Matter of Fact

By Joseph Alsop

IF – IF – IF –

Baghdad, Iraq. – These are breathless times, but this reporter cannot remember any purely political situation more breathless than the one here in Iraq. It lies in one man's power to insure the victory or cause the defeat of the new Communist drive into the Arab lands. Which will he do? Only he can say.

Joseph Alsop

But even if no one else can foretell the choice of Iraq's new revolutionary leader, Brig. Abdel Karim Kassem, it is at least possible to foretell the consequences of his choice.

If Kassem finally accepts the role the Communists have allotted to him – the role of the Kremlin's Nuri Pasha – the consequences will be very serious indeed. The first effects will appear in Syria, where the Communists are already growing daily bolder and more defiant of Gamal Abdel Nasser. But in the end, the Lebanon and Jordan and Egypt herself and the countries of the Arabian peninsula and the Arab lands in North Africa will also be explosively affected.

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AT the present stage of Arab development, in short, the trend in all the Arab lands will be deformed and twisted if Kassem makes the Iraqi choice in favor of the Communists. Gamal Abdel Nasser himself is not strong enough to prevent this result. For Nasser is too much the prisoner of his own past dealings with the Kremlin to defend the non-Communist Arab nationalism, which he really believes in, against the impact of a wrong choice by Kassem.

But what if Kassem makes the other choice, as this reporter things more probable? That is the really exciting question. And the best answer is that the Iraqi revolution will then have a good chance of being remembered as the dawn of sanity in Arab affairs.

The reason for this is rather simple. The essential point about the Iraqi revolution is that it shattered the foundations of the Western policy in the Arab lands and of Nasser's policy too. The old Western policy was deeply influenced by Britain's economic vulnerability. It was therefore founded on the principle of maintaining positions of strength, in the form of pro-Western governments. These were in turn expected to protect Britain's and the West's Middle Eastern oil jugular.

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THERE is no use arguing any longer about whether the Western policy might have been made to work, by greater courage and adroitness in Washington. The fact is that the Western policy of positions of strength was defeated, for good and all, when the old regime in Iraq was bloodily wiped out. Furthermore, the Iraqi revolution has raised an obvious question about the necessity for this defeated policy; for the revolutionary government here has most conspicuously refrained from nationalizing the Iraq Petroleum company.

The shattered foundations of the Western policy are, so to say, lying about in the open for all the world to see. The shattered foundations of Nasser's policy are not so easy to see. The shattered foundations of Nasser's policy are not so easy to observe, but the collapse has occurred all the same.

The mere promotion of Arab nationalism, the mere expulsion of foreign influences from the Middle East, were not the real foundations of Nassers' policy. Nasser's policy was squarely founded on the claim to be Arab nationalism's unique, all-deciding leader. All or nothing was the rule. Other Arabs were called upon to acknowledge Nasser's unchallenged authority, or they were venomously denounced as traitors to the Arab nation. "I am Arab Union," was Nasser's version of Louis XIV's famous remark about the state.

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THE Western policy may have been impractical from the outset, but so was Nasser's. It was always predictable that if Nasser became emperor of pan-Arabia the next morning, he would start losing provinces from his empire only a few mornings later. The Arab lands are too various. They are too differentiated by local interests and habits. They could never have been successfully ruled by an Egyptian dictator without great military force at his disposal.

The Iraqi revolution has now returned a rude answer to Nasser's assertion, "I am Arab Union." Brig. Kassem earnestly desires the most intimate Arab cooperation, but he also insists, as he laconically remarked to me, that "Baghdad is the capital of Iraq." And while it was wonderfully easy for Nasser to whack away at the old regime in Iraq, as a parcel of traitors to Arab unity, whacking at Kassem is quite another problem.

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NASSER has publicly acknowledged as much. For the first time, he has abandoned his former claim of unique leadership and authority. For the first time, he has publicly acknowledged that all the Arab states must develop in their own way, within the broader framework of "Arab brotherhood." Characteristically, he has also self-righteously denied that he ever made the now-abandoned claim anyway.

In these circumstances, there is a chance for a wholly new start here in the Middle East. The old Western policy and the old Nasser policy, which clashed so sharply with one another, have both been defeated. The debris can therefore be cleared away. An effort can begin to work out new relationships, both between the Arab states and between the Arab states and the West.

A hard-headed re-examination of the West's relations with Nasser himself is the first requirement for a sensible new start. Another is an effort, sustained and not damp-handed and ever eager, to ease Kassem's choice in Iraq. By these means, if–if–if –Kassem makes the right choice, progress towards Middle Eastern stability and sanity is at last possible.

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Chicago School Fire Toll At 91; City Prays Others Can Survive

Chicago –(UPI)– The death toll in Chicago's school fire climbed to 91 Friday night, hours after 70 of the victims from Our Lady of the Angels school were buried in crisp, cold December weather.

Services for 12 more of the children were to be held yesterday. Three Roman Catholic nuns who died with their charges in Monday's blaze and five other children were buried Thursday.

Attention of the heartsick city shifted to the city's hospitals where 12 youngsters and one nun remained on the critical list, and prayers were offered that the delayed death Friday night of Victor Jacabellis, 9, might be the last in the overwhelming tragedy.

A solemn requiem Mass was celebrated by Chicago's Archbishop Albert G. Meyer at a National Guard armory where 18 girls and nine boys rested in white and gold coffins. Separate funeral services were sung at numerous parish churches throughout the city for many of the remaining children.

Spellman Assists

Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York assisted at the Mass held in the temporary "cathedral," chosen because no church in the city was large enough to hold the victims, their relatives and mourners.

About 7,000 persons were at the armory, and another 2,000 gathered later at the Holy Innocents Shrine of Queen of Heaven cemetery where 21 of the victims were brought for final burial.

There, as gusty winds blew bitterly, Bishop Raymond P. Hillinger offered a final prayer over the coffins and weeping relatives huddled together for comfort.

One bereaved father was denied the comforting release of tears. Stanley Burda, 37, had undergone an eye operation Monday, the same day his daughter, Beverly, 13, was killed in the fire.

Doctors had warned him that excrutiating pain and possible damage would accompany any tears he might shed at the funeral, and Burda struggled to obey the warning.

Sodliers Cry

A short distance away were the newly turned graves of the three nuns and a statue of the smiling Christ surrounded by the figures of three little children. Inscribed on the base of the statue were Christ's words "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God."

Mourners contained their grief during the requiem Mass, but at the close, as National Guardsmen escorted the tiny coffins and families out, tears began to flow profusely.

Three women required first aid, fathers wept openly, and several National Guardsmen were forced to leave their posts because, as their commander put it, the combat veterans of World War II and the Korean war "just couldn't take it."

Booby Trapping Turns Out To Be Officer's Booboo

Seattle, Wash. –(UPI)– The King County Sheriff's office yesterday put out a cancellation order on a bulletin asking officers in the Western states to watch two cars which were reported to be booby trapped.

Harold Wieland, chief of detectives, said the story originated from a Washington state patrol bulletin of May, 1956. At that time three burglary suspects were reported to have wired their cars so a charge of dynamite would explode if anyone else tried to open the doors.

However, the case was cleared up satisfactorily more than two years ago, Wieland said.

He explained that a succession of errors resulted in a bulletin going out on the police teletype network which indicated the case was a current one.

Assuming

He said a police officer from Medina, Wash., was riding with a police sergeant from nearby Bellevue. The Medina officer saw the old information listed on the Bellevue police board. Assuming the case was a current one, he notified the King County sheriff's office which put the bulletin out today.

When the error was discovered, a cancellation order was put out on the police network immediately Wieland said.

Port of Umatilla May Face Paying Attorney's Fees

Pendleton–(UPI)–The Port of Umatilla may have to pay $15,000 in attorney's fees in a land condemnation case instigated by the port.

An interlocutory judgment of $15,000 was entered Friday in circuit court here by Circuit Judge William M. Wells.

Attorneys John F. Kilkenny and John H. Kottkamt of Pendleton, P. W. Mahoney of Heppner and Charles L. Powell were seeking the fee set by the court. They were attorneys for defendants R. W. and Elsie Richmond, owners of the land.

For Development

An original suit filed by the port commission wanted the land condemned for development purposes but Judge Wells ruled that the port was seeking to condemn land far in excess of its needs.

The Oregon supreme court reversed that decision and sent the case back to Morrow county for a land appraisal. A jury ruled the land was worth $60,000. The port had originally offered $56,000 for it.

Not Yet Decided

The commission has not yet decided whether it will purchase the land at that price. The area is located along the Columbia river near Cove Springs Landing.

REJECTION SLIP

Rutland, Vt.–(UPI)–After Rutland City aldermen suggested that Rutland Town selectmen set up a committee to investigate annexation they received a two paragraph reply. The first paragraph acknowledged receiving the suggestion. The second paragraph read, "We feel we want no part of your proposal and refuse to appoint such a committee."

TOUGHEST TASK

Oklahoma City–(UPI)–What is the hardest task a governor has? "Saying 'No,'" says Oklahoma's Gov. Raymond Gary.

Neuberger Urges That State Match Medical Grant

Portland –(UPI)– Sen. Richard L. Neuberger (D-Ore.), said Friday Oregon would be losing a golden opportunity to become one of the great medical centers of the nation if it failed to match a $1,296,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health.

Neuberger told the faculty of the University of Oregon medical school that "I virtually pledged our honor when I told officials of NIH that our state would put up its share of these funds for construction of a medical research building at the medical school."

He said that if Oregon's government failed to fulfill its part of the bargain "we shall never have such a chance again."

Neuberger said Oregon would get the $1,296,000 out of a total federal appropriation of only 30 million dollars for the entire United States for medical research facilities.

The junior senator said he planned to get in touch personally with Gov.-elect Mark Hatfield again as well as with leaders of the Legislature's Ways and Means committee if Oregon matching funds are not appropriated by the time he visits the state during next April's Easter recess of Congress.

ALWAYS SUNNY

It's always sunny clothes-drying weather, with the help of an automatic gas dryer to give clothes a better-than-outdoors freshness and fragrance.

RESIGNS — Will Harridge has resigned as president of the American League, to take effect as soon as a successor is named.

ANGLING FOR BUSINESS

Nyack, N.Y. – (UPI) – Orange and Rockland Utilities, Inc., of Nyack, has gone into the business of servicing 800-watt power units installed in vending machines which dispense . . . live fishing worms. The machines, illuminated and refrigerated, sell the worms for 50 cents a dozen. One of the "wormatics" sold 3,000 nightcrawlers during a recent week end.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Topeka, Kansas–(UPI)–It took police to assure a pinball player he could return the next day to collect on the 112 free games he had just won at a tavern's legal closing time.

WHAT THEY SAY

Here's what automatic dishwasher users say: Fewer dishes and glasses broken, fewer tea-towels needed, hot water saved because dishes are done fewer times a day.

ASK AN EXPERT

When planning kitchen improvements, consult an expert, especially when a built-in range is considered, suggests the Gas Appliance Manufacturers association.

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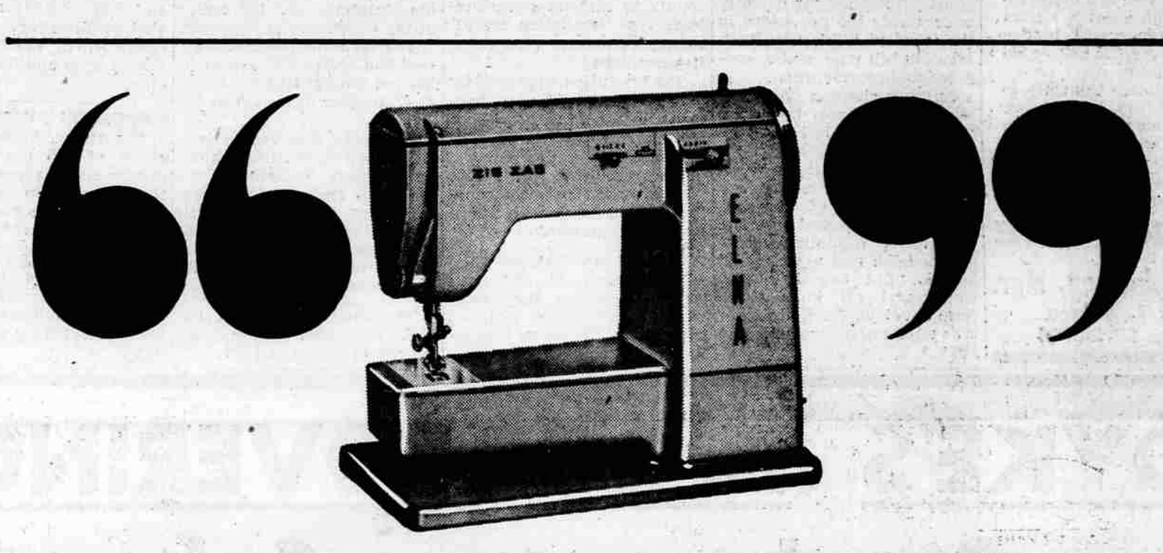

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