

The Problem of the East

Mesamarat al-Gayb, 14 October 1945

The gravely significant problem is not confined to Europe alone: the East, too, holds its own problems, no less significant, no less dangerous to international cooperation, than the problems of the West. There is no doubt that the new, genuinely, thoroughly complex life of Europe carries genuinely grave consequences for the future of international balance — but there is equally no doubt that the new life of the East is likewise genuinely, thoroughly complex, itself a source of difficulties that will keep Western statesmen awake at night, and cost them every variety of hardship. For the world's own life, as we have said more than once, has never rested, nor can it ever rest, on isolation and separation — it rests, rather, on the interconnection of interests, the exchange of benefits, the entanglement of every direction, however divergent, however varied. And should the world sense any weakness, or turmoil, or corruption of affairs in any single one of its own parts, this same thing will carry its own effect, strong or weak, across the whole of the world's own life.

The genuinely significant matter now is this: the relationship between East and West, in the modern age, once rested on the East being weak and stagnant, and the West being strong, shrewd, endlessly resourceful, skilled in exploitation, capable of achieving whatever it wished. But matters have been changing, bit by bit, ever since the past century, and this same change has grown ever stronger, ever faster, since the First World War, until it has now reached a degree of strength and speed admitting neither neglect nor indifference, one that must genuinely, fully be reckoned with. The affairs of the Ottoman state, with its own far-flung reaches across three ancient continents, once genuinely occupied Europe throughout the past century — this same East forming a single entity, represented by the Sublime Porte, with Europe agreeing and disagreeing among herself over her own ambitions and interests, and the policy that would yield these same interests, and secure those same ambitions, with respect to the "sick man," as they used to call the Ottoman state, in that same era.

After the First World War ended, though, that same sick entity, over which interests and ambitions might once have diverged, no longer remained — many new, rising entities emerged instead, striving, however heavily, to secure their own rights, and win their own independence. The

Turkish state herself, in the aftermath of the First World War, proved the most significant of these same entities, the most consequential of them all — confounding Europe's own expectations, proving to the West she could lose her own empire, and still live, nonetheless, a genuinely vigorous, thriving life, one commanding real respect, one genuinely accounted for in international politics.

She cast off the very burdens of her own sickness, freed herself of the weight of her own stagnation, and rose, after defeat, genuinely vigorous, genuinely proud — repelling the invader from her own soil, rejecting the Treaty of Sèvres, compelling the West to conclude the Treaty of Lausanne with her instead. Nor was it long before she demonstrated to the West that, having returned to her own borders, turned inward upon herself, and set her own affairs in order, she remained a genuine, active power in international balance — negotiating with Europe, in due course, over the Straits, and then finding herself courted for alliance, once the first signs of the Second World War appeared. And Turkey came to occupy, between Germany and her own enemies, that same well-known position, distinguished by genuine strength and resolve, as much as by genuine skill and cunning. The West had believed, most likely, that the empire Turkey abandoned would simply become plunder, divided among the victors — but events proved these same hopes false, these same expectations mistaken, demonstrating that this same empire had no wish to be plundered, nor divided, wishing, instead, to reclaim her own lost rights, and her own usurped independence. Everyone already knows how Egypt rose up, until she secured some part of her own right, and continues demanding whatever remains of that same right; how Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq followed exactly the same path; and how the Arabian Peninsula developed, until arriving at the very magnificent independence she now enjoys.

Then came the Second World War, and Europe found herself compelled, throughout this same war, to look upon this same East with a genuinely new gaze, entirely unlike her own former gaze — a gaze whose own substance was flattery, appeasement, and conciliation, and genuine excess in the giving of promises. It may well be true that Europe never genuinely mastered the study of Eastern peoples' own psychology, nor truly grasped their own realities — Europe imagined, throughout all her own relations with the East, that she could promise today, only to break that promise tomorrow; record something now, only to forget it before

long; reckoning the East would simply listen, and then forget whatever it heard, receive promises, and then set aside their own fulfilment. Even though the Arab East's own revolt, between the two wars, ought to have genuinely convinced Europe that the East grows serious exactly where the West grows careless, and that it never receives promises except while genuinely awaiting their fulfilment, genuinely resolved upon it — Europe still, to this very day, persists in exactly this same policy of promises given now, to be forgotten tomorrow, this same policy of relying on forgetfulness, and preoccupying herself with whatever events and trials happen to arise. And so she resolved, in this same war's own aftermath, to neglect whatever she had promised, while the fire of war still raged, filling the earth with sparks and flame — until the Arab East warned her that the age of this same neglect had already passed, come to its own end, and that the relationship between East and West must, from this point on, rest on seriousness admitting no play whatsoever. The Syrian and Lebanese problem stood as clear proof that the Arab East had already taken her own affairs firmly in hand, resolved that her own independence should never remain mere talk, nor her own rights a subject for manoeuvring, and evasion.

And so the Eastern problems have been set, precisely and correctly, in their own true place — whether Europe finds this genuinely satisfactory, or not, and whether Europe genuinely believes it, or not.

Europeans once looked upon the Arab League with a gaze full of genuine condescension, and full of real disdain, and dismissiveness. But events have already demonstrated, to those Europeans genuinely possessing insight, that Arab peoples neither toy, nor trifle, nor treat the League as a mere mirror, content merely to gaze into it — they treat it, rather, as an instrument for achieving genuine goals, and securing genuine rights. It may well be true that Arab governments have not genuinely valued the League to the same degree the peoples themselves have — but governments change, while peoples endure, and what admits of no doubt whatsoever is that the Arab peoples, for all their own diversity, for all the variety among their own classes, hold a genuinely deep conviction in their own right to independence, first, and their own duty toward cooperation, second — and will never rest easy, until they have compelled Europe, whether willingly or reluctantly, to acknowledge their own right to dignity, freedom, and independence.

I have no real doubt Europe will go on deceiving herself, for a longer or shorter time, and will go on deceiving the Eastern nations, for a longer

or shorter time too — but I have no doubt, either, that Europe will end up, willingly or reluctantly, confronting the actual, established facts, and genuinely accepting that deception can never substitute for what is right.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Europe holds real hopes, ambitions, and interests in the Arab East: the East is her own path toward her own various empires, and the East holds treasures Europe knows full well, and cannot possibly do without. Europe once held genuine authority over the East, one she cannot possibly relinquish easily, or lightly. But Europe will come to know full well — if she does not already know it — that achieving these same hopes, securing these same interests, and reaching these same empires, can all genuinely be attained through the path of goodwill, familiarity, and cooperation — and that all of it becomes genuinely, gravely endangered, should its achievement be sought instead through force, violence, and domination. And she will come to know — if she does not already know it — that there exist certain things people simply lose, and must console themselves for losing, since the very nature of things demands it, and that dominion is one such thing. Europe held dominion over the East for a time; the time has now come for that same dominion to pass away; it has already begun passing away, in fact, bit by bit; and it must, inevitably, end in complete disappearance. It would be far better for Europe, then, to greet the new world with new minds, and new hearts, and to build her own relationship with the East on genuine, sincere cooperation, resting on honest counsel, and good faith — not on deception, and hypocrisy.

This same cooperation is exactly what secures the routes of communication; exactly what makes possible the extraction of treasures, and their exploitation for the benefit of East and West alike; exactly what guarantees economic and cultural relations a genuinely steady growth, one leading, in the end, toward that very goal civilization itself has sought for so long: the goal of genuine equality in rights and duties, and genuine work toward continuous human progress.

Nor are the East's own problems confined to any single one of the great powers — they remain, rather, common to all the great powers alike, and to all the states of the East alike.

There are, then, problems between Russia and Turkey, and other problems between Russia and Iran. Great Britain and the United States of America hold their own respective views on these same problems — but what matters is never whose view, this power's or that one's, ultimately

prevails; what matters, rather, is that Turkey and Iran retain their own dignity, and their own rights, with respect to all these same powers alike, and for the benefit of the entire world besides.

The same might be said of the relations between the Arab nations and the great powers. Great Britain holds her own position with respect to Egypt and Iraq: an old occupation here, one that must end; an old mandate there, whose own traces must vanish entirely. France holds her own problem in Syria and Lebanon, one that must be resolved finally, decisively, admitting neither play, nor manoeuvring.

America, too, holds her own hopes, and her own economic interests, across all these same countries — and the realization of these same hopes and interests must rest, likewise, on goodwill, and respect, and genuine acknowledgment of equal rights.

Russia, too, casts her own occasional glances toward the Arab East, from time to time — and these same glances must remain genuinely clear, genuinely pure, entirely free of suspicion, and doubt. The great powers must genuinely understand they commit a gravely mistaken psychological error, should they believe themselves capable of continuing their own old rivalry over the lands of the East — the age of this same old rivalry has already come to its own end.

There remain two genuinely serious problems, one occupying the entire world right now, the other occupying it from time to time — both genuinely requiring a decisive resolution, one restoring matters to their own proper order, between East and West. The first of these two problems is the Palestinian problem, one very nearly occupying world opinion to the exclusion of everything else. What is genuinely strange about this same problem is that it stands entirely artificial, invented from nothing whatsoever, conjured up by the West out of pure fabrication, a direct result of exactly this same entanglement in promises given, without any real reckoning, throughout the war! The world lived, for centuries, with Palestine as a genuinely natural part of the Arab world, its own people living there exactly as they lived across every other Arab country, an entirely ordinary existence, free of any crookedness, or distortion. But the First World War invented this same new problem, entirely fabricated it, drawing from the very illusion of the devil this same idea, one sowing division, and corrupting relations between East and West most gravely. It is only right that those who invented this same problem should be the ones to resolve it, sparing the world, and sparing

themselves, its own burden — Palestine was, and remains, genuinely Arab; Palestine must remain Arab; must belong entirely to herself; must manage her own affairs exactly as she herself wishes, not as this or that country in Europe or America wishes for her.

This, and this alone, is exactly how this same problem must be resolved — indeed, this same problem ought simply to be abolished outright, since it remains a genuinely artificial problem, one arising from contrivance, and imposition, not from actual, established facts, nor from the natural order of things.

There does exist, upon this earth, a genuine Jewish problem, arising from the injustice, and oppression, of certain European countries — a genuinely European problem, then, one Europe herself must resolve, at her own expense, not at the expense of anyone else. Europe possesses vast colonies, and immense empires, genuinely capable of accommodating millions upon millions of Jews, without finding in it any real difficulty, or hardship — let Europe rely, then, upon these same colonies to resolve this same problem, since it was Europe herself who wronged the Jews, and drove them toward emigration, and Europe herself who has tested the whole world with this same complex problem, one she herself entirely fabricated.

The second problem, meanwhile, lies settled in North Africa: the Arab East, after all, does not end at Egypt — it extends all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. This is exactly how Europe herself viewed it, throughout the Middle Ages, and exactly how she viewed it in the modern era; exactly how we ourselves have viewed it, ever since the Arabs first settled in North Africa, toward the end of the first Islamic century, and exactly how we view it now. This same part of the Arab East now labours under exactly the same foreign domination we ourselves once laboured under; enjoys exactly the same taste of life, and activity, and the very sense of a genuine right to dignity, and independence, that we ourselves enjoy. We share fully in this same sentiment with her, demand for her exactly what we demand for ourselves, and believe the resolution of the East's own problems can never be complete, unless the problem of this same part of North Africa is resolved along with it. We believe, too, that the Arab League itself can never be complete, unless this same part of North Africa is genuinely represented within it. Should Europe genuinely counsel herself well, and counsel the East well too, it would be far better for her to view all of these same problems exactly as we ourselves view them, and confront them with exactly the same resolve we bring to them,

the same genuine wish to resolve them along these same lines of cooperation, and good faith, that we have already described. Europe may well deceive herself, and deceive others too — but she will be the very first to suffer for that same deception. It might well do Europe good to get ahead of these same hateful, abominable events, and hasten to settle matters between herself and the East on the basis of goodwill, and fraternity. Should Europe fail in this, though, it becomes our own genuine duty not to fail in it ourselves — to remember, always, that our own problems, however divergent, however varied, remain, in reality, a single problem — and that the affairs of the new world will never be set right, unless the Mediterranean's own southern shore is granted exactly the same independence its own northern, European shore alone now enjoys, an independence the African and Asian shore must come to enjoy as well.

And without exactly this same equality, matters between East and West will never be set right — especially now that it has become clear the age of domination, and subjugation, has already, long since, come to its own end, with respect to these same Arab countries.