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SIMLA BRITAIN AND THE ARABS

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Anniversary Lecture delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Royal Central Asian Society on June 10, 1959, Sir Hugh Dow, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., in the chair.

BEFORE such an obviously extremely well-informed audience I do not propose to waste time by drawing your attention to the importance of the Arabs in the Middle East or to their past history. I plunge straight into the centre of my subject by saying that the suggestion which I wish to put before you is this: that the present situation in the Middle East cannot be rectified by force but can be rectified by ideas.

Prior to 1919 all the Arab countries, with the possible exception of Egypt, had been for more than four hundred years the most backward provinces of the Ottoman Empire. One could almost say that they were four hundred years behind the social development of Europe. Then, all of a sudden, during and after the First World War, Europe arrived in their midst, and we still have to remember what a tremendous impact that produced. Unfortunately, the number who witnessed it is growing less but it is, to a great extent, the key to what is happening today.

The Arabs were probably influenced at that time by two factors. Firstly, the sudden discovery that they were centuries behind other nations and, secondly, at the same time, with their establishment of Arab governments, the resurrection, the renaissance, the remembrance, which was diligently propagated, that at one time they themselves had been an imperial race. These two ideas together, the fact that the Arabs realized suddenly how far behind they were and at the same time that they once had been in the lead, started to produce the ferment. Unfortunately, we, the British, were the first to encourage this, and afterwards at the end of the First World War we, to some extent at least, disappointed their hopes. Those disappointments have never been allowed to rest, the grievance is actively nursed today. This is a factor also worth emphasizing. I do believe that in many ways the Arabs got a bad deal; but, after all, during the years which have elapsed since the First World War, the United Kingdom and many other countries have been virtually ruined by wars and all sorts of acts by other nations. But there is nothing to be gained by continuing to nurse one's grievances. However, that is what has happened out in the Arab countries. Since 1945 they have all been independent, but the grievance is still kept alive by the existence of Israel, and this is probably the principal factor which enables Arab countries today still to feel that they have been badly treated.

During the last seven or eight years all the more advanced Arab countries, by which I mean Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, have suffered some form or other of internal convulsion. Several have had com-

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plete revolutions; others have had civil wars, frequent seizures of power by their armies, strikes, riots, and every other form of disturbance one can think of. An interesting sidelight on this unending succession of disturbances is that they nearly all started off with a group of men in their 70's in power and they all finished off with a man of 40 in power. It is remarkable that thirty years should be dropped in that way in the age of the leaders. One expects a man of 70 to be succeeded by a man of 60, but on going over the names of those in power it will be found that in almost every case the man of 70 has been succeeded by a man of 40 years of age.

Thinking backwards we realize that a man aged 65 to 70 today is the youngest man who completed his education under the Ottoman régime. A man of 40 was only born in 1919. I associate this with the violent impact to which I have referred; the sudden arrival of Europe in the middle of these mediæval provinces produced an impact which naturally resulted in the fact that the men born and bred up after that were quite different to the men who had been born and bred up and completed their education before 1914. It was those who had been educated under the Ottoman régime who had been in the high seats of power up to the last six or seven years.

That is one way of looking upon this endless succession of violent convulsions as being the take-over by the young generation educated on European lines from the old men whose education had been completed before the irruption of Europe into the Arab countries, that is in Ottoman times.

Another factor which emphasizes this prominence of youth is that, since the Second World War especially, the northern Arab countries have made the most tremendous efforts to increase education. The speed with which they open new schools is quite surprising. They always start the right way by opening a new school before there are any teachers. Nevertheless, although in some cases the academic standards may not be very high, they have achieved an amazing success in teaching people to read and write. Millions and millions of Arabs whose fathers and ancestors were always illiterate can now read and write. Reading and writing may be called the portal to an interest in politics; or we can put it the other way and say reading makes people accessible to propaganda. If one could take a census of the number of people actively interested in politics in these Arab countries owing to the sudden rapid spread of literacy, it would probably be found that those in their 20's immensely exceed the number, let us say, who are in their 30's, but vastly exceed the number in their 40's, 50's or 60's. So we see both these factors going on together. As a result of these disturbances, groups of men all round about 40, some between 35 and 40 years of age, in all the key positions. One can almost say that in some of the Arab countries nearly every man over 40 has been thrown out; there is nobody in power of over 40, and at the same time the great majority of their supporters are in their 20's, these being the newly literate people who have grown up since the Second World War. To some extent the temperamental, emotional, excitable course of their politics can be attributed to this unbalance between the ages, the extreme youthfulness of everybody who is now in politics.

I believe that all the Arab countries, basically, wish to be neutral between the Western powers and the Iron Curtain countries. A point of interest is whether neutrality is possible from this point of view. These young Arabs seem to want two things which are not quite, though certainly to some extent, incompatible with one another. Firstly, they want complete independence; one might almost say 110 per cent. independence. Many of them claim that independence means complete freedom from all foreign influence. He would be a bold man who claimed we possessed that in Great Britain. Secondly, these young Arabs want at the same time immediate modernization. To modernize, industrialize and to get all the newest things is impossible for them without technical and financial assistance, yet they hesitate to accept technical or financial assistance lest they introduce foreign influence. So to some extent these two requirements appear to be incompatible with one another.

Extremely interesting developments took place during 1958. Until a year or two years ago nine young Arabs out of ten to whom one mentioned Russia would say "Oh, we don't worry about Russia at all. Russia is no danger to our countries. You see, the Russians are not imperialistic; they are not greedy; they are just philanthropic. The only menace to our independence comes from Britain and America." As a result, perhaps, of that almost universal belief amongst the young political people in a number of Arab countries the Communists made common cause with the Nationalists to resist the influence of the West. So successful were they that Western influence has vanished in many of the Arab countries. But what is interesting is that as the Western influence disappears the Russian influence comes in, and as the Western influence disappears and the Russian influence comes in so the Nationalists tend to part company with the Communists. If after all the definition of independence is complete freedom from all foreign influence, then it applies as much to the Russians as to the British or the Americans. Therefore there is liable to be an increasing breach between Nationalists and Communists who were formerly allies when the West was the enemy, but now that the West has disappeared their paths tend to separate. From our point of view the only unfortunate aspect of this situation is that we still remain enemies of both sides. Whether we shall continue to do so depends rather on ourselves.

An unfortunate aspect of the rise of these young men is that they all believe that we were supporting the former régimes. A short time ago I was giving a similar talk to this in an industrial city in the Midlands, and as I was leaving an Iraqi student accosted me and asked: "Why does Britain always support mediæval forms of government?" I said "I do not know, but do you think she really does?" He replied: "Of course she does. Now, take your case, you were in the Middle East for 36 years and you were always opposed to revolutions." To which I replied: "I was not particularly involved one way or the other," whereupon he said: "Please do not try to get out of it. Put it the other way: can you honestly say you ever started a revolution?"

Of course it was not so simple as these young men think. I imagine that what happened was that after the First World War these Arab countries were thrown open to Europe, and various governments, oil companies

or anything else, wanted to make treaties, commercial agreements or obtain concessions for oil. They obviously entered into such agreements with whatever government they found in power. I rather doubt that it was ever deliberately thought that we must keep this or that man in office, although that seems to be the universal belief amongst these younger men. The fact remains that when the young people were growing up they got this idea, and there is no doubt that Communists and other such like folk made hay while the sun shone. The general feeling was that the West only supports old-fashioned systems, and the Russians were ready to say: "We are the people who are progressive; we want to see you get on; we like young people; the West only likes old people." It is not really so simple as these young men think. Yet, as a matter of fact, there is a certain amount of truth in it. Almost everywhere in the Middle East the people over 40 years of age are pro-West; those in their 20's, until quite recently, have been mostly pro-Russian, and it seems to me that is because we failed ever to take any trouble with young people. There were our agreements with the governments in office; they were perfectly legal governments; we were not supporting them by armed Forces or anything of that nature. Having entered into the agreements we just sat back.

I remember that in 1953 when the Communists started to try to get into Jordan the instructions they gave to Party members were that they should only concentrate on the young, and have nothing to do with the old people who were in office at the time. All their efforts were devoted to students, schoolmasters and young people. That lesson is as true today as it was in 1953. We still do not concentrate on young people.

Another revolution which has taken place since the Second World War is evidenced by the fact that international relations are no longer limited to the channels of diplomacy. Particularly the Russians very often neglect the governments of countries completely, and they direct all their efforts to the general public. This process of speaking to a whole nation instead of to its Minister for Foreign Affairs has never previously been possible in the history of the world. That is an interesting point to bear in mind. This is an entirely new field for which no precedents can be found in history. It has, of course, been made possible by the present ease of communications, but it has been particularly devastating in its results in Arab countries owing to that very phenomenon which I mentioned earlier, namely, the rapid spread of education. The spread of elementary education has produced millions of people who can now read and write, who are accessible to propaganda and to newspapers, who are extremely lively and intelligent, who are passionately anxious to catch up, but who have no experience of public affairs and really no conception of how the rest of the world lives or works. Such a population constitutes a fertile soil for any ideas which anybody likes to project at them. They are not sufficiently experienced to be able to differentiate the true from the false; in other words, they will swallow any story.

It is worth noticing also that when anyone wishes to place foreign affairs before such an audience it is no use producing statistics, and neither is it of any use to produce logical arguments; they are all much too dull.

Nobody wants to hear that kind of thing. If one wishes to get a policy across to a public of this kind it has to be emotional and not logical.

Many people in European countries misunderstand the Arab or Middle East dictator. Our own Press, perhaps, is rather given to treating dictators as ruthless tyrants ready to shoot all who hold a different opinion from their own. It seems to me much nearer the truth to say that an Arab dictator is somebody who has the technique for arousing and, we hope to some extent, swaying the emotions of his public. It is by working up their passions that the dictator rides on the crest of his wave.

It is interesting to try to look back 120 to 200 years in Europe when a similar stage was being passed through. Much of what we have read about the crowds in Baghdad reads rather like 1789 happenings in Paris. In both cases the crowd surged through the streets shouting for the enemies of the Republic to be executed. Very fine. In due course, according to the precedents, the crowd become slightly more experienced or perhaps somebody obtains a certain amount of control over it. It took the French 26 years to get round to bringing the Bourbons back, but the point here is that although the Bourbons returned, nothing was ever the same again. In other words, the suggestion I am putting forward is that at a certain stage a country which has always been autocratically ruled goes through a stage during which the public appears on the scene, and the public arrives on the scene as a result of just this process of hasty and elementary education thinly spread; the public bursts on the stage in this highly embarrassing manner, hanging people on lamp-posts and so on. The point is that once the public have come on to the stage they cannot be got off again. Whatever swings of the pendulum there may be, whether there is a Republic, an Emperor or a King, it is never the same again. Henceforward the public are on the stage and all that can be done is to hope that they will become better instructed. No one can push them off the stage again. I incline to think that something of this kind is happening in the Middle East, a new era similar to the new era which dawned on Europe in 1789. There is no use in hoping that there will be a return to the previous position.

The unfortunate part of what has happened from our point of view is its effect on the world situation. If the world situation were different we might say: "Well, all nations go through these stages; it is just too bad; they will have a rough time but perhaps in a number of years they will settle down to some new system which suits them." But I assume that the general situation now is that the West and the Russians are deadlocked in Europe. As they have weapons which can exterminate everybody, there does not seem to be much use in starting up a war. When any reasonable man comes up against an immovable object he does not run his head against it but goes round it. Or, to change the simile for my contemporaries, some remember, after the battles of the Marne and the Aisne, how we and the Germans both had our flanks in the air, and both raced to turn the other flank. Every day more men were being sent to the British left and more and more to the German right until eventually they got to the sea. An illustration of when deadlocked at one sector, all one can do is to go round. A study of the map shows that the way to

turn the deadlock in Europe is through the Middle East and Africa. So the coincidence that the Arabs are going through the stage at this moment unfortunately provides the Russians with an opportunity for turning our flank. They are succeeding in this because we and the Arabs are at loggerheads in our ideas. It is incredible to me that the majority or even a great number of Arabs can want to be Communists, but there is undoubtedly this profound misunderstanding between us and them. It is that which is offering the other side their opportunities.

It may be argued, perhaps with considerable plausibility, that all these people were much better off when the British were really in control. Certainly they were more secure than they seem to be now; but I think we are all agreed that it cannot be done any more. We are faced with two alternatives: either we must do it with force or else abandon force altogether; we have either to do it by force or, alternatively, by friendship. It is extremely difficult to combine the two. Once we apply force we sacrifice the friendship. But surely the worst of all possible worlds is to maintain an attitude of superiority, to continue to be condescending when one no longer has the force. In that way, surely, you lose everything. You no longer have the force to impose your ideas, although they may be very good ideas indeed. But if you continue to act in a supercilious manner you will be hated. It is not unlike the situation which often faces parents. Personally, I do not think we need apologize much for the past although we made terrible mistakes, mistakes now only too obvious. In the case of parents surely there is a stage at which force has to be used. One cannot philosophize with infants, but continuously parents have to be gradually relaxing authority until, in the end, they have to go over from authority to friendship. If parents try to assert authority when their children are grown up the result is usually unsuccessful. So it is only necessary, it seems to me, to make a small adjustment, to give up a superior manner, and yet it is an adjustment which is difficult to make because we are so used to another system.

I believe the key to this vital problem is just in a small change of approach. Firstly, it is essential to realize that in the Arab countries now the public is on the stage. Other people have realized that much more quickly than we have, and they have taken advantage of it and have won the most sweeping victories because they have appreciated early enough that they have to put over a popular appeal. It seems to me the first essential is to realize that this is happening.

Secondly, looking at the scene today it seems that the extraordinary successes achieved, basically, by the Russians, but also by the Egyptians and other people of the same kind, show that this is a new art, a new technique. There is some tremendous power here. It is possible to raise a whole nation into a frenzy of excitement. How is it done? All action is based originally on research, and yet again and again one seems to see examples which show that we have not a clue to what it is all about. Should not we start by research? It is a technique of mass psychology and of manoeuvring. It seems absolutely vital that some of the best brains in this country should be turned on to finding out about all this: how countries, even continents, can be swept off their feet in this extraordinary

manner. There is obviously a general technique which is applicable to everybody. It could be done to us just as well.

If some power were in the position to do what can be done in the Arab countries through the Press, through books, through broadcasting or whatever else, if something such as that could be turned on to us, the human mind could not resist it. There is nobody in this country at the moment in the position which enables them to wield the necessary tools, but I believe if this can be done to any race it cannot be resisted by the human mind. So there is no use our blaming the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Iraqis, or whoever else it may be. Forces have been brought to bear on them which cannot be resisted, psychological mental pressure. Others have learned how to use these tools; we have not. That is why it seems to me so essential that we should start finding out how it is done.

Although it was neglected until a few years ago, to some extent the power of broadcasting has now been discussed or, we may say, to a slight extent appreciated—I am not saying that any action has been taken—and one does see reference to it. And so I draw your attention to something else. Anybody who has been in an Arab country while a broadcasting campaign has been carried on, appreciates what a tremendous power it has. I myself, and probably many here, can remember instances of its power, when owing to just one single broadcast one evening from a different country, one woke up the next morning to find all the shops shut and the people throwing stones in the streets. This, again, is something we never seem to investigate scientifically. I do not know how long the effect lasts. After all, broadcasting is words on the air. They may put people into a frenzy over-night, but a fortnight later, a month or three months later, how much of what has been said on the air is remembered? I should have thought that was one of the things we should be investigating.

Then there is the power of the printed word, firstly, in the form of newspapers and, secondly, in the form of books. Newspapers to some extent have a short-term power like broadcasting. The effect of books is far more difficult to estimate. Unfortunately, Arabs read very few books. The literate Arabs read half-a-dozen newspapers, and when you visit their houses you hardly ever see a shelf with books. Yet a book, in a sense, has a potentially far greater long-term effect. People throw newspapers away every day. Those who buy books usually keep them. A book can be read again, perhaps the family read it, or the sons do, and it is lent to friends.

I was interested recently—this may sound a different department—to find what seemed to be a similar case. Nearly 150 or 160 years ago something similar to that which has taken place in the Arab countries was happening in Britain. Large numbers of people were learning to read, and at that time, apparently, a whole class of people grew up who printed nasty little books, chiefly on highly immoral subjects, which they took from door to door. They hawked them round and sold them for one penny or twopence each. This new business came about as a result of the creation of this vast new class of hitherto uneducated people who had just been taught to read. In so far as this new aspect of the matter is concerned, the damage that was thought to be going on here was moral rather than political. Little books containing dirty stories were being sold at

every cottage door. In order to combat that a voluntary society was formed called the Religious Tract Society, which printed nice books and hawked them from door to door.

What is interesting in this regard is the point we never seem to get. Not only in the Arab countries but perhaps more in colonies, we teach the people to read and write; and that's that. We pass on to something else without appreciating that as soon as a man is taught to read there are opened up to him vast new worlds, worlds which may lead him to religion or to atheism, may teach him statesmanship or communism. It is not possible to control what that chap is going to read once he has been taught. A system usually followed seems to be that we teach people to read and the Communists supply the literature.

Does not it seem extraordinary that nobody seems to have thought of this although in past history in all other countries the same process has constantly been repeated? As soon as there happens to be a really wide spread of education, then it is the immoral, the nasty, people who produce the reading matter. I should have thought it would be well worth while not only to subsidize books in Arabic or other local languages but even to employ authors to produce the kind of books needed, and they need not necessarily be a medium of British propaganda, they might be novels. Surely it is necessary to make available to this new vast reading public something which is not Communist propaganda or low journalism? Nevertheless, those are, roughly speaking, the only two forms of literature available to these millions who are learning to read.

One word in conclusion. It always seems to me rather curious that the Western powers when they approach these people never seem to mention the future. Communists, of course, do talk about the future. The story they produce about the world they are going to make may not be very attractive to us. But there it is. They are promising a better world. I do not think we ever speak of the future at all. We seem to live only day-to-day. In fact, I do not think it much of an exaggeration to say that the impact we produce on the Arabs is that we want to safeguard our oil, or this or that. That may be fair enough. But it is not a very inspiring approach from the point of view of the other people. It does not make them terribly enthusiastic when we write a note saying: "Please notice we have the right" to do this, that or the other. To a great extent this happens just because we have not thought about the problem. Surely we are working for a far better approach, a far better future than the Communists? We are actually doing something about it. Unfortunately, we never draw attention to what we are doing.

I should like to see us producing a little picture of the world we think we would like to see. Fifty years hence if you like, twenty-five years hence, what is it going to be like? What do we want it to be like? I assume the first thing you will have to say is that it is going to be an equalitarian world. As I have said, the public are on the stage, and you cannot get away with one lot being superior to another lot. So that must be the first basis.

It always seems to me remarkable that when we do wish to recommend ourselves to the Arab people we tell them that we have a higher

standard of living than they have. Also not very inspiring from their point of view. Sometimes we even suggest that if they work with us they will get a higher standard of living. But is not that extremely mistaken psychology? I can remember the days when it used to be said: "Oh, you will never have any trouble with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. The Persians need money; they cannot make any trouble." But they did.

These are all profoundly emotional questions; tremendously emotional. When people are worked up they could not care less about money or material benefits. For that matter, no one in life is really stirred up by material advantages. It is only much deeper human passions which arouse people, and all those passions have been worked up against us.

Only two days ago I read in one of the leading British newspapers that in the Middle East force is no longer applicable; there was something about propaganda, but that in itself was said to be passing. What is important now, the paper said, is the commercial aspect. As to that I could not differ more completely. In fact, it is exactly the other way round. Because the emotions of these people are aroused they attempt to bring in the Russians on a commercial basis. But it is the emotional side which is the key, not the material and the commercial sides. Therefore I feel sure that we must make an appeal to these people by telling them what we are trying to do. I do not think I ever met an Arab who had any conception that the British Commonwealth was working for equality of races, for a Commonwealth of Nations, objects which after all started being talked about in Britain one hundred years ago. The Arabs have never heard about our efforts. Their belief is that Britain hangs on to everybody, but is now being thrown out.

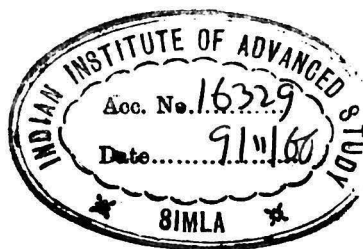
Surely we could present a picture of this equalitarian world which we are actually making, something sufficiently idealistic to arouse the emotions of the Arab people, but not so idealistic that it does not seem as if it could be carried out. There is tremendous evidence to prove what has been said. Although we are extremely philanthropic, with the best of intentions and so on, we still tend to help these people as though they were poor relations and we are being rather charitable. I do not believe that friendship can be based on one wealthy side which gives and the other side which receives. Friendship can only be based on an equal partnership, working for a common ideal.

If you put across your picture of the world you want, one should then go so far as to say to the Arabs: "These ideals cannot be realized without your help." I think you will appreciate what I mean by that. Until they feel that they are playing a useful part, the thing is of no interest to them. One cannot feel enthusiastic about receiving charity; but if there is a feeling of being wanted, then one gets down to it.

And so, briefly, what I find frustrating is not that we made a mistake, that we have supported the wrong man. Everybody accosts me here with questions about minor tactics: Ought we to have supported Nasser? Should we have helped King Hussein? What are we to say now to Kessim? This is day-to-day tactics. I do not believe that is of vital importance. What you want is only a minor but vital change in your psychological approach. If only we could bring that off I believe we could again

win the friendship of the Arab people and that we and they really could once again work happily and enthusiastically together to bring about this ideal world, not only a world with a higher standard of living but a more secure world, which is, after all, what we and they so urgently need.

The CHAIRMAN: It only now remains for me to thank, on your behalf, ladies and gentlemen, Sir John Glubb for what has been a most stimulating talk. In any case, it seems it is not the kind of talk which lends itself readily either to asking short questions, still less of giving short answers. The lecture will, through the Society's *Journal*, be read by a wider public than represented here. If I might venture a personal hope, it is that it will be studied by the pundits of the British Council.



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