

FROM THE ARABIC LANGUAGE PRESS:

An Arab Comments on the Kuwaiti Crisis

[This selection was kindly sent to us by the Arab brother who has been sending us these translations from time to time (see III/3 and V/3). Many thanks! What makes the article so interesting is that it is written by an Arab Muslim to Arab Muslims. The words between brackets are by the translator. Ed.]

"HISTORY DOES NOT STAND STILL NEITHER DOES IT GO BACKWARDS," by Bassem Al-Jisr. The following article appeared in the 21/9/1990 issue of the London-based Al-Hawadeth under the general title of "Afaaq" (i.e. Horizons)

IT IS HIGH TIME FOR US TO REALIZE THAT WE DO NOT LIVE ALONE IN THE WORLD --- AGAINST THE WORLD.

As we reflect on the Kuwaiti tragedy, no person, and especially no Arab, may neglect to take into account these two basic principles: the right of every people to decide their own destiny, and the duty to respect international law. Iraq "annexed" Kuwait by force of arms, and not through the consent of its people or a decision of its government. Furthermore, the invasion by one member of the United Nations of the territory of another member cannot in any way be accepted by the other members. Otherwise, the entire world would revert to the law of the jungle where the strong eat up the weak.

From this starting point of view, and regardless of the evolution of this regional and international crisis which has been brought about by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqi forces must leave Kuwait. It is also inevitable that the Kuwaiti regime returns to power.

It is both a great historical and political error to depict the present struggle as being between the Arab-Islamic peoples and the West, or to set forth the future of Kuwait on the basis of the way it was administered during the era of the Ottoman Empire. This is a very dangerous type of logic which would allow, should it be followed, many states in the world and in the Middle East the right to demand parts of neighboring states, which were throughout distant or recent history a part of its territory, or related to it politically or administratively or culturally. Furthermore, that a certain state has broken international law, which is incarnated in the United Nations, does not justify another state breaking it. One wrong act cannot be rectified by another, neither should one crime be punished by committing another.

Of course, there are unsettled problems between the Arab Nation and the great powers which have supported Israel and deprived the Palestinian people of their rights. But the best way to regain the Palestinian rights and erase the wrong is not to embark on a costly adventure which threatens Arab unity and cooperation, as well as international interests. This has led the international community to take a stand against an Arab state, and caused another Arab people to become

refugees. Furthermore, it has also deprived hundreds of thousands of Arab citizens of the living they were making in the Gulf area, making them poor and homeless. This will result in what is left of Arab oil wealth which God has given to the Arabs being wasted, and a rush to purchase weapons to be used, not against Israel but to enable some Arab states to defend themselves against other Arab states!

Today, the Arab peoples actually suffer from many political and economic problems as well as from international oppression. They are victims of inequalities such as in the areas of the distribution of riches and of responsibilities. But correcting such a situation or lifting up the Arab nation from its predicament does not permit one to turn things upside down, wage battles which appear already as failures, transgress international law, cause the whole world to take a stand against Arabs and Muslims, or wage one war after another which could have been avoided through negotiations and diplomatic solutions.

Had the United States of America and the Soviet Union, during their attempt to dominate the world or defend themselves against each other, embarked on a course similar to the one followed by the Iraqi regime, and used nuclear weapons against each other, no single human being would be alive today. When there was a military coup in Damascus against the Egyptian-Syrian union [in 1961], Gamal Abdul-Nasser had all the legal and international reasons to strike back at the coup, but he refused to do so. He realized that the Egyptian-Syrian union (which had been forced upon him [in 1958] by all the Syrian political parties [except the Communist Party]) was premature. He also refused to allow Arabs to shed Arab blood in order to realize the goal of one Arab nation [i.e. Arab unity from the Gulf to the Atlantic.]

Someone may say that what the Iraqi regime has done should force the world conscience and the West to confront the problems of the Arabs and of the Middle East, which they have long neglected. Others believe that force is the only language which the West and the world understands. Others are naive enough to imagine that if one Arab state controls the sources of oil it would force Europe and the United States to fall down on their knees and recognize the validity of the rights of the Arabs.

Such calculations are naive, wrong and dangerous. Even though Western states do not like war, nor do they want them, they would not stand idly by when their vital interests are being threatened. They would not accept a situation which jeopardizes their economic life, and ultimately their very existence. Furthermore, wars are not fought without fine calculations, taking into account the forces which would support the wars and those which would oppose them.

People in the West have begun to feel Israel's wrongs, and the legality of the rights of the Arabs, as well as the necessity of liberating the Arabs and other people of the South from their backwardness and debts. But the West would certainly not become more convinced or eager to see that right prevails for the under-developed peoples, should they find their vital interests threatened and their future challenged in the way the Iraqi regime has done.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has precipitated an ideological and political debate among Arab intellectuals living both in the West and in their own homelands. This debate centers on the attitude of the average Arab vis-a-vis a war or a battle between foreign troops and an Arab state. It is true that the contemporary Arab feels that he has a score to settle with the Western states that have supported Israel. It is equally true that there are certain political theories, with nationalistic, ideological, and religious presuppositions, which consider the West an enemy of Arabs and Muslims. They advocate a Jihad against the West and a revolutionary struggle as a way to regain rights and achieve liberation.

On the other hand, have not the Arabs paid dearly for such theories during the last forty years? Have not such attitudes led from one setback to another? Have not hundreds of billions of the riches of Arabs been wasted on wars not all of which were imposed upon them? Has not the struggle against Israel and imperialism been transformed into wars pitting Arabs against Arabs, and Arabs against Muslims? Have not these struggles paralyzed the Arab potential, and caused hundreds of thousands of the best trained Arabs to emigrate to other countries in search of an honorable living, freedom and creativity? Has not an advanced and beautiful country like Lebanon been destroyed by such political and ideological theories used by ambitious people eager to attain positions of leadership or maintain places of power? Have not such theories and slogans immobilized the League of Arab States and all other possible Arab cooperation?

It is high time that we Arabs understood that we do not live alone in this world or take on the whole world. What we have suffered from oppression cannot be overcome by making the whole world our enemy! We must not confront the vital interests of other peoples and states. If we desire to regain our rights and our past glories, we may not follow novel politics. We must not just walk the path anchored in the history of past glories, and ignore to take seriously our contemporary history. We may neither forget international law or the gains achieved by modern man in the areas of freedom and the right to choose one's own destiny.

History has not come to an end, but neither does it repeat itself and go backward. We Arabs have not yet reached two hundred million people. There are several other states which surpass us in number, power and potential. They have not set the world on fire trying to regain their rights and eliminate oppression.

It is high time that we begin to understand what has happened to us during the last fifty years. We have gone through many experiences and should have learned many lessons. This does not mean that we should no longer seek to achieve our rights. Neither does it mean that we should stop our struggles or surrender our ambitions to be at the forefront of the peoples of the world, as we used to be in the past. What it does mean is that we should start at the beginning. We should climb up the ladder of our awakening step by step. We must emphasize the right of every Arab for freedom, democracy and an honorable living within his own country. We must stand firm against Israel until its aggression is over or until its expansionist and colonialist ambitions have disappeared.

Our various attempts to take a great leap forward, to accelerate the pace of Arab unity and achieve equality among the citizens have led us from one debacle to another. If we continue to keep looking backward, we may still find ourselves confronting not just the West, but warring other Arabs as well.

Nobody wants a new Western occupation of Arab lands. We do not desire to see the Great Powers impose their will upon us and force us to serve their interests. But we do owe it to the world not to jeopardize its interests as we seek to gain our rights or defend our interests. We have more than one example of nations which have regained their position under the sun by behaving differently and taking a different route than the one we have taken. Let me simply mention Japan and Germany.

The departure of the Iraqi forces from Kuwait should not be considered an Iraqi defeat as much as an Arab victory. It is an important step which must be taken in order to convince the world that achieving Arab rights does not threaten the rights of the entire world. Eventually, this may lead to other Arabs regaining their own rights, especially the Palestinians.

Here begins the correct road. Otherwise we face a new adventure which may result in God only knows what other Arab debacles.

BOOK REVIEWS

Ed Challen. To Love A Muslim. London: Grace Publications, 1988, 143 pages. [Distributor: Evangelical Press, 16/18 High Street, Welwyn, Hertfordshire, AL6 9EQ, England.] Reviewer: E. M.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says: "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body." I'm sure, however, that this little book will not be wearisome; you will in fact find it useful, in your ministry or as a gift. It is a good basic introduction to Islam for the novice. It uses non-technical language, is very readable, and exhibits a loving attitude. The Table of Contents tells you much about the book.

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