Fearful ... and Fear-Mongering

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They are our friends, the Turks, who confess, privately and publicly, their fear of this neighborliness which geography and history have imposed between them and Russia. And the bond between Turks and Russians, since ancient times, has been marked by greed and fear, tempting them at one moment toward alliance and at another toward discord, but never at all toward purity of heart.

Russia's covetousness for this or that part of old and modern Turkey is well known, and it has stained history red at many a time, and in many a place as well. The suspended agreement between Turks and Russians under various circumstances is likewise well known, particularly in the first phase of modern Turkey's life, when the Turks threw off the burdens of the First World War, recovered for their country its full right to freedom and independence, and relinquished, reluctantly, their vast empire in the Arab world. And this fear which the Turks confess, privately and publicly, of their powerful, troublesome neighbor is what has marked their foreign policy, since the last war ended, with a drawing-near to America — a drawing-near that verges on infatuation with her and surrender to her.

The Turks are, of course, free to adopt for themselves whatever policy they please, and to follow whatever path their policy takes; but Turkish foreign policy has, for some time now, gone beyond the bounds of fear and caution into something else, its very opposite in the farthest sense: intimidation and adventurism. For it seems they have been so possessed by their love of drawing near to America that it has driven them quite out of that character we once knew them by, when the last war was raging and spreading horror across the lands of the earth.

In those days they were most reserved, at peace with all their enemies, profiting from the matter, courting the Allies while keeping on good terms with the Germans, and standing toward both sides in an attitude of caution and prudence. But now they feel, it would seem, a deep longing for their old empire on one hand, and a need to go to great lengths to please America on the other. And for this reason they coax some Arab countries while intimidating others; they coax Iraq, concluding with it this alliance of theirs which people have not yet finished discussing, and they intimidate Syria, hoping that intimidation

might avail there, so that she might join the alliance for the sake of her own safety, or at least avoid the other Arab alliance while waiting to see what events will reveal.

There is no harm, so far as the Turks are concerned, in setting up alliances in place of domination and colonialism, for something is better than nothing. What matters is that the Arab countries allied with Turkey should be ready to place their various resources at her disposal when she needs them, and ready likewise to place their resources at the disposal of the West, whose policy America directs on the basis of resisting Russia everywhere.

And Turkey has found, among some of the old guard of Iraqi statesmen, a nostalgia for the old era, a longing for those times when the Arab peoples were heedless, with no share of awakening, ignorant, with no share of knowledge, listless, with no share of vigor, when the Turks could do with them as they pleased, and took their notables and their wealthy — where notables and wealthy men existed among them — as a means of degrading the poor and the weak, and subjecting them to whatever the ruling Ottoman Turkish masters wished. And so this alliance was concluded with them against the fierce reluctance of the Iraqi people, and of the educated among her sons in particular.

There is no harm, so far as the Turks or the old-guard Iraqi statesmen are concerned, in compelling an Arab people to what it does not want and driving it to what it does not love; for Turkish policy was anciently built on just this compulsion, and the Ottoman Turks anciently believed, in the depths of their consciences — and felt no scruple in declaring this belief — that the Arabs were subjugated to them, humbled to their purposes, that they ought not covet justice nor aspire to freedom, for they were a people God paid no heed to, since they were not Turks. And the Egyptians have not yet forgotten that Egypt, once she had won some measure of internal independence in the past century, became a refuge for free Arabs whenever the old Turkish violence frightened them.

They emigrated to Egypt from Iraq, as they emigrated from Syria and Lebanon. They fled with their freedom, their dignity, their minds, and their hearts from the humiliation, the injustice, and the enslavement, and from all that infamy which used to be imposed upon free Arabs in those dark days.

The Egyptians have not forgotten those free Arabs who emigrated to their homeland in those days, who found in it security, ease, and comfort,

and who found in it fertility of mind and keenness of heart, so that they benefited themselves and benefited others, and took part in stirring up this renaissance which allowed the Near East to taste freedom and to struggle in its cause, and to renew what had faded of Arab-Islamic civilization thanks to the old Ottoman Turkish sultanate.

Were it not for the Turks' nostalgia for that empire of theirs, and the longing of some Iraqi politicians for a life of humiliation and abasement, this alliance would never have come about. And I had thought that the very last thing a free Arab could contemplate was an alliance with the Turks, after the Arab world had tasted what it tasted of the old Turkish sultanate; but this latest bitter experience, which Iraq now suffers, has shown that among the Arabs there are those who have not found the taste of freedom sweet, who have not relished it, and who have not freed themselves of the need to be followers.

And Syria refused to be afraid, refused to return to the old humiliation, and refused to squander the dignity granted her after so long a struggle to win it in hardship; and lo, the Turks intimidate her now with threats, now with aircraft glimpsed from near or far, and matters threaten to become entangled again between Arabs and Turks, after they had reached a measure of ease, good neighborliness, and forgetting of that hateful past, which is not yet far behind us.

For the Arabs have not forgotten, though they would have loved to forget, that the Turks destroyed their Arab-Islamic civilization when they extended their dominion over the Levant and Egypt and the lands beyond them; they destroyed this civilization in a destruction the Arabs still struggle to repair, and it seems they will struggle long before they achieve what they wish of this repair. They destroyed this civilization and built nothing else in its place, but lived upon it and upon its ruins for centuries, until, once the turmoil of the First World War had cleared from around them, they denied whatever debt they owed to this civilization, and flung themselves into the arms of European civilization, infatuated with it and devoted to it, as though they had never known that Arab civilization, and had never made it the foundation of their lives.

Could it be that it has displeased our Turkish friends to see Arab civilization return to something of its old flourishing, so that they wished to bring it back to the state of ruin and calamity in which they left it, reluctantly, behind them? If such a thought has crossed their minds, or toyed with their souls, then they ought to know that the Arabs today, in

the Levant and Egypt at least, are not like the Arabs over whom they extended their dominion at the close of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the modern age, and that the Arabs today are capable of meeting good with good, and capable of meeting evil with evil, and capable of standing firm against whatever calamities may come; and that the Arabs were not delivered from the domination of the French and the English only to return to the domination of the Turks once more, by way of alliances or things resembling alliances.

And that the Arabs of the Levant and Egypt have outgrown their swaddling bands, and have come to fear no harm from the Turks, now that they are free of the violence of the French and the English, and that the world around the Arabs and the Turks has changed, and that even the powerful themselves are no longer able to intimidate peoples who have tasted freedom. How much less, then, the weak, who cannot protect themselves from fear except with American assistance.

And the Turks ought to remember that Egypt sheltered free Arabs in the past century when they fled to her with their freedom, and that she has not yet departed from her custom of sheltering the free from east and west of the Arab world; let her, then, be content with what she has gained of the Iraqi old guard, and give herself time to digest them, or leave it to America to digest them, and let her leave the Levant and Egypt to do as they wish — for frightening them is hard, and digesting them harder still.