

CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

*Which
Way
Israel?*

By A. B. MAGIL

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A. B. MAGIL served as a foreign correspondent in Israel during its liberation struggle in 1948. He is author of the book, *Israel in Crisis*, co-author with Henry Stevens of the book, *The Peril of Fascism*, author of various pamphlets, of which the most recent is *What Happened in Guatemala*, written in collaboration with Helen Simon Travis. He has been associated for many years as editor, first, with *New Masses* and later with *Masses & Mainstream*.

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Exploding headlines tell of border fighting between Israel and Egypt, between Israel and Syria. Headlines snarl charges and counter-charges between Jerusalem, Cairo, Damascus. Headlines shriek about Czechoslovak arms shipments to Egypt, about a Soviet "threat" to the Middle East.

What's it all about?

The news out of the Middle East in recent months has filled with alarm millions of Americans, Jewish and non-Jewish, who are deeply concerned about the dangers that beset the young state of Israel. They see in Israel a tiny beleaguered country which only a few years ago won its independence in a stubborn heroic struggle. It seems as if the land in which so many survivors of the Nazi gas-ovens found refuge is constantly being pushed to the brink of new annihilation.

Democratic Americans have a big stake in Israel's welfare. Our support helped forge victory in the liberation struggle of 1948-49 when powerful forces in Wall Street and Washington sought to betray it. Many of us have contributed dollars and pennies in the hope of advancing the development and national independence of Israel. The American people also have a vital stake in the well-being and peace of all the nations in the Middle East.

When I was in Israel in 1948, people used to say, speaking of the difficulties of life in that country and the barrenness of the soil: "When Moses was leading the children of Israel out of the wilderness, why did he have to stop here? Why couldn't he have gone a little farther—say, to California?"

Israel's misfortune lies, however, not in the fact that Moses—who was fated to gaze at the Promised Land only from afar—stopped there, but that many centuries later the oil trusts—including those from California—did. The poverty-stricken lands of the Middle East, the area in which Israel is located, are rich in oil. In fact, the Middle East is the world's greatest oil gusher. Three-quarters of the known oil reserves of the capitalist world are there, or more than

twice as much as in the United States, Canada, Britain, France and Italy combined.

And all of it is controlled by American, British, Dutch and French corporations, with the lion's share in the hands of the Americans—Standard Oil of New Jersey, Standard Oil of California, Socony Vacuum, Texas Company, Gulf Oil, and the American Independent Oil Co.

Until recently it had been thought that Israel's soil was indeed barren as far as oil was concerned. But on September 22, 1955, oil in substantial amounts and of excellent quality was struck at Heletz in the Negev region, nine miles from the Egyptian-controlled Gaza strip. This produced quite a boom on the New York Stock Exchange in the stocks of the oil companies operating in Israel—U.S.-dominated companies of course.

The oil of the Middle East could be a blessing for the peoples of that area were it used to promote their well-being instead of the profits of Wall Street and London investors. Under present conditions the politics of oil, joined with the politics of cold war and preparations for hot war, is the curse of Israel, as of the Arab states and non-Arab Iran, Turkey and Pakistan.

Oil was chiefly responsible for net profits of \$413,000,000 in 1954 for American corporations from their Middle East investments. But in addition to these economic attractions, the Middle East has great strategic importance. It is the land bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa. It controls communications by land, sea and air that bind the world together. It embraces the Suez Canal and the Eastern Mediterranean. And it borders directly on the southern flank of the Soviet Union.

Clearly, whatever happens in the Middle East, there's more than meets the eye. To understand the Israel-Arab conflict or the meaning of the Czechoslovak arms shipment or the demonstrations in Jordan against the Baghdad Pact, we have to look behind the headlines.

And we also have to make a distinction between peoples and governments. Especially must we make a distinction between the American people and the Cadillac Cabinet that is our government.

The problems involved in the Israel-Arab conflict are complex and there aren't any easy answers. But if we take as our starting-point what's really good for Israel, even though our government may be against it and Israel's government may be against it, we will begin to find an approach to the constructive solution of these

