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The Arab State of Mind

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THE RUDE dismissal of General Glubb by Jordan serves as a sign that the situation in the Middle East is a crisis for the West. The stalemate between Israel and the Arab countries is only one symptom of this crisis. The policy that inspired the British evacuation of Suez has failed. It has led to the steep decline of the position and prestige of the West in the Middle East. Britain has officially recognized this. Large sections of American public opinion and of the American press, including *Life*, are aware of it. Officially, Washington has still to admit it.

The American assumption, explicit since 1953, that the situation in the Middle East can be fundamentally accounted for by "colonialism" and the existence of Israel, or the posture it assumes, is perniciously superficial. The actions based upon it have had disastrous results. They have contributed to the breakdown of the British position. They have led to international anarchy on the part of Egypt and her Arab followers, confirming their suspicion that irresponsible opportunism pays. They have produced guerrilla warfare and made Israel the target for terrorism. They have cost us our capacity to maneuver to a degree that threatens our freedom and our honor. They have permitted Russia to become the sponsor of the Arab spirit and have led to misunderstanding between Britain and America as well as between Israel and America. They may have to be interpreted as the documentation for a policy of appeasement.

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At the heart of the crisis lies an Arab state of mind that has been fairly constant for more than a generation. Britain has always been aware of this Arab psychological problem and has been partly able to protect itself from it, though unable to make it contribute to constructive purposes. Mr. Dulles gives the impression of being ignorant of it or ignoring it. The bearing of Israel, sometimes called "rigid," shows that it understands the state of mind of its neighbors very well. Neither British power nor the crea-

tion of the state of Israel produced the basic problem in Arab psychology; they have only determined some of the forms of its expression, as have the policies of Mr. Dulles. General Glubb has recently spoken of "intransigence" as a constant in the Arab record; but this too is only one symptom pointing to a state of mind that reflects the long agonizing struggle of the Arab peoples for the possession of their own soul at the level of nationhood.

One of the more comprehensive and public exhibits of the seemingly endless series of cycles, major and minor, in which this struggle expresses itself is set in Iraq in the early thirties. In 1931 the kingdom of Iraq was a British mandate. Agitation was rife for the termination of this mandate. It expressed itself in strikes, boycotts, guerrilla action, and rallies with addresses that appealed to the "sympathy of the world." Iraqis, it was said, in all sincerity, wanted to get to work on their own problems: illiteracy, disease and hunger; but they could begin to do so only if they were given a free hand in their own affairs.

In 1932 Great Britain bowed to the demand. Iraq was admitted to the League of Nations and its internal affairs came into national hands; through a "treaty of alliance" the substance of foreign relations remained under British influence. There was high elation, a three-day celebration. A new era was announced in plans for education, health service and irrigation. But faced with the stubborn facts of actual conditions and dampened by an age-old lethargy, the spirit of resolution flickered badly. Excuses for delay and failure seemed necessary. They were provided not by a purifying self-appraisal nor by a realistic analysis of the difficulty of the task, but by the re-establishment of Britain as a scapegoat. It was hinted that the program was failing because the political freedom was still not complete. Then graft, corruption and venality grew, purpose waned, and the sullenness of agitation returned. But thoughtful Iraqis knew that, without valid excuse, they were walking away from an inescapable challenge.

The real tragedy of the situation was not just the failure of a socio-economic program but the inability of a nation to come into full possession of its own soul. The spirit that could pay the cost—industry, discipline, steady perseverance—for the realization of a sincere ideal was wanting. Thus the government did not achieve true legitimacy; and to this extent its policies and acts were evoked by an empty opportunism, unqualified by a truly national

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