

### The Middle East

The informal discussions on defence between the EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER and the BRITISH AMBASSADOR which have gone on for two months in Cairo are suspended, while the diplomatists leave for Lake Success. The talks have not so far disclosed any basis for more formal negotiations, either on defence or on the Sudan. Yet the necessity of a political settlement in the Middle East has been underlined again by events in Korea. As M. EMIL BUSTANI pointed out in a recent letter, the Middle East is not only of immediate strategic importance as a link between Europe and Asia; it is also, in its present uneasy posture, peculiarly vulnerable to Communist propaganda designed to create disturbances that will deny its valuable resources, particularly oil, to the western Powers.

These Powers rely largely on oil from the Middle East both in peace and war; but the oilfields are situated in countries that are inherently unstable because the ruling classes have failed to gain the support of the masses; behind the façade of democratic institutions oppression and corruption often flourish unchecked by paper projects for social reform. Without a comprehensive settlement of current political problems the demand for economic and social betterment will remain ineffective, because instructed public opinion, which is its chief driving force, is still mainly concerned with questions of national prestige and international security. Any settlement, to work, must begin by covering the relations of the Arab States with each other, with Israel, and with the western Powers, particularly Britain.

It has still to be seen if working unity in policy and action can be established between the Arab countries, divided as they are by national jealousies, dynastic feuds, and conflicting interests. The conclusions announced by the political committee of the Arab League during its sessions at Alexandria show that an effort is being made to pull them together. This is clear from the altered position of Jordan. Although Egypt and other Arab Governments still dislike Jordan's attitude towards the internationalization of Jerusalem and disapprove of her incorporation of parts of Arab Palestine, they now show more understanding of her policy—and have renounced their ridiculous intention of boycotting her. Her relations with Egypt, very strained until recently, have been eased by friendly contacts between the two Foreign Ministers.

Prospects of a general settlement between the Arab States and Israel have not been appreciably advanced by the patient efforts of the United Nations conciliation commission. Egypt and other States insist that Israel must comply with the decision taken at Lake Success for the readmission of Arab refugees before they will negotiate. At the next General Assembly the Arab States are to raise the question of the refugees; Israel will then have an opportunity of explaining her real difficulties. Only a greater sense of realism, induced by the threatening international situation which is now beginning to influence the Arab countries, will convince them of the truth that in the interests of the entire Middle Eastern region, individual settlements with Israel are indispensable. They have to accept the new State as permanent, which some of them have not yet done. Unfortunately there have been set-backs to Israel's prospects of quickly establishing working relations with Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and the Lebanon. Existing armistice lines often cut off Arab villagers on the frontier both from the fields they cultivate and from their only source of water; Israeli frontier guards, with strict orders to prevent Arab infiltration, have laid themselves open to the charge of acting with unnecessary brutality. Arab States that

border on Israel are still afraid that her zealots may expand her frontiers—in spite of the guarantee given by the three western Powers.

The British part in a settlement is to seek a firm understanding with Israel on one hand and with the Arab States on the other. An Anglo-Egyptian settlement would at once make many of these problems more manageable; but Egyptian public opinion, in all parties, is committed to insistence on the evacuation of the Canal zone and the "unity of the Nile valley" under Egyptian sovereignty. If the present Wafdist Government, fortified by an overwhelming majority at the last election, were to conclude that Egypt cannot remain neutral in a future world war, and that some kind of military alliance with Britain was needed, the political differences with this country which still frustrate negotiations might possibly seem less formidable. Clearly, an alliance between Britain and Egypt on equal terms for protecting their common interest in the peace of the Middle East could lead to similar pacts with other Arab countries; and the establishment of good relations between the Arab world and the western Powers, as well as between the Arab world and Israel, is essential if the urgent economic and social problems of the Middle East are to be solved. But not even a beginning can be made while the present deadlocks persist.