

# MIDDLE EAST POWDER KEG

By K. SEREZHIN

Moscow (by cable).

SINCE the end of the war efforts of the Arabs to release their countries from a state of dependence, and to put an end to various imperialist maneuvers that have impaired their national sovereignty and retarded their economic development, have taken definite form. They are expressed in the struggle for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt and for the revision of those treaties between Arab countries and foreign states which palpably curtail Arab independence. These efforts are also directed towards the abolition of the already compromised League of Nations mandatory system.

Changes brought about by the Second World War provided conditions necessary for the Arab countries to acquire national sovereignty. The war has left a deep mark on the Middle East and has given rise to considerable alterations in its international position and led to many important internal advances. Changes in the economy of the Arab countries have taken place, mutual relations have developed and more intimate political and economic bonds have been formed between them. The defeat of Germany and Italy resulted in a severe setback for local fascist agents and their efforts to use for their own ends the progressive strivings of the Arab peoples for independence and unity.

Important changes have also occurred in the relation of forces between the great powers that consider themselves interested in a solution of Middle East problems. Because of a number of circumstances, France was compelled to agree to a proclamation of independence for her mandated territories of Syria and Lebanon. On the other hand, the United States has become active in the Middle East and is displaying considerable interest in the economic penetration of Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. The conflict among the contradictory interests of powers that are jealously guarding their old positions in the Arab world, and the efforts of the Arabs to achieve at last the independence that the Allies promised them as long ago as 1918 have now led to tense political situations in the Middle East. They manifest themselves in the bloody clashes in Palestine, a number of incidents in the Levant, in the Cairo demonstrations and in numerous but still fruitless diplomatic negotiations concern-

ing the fate of a number of Arab countries in the Suez Canal zone and along the East Mediterranean littoral.

Today, as has been the case during the past few decades, Arabs in their struggle for independence turn to that Arab unity which played an effective role during the Moroccan war of liberation, the Syrian uprising in the twenties, and during the disturbances in Palestine in the twenties and thirties.

Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, the idea of Arab unity found expression in the diplomatic documents known as the Treaty of Arab Brotherhood and alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, to which Yemen later became a party. The treaty, concluded in Baghdad in April 1936, provided for the cooperation of its signatories in the fields of economy and culture and for the amicable settlement of differences that might arise and for mutual aid in case of aggression.

As foreign observers have noted, the idea and slogans of Arab unity have taken on new forms and new content under present-day conditions. The American quarterly *Foreign Affairs* has pointed out that the problem of Arab union, which has come to the forefront in the discussion of political perspectives for the whole Middle East and even for North Africa, becomes still more weighty when considered in light of its connection with problems of world import, notably maintenance of British imperial communications and American activity in Africa and Asia.

AMONG the various projects for the political unification of Arab countries that made their appearance while the Second World War was still in progress, the one which caused the greatest hubbub was the so-called "Greater Syria" plan, whose author was Nuri Said, the former Iraq prime minister. This was a plan to federate Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and part of Palestine in a "Greater Syria" to be known as the "inner circle" which would in turn be federated with Iraq, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, called the "outer circle." The project proposed the Emir Abdullah Ibn Hussein of the Hashimite dynasty and present ruler of Transjordan, as king of "Greater Syria." The Emir Abdullah is a close relative of King Feisal II of

Iraq. Presumably by ascending the throne of a "Greater Syria" in addition to that of Iraq, the Hashimite dynasty would assure its hegemony in the Arab world and, in view of its British orientation, bring the whole Arab federation, including Syria and Lebanon, under British control.

Nuri Said's plan naturally did not meet with the sympathies of Egypt or Saudi Arabia. But the most strenuous objections were raised in Syria and Lebanon. These two republics, which evinced the greatest desire for independence during the Second World War, do not want to relinquish their sovereignty or their republican form of government. The "Greater Syria" plan would convert these republics into provinces of the Hashimite monarchy and place them under foreign control. Not so long ago when the political intrigues connected with the "Greater Syria" plan again became more intense, Shukri Kouatly, the president of Syria, called this idea a purely imperialist project.

After the majority of the Arab states had expressed their positive rejection of Nuri Said's plan for Arab federation the initiative in the Pan-Arab movement went to Egypt. From August 1943, up to the convening of the Conference of Arab Foreign Ministers in February and March 1945, Egyptian diplomacy became particularly active, as a result of which agreement to form a League of Arab States was finally reached at the Pan-Arabian Congress held in March 1945. Some foreign observers at that time connected the comparatively speedy conclusion of the final stages of setting up the Arab League with conversations which President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill had at the beginning of 1945 in Cairo with Arab leaders, especially with Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia and King Farouk I of Egypt.

The pact of the League of Arab States—signed March 22, 1945 in Cairo by representatives of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Transjordan and later by Saudi Arabia and Yemen—came into force on May 10 of that year after the ratification by all the signatories. In December 1945, Palestine was admitted as a member of the League. According to the report of the Cairo pact, the League is a permanent regional organization of independent Arab states. It

aims at rapprochement between the Arab countries and the coordination of their political activities for the purpose of ensuring peace and security in the Middle East and protecting the sovereignty of the Arab peoples.

One cannot, however, close one's eyes to the fact that certain extraneous forces by no means interested in the protection of the sovereign rights of the Arab countries are inclined to give the activities of the Arab League an entirely different objective. They are certainly trying to influence the League in other directions. Bearing this in mind, com-

ment in the foreign press on the establishment and prospects of this regional federation is not devoid of interest: it reveals the efforts of certain circles to turn the Arab League into some sort of bloc or alliance which will not serve Arab interests in the least.

"The idea of Arab federation," wrote the Turkish newspaper *Aksam*, "is encouraged by Great Britain. The Arab League would be a strong weapon for the protection of imperial communications, and oil fields throughout the whole stretch of territory from Egypt to Basra [Iraq]."

The effort to give this interpretation to the idea of the Arab League is confirmed by recent reports that the League might possibly be extended to include the dependent Arab countries—the British protectorates of Muscat and Oman (in the eastern corner of Arabia), Kuwait (on the northwestern coast of the Persian Gulf), the Bahrein Islands (in the Persian Gulf), and others. Foreign reviewers stress the fact that such expansion should increase the influence of the League and of Arab politicians who are completely dependent on London.

There have been even more definite pronouncements concerning the role which certain foreign circles wish to allot the Arab League. In the Turkish press which only a year ago evinced but scant delight at the establishment of the League, voices have since been raised in favor of Arab-Turkish rapprochement. Furthermore, Ankara politicians have recently been making extraordinary efforts to include the Arab League in all kinds of combinations connected with the idea of an "Oriental Alliance." A Cairo correspondent of *France Presse* recently reported that reactionary circles cherish the thought of using this "Oriental Alliance" as a kind of buffer against the Soviet Union.

Naturally only practical activity of the Arab League can show to what extent it will justify its sponsors' hopes that it will be capable of uniting the Arab states in the interest of national emancipation and not for the purpose of serving the interests of outside foreign policy.

SINCE the League came into force, events of great moment have occurred in the Arab countries. Last May and June there was conflict between France on the one hand and Syria and Lebanon on the other in which Great Britain played a very active role. The conflict developed into armed encounter and threatened the sovereignty of the two young republics. The world then saw grave events in Palestine where literally on the morrow of war there began a bloody clash, which still continues, between the British colonial authorities and the population. The seriousness of the situation in Palestine is borne out by the constant increase in strength of the local British garrisons and naval forces. Lastly in Egypt and Iraq a mass movement has developed demanding the revision of treaties abridging the sovereignty of these countries and the withdrawal of British troops.

How did the League react to these events that are setting the whole Arab world in uproar? In June 1945, on the



Woodcut by Antonio Frasconi.

demand of the governments of Syria and Lebanon, which appealed to the Arab League for help, an extraordinary session of the Arab League Council was called "to study the resultant situation and adopt suitable measures," as the official communique said. The session was opened on June 4 and continued until June 11. It was then announced that the session was suspended but that members of the council intended to meet again in the near future. No other meetings took place, however, and all that became known was that the League council recommended that all Arab states "adopt necessary measures against French aggression." Some observers at that time explained the suspension of the League Council as due to British proposals to turn the question of Syria and Lebanon over to a commission of three powers—Great Britain, France, and the United States—against which the governments of Syria and Lebanon protested.

The situation in these two Levantine Republics has recently become still more tense after the conclusion of the Anglo-French agreement of December 13, 1945. As Faiz Al-Khoury, who heads the Syrian delegation to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, stated, Syria cannot understand "how this step can be held to be in line with the principles of security. The presence of foreign armed forces on Syrian and Lebanese soil does in fact, as judged by past experience, present serious danger to security. . . ."

The Palestine question was another test for the Arab League. In contradiction to the majority of the Arab states which have already been granted formal independence, Palestine is still mandated to Great Britain. The Palestine problem has become much more intricate because of the constant conflicts, fanned from without, between the Arab and Jewish populations.

Plans for creating a Zionist Jewish state in Palestine are supported by influential American circles. The publication of President Truman's message containing the proposal to transfer 100,000 Jews from Europe to Palestine and the subsequent British-American negotiations on this subject have added to the complexity of the Palestine problem. The British-American Committee on



**News item: Democratic vote declines in New York's 19th congressional district. Johannes Steel loses by small margin as ALP vote rises from eighteen to thirty-eight percent.**

Palestine Affairs which was set up undertook to solve the problem without the participation of those directly interested.

In connection with the formation of the British-American committee on this question, foreign press observers call attention to the fact that certain American and British circles are trying to link up the Palestine problem with the question of the fate of the Jewish population of Europe. By this, however, no actual provision is contemplated for the thousands of Jewish families who have suffered from the atrocities and persecution of the Hitlerites and who are trying to get their feet on solid ground. It is obvious that the creation of normal conditions for the life and future of the Jews of Europe does not depend on Palestine immigration quotas but on energetic measures for the complete eradication of fascism, racial fanaticism and its consequences, on real help for the Jewish people.

On the other hand it is pointed out that the acute stage the Palestine problem has now reached reflects sharply the conflicting interests of Great Britain and America in the Middle East. Bevin's announcement concerning the British-American compromise on the Palestine question and possible retention of present quotas for Jewish immigration while "the problem is being studied" is, in the opinion of the Cairo *Le Progres Egyptien*, a disappointment to Jews and Arabs alike. The situation in Palestine is still tense.

What has the Arab League done to face these events? A session of the League which took place in November and December of last year was devoted entirely to the Palestine problem. The League Council, however, was working at what was obviously reduced speed. Meetings to study the Palestine problem began October 31 but it was only in December that the council adopted the decision opposing the setting up of the British-American committee and announced the desire of all Arab peoples to see Palestine independent.

In the short period of its existence therefore the Arab League's activities have not yet produced any positive results from the standpoint of protecting the interests of the Arab countries. The intense political situation that is developing in the Arab East will undoubtedly in the near future show to what extent the League will be able to justify the hopes of those who want to see in it the protagonist of the unity and independence of the Arab countries.

## Anthem for UNO

(To the tune of "America")

United Nations, we,  
Although uneasily  
We so declare.

Long may our World remain  
Bright Freedom's firm domain,  
Except, perhaps, in Spain,  
Since Franco's there.

Our pact we will not flout,  
Though some of us may doubt  
Its plans serene.  
"Let peoples rule!" we shout,  
Proclaim it all about,  
Although we must leave out  
The Argentine.

We, great democracies,  
We never will appease  
Despotic hands.  
Nor ever will we seize  
Lands o'er our boundaries,  
Except when Javanese  
Dispute said lands.

We share our peaceful beds  
With all, yes, even Reds  
(But not their views.)  
May Mankind's harried heads  
Partake that calm that sheds  
From every soul its dreads  
(Except for Jews.)

OSCAR B. ROGERS.

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