

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WDF - 2

Fighting in Suez:
Pakistan Pops Off

Nedous Hotel
The Mall
Lahore, Pakistan
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers,

We have here in Lahore, on the east side of town, the Upper Bari Doab Canal. You would have thought the British and French attacked it. The events in the Suez during the past week have touched off a public response that has included noise, let-off steam and a great deal of smoke. With all the obfuscations, it appears at the week's end that in terms of public favor, at least, Britain has been disgusting, Egypt has won more active sympathy, Russia has gained increased respect, and America has been regarded with friendly skepticism.

My nose for news had taken me last week 150 miles out into the countryside, out of touch with Suez, Hungary or even the horse races in Lahore. It was two days after the British had bombed Cairo that Phil Talbot and I were having afternoon tea with the manager of a Pakistani oil field out in the wilds of Jhelum district and first heard the news. Filling in a gap in the conversation, our host put in, "Nasty turn in the Suez situation." Yes, we replied, the Suez situation was a problem. He saw that the reply was too casual to be up to date and so informed us of the rash of events. His own opinion was that "all the propaganda about 'Western imperialism' has been 'proved' now by the (British and French) invasion." The "blunder" would be remembered in Asia for years.

We picked up the next news the following noon, when we visited the Khewra Salt Co. 25 miles away and had lunch with the young British general manager and talked to four British technicians. They were all for "giving it"---a sound thrashing, not the canal---"to old Nasser." World opinion wouldn't "understand" Eden's rationale, however, and "above all, we should have consulted the States." "What we should have done was attack right after Nasser nationalised the canal," but as long as the attack had now begun, "We'd better get it through with." The cheeriest of the Britons was the general manager, who had just been notified that his replacement had cleared Suez on his way eastward and would arrive within two weeks.

We had heard rumors of "anti-Western riots in Lahore and Karachi" and although we did not hurry up our schedule in order to return to Lahore for whatever uproar there was, we were anxious to find out what the reaction had been. Driving back into the city, it was only slightly disappointing to see, by this time, all quiet.

A quick look at the newspapers showed that whatever else had happened, the banner headlines of the preceding days---"Anti-Soviet

Rising in Hungary" and "Rebels Set Up Own Regime"---swiftly shrunk in size and moved off the front page. There were headlines now telling of "Israeli Spearheads," "British Troops Landing Reported," "Egypt Undaunted," and "U.K. & France Veto U.S. Cease-Fire Plan."

The headlines declared also that a "wave of indignation" was "sweeping Pakistan." There was a wave of something: in Lahore, university students were the first to take up the cry. Thursday Nov. 1 was their "Protest Day," and a mile-long procession, an estimated 25,000-strong, assembled near the University of the Punjab and marched down The Mall with shouts of "Down with the British and French," "Down with imperialism," "Down with Israel!" Bound for the British Deputy High Commissioner's office on Race Course Road, the students were checked briefly by police brandishing lathis, brass-tipped, five-foot long billyclubs. Moving on to their destination, the students were blocked by police at the British DHC's gate, but they managed to pull down the signboard, and after posing with their prize for news photographers tried to set it afire, but to no avail. Then harangued by their leaders at length, the students resolved with a shout to call upon the Government to declare full support of Egypt and promising to volunteer to fight on the Egyptian side against the Anglo-French and Israeli invaders.

By the time the college boys were ready to go home, school boys were finished with classes, and demonstrations continued in streets and parks until late afternoon. It was a day of protest---and a lark, a day of no classes, as several students told me. One told me, "We wanted to misbehave, but the police wouldn't let us." He apologized on behalf of the "young boys" who threw stones which smashed windows of the US Information Service building: "They didn't know what it was all about."

For three days there came a loud chorus of protests from all corners of Pakistan. Students went on strike, stores and markets closed. Members of Parliament "demanded," bar associations "urged," ladies clubs "called for." In mass public meetings sponsored by the political parties, resolutions and slogans ranged from condemnation of Britain and France to sending military forces to oppose them. The Government was called upon to quit the Commonwealth, the Baghdad Pact and SEATO; to cancel import licences of British agencies, and nationalise British banks and insurance companies; to aid volunteers to fight alongside Egyptians, and to send token forces of soldiers and airmen. (It was ex-Major General Akbar Khan of the leftist Azad ("Free") Pakistan party who demanded the creation of a military contingent to go to Egypt's aid, and it was ex-Air Commodore M.K. Janjua who proposed government aid in creating an "anti-aggression air force" to do the same.) All Pakistan was enjoined to boycott British and French goods.

On another level, students in Dacca set fire to the British Information Service building and burned Eden and Mollet in effigy. In Karachi a crowd burned a British flag and police fired tear-gas to disperse them; British firms reportedly locked their doors and Britons spent the week-end inside their homes or in the countryside.

Along with anti-British sentiment, there seems to be another main element in the tumult and shouting: loyalty to Islam. Dawn, an English-language daily in Karachi, saw Eden as "a Hitler who throws his own country's honour and all cherished moral, human and international values which it has itself fostered in the past, out the windows of the Houses of Westminster into the Thames..." Of course. But he also, we are told, then "proceeds to shed innocent Muslim blood to dye red the Nile, opening a new and unbelievable chapter of perfidy and violence in the history of the human race..." Is this not the rise once again of bigoted and perverted Christendom against the world of Islam in alliance with the Jews? Is this not a threat poised against Muslims from the Atlantic to the Pacific?"

Speakers at mass meetings also spoke of the "spilling of Muslim blood" and pointed to British "bombing of mosques" and a frequent catch-phrase was "Muslim brotherhood."

Early this week, with the proposal for the UN police force making the rounds, the more strident slogans were replaced by pleas for "Relief for Egypt" and demands for "Restitution for the Bombing Damage."

Now, with fuzzy reports of the end of hostilities, if not the withdrawal of invading troops, these developments were reported in the Pakistani press: Bulganin, in a message to Eisenhower, called for a UN-sanctioned, joint Russian-American military intervention in Suez "in order to put an end to aggression and stop any further bloodshed." The US promptly refused to place such a proposal on the Security Council agenda. Then Bulganin warned Britain and France that they must end the fighting or face possible Soviet military retaliation. Simultaneously it was reported that Britain and France had agreed to a rapid cease-fire. The morning headlines of the Moscow-prone Pakistan Times trumpeted: "U.K. & France Order Cease-Fire in Egypt---Soviet Warning Proves Effective." The US announcement that it would oppose any Soviet effort to intervene in Egypt was lost in the shuffle. A little pulse-feeling was in order.

I talked to only a few persons and rather "thinking citizens" at that---a newspaper editor, a medical student, a bicycle-shop owner. I tried the local equivalent of that proverbial barometer of public opinion, the cab-driver---here the tongawala---and because of my language inability got only this viewpoint, but perhaps a significant one at that: "Egypt---good! Britannia---very bad!"

Unanimously, those I talked to were agreed that it was the Bulganin letters to Eden and Mollet that brought about the end of the fighting. The US counter-statement that it would oppose any Soviet intervention was seen as ineffective and mild. "Bulganin spoke of bombs and rockets," the editor said, "while the States only said they would 'oppose.' What does 'oppose' mean?" The bike-shop man said, "Russia actually threatened Britain and France, who, after all, were the aggressors. Why didn't the US threaten Britain and France? Because the US are on the side of Britain and France!"

Whatever congratulations Americans here were affording themselves over America's being on the "right" side in the UN were nullified by the Bulganin letters. "Of course," I was told, "the States sponsored the cease-fire resolution, but words mean nothing. The States would not have forced the British to withdraw, would they?" To the question, "Were the Bulganin letters anything more than words?" came the answers, "Yes, the Russians threatened because the States had said they wouldn't go to war," and "Certainly, the Russians want to appear the champions of freedom for the defenseless countries of the Middle East." In short, whether the US was trumped or finessed was immaterial; the USSR had taken the trick. Indeed, over the past half-year, in the eyes of those I spoke to, Russian prestige has climbed, while American prestige has sloped downward. "Russia gave Nasser arms and stood up for the Egyptians after they nationalised the canal, and now they have stopped the British attack." Meanwhile, "the US assisted the British, refused the Aswan loan, and now they've done really nothing about the British intervention."

What of the proposed UN police force that Pakistan has said it will contribute to? Said the editor: "The so-called police force should only be for the purpose of taking British and Israeli troops from Egyptian soil. The canal belongs to Egypt---we must not lose sight of that fact." And the businessman: "We are opposed to the aims of the British and French as well as their methods. The UMO is not going to win those aims for them by using some other method."

Amidst cries of discontent from the press and political "outs," the Government of Prime Minister H.S. Suhrawardy has been a paragon of restraint. Arriving home from a 12-day state visit to China just as news of the Anglo-French attack was announced, the Prime Minister said that he "could not but express alarm at the turn of events in Egypt." The following day, the Cabinet met for four hours and came forth with a statement supporting the proposal to call an emergency session of the UN General Assembly and stating that Pakistan would not condone or uphold recourse to force on the Suez issue. Since then, the Government's statements have been neither rash nor resolute, and early this week the Prime Minister flew to Teheran for a meeting of the Baghdad Pact nations (minus Britain).

How seriously the Government will have to take the repeated demands to quit the Commonwealth and the Baghdad Pact (or toss the British out of the Pact) is beyond me. The Baghdad agreement seems to be under heaviest attack and it was an irritation to those I talked to. The editor was peeved about it: "This has been a good lesson in foreign affairs for Pakistan. We have seen how the British through the Baghdad Pact have tried to divide the Muslim world. Now we see how they attack our Arab friends." On withdrawal from the Commonwealth there was hedging: "We still need foreign assistance, you see."

All in all, the events in the Suez during the past week have produced a reaction here that was partly a binge---but partly a slow burn.

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