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ANTI-IMPERIALIST STRUGGLE IN THE MIDDLE-EAST

*Paper presented by Hassan el Nouty
to the Second Annual African
Activist Association
Conference, May 1980*

My aim is to give you a broad assessment of the anti-imperialist struggle at its present stage in the Middle East. By Middle East, I mean the whole area stretching from the Western Sahara to Pakistan, which is today unified as one battle front in a common liberation struggle waged by the peoples in that area against a common enemy: world imperialism. That struggle has been going on in various forms, with ups and downs, since the start of Europe's imperialist aggression in the nineteenth century. By the end of World War I, imperialism had under its control the whole Middle East. Its hegemony relied on three bases:

- 1) The military occupation of various Middle Eastern countries.
- 2) The creation of a Zionist settlers colony in Palestine which was designed to function as a local running dog who sees to it that no threat be allowed to reach uncontrollable proportions in the area where lie some of imperialism's most vital interests. Palestine, as you are aware of, is at a striking distance of the Suez Canal and the Arabian oil fields. The creation of that settlers colony was the result of a deal between Western imperialism and the world Zionist movement. The running dog proved its efficiency when it launched a surprise attack against Egypt in June 1967 (that is known as the Six-Days War). The regime in power in Egypt was the Nasserite regime whose nationalistic and anti-imperialist stand constituted precisely that type of threat that the Zionist state's mission was to do away with. The military defeat suffered by the Nasserite regime triggered a process of internal changes within the power structure governing Egypt. Those changes led to a 180° turn to the right which was completed under Sadat who will be remembered as the greatest traitor in Arab history.
- 3) The third basis of imperialism hegemony was the least conspicuous and, because of that precisely, the most dangerous in the long-run. In some instances, imperialism could impose its hegemony without resorting to military action. It was an indirect type of domination. That could be done whenever imperialism found in a given country complacent feudal or tribal rulers willing to act as local policemen in exchange for their getting a share in the profit-producing process of imperialist exploitation of the local masses. The most striking examples are

Pahlevi dynasty in Iran and the Saudi dynasty in Arabia.

Because there is no military occupation, those rulers can, at least for a while, fool the people and maintain a façade of political independence. They can be compared to Trojan horses built up within the Middle East in order to stab in the back the anti-imperialist liberation struggle whenever it reaches a dangerous momentum (from the imperialists' viewpoint of course). One of those local allies, King Hussein of Jordan, was thus used to deal the Palestinian Resistance a blow that imperialists hope it would be fatal. I am referring to the bloody onslaught against the Palestinian refugee camps ordered by Hussein to his mercenaries in the Black September of 1970. The Shah of Iran was used to contain the popular uprising in Oman which threatened to extend to the whole oil-producing Gulf area. The Shah sent his army to fight the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman. The King of Morocco is being used, in a similar fashion, against the Polisario (but I leave it to my Sahraoui brother to elaborate on that). As a newly recruited policeman, Sadat is assigned some of the tasks formerly assigned to the Shah who, for obvious reasons cannot fulfill them anymore. Egyptian soldiers have already been sent to Oman. Perhaps the archvillain among imperialism's local allies in the Middle East is the Saudi regime. Instead of using the immense wealth it derives from oil to help the cause of Arab liberation, it uses that wealth in the service of U.S. imperialism: by means of bribery, corruption, and intrigues, the Saudi regime seeks to divide, disrupt and sidetrack the Arab anti-imperialist struggle. The Saudis finance rightist religious groups in Syria in an effort to create a religious rift inside that country and undermine the Syrian regime which is guilty, in the eyes of the Saudis and of their imperialist masters, of opposing the Camp David agreements. The Saudis do not limit their activities to the Arab world. They finance the fascistic military dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan. They have even sent money to help to defeat the French Communist party at the last parliamentary elections which were held in France two years ago!

After World War II the global picture of imperialism domination underwent some important changes. First, the U.S. replaced Great Britain and France as the major imperialist power. Second, the imperialist strategy had to be revised as a response to the new situation created by the tremendous leap forward of the democratic and progressive forces throughout the world. The upsurge of national liberation movements dedicated to armed struggle against imperialism forced the latter to retreat from many areas it previously held under its grip: China, Vietnam, Algeria. This came as a warning to imperialism that it must find an alternative to direct military intervention and occupation which now proved to be of little avail. Before World War II, imperialism had met the rising tide of nationalism in

those countries of Africa and Asia under its rule, with one answer: military repression. That left the "bourgeois" wing of the nationalistic movements in those countries with no other choice but to seek a closer alliance with the masses in order to resist that repression. At that point, popular armed struggle is only one step away because within any nationalistic movement the masses constitute the segment that is genuinely dedicated to achieve total liberation. That is exactly what happened in Algeria and Vietnam with the disastrous consequences for imperialism that we know. If that pattern of events had to be altered, then it was imperative to find a way for luring the less "radical" elements--or, more precisely, the "bourgeois" wing--within the nationalistic movements away from the masses and subsequently against them. That could be done by duplicating that type of "indirect domination" we have referred to. In the same manner as the feudal or tribal leaders, the "bourgeois" wing would be offered a joint partnership with imperialism in exchange for its acting as a local policeman. Thanks to a repressive apparatus that imperialism would gladly assist in developing and "modernizing," the "bourgeois" wing would be in a position to keep a watchful eye on the local masses and prevent them from jeopardizing imperialist interests. That imperialists' new approach can achieve its goal wherever the "bourgeois" wing sits in the driver's seat of the national liberation movements and is allowed to gain, from there, the control of the state apparatus. That gives it the means to repress (with the imperialist's support as we have mentioned) the popular opposition that is bound to shape up sooner or later against its coming to terms with the imperialist enemy. We have put in a nutshell a process that is best exemplified by the Sadat phenomenon in Egypt.

The phenomenon has not been limited to Egypt. Previously, "nationalistic" and "progressive" regimes also turned into reactionary allies of imperialism in other Mid-Eastern countries, like Tunisia, Sudan, or Turkey, to name a few undisputed cases. However--and this should be repeated again and again--the "Sadat phenomenon" constitutes a pending menace wherever the political leadership is not in the hands of the masses but in the hands of the "bourgeois" wing of the liberation movements. The "Sadat phenomenon" rapidly leads to a series of developments. The closer the renegade bourgeoisie comes to the imperialist camp, the wider the gap between that bourgeoisie and the masses and the deeper the latter's antagonism. Soon they are dreaded by the local renegade bourgeoisie as much as by imperialism. And the two get together to map a unified policy aimed at containing the masses' growing discontent. As a result, we have the unholy alliance between imperialism, its Zionist helper, and the newly recruited local ally, which was officially sealed at Camp David. No one can doubt that Sadat went to Camp David with the secret blessings of the other Arab reactionary regimes though some of them have pretended to oppose his move--they do it out of fear:

if he tumbles, they can disclaim any connection with him; if he succeeds, it will always be time to openly embrace him. Who can believe that the Saudis, when they attended the Arab summit at Bagdad where Sadat was condemned, were motivated by a sincere indignation against the Camp David accords? Rather, they went to Bagdad to make it sure that no decision be taken there that would seriously hinder the imperialist-Zionist plans, like for example using the oil weapon which is the only efficient answer beside armed resistance, to the conspiracy that was concocted at Camp David between Carter, Begin, and Sadat.

But no sooner had the unholy alliance been sealed than it was faced with mounting dangers. One of the main goals of the Camp David conspiracy is to neutralize the Palestinian Resistance in one way or another. Imperialist domination can never feel safe as long as there are organized popular movements capable of waging armed liberation struggles. Now, in spite of all efforts made by the mercenaries of imperialism, whether the Zionist state or the Jordanian monarchy or the fascist militia in Lebanon, the Palestinian Resistance could not be crushed. On the contrary, it regained increased strength when it got the support of a large sector of the Lebanese masses who joined the anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist liberation struggle. The only hope that is left to the imperialists now is to try to duplicate the Sadat phenomenon among the Palestinians, that is to try to lure the "bourgeois" wing of the Palestinian Resistance into accepting a so-called compromise, which would actually mean putting an end to the armed liberation struggle. One can easily understand how the defection of Sadat could be used as a compelling argument in favor of such a "compromise." The reasoning would be as follows: "By withdrawing from the battle against Israel, Egypt, which has the strongest Arab army, has seriously disturbed the balance of powers. The Arabs run the risk of suffering another defeat. It is better to save something than to lose everything. Why not accept a 'compromise' now with the imperialist-Zionist camp and wait for better days?" That would be, I imagine, the language of the so-called moderate Palestinians that the plotters of Camp David are desperately looking for. But it is already too late. The defection of Sadat has been outweighed by the collapse of a major pillar of imperialist domination, the Iranian monarchy. The balance of powers in the Middle East has actually been restored again in favor of the liberation movements underway. One must realize that the full impact of the Islamic Revolution in Iran has not materialized yet. The Islamic Revolution has dissipated the ill-effects of the Saudis' fraud. They had almost persuaded us that Islam was synonymous with bigotry, political backwardness, and subservience to imperialist-Zionist hegemony. The Islamic Revolution has demonstrated that, on the contrary, Islam is on the side of revolution, freedom struggle, and social progress. The enormous potential of religious fervor that fills the Moslem

masses in the Middle East can thus be unleashed in the service of the anti-imperialist struggle. The consequences of that turn of events are simply incalculable. Already, the foundations of the Saudi kingdom are shaking, as evidenced by the popular uprising that culminated last November in the seizure of the Grand Mosque at Mecca.

The imperialists can be compared to a man who is fighting a spreading fire. No sooner does he believe that he has extinguished it in one place then it breaks out in another spot. While he rushes to extinguish it in that other spot, it breaks out in two other spots, and so on. Well, the fire in the Middle East has spread from Palestine to Southern Lebanon to Oman to the Western Sahara to Iran. There are signs that it will spread to Saudi Arabia, to Turkey, to Tunisia (remember the events at Gafsa two months ago). And judging from the quickly evolving situation in Egypt, Sadat will have his load of internal troubles shortly. A United Democratic National Front, grouping the religious movement, the liberal movement, and the left, was constituted in Egypt last February to put an end to that era of infamy that is the Sadat regime.

As you can see, my friends, the outlook for the anti-imperialist struggle in the Middle East is very bright, very bright indeed.