansion. As Sir Reader Bullard has recounted, when in the 1930s Dr. Weizmann was being criticized by some of his Zionist supporters for proposing to give away to Jordan rather more of Palestine than they thought was fair, he observed to them, "Well, it will not run away." In other words, it would still be there for the taking.

The Arabs, therefore, do have grounds for fearing that Israel might one day try to expand her territory at their expense. But to say that, conveys no idea whatsoever of the intensity of Arab feeling about Israel, and it is the one thing about which the Arabs are all agreed. In the West we often talk as though the problem of Israel consists of finding a method of arriving at an agreement between the Arabs and the Israelis about the frontiers or about the treatment of the refugees—in other words, of finding a com-

promise between the Arabs and the Israelis. To the Arabs the only problem is how and when Israel can be eliminated altogether. The question of a compromise is something they simply do not even begin to consider. In the West we tend to forget that for the last eight years every Arab State has behaved as though Israel did not exist. There has been a complete economic boycott of the country, and the state of war with Israel has been continuous ever since 1948. We are apt to forget also that Israel's Arab neighbours and Iraq harbour a million homeless refugees from Palestine, whose only hope in life is that one day they might be able to go back. Nearly half of them live in Jordan, and there can be no doubt that the reason for the recent upheavals in that country was largely that the Government of Jordan looked like doing something which was unpopular with the refugees. There is no doubt also that the refugees have been used quite heartlessly for political purposes by some of the countries which harbour them. They have, for instance, been discouraged from accepting resettlement, because if they did agree to resettlement schemes they might lose interest in the possibility of a return to Israel.

The truth is that the Arabs are so obsessed with their hatred of Israel that they are almost totally blind to anything else. And the determination to remove Israel from the map is the first and most important way in which the Arabs wish to change the *status quo*. The second arises from the nature of Arab nationalism. This has been given a tremendous impetus by the Bandoeng Conference last year between the Afro-Asian nations and the consequent promotion to dirty word status of expressions such as " colonialism," " imperialism," and so on. But Arab nationalism had its origins far back in the last century, and the feeling is all the bitterer now because of the frustrations the Arabs met with between the wars, when instead of obtaining the independence they thought they had been promised they found that all that had happened was that they had exchanged Ottoman domination for domination by the British or the French.

Since 1945, the complete withdrawal of the French and the gradual withdrawal of the British has given the nationalist movements a great deal more encouragement. Now that the British really are almost out of Egypt, the pressure to remove all that remains of foreign political influence is becoming exceedingly great, in Jordan, for instance, or in Aden, and possibly later on in Libya, or even in the Persian Gulf. This does not by any means necessarily mean that the Arab States wish to eradicate foreign economic interests. On the contrary, most of the Arab States seem to recognize that they will need foreign techniques and foreign finance for many years to come, although Syria for one has refused to accept Point Four aid from the Americans for fear that this might lead to American political influence. What it does mean is that any attempt by the West to exert control over policy—as, for instance, through the Arab Legion, or through a position such as the French occupy in Algeria—is bound to be bitterly resented and actively resisted. Here is a translation of a recent broadcast on the " Voice of the Arabs " transmission from Cairo:

> " We want for you life, life with us on an equal footing, without imperialism, exploitation or enslavement. Do you hear, O Britain—do

you hear our call to live? Only give up your imperialism, and we shall ensure for you your interests, your reputation and everything that is dear to you."

One thing which is often forgotten about the Arab nationalist movement is that the various Arab States which now exist have all been created in the last generation and there is, therefore, a great deal less loyalty to the State as such than there is to the idea of Arab unity. This feeling of unity among the Arabs is a very real thing and it transcends most, if not all, of the man-made artificial frontiers which the West has drawn across the map in that area. After all, these people have a great deal in common—in their language, their religion and their way of life—though it is true that their way of life is being rapidly distorted by the new wealth that oil is bringing. And it is important to remember that Cairo is in many ways the centre of the Arab world. Egyptian newspapers, Egyptian films and Egyptian radio transmissions get a wide dissemination throughout the area, which cannot be said of those of any other Arab country. One of the reasons why the Egyptians were so bitter about Nuri es-Said's decision to join the Baghdad Pact was that it constituted a real breach in this unity of the Arab world. At the same time, although Islam is one of the principal reasons for the strength of this feeling of unity among the Arabs, religious differences may well have contributed to the defection of Iraq, for, as you know, a large proportion of Iraqis follow the Shia persuasion, whereas in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, Sunnis predominate; and it is among the Sunnis that the Muslim Brotherhood has made its greatest progress. Although the Brotherhood has now been driven underground in Egypt and in other countries too, it has, potentially, immense political importance, for it is a revivalist movement like the Wahabi movement in the eighteenth century, and its adherents believe passionately in a return to the strict teaching of the Koran and the complete rejection of the Western way of life. So the strength of religious emotion tends to make the Arabs feel different from the West, sustains the feeling of Arab unity, and fortifies the objections of the Arabs to any kind of foreign political control.

The leaders of the Egyptian revolution are making the fullest use of all these feelings in their present attempt to create an Egyptian hegemony and to build up a kind of nationalist Arab Third Force in the area. Up to the present, their policy has been exceedingly successful throughout the Middle East, with the solitary exception of the Sudan. The Egyptians have broken the power of the British in Jordan, they have made it difficult for any other Arab country to join the Baghdad Pact and they are actively assaulting the British position in the Persian Gulf and Aden, which is evidently the reason for the latest move over the Yemen. They are carrying out a campaign of political warfare and subversion against the British in Tanganyika, Kenya, Zanzibar and Uganda, and it is worth noting that an Egyptian radio transmission is about to begin to Nigeria, if it has not already begun. In addition, they have given every possible support to the rebellion against the French in North Africa. The remarkable success which the Egyptians have achieved by this policy has for the moment

completely hypnotized the Arab world, and as a result the Egyptians are at present the main obstacle to Western plans in the Middle East.

But the Egyptians have had to pay a certain price for their success. One of the things which it has involved is the exploitation of old feuds which, so far from furthering the object of Arab unity, makes that object more difficult to attain. For instance, one of the methods they have used to keep Syria and the Lebanon out of the Baghdad Pact is to remind them of Iraq's ambition to achieve a greater Syria, and so they have set the Levant states against Iraq. The policy has meant also the exploitation of the traditional feud between the descendants of Ibn Saud and the Sherif of Mecca, whose family occupy the thrones of Iraq and Jordan. It has demanded the closest *entente* with Saudi Arabia, which is apparently acting as the paymaster to the bloc of powers which Egypt has built up for the costly campaign of political warfare and subversion that the policy requires. This also may lead to difficulties, for there is a contradiction in terms between the internal policies of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. After all, Colonel Nasser is engaged on a social revolution, and to my mind one of the most admirable things about the present regime there is its determination to improve the standard of living of the *fellahin*. The first act of Nasser's predecessor, Neguib, was to try to divide up some of the big estates, and the whole object of Colonel Nasser's cherished plan to realize the High Dam scheme at Aswan is to revolutionize Egypt's economic position. But a social revolution is the last thing which is in the minds of the rulers of Saudi Arabia, where social and economic conditions can be described only as feudal. The things which Colonel Nasser is out to destroy in Egypt are just the things which in Saudi Arabia it is the interest of the ruling classes to preserve. I find it difficult to believe that an alliance which is based on a union of opposites can have any lasting value—like the alliance between Hitler and the Russians in 1939.

Then again, the leaders of Egypt's revolution have certainly got big ideas about the future of Egypt and the part that their country is likely to play in the councils of the Middle East when foreign influences are finally withdrawn. Memories are short in the Middle East, but I do not think people have altogether forgotten the Empire which Mehemet Ali carved out for himself in the Middle East 140 years ago and they are therefore well aware that there can be such a thing as Egyptian imperialism. I see no reason why Egyptian imperialism should be any more popular in the Arab world than any other kind of imperialism, and the more successful Egypt's policy is, the greater will be the local opposition that it is likely to build up against itself, even among those who at the moment are Egypt's closest associates.

Above all, the policy has given the Russians their chance to intervene in the Middle East. All Oriental Powers dream of being able to play off one great Power against another and, sure enough, in this case the policy has paid at least one handsome dividend over the High Aswan Dam scheme, because I very much doubt whether the World Bank would have agreed with such alacrity to finance the scheme if the West had not been afraid that if they did not do it, Colonel Nasser would very soon find somebody else who would. Here, again, there may be serious difficulties

ahead if the policy of bringing the Russians into the Middle East is pursued much further. After all, there is a fundamental difference between the Moslem way of life and the Communist way of life—probably a greater difference than between the Moslem way of life and the Western way of life. For one thing, Islam is a religious movement and is based on spiritual values, whereas, if it is right to call Communism a religion at all, the Communist believes that all spiritual values are illusory. And the acceptance of Russian help requires the Egyptians and their friends to accept at its face value the Russian assertion that there are no strings attached to Russian help. It requires also an implicit belief that there is no such thing as Russian imperialism and that the Communist threat to the Middle East is simply a bogy invented by the West to frighten the Arabs into falling in with Western plans.

It is their freedom from illusions of this kind about the Russians that has brought the non-Arab Moslem countries of the Middle East together in the Baghdad Pact—together with Iraq, the only Arab country which is a member of it. The Turks have had a long history of resistance to Russian expansionism, and in any case they are members of N.A.T.O. The decision of Pakistan to join the Pact was no doubt reached on rather different grounds, for the deciding factor in this case was probably the sense of isolation that Pakistan felt through the Soviet penetration of Afghanistan on her western frontier, and on the eastern frontier the Soviet support for the Indian case over Kashmir. The Persians, like the Turks, have for centuries had to struggle for their existence against the Russians. All the same, the Persian decision to join the Pact meant the abandonment of Persia's traditional policy, which she has constantly pursued for the last 150 years, of not committing herself either to Russia or to any of the great Powers of the West. I think that the Egyptians and their friends would do well to reflect that Persia is the only country in the Middle East where people know from their own experience what a Russian occupation can be like, and that it was not until the Russians had shown their hand and made it clear through the Czech offer of arms to Egypt that they intended to intervene in the Middle East, that the Persian Government decided to come off the fence and join the Pact. It may be that the decision was forced on them by the British and the Americans and bore no relation to public opinion in the country, if it is right to speak of public opinion at all in Persia; but even if that is so, I can hardly believe that the Shah would have dared to join the Pact if the Russians had not first shown their hand.

The position of Iraq as a member of the Pact is particularly interesting. There is no doubt that to an important section of public opinion in Iraq the idea of Arab unity makes an immense appeal. Iraqis who think this way are convinced that the only thing which matters to a good Iraqi is Israel. They feel that their own Government has made a mistake in joining the Pact, and they sympathize with the view of the Egyptians that foreign political influence should be removed from the Middle East. If anybody is inclined to doubt the strength of this feeling, I would remind him of the fiasco of 1948, when the Iraqi Prime Minister came to London with an overwhelming vote of confidence in his favour and signed with

Mr. Bevin the famous Portsmouth Treaty, but found when he got back to Baghdad that anti-imperialist feeling in the country was still so strong that the Treaty could never be ratified. These feelings are being fomented by the immense effort being put out in Iraq by Saudi Arabia propaganda. When I was in Baghdad recently someone said to me that Iraq now has two sources of wealth—the royalties from the Iraq Petroleum Company and the Saudi Arabian gold which is spent in Iraq on subversion.

On the other hand, Iraq is the nearest to Russia of all the Arab States, and she has always been exceedingly sensitive to the possibility of Communist penetration. The present Government of Nuri Pasha—who, incidentally, is himself of Turkish origin—is evidently convinced that Iraq could not do without the West, even if this means, as it has meant, splitting the Arab League and destroying the unity of the Arab world. It is probably true that Nuri has been able to get away with this only because he knows how to govern. Indeed, I was told in Baghdad that Iraq can almost be classified as a police state, although that is almost certainly an exaggeration. But one cannot fool all the people all the time, even in Iraq, and there is certainly a good deal of support for Nuri. The trouble is that he admits to sixty-eight years of age, and what will happen when he goes is anyone's guess. There is an obvious risk that there might be a complete swing of the pendulum and that Iraq might once again declare herself against the West.

Whatever may happen to Iraq, the fact remains that today the Middle East can be divided into those to whom fear of Russia means something—namely, the members of the Baghdad Pact—and the Egyptian bloc. As for the Russians, anything that one says about their intentions is bound to have a very large element of guesswork in it, especially at a time like this, when Stalinism has been rejected and the policy of the Kremlin is obviously in the melting pot. All one can do is to look at the facts. It is, for instance, a fact of geography that the long frontier which Russia shares with Turkey and Persia could be the approach to the vital industrial centres she is building up in Central Asia, and that the Russians have every right to feel sensitive about that frontier. It is a fact of history that since the time of Peter the Great, Russia has had a warm water port on the Persian Gulf on her shopping list. It is unfortunately also a fact—indeed, it is a commonplace—that economic and social conditions in the Middle East are so desperate that the whole area is in what the Marxist textbooks call a pre-revolutionary state. It is equally undeniable that if one day the Russians were able to bring about a Communist revolution in the Middle East, it would not only provide Russia with a protective belt along that very important frontier and give her a position on the Persian Gulf, but the loss of Middle Eastern oil, which might be the consequence, would mean the economic collapse of this country, if not of the whole of Western Europe. Such a result could be brought about by subversion, and military action might not be necessary at all.

It is in the light of these facts that we have to judge the steps Russia has taken in the Middle East during the past year, namely, the sale of arms to the Arabs and the opening of a major economic offensive throughout the area. As for the arms deal, there is no doubt in my mind that it had two objects. One was to break the Baghdad Pact, which the Kremlin

thought was directed at the soft under-belly of Central Asia, and the method was simply to offer arms to the Arabs on condition that they did not join the Pact. The second was to force the West to recognize that Russia has the right to be consulted about the Middle East, and I should not be at all surprised to hear that if, as a result of the present negotiations in London, Russia is asked to join the great Powers of the West in a guarantee of peace in the Middle East, the supply of arms by Russia and her satellites to the Arabs had suddenly and mysteriously ceased. If so, it will certainly cause a good deal of disillusionment in the Arab world. But the process of agonizing reappraisal of Russian intentions by the Arabs has already begun, particularly in the reaction of the Egyptians to the Russian support for Mr. Hammarskjoeld's mission to the Middle East. In any case, I do not suppose that that would worry the Russians very much. It will certainly be uncomfortable for us to have to work with the Russians in the Middle East after the area has been so long a close preserve of the West. But it is difficult to challenge the right of the Russians to be in the Middle East, and in any case, it is now quite impossible to keep them out.

The economic offensive which the Russians and their satellites are waging in the Middle East is to my mind a much more serious matter. The method is to offer Russian aid by way of Russian economic and technical assistance and so on; and for the past six months hardly a day has passed without bringing news of yet another development in this direction. The economic interest which Russia has shown in this area is so sudden and so intensive that one is bound to conclude that behind it there is a carefully co-ordinated plan. And although it is the invariable refrain of the Kremlin that there are no strings attached to Russian aid, there has been nothing to show that the ultimate object is not just as political as the similar economic offensive carried out by Dr. Schacht in South-East Europe between the wars—in other words, political domination through economic penetration. If that is so, the protection of Western interests has ceased to be a purely military problem. I am not saying that it is unnecessary to consider military measures to protect Western interests in the Middle East—far from it. What I am saying is that military measures may not be enough.

Faced with this challenge, the West has shown a singular lack of unity about the Middle East. We in this country lack the power to act, and for the present the Americans, who have the power, are paralyzed. It was stated in the House of Commons only a few weeks ago that the two cornerstones of British policy in the Middle East were the Tripartite Agreement of 1950 and the Baghdad Pact. The Tripartite Agreement seems to have been flung in the waste-paper basket by the decision of the Americans and the Russians to try to settle the question of Israel through the United Nations; and for months the Americans have refused to join the Baghdad Pact, although they gave it all their support in its early days. Their decision to join the Economic Committee and the other Committees last week is certainly an encouraging sign, particularly because it will provide an answer to the critics of the Pact, who from the start have complained that the Pact was merely a militaristic anachronism and was a proof that the West was thinking in military terms only. But the difference between the

British and the American view of the Pact has persisted for so long that the rift between our two points of view is plain for everybody in the Middle East to see. The net result is that although the Arabs constantly talk of Western policy in the Middle East as though it were a common policy, the only thing that seems to be common about it at present is an agreement to differ in public on nearly all the major issues.

But the importance of the Middle East to the West is so enormous that somehow or other the West will have to agree among themselves about it. It is not for me to say how this is to be done. All I can say is that any Western policy for the Middle East will have to satisfy one or two elementary requirements. One is that it will have to be a policy on which all the Western Powers are agreed, because faced as we are with the Russian challenge we are none of us strong enough individually to go it alone. Another is that we shall have to face the problem of Israel, instead of trying to ignore it, as I think some of us did during last year's orgy of pact building. Yet another is that we must realize that the defence of Western interests in the Middle East is not exclusively or even mainly a military problem. On the contrary, the more we talk of military measures the more the West lays itself open to the charge of imperialist warmongering. Finally, the Russians have told us that in the Middle East and in all the other uncommitted parts of the world they intend to proceed by the process of competitive co-existence. If competitive co-existence means anything, it surely means that the West will have to *compete* with the Russians—that the West will have to make an immense effort to improve on the Russian offers of economic and technical assistance, so immense that it will have to be a co-ordinated effort on an international scale. For unless the West is able to show that it can compete with the Russian challenge, the future it faces in the Middle East is gloomy indeed.

WARIS AMEER ALI: Did I understand the Lecturer correctly to say that in his opinion the Russians had a right to be consulted about matters in the Middle East? If so, why?

Mr. SWEET-ESCOTT: I do not think that is quite what I said. What I meant to say was that the Russians are in the Middle East now and it is exceedingly difficult, when they say they must be consulted about the Middle East, to see why they should not be consulted. We have got to face the fact that they are there, whether we like it or not. It may not be a very agreeable thing to have to do, but the fact remains that they are there and we cannot turn them out.

AMEER ALI: Are they there except for an adequate supply of Czech arms, which I understand have also been supplied to Israel in the past?

Mr. SWEET-ESCOTT: They are getting in commercially in a very big way. As I said in my talk, hardly a day passes without some indication of yet another move by Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia or the Russians themselves offering contracts, loans or technical advice of one kind or another—for instance, the nuclear laboratory that the Russians are setting up in Cairo. A large part of the Egyptian cotton crop this year might have had to be carried over but for the fact that the Russians, the Czechs, the Hungarians and the Roumanians bought it at the Egyptian Govern-

ment's price. The curious result of that is that they have bought a great deal more than they need; and now, if a Central European wants to buy Egyptian cotton, he can buy it in Hamburg and Zurich for a good deal less than he would have had to pay for it if he had bought it direct from Egypt.

The CHAIRMAN: I am afraid our time has come to an end. We have had a most interesting and astonishingly clear analysis of this most important problem from our Lecturer, and on your behalf I would thank him very much indeed for all the trouble he has taken in preparing his talk and for coming and giving it to us in such a clear manner. Thank you very much.

April 25, 1956.