

The Fate of the Arab East

Mesamarat al-Gayb, 16 September 1945

People have no other topic of conversation, in these very days, but this council now meeting in London, composed of the foreign ministers of the five great powers — the very discussions of this same council feeding the wire services, the radio broadcasts, and the newspaper columns alike.

These same discussions naturally vary, differing not only according to the subjects this same council might take up, but differing too according to the varying perspectives the different nations themselves bring to each one of these same subjects.

It is enough to take a single example: this same council, among the matters it studies, studies the peace treaty meant to be imposed upon Italy — and it stands entirely clear the great powers' own views of this same treaty agree on one point, while diverging sharply on another. They agree that Italy, a defeated power, must be made to accept a peace reflecting her own defeat, and the Allies' own victory; agree, too, that Italy surrendered early, easing certain wartime matters for the Allies, assisting them somewhat toward victory, and so deserves some measure of leniency. Beyond this, though, they diverge sharply — a divergence rooted in the differing interests the Allies themselves are eager to secure, in Europe, in the Mediterranean, and in both the eastern and western halves of that same sea alike...

The United States of America, for instance, holds no territory in Europe, nor in Africa, nor in Asia, along the shores of the Mediterranean — and has, for that very reason, no genuine colonial interest, strictly speaking, to secure. What genuinely concerns her, rather, is that a just peace settle in these same countries, one steeped in democracy, of the American variety, not British socialism, nor Russian communism — a peace allowing Italy to recover some measure of her own strength before long, becoming a genuine source of balance in this same region; a peace, too, capable of assisting the spread of prosperity, the growth of trade, and the resumption of genuine exchange, between the New World, and this same part of the Old.

Russia, likewise, holds no possessions in these same countries — but she has allies, and supporters, whose own benefit from the peace treaty with Italy genuinely concerns her: wronged Yugoslavia must genuinely

secure some measure of fairness, at unjust Italy's own expense. Russia may well hold economic hopes, too, in this particular region of the earth — but she holds, above all else, political hopes, tied to her own long-standing dream of extending her own influence to the Mediterranean itself.

Up to this point, then, the United States and Russia might well count as elements of moderation, genuinely helping secure balance in the peace to be imposed upon Italy. I very nearly forgot China — her own presence at this same council, with respect to this Italian treaty, remains very nearly theoretical. Not so, though, when it comes to Great Britain and France: each holds genuinely significant interests in this same part of the world. France is Italy's own neighbour in Europe, Italy's own neighbour in Africa, Italy's own partner in the Mediterranean — and remains, beyond all of this, genuinely aggrieved, having never forgotten Mussolini's own betrayal of her, in June of 1940. As for Great Britain's own interests, and her own ambitions, in the western and eastern Mediterranean alike, they are far too obvious to require any real explanation.

And so each of these same five powers looks upon the peace with Italy through two lenses at once: one shared with her own fellow powers, the other genuinely her own, tied to whatever interests, and ambitions, she herself is eager to secure.

Nor is the matter confined to these same five great powers alone: other states, too, hold interests, ambitions, and hopes of their own, and look upon the Italian treaty exactly according to these same interests, ambitions, and hopes. Greece remains genuinely aggrieved with Italy, and demands the Dodecanese Islands; Turkey looks upon these same islands with a gaze full of real hope, one wishing to reveal itself, yet genuinely embarrassed to do so, since Turkey never actually joined the war until it had already ended. Yugoslavia remains genuinely aggrieved too, demanding a stretch of land long disputed between herself and Italy. Even Austria harbours her own ambitions, in the Tyrol. And should we leave all of these same nations aside, and turn instead to the Arab nations... we would find Egypt herself genuinely aggrieved with Italy, who seized part of her own territory in the past century, embittering the National Party's own existence — no one has forgotten the story of the Sanusi dependencies.

Egypt remains genuinely aggrieved, too, with the Italy that attacked her again in this same century, redrawing Libya's own borders at Egypt's own expense, with British assistance — seizing Jaghbub, and whatever came with it, under that same treaty His Excellency Sidqi Pasha concluded, a treaty both Egypt and Britain paid a genuinely dear price for, in this very war. Egypt remains genuinely aggrieved, finally, with the Italy that attacked her own soil in this most recent war, reaching, together with her own German allies, as far as El Alamein, striking, together with her own German allies, Egyptian cities, and Egyptian infrastructure.

All of this ought naturally to drive Egypt toward genuine attentiveness to the peace treaty meant to be imposed upon Italy — toward demanding the return of whatever land Italy carved away from her, in the past century, and in this one; toward demanding her own borders be secured, so she is never again exposed to Italian aggression; and toward demanding, beyond all of this, some measure of genuine latitude in her own practical freedom, within this neighbouring part of North Africa, and her own right to whatever reparations are imposed upon the Italians.

Egypt, in demanding all of this, commits no injustice, imposes no unreasonable burden — she never invited the Italians to carve away part of her own possessions in East Africa, nor to carve away Jaghbub, nor to attack her own soil, and strike her own cities and infrastructure. It remains among the very simplest of her own rights to demand the return of whatever was taken from her, to safeguard her own future, and secure for herself a reasonable measure of genuine security.

The genuinely amusing thing in this whole story is that the British themselves were the ones eager to appease Italy — the very ones who appeased Italy at Egypt's own expense, in the past century, and in this one — and the very ones who received, from Italy, exactly Sinimmar's own reward! It is only natural, then, that they should now exert every effort within their own power, to restore to their own friend and ally, Egypt, exactly what they took from her, and handed to their own enemy, Italy. The British, indeed, promised Egypt, during the last Wafd ministry, that they would exert every effort to secure Egypt's own participation in the peace conference, whenever matters concerning her were under discussion — promising her, too, that Britain would never enter into any negotiations touching Egyptian interests, without first consulting Egypt on the matter.

We do not know whether the British have honoured this same promise they made to themselves, or failed to honour it; nor do we know how far they have actually gone, or intend to go, in fulfilling it. Our own government has told us nothing whatsoever about any of this — though we do know the Egyptian government itself has already sent a memorandum to the council now meeting in London, setting out what it regards as Egypt's own view of the peace treaty with Italy. We do not know whether this same memorandum was the subject of genuine consultation between Egypt and her own ally, or whether Egypt sent it entirely on her own initiative, without any prior agreement with our own British friends.

What admits of no doubt whatsoever is that the Egyptian memorandum may well be drafted with genuine diplomatic skill, combining precision and moderation — yet it remains, in any case, genuinely lukewarm, reflecting neither real conviction in the justice of the cause, nor genuine eagerness to secure it, nor real insistence on achieving it. It may well be marked, besides, by a certain genuinely dangerous ambiguity: it may well be just, and right, to hold a referendum in Libya — but it is equally just, and right, that Egypt's own land, taken from her under the Sidqi Pasha treaty, be restored to her first, before any such referendum in Libya at all.

It may well be an established fact that Egypt and Great Britain currently share administration of the Sudan, as the memorandum itself states — but it remains an established Egyptian truth, one no Egyptian government ought ever to doubt, or ever expose to doubt, that the Sudan, whatever has been taken from it, and whatever might be restored to it, remains a genuine part of the homeland, falling under a single sovereignty that ought never to be divided: the sovereignty of the very people who inhabit the Nile Valley. The Egyptian government ought, then, to have demanded, first, the return of whatever was taken from Egypt in the past century, and in this one; second, measures to secure Egypt's own borders in North Africa and the east; third, Egypt's own guaranteed right to reparations — and only then, afterward, expressed her own view on Libya's own future, resting on a referendum. Though I myself remain genuinely doubtful of the real value of any referendum the British, currently settled in this same part of North Africa, might conduct — particularly given the very nature of Libyan territory, and the scattered condition of the people inhabiting it. A referendum might well prove feasible in the cities — but a referendum in the desert remains a

genuinely doubtful proposition.

This, then, is one picture of the Arab nations' own view of the treaty now being prepared in London, for imposition upon the Italians. But there remains something else, one we, in the Arab East, are very nearly overlooking, or neglecting entirely: the negotiations unfolding on the very margins of this same council, openly at times, discreetly at others, touching the Arab East's own interests very closely indeed. The French Foreign Minister does not spend his entire time in London merely studying the peace treaty with Italy — he studies other matters too, actually negotiating them with his own British colleague's own views, actually sounding out his own other colleagues' views on them as well. He studies the problem of western Germany; studies the problem of the Near East; studies the problem of the Far East; prepares the ground for agreement between Britain and France on these same problems; and prepares the ground, too, for concluding the Anglo-French alliance, whose own conclusion has already been delayed far longer than it ought to have been.

Nor are the British any less eager than the French to secure exactly this same agreement, and reach exactly this same alliance — and the Americans, too, genuinely hope this same effort succeeds, since it would protect Western Europe from communism, and secure capital sufficient influence in the Near East, and the Far East alike.

And if all of this is true — and it is, without any doubt, entirely true — then the very fate of the Near East is being decided right now, in London, with the matter meant to be settled there, while the Near East itself remains genuinely inattentive, distracted, preoccupied with trivial matters. General de Gaulle, in fact, set out the French own point of view in his own interview with *The Times*, earlier this very week, and both official and unofficial British circles welcomed this same point of view with genuine warmth, as the saying goes.

This same point of view is genuinely simple: precise, open cooperation, entirely free of any taint, between the British and the French, in everything touching the Near East. What this means, in genuinely plain language, is that France should retain her own influence, complete, within her own spheres of influence in the Mediterranean, that Great Britain should retain exactly the same, and that both alike should cooperate in preserving this same influence.

And so the French and British monopolize political and cultural influence in the Near East between themselves, perhaps permitting others some small measure of economic influence, or the very simplest cultural expansion.

And the strangest thing in all of this is that there exists an Arab League, established only this very year — a League the English themselves welcomed into being, one genuinely eager to secure complete independence for its own members — yet the English now seem to be forgetting it, bit by bit, in order to please France; while the French, for their part, mention it only with the very tips of their own tongues, shrugging their own shoulders, shaking their own heads. As for the League herself, she gazes at her own reflection in the mirror, genuinely pleased with her own existence, and her own goals — yet postpones actually achieving these same goals, until God alone wills it.

What proves genuinely most serious of all, in this whole matter, is that the great powers themselves never content themselves with merely gazing in the mirror, nor postpone achieving their own goals, and realizing their own hopes — they seize every opportunity, rather, and seize it well.

It seems to me the Arab League would do well by herself, and by her own members, were she to cast a genuinely thick veil between herself and the mirror, and look, instead, at the events unfolding around her, rather than at herself. There, she would see real scheming being plotted against her on every side, and see herself on the very verge of becoming entangled in snares laid out for her; and she would see, too, that the entirely natural result of prolonged gazing in the mirror, of endless talk about oneself, and the mere announcement of things that bring no genuine benefit, is exactly this: the tightening of foreign influence's own rings around the Arab East, rings from which escape may not be found; and the Palestinian cause itself falling victim to this same mirror-gazing, this same self-regarding talk, this same contentment with whatever empty words are published here and there.

There is nothing I wish for more genuinely than to see proven false those who have said the Arab League was never anything but a British deception, raised during the war, only to be entirely neglected, once peace arrived.

I genuinely hope those who say this are proven wrong — and proving them wrong remains genuinely easy, since it lies entirely within

the Arab League's own hands: simply to stop gazing so intently into the mirror, and to turn, instead, toward the Arab peoples themselves, far more than toward the European and American governments.