
Arab Middle East *

Jewish Populations

IN the Arab countries of the Middle East—Aden, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, the United Arab Republic (UAR; Egypt and Syria, with Yemen loosely attached)—the Jewish communities, already extremely small at the beginning of the period under review (July 1, 1958, to June 30, 1959), continued to dwindle. In modern times Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan never had Jewish communities of any significant proportions. Where relatively large Jewish centers had existed—Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen, and to a lesser extent Aden, Lebanon, and Syria—major population changes had taken place before July 1958.

In Iraq a Jewish population of about 130,000 was reduced to perhaps 5,000 by a mass emigration, chiefly to Israel, in 1950-51. Yemenite Jews, who had been emigrating to Palestine since 1881, carried out a virtually total evacuation in 1949-50, when over 40,000 were flown to Israel. The Syrian Jewish community, which had been gradually declining for decades, dropped from approximately 30,000 to about 5,500 after the rise of Israel. A similar decline in Egypt, from perhaps 90,000 in 1947 to between 40,000 and 50,000 in 1956, was sharply accelerated after the Israeli attack on Sinai in 1956. The emigration which followed left behind approximately 15,000 Jews in Cairo and Alexandria. During those years Lebanon and Aden were transit areas for large numbers of Jewish émigrés from Syria and Yemen respectively, but by July 1958 the Jewish population had stabilized at between 6,000 to 6,500 in Lebanon and 800 in Aden.

Those Jews who had remained in the Arab countries were often the wealthy, who had most to lose by leaving, or the old, who were reluctant to leave a familiar environment, however harsh. Community functions, shrunken by the decline in numbers, were generally subject to stringent government control. Jewish economic activities were frequently hampered by policies of "Arabization." In the UAR especially, the government sometimes placed Moslem Arab supervisors in charge of enterprises owned by foreigners, Christians, or Jews, and required them to hire additional Moslem Arab employees. Jews, because of the conflict with Israel, were subject to especially close and suspicious supervision.

Pan-Arab Nationalism

The trend to pan-Arab nationalism, which reached its height when Egypt and Syria joined in the UAR on February 1, 1958, met strong opposition in

* For meaning of abbreviations, see p. 359.

some Arab countries during the year under review. Internal Arab conflicts were interwoven with the global rivalry of East and West. A realignment of forces was still in process in the summer of 1959.

Lebanon

In July 1958 the pan-Arab cause seemed about to celebrate a new triumph through the expansion of UAR President Gamal Abdul Nasser's sphere of influence into Lebanon, torn by civil war. The hard-pressed pro-Western government of President Camille Chamoun and Premier Sami as-Solh was being given little aid by either the Western governments or the UN. On July 4 the first report of the United Nations Observation Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL) declared that it had not been possible to detect evidence of large-scale infiltration of armed forces into Lebanon.

On July 14 Iraqi forces under the command of Brigadier General Abdul Karim Kassim and Colonel Abdul Salam Mohammed Aref, ordered to Baghdad in support of Chamoun, rebelled and overthrew the Iraqi monarchy. On the following day American troops were sent to Lebanon and on July 17 British forces were flown into Jordan, in response to the appeals of their governments.

The political consequences in Lebanon were inconclusive. On July 31 the Lebanese parliament chose General Fuad Chehab as a candidate acceptable to both sides to succeed President Chamoun when his term of office expired on September 28. By September 24 Rashid Karami, a leader of rebel forces, was announced as Chehab's proposed premier. This provoked armed opposition by the (Christian) Phalangist movement. On October 14 a compromise government headed by Karami but composed of a balanced group of pro-Western and pro-Nasser, Christian and Moslem, elements, was announced. Hostilities gradually came to an end, and American forces were withdrawn by the end of the month. On December 10 Karami announced that Lebanon no longer supported the Eisenhower Doctrine.

The political upheavals of 1958 did not pass without seriously unsettling the Jewish community in Lebanon. In June the rebel groups had threatened to blow up the Jewish quarter in Beirut, charging that ammunition was being stored in the synagogue (*London Jewish Chronicle*, June 27, 1958). In September Jews were arrested or kidnapped by Moslem extremists on several occasions. On November 7, 1958, the *Jewish Chronicle* reported that 500 Jews had emigrated to Latin American countries "in recent weeks" and 500 more had applied for admission to the United States.

Jordan

The Iraqi rebellion of July 14, 1958, marked the end of the Arab Union, formed five months earlier by the Hashemite kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan in opposition to Nasser's UAR. It seemed to many that Iraq would soon join Nasser's pan-Arab federation, and that British occupation was only a temporary barrier to the engulfment of Jordan. However, the outcome was a sharp setback to Nasser in both cases.

Egyptian pressure against Jordan was countered a few days before the Iraqi

revolt by the arrest of 60 Jordanian officers as alleged plotters against the regime. When the British paratroopers began to leave Jordan at the end of October, King Hussein felt sufficiently strong to cancel death sentences imposed upon rebels. On November 10 he departed by plane for a trip abroad, but it was cut short. Threatened—or allegedly threatened—by UAR aircraft over Syria, the young monarch returned to his capital of Amman, his prestige among his people strengthened by the apparent plot to kidnap or assassinate him. Martial law was lifted on December 1. In December, too, the situation seemed stable enough for the UN to withdraw its last observers from Lebanon and Jordan. On March 8, 1959, King Hussein departed for his postponed trip, during which he successfully negotiated in Washington and London for increased aid to his kingdom. He also visited Nationalist China, Italy and the Vatican, and Turkey.

Iraq

In Iraq the chief advocate of closer ties to the UAR was the Ba'ath party. (Adherents of this international pan-Arab socialist party had taken the initiative in bringing about the federation of Egypt and Syria on February 1, 1958, in part to prevent Communist domination of Syria. Subsequently Nasser banned all parties except the officially-sponsored mass movement.) In Iraq Ba'ath had support in the top echelon of the revolutionary command from Colonel (later Brigadier) Aref. The pro-Nasser pressure exerted by Aref and his partisans brought together in defensive alliance varied elements, including Communists, who opposed Iraq's absorption in the UAR. Kassim based himself upon this coalition and in a series of moves crushed the supporters of Nasserism in Iraq.

On September 12, 1958, Aref was deposed as deputy commander-in-chief of the Iraqi forces. At the month's end he was also relieved as deputy premier and minister of the interior, and was named ambassador to West Germany. On October 7 Kassim placed Aref under house arrest. On October 12 Aref finally departed for Europe. But he soon returned to Iraq, and was arrested on arriving at the Baghdad airport on November 4. Rioting took place in the streets of Baghdad at this time between supporters and opponents of union with the UAR, the latter showing a strong Communist influence. On December 8 the old extremist-nationalist leader, Rashid Ali al-Gailani, was arrested as the leader of a new plot; but on January 14, 1959, Kassim took measures to curb the growing Communist influence by ordering the police activities of the so-called People's Resistance Force to be restricted. In January both Aref and al-Gailani were condemned to death for treason in secret trials before a "people's court" headed by Kassim's fellow-traveling relative, Colonel Fadhil Abbas al-Mahdawi, but Kassim did not approve execution of their sentences. On February 7 Foreign Minister Abdul Jabbar Jomard and five other ministers resigned and were replaced by opponents of union with the UAR. A climactic effort by pro-Nasser elements was the uprising by army units under Colonel Abdul Wahab Shawaf, aided by Shammar tribesmen, in Mosul on March 8. Loyal army and air-force units, together with Kurdish tribesmen, repressed this rebellion and administered a decisive defeat to pro-Nasser forces in

Iraq. In Cairo and Damascus, as well as in Western capitals, these developments were interpreted as the beginnings of a Communist take-over. But in May Kassim issued a succession of statements in which he rejected Communist demands for official recognition as a distinct political party and specific representation in the cabinet.

The position of Iraq between the Eastern and Western blocs was marked by a "neutralism" as ambiguous in its intentions as that of Egypt in earlier periods. In July 1958 Iraq and the UAR alike suspected that the American-British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan was directed against the uprising in Baghdad. When Israel, after a short delay, granted permission for British flights over its territory to supply Jordan, the Egyptians and Iraqis were joined by the Soviet Union in condemning the alleged "Zionist-imperialist" plot against Arab nationalism. Communist delegations from the Soviet Union, China, East Germany, and the Soviet satellite states appeared in Baghdad, and treaties for trade, cultural exchange, and technical and military assistance were signed. As the Iraqi opposition to absorption in the UAR became clearer, Egypt, its own "neutralist" attachment to Moscow growing cooler, began in November and December 1958 to charge that the Communists were engaged in an antinationalist plot against Arab unity. Nevertheless, in November 1958 Nasser accepted Soviet assistance in carrying out the first stage of the Aswan dam, while Kassim did not let his "neutralism" or his new ties with the Eastern bloc prevent him from maintaining advantageous relations with the West. Throughout the period the Iraqis conducted negotiations with the Iraq Petroleum Company to keep Iraqi oil flowing to the West and to obtain the introduction of additional Iraqi personnel (reportedly enjoying Russian technical advice) into strategic positions in the company. On March 24, 1959, Iraq withdrew officially from the Baghdad Pact (see p. 104). On May 11 an agreement was announced by which Iraq was to receive new British equipment for its armed forces, in addition to the material being supplied by the Soviets.

SEQUESTRATION OF JEWISH PROPERTY

After the mass flight of the Jews in 1950-51, a law of March 22, 1951, provided that Jews who had left the country individually and on Iraqi passports (like those affected by the laws concerning the mass evacuation) were to be denationalized, and their property was to be sequestered, if they did not return to Iraq within two months after their names were posted by Iraqi diplomatic or consular service. On November 30, 1958, Radio Baghdad announced that on the following day Jewish property sequestered under this law would be auctioned off in the central market place of the city. In April 1959 it was reported that the government, with the aid of a citizens' committee of Shi'ite clerks, had begun checking the past transactions of firms, large and small, suspected of serving Jewish or Israeli interests.

UAR

The period under review saw a decided swing in the policy of the UAR against Communist influence in the Arab countries. Nasser also increased his efforts for a political and economic rapprochement with the Western

powers. At the same time he did not mean to abandon the advantages he gained from relations with the East. The cautious policies adopted toward the UAR by both Eastern and Western blocs made this policy feasible.

On July 17, 1958, after the American intervention in Lebanon, Nasser flew to Moscow. Cairo reports of his activities there stressed that he was urging Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev not to intervene with force in the dispute. Other interpretations would have it that the Soviet authorities were not interested in committing themselves further to aiding Egypt militarily—except through war-of-nerve tactics such as talk of sending “volunteers”—and that they had suggested economic aid as an alternative in order to sweeten the pill. At this time the UAR and the Russians both condemned the American and British interventions as a “Zionist-imperialist plot.”

United States Deputy Under Secretary of State Robert Murphy was very coolly received in Cairo on August 6, when he came to discuss the situation. (For U.S. aid to Egypt see p. 103.)

France and the UAR signed an agreement on August 13 settling financial claims against each other arising out of the Suez fighting of 1956. On August 30 President Nasser invited Premier Amintore Fanfani of Italy to make a state visit in Cairo. Through the mediatory efforts of President Eugene R. Black of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, an agreement on the settlement of claims arising out of the Suez campaign was finally signed by Great Britain and Egypt on February 28, 1959. In May 1959 discussions took place between Egypt and the International Bank on a possible loan for widening the Suez Canal.

By the end of 1958 the strain on UAR-Soviet relations caused by the events in Iraq had become acute. Nevertheless, the Soviet agreement to finance and execute the first stage of the Aswan dam was announced in October. In December Nasser accused Syrian Communists of plotting to break up the UAR and soon thereafter took measures to repress the Communists in Syria and Egypt. Yet on January 7, 1959, Premier Otto Grotewohl of East Germany, visiting Cairo at the same time as Premier Fanfani of Italy, announced an agreement to exchange consuls-general. In response to West German protests the Egyptians explained that what was contemplated was not the establishment of diplomatic relations, constituting recognition of East Germany, but only facilities for trade relations. The exchanges between the UAR and the Soviet Union grew sharper in tone. Khrushchev remonstrated against the persecution of Communists on January 27 and rebuked Nasser as a “hot-headed young man” on March 20, while Nasser charged Iraq and the Soviets with plotting against Arab unity. It was generally believed that the emigration of Rumanian Jews to Israel was suspended in March 1959 because of Arab League and UAR protests, among other reasons (see p. 275).

In the negotiations between the UAR and Western powers on financial claims arising from the Suez fighting and its aftermath, the claims of Jews were a source of recurrent difficulty. A UAR decree of April 8, 1958, provided that Jews within certain broad categories who had left Egypt should be inscribed on “the lists of persons to whom access [to the territory] is forbidden.” The French agreement of August 1958 provided that French citizens who wished to regain or liquidate assets released from sequestration by the UAR should be

readmitted to Egypt, but at the discretion of the Egyptian government. The press continued to report that such French Jews were normally not being readmitted. During his visit to Cairo in January 1959 Premier Fanfani obtained a similar agreement on behalf of Italian citizens. In reply to critics in Rome, it was stated that no discrimination against Jews was accepted by Italy in the agreement, and that among the first 20 Italian nationals to return to Egypt, three were Jews. However, on May 3, 1959, members of an Italian economic mission returning from Cairo said that they had asked the UAR government "to suspend the sale of property owned by Italian nationals, including several Jews" and cancel its sequestration, so that the owners could sell it or transfer it to Italy, in accordance with the agreement.

The Anglo-Egyptian settlement was long delayed by Egyptian demands for war damages and Britain's wish to establish a mission in Egypt to observe the execution of the agreement without implying resumption of diplomatic relations. When other details were worked out, it was disclosed on February 28, 1959, that the Egyptians had listed as agricultural land a large section of valuable suburban real estate near Alexandria, developed from a marsh by a British Jew, Joseph Smouha. The issue was resolved not by revising the evaluation but by an agreement that most of the land would be restored to its owner.

Other Arab Affairs

The division of Nile water for irrigation remained a source of friction between Egypt and the Sudan. The diversion of Nile water by Sudan was a theme of UAR agitation among Egyptian peasants, and in Sudan itself pro-Nasser elements sought a new government more amenable to Cairo. A military *coup* led by Lieutenant General Ibrahim Abboud on November 17, 1958, was generally understood as being intended to strengthen Sudanese independence. The military junta in Sudan faced internal difficulties from certain younger officers, widely regarded as pro-Communist. In June 1959 two of these officers, Brigadier Abdul Rahman Shennan, who had been made minister of local government, and Minister of Communications Mohieddin Ahmed Abdullah, were arrested by order of General Abboud.

Saudi Arabia, which in earlier years had played a leading role in the politics of the area, remained preoccupied with its fiscal difficulties. Attention was devoted chiefly to the problem of balancing the national budget, in large part given over to the maintenance of the royal kinsmen and retainers, and Saudi Arabia remained relatively inactive internationally. However, the policy of the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) of banning Jewish employees not only in Saudi Arabia but also in New York State became a public issue (see p. 106).

In July 1958 the dispute between Yemen and the British in Aden over the allegiance of the sheikhs on the borders of these two countries was acute. During the summer of 1958 one sheikh, the sultan of Lahej, attempted to organize his peers in opposition to the British, with the result that recognition of his rule was withdrawn by London and he fled to Cairo. There he consulted with Sheikh Abdullah as-Salim as-Sabah, ruler of oil-rich Kuwait, who had for

months been discussing a possible relationship of his country with the UAR. It had long been one of Egypt's dreams to combine the oil wealth of such countries as Kuwait with the control of all the lanes of Middle Eastern transport as political and economic levers for raising over-populated Egypt out of its extreme and seemingly hopeless poverty.

However, the Iraqi-Egyptian split and the shift in Egypt's position between East and West changed the picture. Whatever interest Kuwait may have had in a federal relation with the UAR dissipated, and in February 1959 pro-Nasser as well as pro-Kassim demonstrations were banned in Kuwait. In April an attempt to overthrow the government of Kuwait was reported by Cairo as Communist-inspired.

The unrest on the Yemen-Aden frontier continued through the summer and fall of 1958. In the beginning of November fighting in Aden itself left 5 dead and 18 wounded, and during the disturbances the Selim Jewish school, maintained by the Anglo-Jewish Association, was set afire. The elections of January 9, 1959, were boycotted by Arab labor and nationalist groups. On February 11 Britain joined six sheikhdoms on the Yemen-Aden borders in a Federation of Arab Emirates of the South, tied to Great Britain but promised ultimate independence. In May a Yemeni delegation was sent to Aden to negotiate a settlement of the outstanding disputes.

Arab League, United Nations, and Israel

The sharpening conflicts among the Arab countries had the paradoxical result of bringing back into prominence one symbol of Arab unity, the Arab League. But attempts to use the league to solve critical differences ended in failure. On the issues between the Arab states and Israel, such as the refugee problem, the Arabs remained uncompromising. The sharper the rivalry between opposing Arab countries, the more keenly they competed to appear most ardent in hostility to Israel; sometimes joint action against Israel could bring together Arab countries which refused to meet for a settlement of their own differences.

During the first week of June 1958 the Arab League met in an unsuccessful effort to settle the dispute between Lebanon and the UAR, then pending before the UN. After the Iraqi rebellion and the Anglo-American intervention in Jordan and Lebanon, an Arab-sponsored resolution passed the UN General Assembly unanimously, even Israel voting in favor, on August 21. It called on the Arab states—i.e., the Arab League—to settle their internal differences in a spirit of mutual respect in consultation with the UN secretary general. But the meetings of the league in September were marked by an acrimonious dispute between the UAR and a new member, Tunisia. This led to a walkout by the Egyptian delegate and Tunisian withdrawal from the league (see p. 316). At the same session the league voted to oppose the election of Charles Malik of Lebanon as president of the UN Assembly, and he was elected against its opposition. Later, in May 1959, he was violently attacked by Lebanese parliamentarians because he had been photographed drinking a good-will toast, in his official capacity, at the Israeli pavilion in the international exhibition at the New York Coliseum. (Malik said he had been tricked into visiting it.)

When Sudan, on March 24, 1959, asked that the Arab League council be convened to mediate between Iraq and Egypt, Iraq refused to attend the session, which took place in the first week of April. Iraq also boycotted an Arab oil conference in April. Inter-Arab polemics gave indirect evidence of the peculiar role of Israel as a deterrent to military adventures by one Arab regime against another. In the trial of Major General Ghazi Daghestani in Baghdad in August 1958, the accused and a former Jordanian officer, General Ali Abu Nuwar, testified that Hashemite plans to invade Syria or to move Iraqi troops across the Jordan were held back by fear of Israeli action against the Jordanian West Bank. A similar revelation was Nasser's charge, on March 22, 1959, that the Iraqis had refused to join him in a "decisive battle" against Israel in November-December 1958, when Arab radio services were raising an alarm over alleged Israeli plans of aggression.

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