

Thatcher Joins the US-Israeli War on Syria

On November 2, 1917, 'Her Majesty's' Foreign Secretary Balfour issued his famous declaration which granted Palestine to the Zionists. On October 29, 1956, Britain joined France and 'Israel' in waging war on Egypt, in a clear challenge to President Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal. In both historical incidents, Britain was the powerful empire, «on which the sun never set.» The Balfour Declaration was issued when imperialist Britain was at its peak. It gave the Zionists the break they needed in legalizing their occupation of Palestine. However, after the defeat of the 1956 tripartite attack on Egypt, the British empire saw its last days. Britain had been relegated to playing second fiddle to US imperialism.

Now, thirty years after the Suez war and 69 years after the Balfour Declaration, Thatcher imagines that the sun might shine on Britain again, and that 'happy days' might be 'here again'. The latest example of this wishful thinking was seen in the breaking of ties with Syria, on the pretext of fighting 'international terrorism'. However, the final act of the play is not yet over.

The 'play' started in April when the British police arrested Nezar Hindawi on charges of trying to destroy an El Al airliner at Heathrow airport on April 17th, by smuggling explosives aboard in the bag of his Irish fiancée, Anne-Marie Murphy. This 'plot' was foiled by an El Al security agent who found plastic explosives hidden in the false bottom of Murphy's hand luggage. It is worth noting that it was an Israeli guard, not British guards or detectors, that foiled the 'plot'. Quite a security scandal!

Until October 6th, the day Hindawi's trial started, there were no indications of an 'Arab connection' - official or otherwise. Even more indicative, Margaret Thatcher had declared, after the British police had completed their investigations, that these showed no Syrian connection with the 'plot' or with Hindawi.

However, the second scene of the play unfolded after the Old Bailey court in London convicted Hindawi of violating the 1982 Aviation Security Act, covering airline sabotage, and sentenced him to 45 years in prison, one of the longest sentences handed down by a British judge in recent years. Just four hours later, British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe announced the diplomatic break with Syria. Howe claimed that the British decision was based on «conclusive evidence of official Syrian involvement» in the attempt to sabotage the airliner. Anne-Marie had earlier been found innocent.

During the trial, Hindawi testified

that he was planning to smuggle drugs in the bag carried by Murphy, not explosives. According to Hindawi, these drugs were to be smuggled to the West Bank in order to make a fortune. He said that he had met a person in Damascus and agreed with him to smuggle drugs to the West Bank for \$250,000. During the trial, Hindawi expressed his belief that Israeli agents had switched the bag which his fiancée was carrying, with one containing explosives, or that the person he had met in Damascus was an Israeli agent. Hindawi testified that after the arrest of Anne-Marie Murphy, he had headed for the Syrian embassy to get help. Hindawi said he met with the ambassador, but the latter had kicked him out.

In an interview with *Time* magazine in early October, President Hafez Assad assured that the Syrian government had no connection with Hindawi, and that «no terrorist acts are carried out from Syria, by Syrians or others.» He said that Hindawi, a Jordanian, had obtained a Syrian passport at a time when relations between Syria and Jordan were tense. He added that Hindawi had gone to the Syrian embassy in London after the incident, but that the embassy officials had refused to give him any help, and kicked him out.

After Hindawi's conviction and the ensuing accusations of a 'Syrian connection', the British government broke diplomatic ties with Syria. Syria responded immediately by closing Syrian airspace, ports and territorial waters to British planes and ships. The nineteen British diplomats in Damascus were given one week to leave the country. The Syrian government issued a statement denying the false charges and indicating that «the present British government, since it took power, has made its campaigns against Arab states and third world countries.»

LOOPHOLES IN THATCHER'S CASE

It is logical to wonder why the British guards did not find the explosives, for the bag went through sophisticated electronic detectors. It is also logical to wonder why the Syrian embassy did not help Hindawi to escape, if Syria had been involved. Even more revealing is the *Washington Times* report on an interview with French Foreign Minister Chirac. In an interview with the editor-in-chief of the *Washington Times*, Chirac had said that the West German government, namely Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, had informed the French government that the Israeli

secret service (Mossad), with Syrian dissidents, had planned the attack on the El Al airliner in order to indict Syria for terrorism. Chirac added that the Mossad had ordered Hindawi to head for the Syria embassy after delivering the explosives to his Irish girl friend. After Paris and Bonn denied the contents of the interview as reported, the *Washington Times* editor-in-chief, insisting that the interview was accurate and genuine, published the whole text two days later (November 10th).

Logic dictates that Britain's breaking relations with Syria had nothing to do with Hindawi's case, but was actually a continuation of the anti-Syrian campaign initiated by 'Israel' and the US long before the Heathrow airport incident occurred. Hindawi's conviction paved the way for «America and Israel to celebrate the first terrorist case which could directly be linked to President Hafez Assad» (*Sunday Times*, October 27th).

The US escalated its political campaign in the Middle East long before the Hindawi case, aiming to continue the imperialist 'peace' process. This was especially apparent after Peres' visit to Morocco, and George Bush's trip to the region, where he talked with Zionist leaders, Hussein of Jordan and Mubarak of Egypt. Then there was the first Egyptian-Israeli summit since Sadat's death in 1981, and lastly, US envoy Richard Murphy's visit to Damascus where he met the Syrian president. All these activities aim specifically at reaching a Camp David-type agreement which would eventually end the Middle East conflict at the expense of the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights.

However, Murphy's discussions with the Syrian president showed that the road to spreading Camp David is still paved with many obstacles. Hafez Assad informed Murphy that the only framework acceptable to Syria, for discussing the conflict, is an international conference attended by all parties concerned, including the PLO, and by the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Obviously, Syria presents a major obstacle to a new Camp David. It is equally obvious that imperialism, Zionism and reactionary forces would pool their efforts to remove this obstacle, along with the others, specifically the Palestinian revolution and the Lebanese national movement. To this end, the enemy alliance is increasing pressure on the Arab national movement and regimes, escalating threats and