

# Allies Aren't Allied on the Moslems

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THE ACES and pains of keeping allies together are nowhere more agonizing than in trying to work out a common American-British-French policy toward the Moslem world.

Sometimes it is painful to work out even an American policy that makes sense. Last Tuesday, for example, President Truman said in a public speech that the peoples of Africa and Asia were right in wanting political freedom as well as economic betterment.

It was wonderful propaganda—at least for the Africans and Asians for whom it was so clearly intended. But on Thursday the President's representative at the United Nations, Ernest A. Gross, announced that the United States would abstain—in other words, would not take sides—on whether to let the Security Council hear complaints against French rule in Tunisia.

In this instance, the United States was trying to avoid giving public offense to the French. It did not want the Security Council used as a stick for beating one of America's most important allies.

The effect, however, was a little like an old cartoon of Herblock's which showed the American delegate in the Security Council standing on his head and saying: "We want to make our position perfectly clear."

## Agreed on Danger

IF AMERICAN officials find it troublesome to be consistent toward the Moslem world, the three allies together find it infinitely worse. Try as they will, the Americans, British and French simply cannot look at the problems of this vast area through the same eyeglasses.

All three can see the same landmark in the background: the golden domes of the Kremlin, which symbolize the pushful power of the Soviet Union. All three want the same thing: to keep Soviet power out of the Moslem world. They wish they could have peace and contentment all the way from Morocco to Singapore so that they could concentrate on the essential—namely, on the containment of Soviet power in Europe and the Far East.

But the details in the foreground look hopelessly different, depending on whether one is in London or Paris.

world—and all other underdeveloped areas—through a rosy glass of anti-colonialism. Franklin Roosevelt looked through such a glass in wartime, when he irritated the British, French and Dutch by talking of independence for India, Indo-China and Indonesia. President Truman was looking through the same spectacles when he approved the text of last Tuesday's speech about freedom.

The American argument, so round, so firm, so fully packed with good intentions, so free and easy with big assumptions, goes something like this:

The United States could not have become an economic giant without having had free political institutions. Similarly, the Moslem world, like other underdeveloped areas, cannot possibly develop health and strength unless political reforms are combined with economic and social progress.

Of course—and here the argument seems to backtrack on itself—you cannot, in the President's words, allow "unscrupulous agitators" to use the present ferment in the Moslem world to stir up bloodshed and disorder. Still less, in Secretary Acheson's words of last Wednesday, can you assume that full independence will solve all problems. When former subject peoples get their freedom and discover that it doesn't solve their problems, said the Secretary, they are apt to turn to communism as another panacea.

## Louder Than Words

THE BRITISH have to do less hemming and hawing in explaining their position for the simple reason that they make fewer speeches about political freedom for other peoples. Since F.D.R. was in the White House, the British have given full independence to India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon; they have set up self-governing assemblies in West Africa and the Caribbean; they have given full citizenship to the Chinese in their Malayan colonies, and, as the most recent step in the postwar sequence, they have proposed letting the Sudan decide its own future.

The British, in short, can argue that their deeds are more persuasive than American words. The odd fact is that Britain, whose leaders talk comparatively little about political freedom, whose present Prime Minister personifies the old imperialism, is more popular in India today than the United States is. It is the Indians who struggled for generations against British rule who are now to follow British

parliamentary forms rather than American, and a debate in the Indian Parliament at New Delhi is almost a replica of the procedures and even the mannerisms of the British House of Commons.

In most of the countries that have recently won their freedom or are trying to win it, the British keep a certain nineteenth century condescension and superiority toward the people. They are hated for it, especially in Iran and Egypt. And they still make a distinction between "moderates," usually the representatives of the rich landholders, and those more rabid nationalists who happen to have popular backing.

Nothing irritates the British more than to have Americans lecture them about the Moslem world. When Anthony Eden, newly installed at the British Foreign Office, went to Paris last November, Secretary Acheson talked patronizingly to him about Iran, as if Eden were a novice. Actually, Eden knows the Persian language, which Acheson never learned in a brilliant career at the bar; and Eden's country, moreover, has been deep in Middle Eastern politics and troubles for 200 years.

This is both the strength and the weakness of British policy in the Middle East—the strength being that the British know the history and the background better than Americans; the weakness being that they tend to neglect or forget the tide of change that is sweeping the Moslem world today.

## The Thick of It

WHEN IT comes to the French, the differing outlook among the three allies becomes glaringly apparent, and for several relevant reasons. For one thing, the independence or home-rule movements today are taking place on French territory, in Tunisia and Morocco; there are no movements of comparable seriousness under the British or American flags.

In each of the French North African dependencies, there is a rich, sizable and politically powerful group of French settlers, the "colons"; these people have done much for the countries where they live, but the narrowness of their vision can be compared only to that of the relative handful of British settlers in Kenya, in East Africa, where Colonel Blimp now finds a happy home.

The French, moreover, had to fight in comparatively recent years to conquer and keep Morocco and Tunisia; they feel they know better than the British or the Americans with the native populations there. They are all the more sensitive to criticism because, according

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French Foreign Legionnaires guard Arabs rounded up recently in Kelibia, Tunisia, in a search for nationalist agitators.

figures submitted to the United Nations, economic and social conditions among the natives in these territories, especially Morocco, are worse than in British or American dependencies.

There is one other reason why the French are especially prickly about North African nationalism. The outer world has led to regard Habib Bourguiba, the leader of Tunisian nationalism, as a reasonable and moderate fellow. Yet the French have discovered letters allegedly written by Bourguiba in 1950 frankly looking forward to an armed struggle and to Soviet intervention against the French colony. The French are using these letters to the last comma to prove what they have always contended in recent years—North African nationalism and communism are the same thing, and that political freedom in North Africa would be an invitation to the Soviet Union to intervene.

In the same way, the French may be saying that they cannot sit on their hands and pay nationalism with nothing but bayonets and bullets. Wise Frenchmen know that they were tragically slow in making political reforms to their former

Far Eastern colony of Indo-China. If they had taken President Roosevelt's annoying advice in time, they might have avoided the long-drawn-out war in Indo-China which now drains the life blood of their officer class and likewise drains the French economy.

For more than a year American officials in Paris and Washington have pleaded with the French, in private, not to be too late again in Tunisia and Morocco. Partly as a result of American pressure, partly because of a more progressive outlook among the leading French politicians, the government in Paris finally agreed last winter to offer generous and sweeping proposals for home rule to the Tunisians. But the French put them forward with a positive genius for doing 'the right thing in the wrong way.

Instead of announcing their reforms at once for the whole world to ponder, they kept them secret until the other day—with the excuse that it would have been impolite not to submit them first to the Bey, the nominal ruler of Tunisia. Next, finding the Tunisian Premier unwilling to negotiate on the French proposals, the French arrested the Premier and other

nationalist leaders, and persuaded the Bey to appoint a more amenable Premier.

Finally, having thoroughly poisoned the atmosphere in Tunisia and throughout the Moslem world, the French made their proposals public. The proposals were good and wise they provided for the gradual, step-by-step creation of responsible self-government. Negotiations are now about to begin, but the Tunisian Premier, naturally, has the appearance of a puppet, and the coming discussions will look as if the French were negotiating with themselves.

What next? The United States and Britain, of course, want the negotiations to succeed. They want a quiet atmosphere in Tunisia, which is one reason why they refused last week to support the appeal to the Security Council. But how three such allies can keep in step, how they can even have the same fundamental premises, is one of the riddles of 1952. With all the other anxieties of diplomacy this year, the allied leaders will have to find some way of reconciling American principles, British pragmatism and stubborn French pride in their dealings with the Moslem world.