

WHAT THE NEAR EAST EXPECTS OF THE UNITED STATES

AN ADDRESS BY

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The following is an address delivered by Dr. Charles Malik at the Princeton University Conference on the Near East on May 27, 1950.



I cannot presume to speak for the Near East as a whole. I represent only one, and indeed the smallest, Near Eastern country. But I am a student of Near Eastern affairs and have now for several years wrestled with them in one form or another, both in theory and practice. I am exceedingly happy that two eminent representatives of the Near East, one representing Egypt and one Iran, will have an opportunity of correcting my mistakes and filling out my omissions. In this way a rounded total picture will be presented.



The Near East expects the understanding friendship of the United States. It feels that it has a right to expect this because of the many historical, cultural, economic and political ties that have always existed between the Arab and Moslem worlds on the one hand, and the United States on the other.

I think it would be tragic if this continuity of fruitful relationship in all these fields were now to be suddenly interrupted, or if its quality were to be marred in any way.

It is right to stress the elementary fact that the permanent and abiding factor in the Near East is its one hundred million Arab and Moslem peoples. It is these peoples who will in the end determine the future of our region. To treat this abiding factor not as an end in itself but in terms of something alien to it, is tragically to miscalculate the real, concrete components of our total situation.



In the realm of security, I think it is correct to say that, despite certain disappointments in the political field, the Near East on the whole wishes to believe that its security continues to be a matter of vital concern to the United States.

The recent statement of Mr. Acheson in London, reaffirming “the deep interest of the United States in the security of Greece, Turkey, and Iran”, is very reassuring. For there is no doubt that in the present geopolitical situation, these three Near Eastern countries are the main bulwark of security, the first line of defense.

Questions of security should be a cooperative affair. The United States or the Western world should not feel that they are protecting that part of the world militarily. Such feeling is healthy neither for them nor for us. We should be in a position to play our full part in our self-defense. Here, as in so many other cases, Turkey serves as a splendid example for all of us. What should happen, therefore, is for local armies and facilities of the Near East to be so thoroughly organized and brought up to date as to enable us, with the help of the friendly Western Powers, to defend ourselves against attack.

The three-power declaration of the day before yesterday expresses the interest of the United States, the United Kingdom and France in the security of the Arab states and of Israel. I cannot yet comment on this declaration in full, it being still the object of active study by my Government and doubtless by the other Governments concerned. I wish only to say provisionally that it seems to me to require clarification in regard to several important obscurities. Thus, for example, it is not clear how or whether the Western Powers will intervene after aggression has happened.

IV

Politically, understanding friendship means genuine interest in the peaceful, free, independent development of our political institutions. The measure and the quality of this development so far leave much to be desired. Our political institutions on the whole lack stability and continuity. The people do not on the whole participate effectively in the management of public affairs. Certain situations exist and persist not because the people consciously will them and would rise in revolt if they were altered, but mainly because there is as yet no available force to alter them. Political parties and the press are as yet minor factors in public life. Much has yet to be done for ensuring the respect for civil rights, and determining and protecting that sphere of fundamental human freedoms which should be beyond the arbitrary caprice of government. The hiatus between ruler and ruled must be closed. It can be closed effectively and democratically only by the strengthening of the middle classes and the orderly lifting and liberation of peasant and labourer.

One cannot survey at present the problem of political development in the Near East without referring to the magnificent recent spectacle of the Turkish and Egyptian elections. I think here we have genuine progress in the orderly development of the democratic process, a progress that cannot fail to have beneficent repercussions throughout the entire area.

Now the region between direct, crude interference and complete unconcern, on the part of outsiders, is pregnant with unexplored possibilities. If the United States is to be the

understanding friend of the Near East that we expect it to be, it cannot sit by and watch political developments in that part of the world without concern; and to be concerned means, as I understand it, that you dare express your opinion and even at times stick out your neck. Of course, you must be sure of your own grounds when you do so. But surely if you see dirt and corruption and darkness and suggest their removal, you are on sure grounds. Surely also you are on firm ground when, seeing injustice and exploitation, you gently intimate that they are repugnant to your sight. Non-intervention out of deference for another nation's right to self-determination is certainly not the equivalent of unconcern; nor does it preclude or render illegitimate honest expression of opinion and daring admonition.

The seizing of opportunities within this intermediate region between crude interference and complete unconcern is itself an accomplished art, the creative work of concern itself.

V

So far as the Arabic-speaking world is concerned, understanding friendship in the political sphere requires, among other things, that the United States, by concrete deeds, effectively disabuse the Arab mind of the obsession that the United States has turned Israel loose on the Arabic-speaking world and will always support Israel against this world, so that in ten, fifty or a hundred years, Israel, with United States blessing and support, will have conquered and dominated this world. It is axiomatic to the Arab mind that in the nature of the case the United States will not dare incur the displeasure of Israel. Therefore it will always appease Israel. The Arab world has by experience become firmly convinced that it is a foregone conclusion that in every major conflict of interest between Israel and the Arab world, the United States shall at the crucial moment always, as a matter of course, decisively side with Israel against the Arabs. This justified fear could be dissipated only if the essential sense of justice at the heart of the American people should reassert itself; only if the United States should assert its independence of Israel.

VI

The Near East expects the United States to play a beneficent role—beneficent to all concerned—in the necessary harmonization of the long-range policies of the Great Powers with respect to the Near East. This applies in particular to the mineral resources of the region. It is not an edifying thought to realize that you are an object of intense and perhaps ruthless competition among great economic interests in regard to a certain mineral for whose existence underneath your sand neither you nor your forefathers have had the least responsibility.

Such harmonization of basic policies is imperative for peace and stability in the Near East. For the traditional frictions and competitions of the Great Powers, expressing as they do a disruption, a malaise, a sickness at heart, in the unity of Western culture, have caused that instability which is characteristic of the history of the Near East since Napoleon. If only the United States, the United Kingdom and France could agree on a high level among themselves with respect to their long-term policies towards the Near East, and if this agreement did not treat the Near East as a means only, but as an end in itself, capable of serving both itself and the world; if, in other words, the Near East could be spared being unnecessarily an arena of scandalous strife and jealousy among the Great Powers: then much of the friction, the uncertainty, the waste, the unhappiness, the instability—which have hitherto bedeviled the development of that region—would give way to internal unity, harmony and cooperation. Such harmonization might eventually usher in an era of fruitful progress unprecedented in the modern history of that region and reminiscent perhaps of its golden ages of old.

VII

Economically, understanding friendship means the continued flow of American private capital to the Near East to help promote economic development. American private capital must continue to operate on a basis of genuine and just partnership in benefit, certainly not on a basis of exploitation. The Near East has come to be supersensitive to the economic exploitation of its resources, its markets, its peoples, by foreign capital. Western capitalism and imperialism have created in many parts of the Near East the justified suspicion that foreign capital is there only to exploit, never to promote genuine economic development or to ensure economic well-being; that whatever such development occurs is but the crumbs falling from the master's table. The practices of foreign economic corporations have in many instances reflected a spirit of domination and greed. In order to maximize its profits, foreign capital has in many cases tended to exploit not only the resources but also the peoples of the Near East. Their employment practices have not always been fair to local experts and technicians: priority has always been given to foreign experts, and nationals were given minor and subordinate jobs. Similar discrimination was exercised in the remuneration of employees, the local employees invariably receiving far less pay than foreigners for the same kind of work. Above all, labour has been shockingly exploited. Due partly to the weakness of local labour unions, partly to the greater political and economic power of the foreign corporations, labour has been defenseless against practices which certainly would be unthinkable in those countries from which capital had flown into our part of the world.

The exact opposite of all these things is of course precisely what is expected of American private capital and enterprise in the Near East.

A statesmanlike and far-sighted application of Point Four is also expected. Technical assistance is badly needed in the Near East and will continue to be so in the foreseeable future. But the relevance of Point Four to the Near East is so far exceedingly nebulous.

But the flow of private capital and the extension of technical assistance are not enough. In addition, public financial assistance is imperative for all-rounded economic development in the Near East. In those fields where private capital is not able, or not willing, to help promote economic development—such as irrigation, hydro-electric development and road construction—the United States should consider direct financial assistance as a means of enabling the Governments of the Near East to implement basic development projects necessary to increase their national production and to raise the standard of living of their peoples. It should also act through the International Bank to enable the Governments of the Near East to receive substantial loans for such projects.

VIII

In general, the economic and the political go hand in hand, so far as the Near East is concerned. But for the Arabic-speaking world, the political is at the present moment decidedly prior to the economic. Everything hangs on a just political settlement. The United States is, in my opinion, quite able to overcome every obstacle in order to help attain such a settlement for the major political problems. It requires bold moral leadership. The belief is alas firmly rooted in the Arab mind that the United States, while able, is not sufficiently willing to overcome all difficulties in order to attain a just settlement and restore peace and good will. I do not think the United States is entirely innocent of this charge.

I do not think it superfluous in this connection to comment that political grievances are often so deep-seated as to crowd out everything else in a nation's life. Such are the political grievances of the Arab world, and thus are they viewed by the Arab peoples. No amount of economic tantalization can dispel the deep political discontent. There are many who would be willing to die rather than live prosperously under political injustice. It may be that this is something which America ought to learn in its present painful ordeals in attempting to shoulder the tasks of world leadership: namely, that not everything is a function of economics, that man is not merely an economic being, that not every problem can be comfortably solved by dollars and goods and economic arrangements, that there are political problems which exist in their own right and which are a function of will and culture and

loyalty and aspirations, and are therefore higher than and prior to economics. After all, it is Marxism which teaches the contrary. If you were to reflect, in your dealings with the outside world, this outlook of the absolute primacy of the economic, you would have subtly fallen a victim to Communism. It would be a tragic irony, indeed, if, in your endeavour to thwart Communism and Communist expansion, you were to become communized yourselves.

I assure you the Arab world will not forget Palestine by sheer economic allurements.

Culturally, understanding friendship means sharing in ideas and ideals. This means much more than science and technology and superficial forms of life. In the present ideological conflict on which so much depends, there is room for a bold, convinced and therefore convincing, articulation of fundamental belief. "What does the American really believe? What does he really live by? What does he aim at? What does he hope for?"—non-Americans press for knowing the answers to these questions. Ever since you abandoned your isolation and took to the path of interaction with other peoples, you have become exposed to the eyes of the rest of the world. Your beliefs and values and very being became the inevitable subject of scrutiny and criticism. It is, one might say, the ordeal of responsibility and leadership. This is what is happening to you now. Everybody is asking what quality of leadership you will furnish and by what lights you will be guided in attempting yourselves to guide the rest of the world.

As far as the Near East is concerned, American leadership expresses itself mainly in social, economic and technological terms. But is that all you believe in? Have you nothing else to supply, to express, to witness to? The Near East, which has seen so much in its history, has waxed quite cynical in regard to these things; therefore you are not going to impress us very much by them. Your missionaries and educators have prepared the Near East to expect something far deeper and far more spiritual. If now your politicians and businessmen—and this is their age—come to the Near East with nothing loftier than a politico-economic message, then no matter how otherwise sound it might be, this self-expression of yourselves will not be true to the deeper expectations of the Near East from you. Nor can you be said by it to be true to yourselves.

There is an appearance of shyness and timidity about the way in which the American people are giving expression to their fundamental beliefs and convictions. Presumably, you do not wish to impose anything on the rest of the world as far as ultimate ideas and values and convictions are concerned. But do you impose anything on anyone if you express your own convictions boldly and clearly?

It may be that the trouble is not merely one of expression, but of belief. It may be that you no longer believe firmly in the foundations of your own civilization and being. I sometimes

gain the impression that the crisis is much deeper than expression and articulation: it may be that the crisis is one of conviction, of being, of existence. If that is the case, then it is very serious.

The Near East, and I dare say the whole world, expects of you something fundamental by way of ideas and ideals. This expectation may well be a wholesome challenge, leading you to reaffirm what is deepest and truest and purest in your positive tradition.

X

Now, my friends, the United States and the Near East are very interesting. But we must take them with a sense of humour: they are not as important as we think them to be. Let me then sum up in non-diplomatic language. I ask, what is expected of America in regard to the Near East? Expected not by me or you, not by the Near East, not even by America, but eternally expected, essentially and ultimately expected; in other words, expected by God.

I shall try to express what I believe is expected of America by God concerning the Near East in five propositions.

1. Do not alienate the Near East. Do not do anything which will throw it into a state of profound distrust of you and of the West. Do not do anything which will cause it either to withdraw hopelessly into its own shell, or to cast itself at the feet of alien forces, alien both to its own genius and to your fundamental interests.
2. At the same time, do not pamper or spoil the Near East. Hold it up to its highest and best. Never allow it to feel that it can wallow in darkness and dirt with impunity. This requirement is infinitely more difficult than the first.
3. Do not be shocked by its immediate sordid realities. See beyond and through them to its great possibilities. For after all you are not dealing with a barbarous region, without past, without glory, without achievement. Can you name one final good in your civilization that did not originate in the Near East? And what was possible once is certainly possible again. Consequently, try to be yourselves a factor, a positive understanding factor, in the realization of the possibilities of the Near East.
4. Never suppose for one moment that mere material help or uplift is sufficient. You must have a cultural and spiritual message for the Near East, a message full of content and meaning and conviction. If you meet the Near East today without such a message, you will miss a great opportunity. And if you miss this opportunity, other messages will rush in to fill its thirsty soul.

5. In dealing with the Near East, in trying to cultivate its friendship, in helping it materially and spiritually to be itself again, do not be ashamed of your deepest convictions. In your dealings insist on truth and justice and righteousness and love. You owe it to yourselves to do so. If it does not understand you at first, it will in the course of time, provided you remain faithful to the deepest you know. Truth, justice, righteousness, love, these belong to the common heritage between you and the Near East, and therefore it will understand you in the end.

If you act on these simple things, simple to understand but very difficult to put into practice, your grandchildren will bless your name a hundred years from now, and not only the Near East but also the entire world will be profoundly grateful.