The Hangings in Iraq

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THE HANGINGS IN IRAQ

The following is an address titled "Not to Stand By Idly," given by the Editor at the Boston prayer meeting that was convoked by American Students for Israel on February 5, 1969.

FRIENDS: One of the tiresome slogans of today is that of the generation gap. No doubt, your generation and mine may vary from each other in several ways, your generation and mine also have different views on a number of subjects. But this common witness of ours here at Boston Common belies the frequent talk of an unbridgeable gap between our generations. This solemn hour shows us one.

We are united in our aversion to violence, in our contempt of brutality, in our protest against all inhumanity. We are joined together in a common search for justice and compassion, in the desire for a society that is truly human and humane, in the dream of a world in which all men are brothers.

Yet, what brought us together today is not only the general vision of peace bequeathed to us by the prophets of old but a concrete event, the slaying of fourteen presumed spies in Iraq and the threat of the Iraqi government to have even more put to death. When I became fully aware of what had happened, last Wednesday, I sent the following wire to the Secretary General of the United Nations, U Thant; the telegram was signed by each and every member of our Institute:

Outraged by Iraqi summary trial and execution of alleged spies, Muslim, Christian, and Jew, we protest its inhumanity. Identification of those hanged as Jews (see picture, front page, New York Times, January 29) shows anti-Semitic character of trial. Whole affair recalls shame of Hitler's and Stalin's courts. Agree with Times editorial "Peace on the Scaffold." Beg your intervention with Iraqi government not to continue trials and soil Near East with more blood.

Before I examine more closely what may become known as the "Baghdad hangings," let me make clear that, as a matter of course, I cannot rule out altogether the possibility that there are some Israeli spies among the Intelligence Service's "accomplishments." As US intelligence—both in Moscow and in Washington—has reached us with evidence of the presence of Israeli spies among the Iraqi "accomplishments," we cannot rule out altogether the possibility that there are some Israeli spies among the Iraqi "accomplishments."
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spies among the executed—all modern states rely for their safety on intelligence—but there is absolutely no evidence. All the news that has reached us speaks against the possibility.

Let me begin with a recent statement by Abdullah Salum al-Samarrai, the Iraqi Minister of Information. He says:

We did not hang innocents. We executed Israeli spies who killed children and old people and tried to sabotage our installations (The New York Times, 2/2/69).

This statement has a fantastic ring about it. A spy worth his salt seeks to be inconspicuous. He tries to submerge in the society he observes; he becomes an artist, a waiter, or a hotel manager—so as to be able to gather and communicate as much information as possible. He never engages in acts of sabotage, much less does he go around killing the young and the old. The Iraqi Minister has simply overstated his case; in other words, he has no case.

The spy hunt and the kill that followed seem to have served several purposes. It was an attempt to bolster a shaky regime. By putting the trial proceedings on the radio, the government hoped to intimidate the populace, and by turning the execution into a folk festival, indeed, a circus, the government sought to win the sympathy of the masses. Unsure of their reaction, however, it had Independence Square in Baghdad, one of the places of execution, guarded by nearby tanks.

As these barbarian festivities were to excite the masses, so the trials as a whole seem to have been staged in order to impress on the Iraqi people and the entire world the image of an Israel bent on destroying Arab lives and Arab rule. Yet, this proved to be a boomerang. The world turned away in horror and disgust; even the Arab sister states showed their disapproval by keeping an embarrassed silence about the Iraqi "accomplishment." Their bewilderment gives the lie to the claim

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of the Baghdad radio: "This [the day of the brutal hangings] is a glorious day, a day of joy for all Arabs." The only Arab leader to approve the Iraqi murders was Yassir Arafat, the leader of Al Fatah, the largest terrorist organization (The New York Times, 2/1/69). Are we to conclude that the verdict of the Iraqi court is but another terrorist activity?

The anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli character of the entire spectacle is further shown by the defense the Iraqi government gave to the outside world. Its Minister of Information, whom I quoted a moment ago, pleaded the government's cause in these words:

It was the Jews who once suspended Christ from the Cross in a most outrageous manner. We hang only spies—not innocent people or prophets (The New York Times, 2/1/69).

One need not be a scholar to know that the man who condemned Christ to death on the Cross was not a Jew but a Roman procurator. The argument that the Jews in Jesus' time did something far worse than the Iraqis did today is an altogether strange one on the lips of a Muslim. The Koran teaches explicitly that Jesus did not die on the Cross—a double was crucified in His stead. This is an assumption without basis in fact. Islam does not believe in the atoning character of Jesus' crucifixion; the easiest way to deny the redemptive nature of His death is to deny the fact of His death. When, for the sake of argument, the Iraqi Minister of Information repudiates his own holy book, the world must realize that his words cannot be trusted.

I have treated the Baghdad affair in such detail to make quite clear that we are not a mob that shouts and shouts but does not know what it is all about. Why have we come here? We have come in obedience to the commandment, not to be indifferent when the lives of our brothers are at stake. Lo ta'amod al-dam re'echa. Ani Adonay. "Do not stand by idly as your neighbor's blood is shed. I am the Lord" (Lev 19:16).

Hence, we plead, we beg, we demand of our administration, of the United Nations, of all powers great and small, to use every effort to bring the Iraqi spy hunt to a halt so that no more lives will be lost. There must be no second trial, no further hangings. If Iraq refuses to listen to these pleas, if the government of Iraq, a junta of left-wing nationalists, goes on hunting spies, we will continue to cry for justice on the heads of the five defendants, the Prime Minister, and the death of the people to the world and to their advisers. The handed policy is that the Power meeting yesterday cumb to the special and spheres of the latest statement the champion of the representatives. There was only one.

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Iraq, a junta of left-wing
nationalists, goes through with plans to try and execute another thirty-
five defendants—again several Jews and this time also two former
Prime Ministers among them—and if no one, let us hope, avenges
the death of these victims of sham justice, their blood will cry and
continue to cry to heaven.

The echo will be heard in the hearts of men. It may awaken many
people to the realities of the Near East. Let us hope that among those
awakened there will be our President, the Secretary of State, and all
their advisers. Lately, we have heard a great deal about an even-
handed policy in the Near East—an ominous phrase—about a Four
Power meeting where, I fear, American participants may easily suc-
cumb to the spell of the great General. Le Général considers himself
the champion of la gloire de la France, that is of that country’s alliances
and spheres of influence; he is no friend of Israel. I also fear that our
representatives may give too much credence to President Nasser’s
latest statement that he is ready to bring to an end the state of belliger-
cency. A short time before, he made exactly the opposite statement.
There was only one solution to the Near Eastern crisis, he said: war!
The cruelly taken lives will cry to heaven, and the echo will be
heard on earth. Let us hope that men will be moved

to bend every
effort for the emigration of Jews from Iraq, Egypt, and other Arab
lands. Some are in prison, others are isolated and in constant fear for
their lives. Of the once 120,000 Iraqi Jews only 2500 are left; of
the once 80,000 Egyptian Jews, again only 2500; of the once 30,000
Syrian Jews, 4000 remain in the land of their birth. All these may
want to be rescued, and we must regain for them and many other
men freedom of movement, lives without fear, without discrimination.
Justice is indivisible. You cannot have justice for a few. Either you
have justice for all or you have no justice at all.

Let us, therefore, pray for the final reconciliation of Arabs and
Jews. Let us extend our prayer and our plea to the brave people in
Biafra who have chosen starvation rather than subjugation, that our
Administration and Congress will come to their aid; to the Catholic
minority in Ireland whose needs are constantly neglected, whose rights
are violated by the ruling majority. Let us extend our prayer and plea,
avove all, to our black brothers in this country. In recent months a
few radicals—noisemakers would be a truer name—have hurled in-
vectives against all white people, particularly against Jews, substitut-
ing abuse for hard work. It would be a great pity, in fact a disaster, if we allowed them to deter us from our purpose of justice for all and peace everywhere, if we permitted them to keep us from fighting against discrimination and poverty, from fighting for equal rights, proper housing, full employment, and proper education of blacks and Puerto Ricans. We are all one family. Another man’s sorrow is our sorrow, another people’s plight our plight. Injustice, hatred, desecrate God’s name: They, obviously, injure those who are made to suffer, but they do harm also to the inner man of those who stand by idly.

Let us, therefore, pray for the hanged and those who mourn for them; let us pray for all those who are still unconcerned that their consciences may become more responsive to misery, that their moral vision may be sharpened; let us pray also for ourselves, for courage, for perseverance, for all the virtues we need to bring the war against inhumanity everywhere to a peaceful end.

I would like to conclude with a marvelous Jewish prayer whose spirit and intent is universal. It is attributed to the great Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlaw (1772–1811), the great-grandson of Baal Shem Tov:

_**Yehi ratson milpanecha**_

May I be Your will [Lord]
To erase from the world wars and bloodshed
And to cover it, instead, with peace, great and wondrous.
Never again shall nation raise the sword against nation,
And they shall learn war no more.
Let all the dwellers on earth
Recognize and know the inmost truth:
That we are come into this world, not for quarrel or controversy,
Nor for hate or jealousy, harassment or bloodshed.
We are come into this world to recognize and know You.
You [Lord] be blessed forever.

_Titbarach lenatsach._

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_The_ only time a Jew stands before the altar is at the **_mish_**.

Thus, we may say that the prayer in the mosque

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