

ARTICLE

The Partisans of Peace in Lebanon and Syria: How Anti-Nuclear Activism in the 1950s Revitalized the Arab Left

Masha Kirasirova 

History Program, New York University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE
Email: Mk2688@nyu.edu

The global confrontation between the Axis and Allied powers during World War II accelerated decolonization in the Middle East. Axis propaganda supporting certain nation-state aspirations pushed the British to support nationalist Lebanese and Syrian leaders' claims to independence from the French. After declaring independence, the leaders of the new Lebanese and Syrian governments sought to further secure their national interests by asking the Soviet Union and United States for help, establishing diplomatic relations with both countries in 1944. This calculated move proved effective.¹ Josef Stalin, at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, opposed the continuously privileged status France enjoyed in the region and, in 1946, Soviet representatives advocated in the UN Security Council for the removal of French and British troops.² US representatives also supported Syrians' right to determine their government, but in more moderate and cautious ways.³

Widespread hopes for a peaceful postwar future raised by the withdrawal of European troops from the region were upended by the 1948 war in Palestine. The defeat of the Arab coalition, which included Syria and Lebanon, undermined the legitimacy of new political regimes. In Syria, popular discontent facilitated a bloodless coup, with the aid of the CIA, by the chief of staff of the Syrian army, Colonel Husni Za'im, setting the trend for military intervention in Syrian politics of the 1950s. The government of Lebanon, led by President Bishara al-Khuri and Prime Minister Riyad al-Sulh, survived the 1948 war but collapsed under growing pressure in the early 1950s. Armistice negotiations with Israel heightened tensions between members of the Arab League, especially Egypt and Jordan. The war also undermined regional economies, as 750,000 Palestinian refugees fleeing or expelled from their homes arrived in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and the Gaza Strip. Economic ties between Syria and Lebanon frayed as Syria's increasingly protectionist economic policies diverged from Lebanon's more free-market orientation.⁴ The joint Customs Union, which had underlined the Syrian-Lebanese community of interests during the Mandate, collapsed in 1950.

¹ Rami Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism* (Sussex, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 26.

² Yaacov Ro'i, *From Encroachment to Involvement, a Documentary Study of Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1945–73* (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1974), 28–31.

³ US diplomatic representatives urged Syria's leadership to adopt a "realistic attitude" and provide "reasonable assurances" with respect to French interests, and the State Department decided not to send a military mission to Syria in response to Syria's request. On early US diplomacy in Syria, see James A. Melki, "Syria and State Department 1937–47," *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 1 (1997): 92–106.

⁴ On the political crisis following a Syrian army intelligence detachment entering Lebanon and killing a Lebanese citizen suspected of spying for Israel, see Eyal Zisser, *Lebanon, The Challenge of Independence* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 170.

These regional destabilizations coincided with the breakdown of the wartime alliance between Western powers and the Soviet state, which focused both sides' attention on the Middle East as a critical component of their global strategy. President Harry Truman called the region a focal point of US containment, and Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko predicted that it was destined for many years to be a place of Soviet confrontation with the US.⁵ In the context of this breakdown of trust, the Soviet Union reinvigorated its global campaign for the moral high ground vis-a-vis the West, which had begun in the interwar period.⁶ The Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) was one of the Soviet Union's leading internationally oriented institutions coordinating the new postwar campaign. The Cominform was established in 1947 to organize the communist parties of Europe, but its World Peace Movement initiative acquired popularity beyond Europe and took on a life of its own.

The World Peace Movement started as a Soviet-led series of international meetings of intellectuals "in defense of peace" in Wroclaw (August 1948), New York (March 1949), and Paris and Prague (April 1949). In April 1949, the World Peace Movement leadership formed a more permanent committee, which was renamed the World Peace Council in November 1950.⁷ While Soviet leadership in this movement was undeniable, its global popularity stemmed partly from the fact that the idea of "peace," deliberately kept ambiguous, resonated powerfully across the world. The idea that future atomic warfare would be so devastating that it served as its own effective deterrent seemed universally uncertain, raising existential anxiety for intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike.⁸ In decolonizing contexts such as Syria and Lebanon, this uncertainty was amplified by recent memories of colonial violence and the awareness of residual inequalities in the emerging postwar international system. New conflicts covered in Arabic print and radio media, such as the Korean War (1950–53), fueled anxieties about regional politics and their potential escalation to violent military confrontations involving foreign interests.⁹

Existential anxiety about nuclear war and US willingness to use nuclear weapons in Asia mobilized intellectuals to organize conferences "for peace": peasants, women, and religious communities sidelined during earlier phases of communist and leftist intellectual outreach attended peace rallies and signed petitions against atomic weapons; translators produced Arabic versions of literary and political texts by European thinkers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as Soviet writers such as Ilya Ehrenburg, Konstantin Simonov, and Nikolai Tikhonov. This field of activism around the peace movement invigorated the Lebanese and Syrian Left in a period otherwise marked by political and economic instability, the emergence of powerful new states, and draconian repressions.

This movement's activities have been largely occluded in scholarship about the region for reasons related to the intellectual politics of the Cold War. Since the Lebanese and Syrian Partisans of Peace (LPP and SPP) were spearheaded by communist intellectuals, historians in Europe and the United States dismissed them as communist "fronts," considering them

⁵ Oleg Grinevskii, *Tainy Sovetskoi diplomatii* (Moscow Vagrius, 2000), 11. At a plenary session of the General Assembly just before the partition of Palestine, Gromyko stated: "the Arabs and Arab countries will still look to Moscow more than once, expecting help from the Soviet Union in the struggle for their lawful interests, trying to free themselves from the residue of foreign dependence." "Gromyko's Speech at the UN General Assembly, November 26, 1947," in *Blizhnevostochnyi konflikt, 1947–56* (Moscow: Materik, 2003), 10.

⁶ Soviet interwar connections in the region were mostly managed by communist parties, although some cultural diplomacy efforts also focused beyond Europe and North America. See Katerina Clark, *Eurasia without Borders: The Dream of a Leftist Literary Commons, 1919–1943* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021).

⁷ Vladimir Dobrenko, "Conspiracy of Peace: The Cold War, the International Peace Movement, and the Soviet Peace Campaign, 1946–1956" (PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 2016), 150.

⁸ Petra Goedde, *The Politics of Peace: A Global Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 7; Lawrence Wittner, *One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement through 1953* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 43–45, 184–90.

⁹ Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 86.

mainly in the context of the Soviet Union's regional "influence" or communism's "threat."¹⁰ The Partisans' association with communism also perpetuated the perception of them as "foreign" elements, and thus historians of Middle Eastern anti-colonial nationalism and its intersecting gender, labor, and religious dimensions also ignored them. At the same time, because the Partisans kept a deliberate distance from institutionalized communism, historians of Soviet-Arab political relations and Arab communism also treated them as marginal.¹¹ Historians of US foreign relations overlooked the movement due to disinterest in its main points of concern: the threat of regional and global nuclear war and opposition to the expansion of American military bases and oil interests.¹²

The Partisans have also received little attention among scholars of the Arab Left. Although this work has moved beyond its original focus on workers, peasants, and national communist parties, scholars of Arab intellectual history continue to refer to the movement's main journal, *al-Tariq* (The Path), as a "communist magazine" and use it to better understand relationships between prominent communist leaders in the region.¹³ The few historians who have used *al-Tariq* to study the wider leftist milieu, beyond communist party politics, have emphasized the partition of Palestine as a point of rupture that "obliterated" the space parallel to the communist movement, the space in which the Left had been developing since the interwar period.¹⁴ In this article, I show that the Partisans of Peace actually expanded this space after 1948 by making it more heterogenous and inclusive. Building on existing scholarship primarily reliant on European, American, and Arab sources, this article draws on *al-Tariq* and archives of the Soviet Peace Committee to illustrate the ways in which leftist peace activists contributed to local and regional politics while, at the same time, negotiating global constellations of power that included, but were not defined by, the intellectual and material resources of the Soviet state.¹⁵

The Partisans of Peace in Lebanon and Syria

The leaders of the LPP and SPP movements were experienced organizers who had participated in the anti-fascist and anti-colonial movements of the 1930s and 1940s, including in the Popular Front coalition that supported the rights of women, workers, and youth. The Partisans' leading regional publication was the Beirut-based, leftist, political-literary journal

¹⁰ Bernard S. Morris, "Communist International Front Organizations: Their Nature and Function," *World Politics* 9, no. 1 (1956): 76–87. On dismissive attitudes towards Middle Eastern branches of Partisans of Peace, see Elizabeth Bishop, "The 'Partisans of Peace' between Baku and Moscow: The Soviet Experience of 1958," in *The Middle East in 1958: Reimagining a Revolutionary Year*, ed. Jeffrey G. Karam (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 65–76.

¹¹ For instance, Yaacov Ro'i observes that although Soviet media commented on the peace movement "gaining ground" in Israel and Iraq and showing "particularly strong development" in Syria and Lebanon, the Soviets were more interested in countries central to the anti-imperialist struggle than those in which the peace movement flourished. Yaacov Roi, *From Encroachment to Involvement: A Documentary Study of Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1945–1973* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1974), 97.

¹² US and European interests aligned when US foreign aid to Western Europe (under the Marshall Plan) deemed that Middle Eastern oil be tapped and exploited. Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The US and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press 2002), esp. ch. 4; Bruce Kuniholm, "US Policy in the Near East: The Triumphs and Tribulations of the Truman Administration," in *The Truman Presidency*, ed. Michael J. Lacey (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1989), 299–338; Toru Onozawa, "Formation of American Regional Policy for the Middle East, 1950–1952: The Middle East Command Concept and Its Legacy," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 1 (2005): 117–48.

¹³ Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre & Decolonization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 83; Sune Haugbolle, "Dealing with Dissent: Khalid Bakdash and the Schisms of Arab Communism," in *The Arab Left: Histories and Legacies, 1950–1970s*, ed. Laure Guirgis (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 77–95.

¹⁴ Sana Tannoury-Karam, "The Making of a Leftist Milieu: Anti-Colonialism, Anti-Fascism, and the Political Engagement of Intellectuals in the Mandate Lebanon, 1920–1948" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northeastern University, 2017), 234.

¹⁵ Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*; Rami Ginat, *A History of Egyptian Communism: Jews and Their Compatriots in Quest of Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2011).

al-Tariq, a 100–150-page monthly journal was started in 1941 by the Anti-Fascist League of Syria and Lebanon founder, Antun Thabit (1907–64).¹⁶ Thabit, a communist and the chair of the Lebanese Society of Friends of the USSR between 1946 and 1948, continued to edit *al-Tariq* through the 1940s and 1950s.

Thabit led the Lebanese delegation of the Partisans of Peace to the 1949 Peace Congress in Paris, where he had previously studied architecture at the Académie des Beaux-Arts. In Paris, he committed *al-Tariq* to upholding the resolutions of the Congress, to opposing the nuclear catastrophe “being prepared for humanity by the colonizers and arms dealers,” and to advocating for freedom, justice, and democracy.¹⁷ At the same time, the journal continued to engage with questions of culture, including the boundaries between “high” and “low” culture, the politics of realism and other literary genres, and the relationship of nationalism, Arabism, and cultural heritage (*turāth*). It also continued to publish on other literary and philosophical topics, including through translations of Russian authors such as Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Maxim Gorky; Soviet writers such as Vladimir Mayakovsky, Alexander Fadeyev, Ilya Ehrenburg, and Konstantin Simonov; and Soviet academic specialists such as the orientalist Vladimir Lutsky and agronomist Trofim Lysenko. These works often appeared alongside translations of Mao Zedong, Mark Twain, Johannes Steele, Nazim Hikmet, and Pablo Neruda. These writings about politics—and, implicitly, the politics of culture, beauty, the family, sexuality, biology, and rights—pick up the various conversations animating the Left in the 1930s and 1940s, while also expanding the set of available intellectual references and analytical tools.

Like Thabit, many of the Partisans’ leaders in Lebanon and Syria were simultaneously involved in organized communism and had multiple ways to access Soviet material support.¹⁸ Indeed, Lebanese and Syrian peace representatives who traveled to international peace congresses did so mostly for free. Such delegations included communist and sympathetic writers, poets, and artists; people from the educational sector, such as professors and students; white-collar professionals, such as lawyers, doctors, and journalists; and several religious officials, such as the Syrian shaykhs Muhammad al-Ashmar and Salah al-Za’im.¹⁹ The movement had also established peace committees in Lebanon and Syria’s main cities, which helped distribute brochures and run petition campaigns—with the support of unions, women’s groups, and students—to publicize the movement’s platform (Fig. 1).²⁰

¹⁶ In 1951, the SPP inaugurated another weekly publication, *al-Salam* (Peace), which focused more on international meetings, disseminated anti-Western propaganda and Partisans’ appeals, and occasionally published articles by non-communist figures, such as Dawalibi. Peace events were also covered by communist newspapers. Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, 80–81.

¹⁷ “Bayan Mu’tamar Ansar al-Silm al-‘Alami,” *al-Tariq* 2 (1949), 3–6.

¹⁸ For examples of communists admitting to drawing up budgets for Soviet state authorities and making additional financial claims to Soviet cultural bureaucrats, see Masha Kirasirova, *The Eastern International: The Eastern International: Arabs, Central Asians, and Jews in the Soviet Union’s Anticolonial Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), ch. 4.

¹⁹ According to reports prepared by the US Legation of Damascus, most of the Congress delegates were communists and had their travels covered by the Communist Party; Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, 76. Soviet reports on the group identified its leaders by their professions rather than class or party affiliation, seeking to highlight mass appeal and distance from local Party circles. For example, a report on the Syrian Partisans of Peace lists the 24 leaders of the group as: Ibrahim al-Hamzawi (jurist), Ihsan al-Jabari (engineer), Ahmad ‘Abbas (agronomist), Ilyas Ward (doctor), Nabit Madal’dji (lawyer), Nabit Garawi (literary figure), Dakar Hwin (poet), Josef Konsowati (businessman), and others. GARF f. 9539, op. 1, d. 66, ll. 21–23 (Report on the Campaign for the Struggle for Peace, 1950).

²⁰ On the early work of the Partisans, see “Nida’ ila Jami’a al-Munazamat al-Dimuqratiyya wa Jami’ya Alasir al-Sulm,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1949), aleph–mim. Soviet reports describe the foundation in Syria in the passive voice characteristic of Soviet bureaucracy, obscuring the role of communists: local committees “were organized,” articles “were placed” in local papers,” and lists of prominent sympathizers “were published.” See GARF f. P9539, op. 1, d. 66, ll. 1–7 (Memo about the Movement for Peace in Syria, 1950).



Figure 1. Members of the Syrian delegation to the Peace Congress in Warsaw, November 1950.

From left: Shaykh Muhammad al-Ashmar, Ibrahim al-Hamzawi, Falak Tarazi, `Abd al-Salam Haydar, the worker Yassin al-Shawa, the farmer Ahmed Abaza. On the other side of the table are the painter Sa`id Tahsin and Josef Mawsilli. Source: *al-Tariq* I (1951), 76.

While obscuring its proximity to organized communism in the region, the peace movement also invigorated it. The Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party, under the leadership of Khalid Bakdash, had struggled through the ideological upheavals of the 1940s, including the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which communists supported in 1939–41, reversing their anti-fascist position of the late 1930s and then reverting back after the Soviet Union entered the war. As Lebanese and Syrian independence movements gathered strength during the war, Bakdash split the party in 1943, staying on as chairman in Syria and assigning Faraj Allah al-Hilu as the party's chairman in Lebanon. In practice, Bakdash continued to wield power over both, reflected in his ability to replace al-Hilu with Nikola Shawi in 1946 and suppress al-Hilu and other prominent communists' opposition to the party's contentious decision to support the partition of Palestine in 1947.²¹ On the eve of partition, the party's headquarters in Damascus were attacked and burned, its newspaper in Syria banned, and many party leaders and activists imprisoned. The persecution of communists in Syria continued under al-Za`im and his successor, Colonel Adib al-Shishakli, forcing the party further underground. Bakdash went into exile in Beirut and did not return to Syria until Shukri al-Quwatli became president in 1954. In Lebanon during this period, communists and Peace Partisans also experienced political pressure, but the repression was less severe and *al-Tariq* could publish without interruption.²²

²¹ On Bakdash's hegemony, see Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998), 25–59.

²² Radwan al-Shaghal was arrested in February 1951 for organizing a meeting in Tripoli, and Thabit was arrested in 1952 in connection with protests against the arrival of a Lebanese-American Korean War pilot, James Jabara. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History f. 495, op. 232, d. 6 (Antun Thabit personal file), l.80 (Report from January 16, 1952); and l. 97 (Tass reports February 26, 1951).

Throughout the political repression and changes of the early 1950s, the Partisans helped accomplish what Bakdash called for in 1951 from Beirut: that communists should transform the party in Syria and Lebanon into “a party of the masses.” This transformation could be achieved, he suggested, through the direction and control of social organizations such as “trade unions, peasant committees, the peace movement, and women’s organizations,” even if “our views and positions on every question are the same as those of the Partisans of Peace.”²³

It helped the Partisans’ cause that, unlike communists, they were not a party but instead a movement (*ḥaraka*) united around a subset of the communist agenda related primarily to international affairs.²⁴ The Partisans opposed nuclear war, Anglo-American imperialism, and the pressure put on Lebanon and Syria to join regional pro-Western military blocs and host foreign military bases; and they advocated solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world.²⁵ This platform overlapped with Soviet foreign policy interests and those of regional communists, allowing the Partisans to use communist pamphlets to promote their message. This international focus made it easier to speak in terms of shared Syrian-Lebanese interests.²⁶ Even in coverage of national congresses or events, such as the imprisonment of Syrian peace activists, *al-Tariq* described how “public opinion in Syria and Lebanon erupted in indignation” and that “a large number of Syrian and Lebanese lawyers volunteered” to defend the Syrian activists.²⁷ Soviet diplomatic reports on Syria also tended to include passages about Lebanon, and vice versa, especially in the context of the movement’s success among lower-level workers and peasants.²⁸

The Partisans’ reach was greater than that of local communists in part because the stakes of their campaigns were lighter. For instance, one of the Partisans’ most effective initiatives involved gathering signatures for the Stockholm Appeal, launched in March 1950 by the French Communist physicist Frédéric Joliot-Curie, which called for a ban on all atomic weapons and the establishment of an international control agency to monitor compliance. This campaign reportedly yielded 150,000 signatures in Syria and, by some estimates, as many as 300,000 in Syria and Lebanon combined.²⁹ As Rami Ginat asserts, most signatories

²³ Bakdash is cited in Ismael and Ismael, *The Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon*, 42–44. During this period of heightened repression of communists, US observers also considered the Syrian Partisans of Peace to be “the most prominent communist front organization in Syria.” US Legation report titled “The Partisans of Peace—Most Prominent Communist Front Organization in Syria,” from December 30, 1950, cited in Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, 252 (note 139).

²⁴ On the Partisans distributing communist pamphlets, see *Ibid.*, 79; the Syrian branch was led by communist lawyers Ibrahim Hamzawi and Mustafa Amin. GARF f. P9539, op. 1, d. 66, ll. 1-7 (Memo about the Movement for Peace in Syria, 1950).

²⁵ For example, they advocated solidarity with “the Arab peoples of Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria” struggling against French colonialism. “Bayan min al-Lajna al-Wataniyya li-Ansar al-Silm fi Suriyya Hawl Muqablat al-Amin al-‘Alam lil-Jami’a al-‘Arabiyya,” *al Tariq* 5-6 (1951), 92–93.

²⁶ For example, see “al-Sha’ban al-Suri wa-l-Lubnani Yarfadun Mashru’a al-Sifa’ al-Mushtarak,” *al-Tariq* 9 (1951), 62–66.

²⁷ *Al-Tariq* described the torture of members such as Dr. Musafa Amin, a member of the World Council for Peace, and Khalil Hariri, a member of the executive bureau of the Syrian Workers Conference, after the two were accused of throwing a bomb at an American news office.

²⁸ A higher number of peasants supporting the SPP is mentioned in *al-Sarkha*, April 6, 1952, but the LPP reported gathering 5000 signatories in opposition to the use of bacteriological weapons in Korea and Northern China from organizations of jurist democrats, students, youth, women’s organizations, workers, and peasants from Zahle, Bikfayya, Aicha Bakkra, Raml az-Zarifa, Furn ash- Shubbak, Bayt Shabab, Choueifat, Nabatieh, Kfar Remen, Wadi Abu Jamil, Khawus Saatiya, Zaytuna, Ain Al Mraiseh, the Al-Zayadina clan, refugees from Baalbek, and others. Both are mentioned in GARF f. P9539, op. 1, d. 152, ll. 1-8 (Report on the Partisans of Peace in Lebanon by the 2nd Secretary of the USSR Mission in Lebanon, 1952).

²⁹ The estimated number of signatories varies. In some sources, the Syrian Partisans estimated that 150,000 signed the Stockholm Appeal; cited in Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, 75. Elsewhere the Partisans estimated 300,000 Syrian men and women (perhaps here “Lebanese” are subsumed under Syrians) signed the call to ban atomic weapons and find a peaceful solution to the situation in Korea; “al-Sha’b al-Suri Yahtafal,” *al Tariq* 6 (1954), 4. The Soviet Committee for Peace followed Lebanese reports about the number of signatories and

“knew about the political and ideological connection between the World Movement for Peace and the Soviet Union” but signed anyway, “because, for them, the choice was between the East and the West, or neutralism and because Western denunciations of the Appeal and attempts to expose it as Soviet propaganda were regarded by these Syrians as hypocritical.”³⁰ Signatories included those who were neither communists nor sympathizers, such as the Lebanese parliamentarian Hamid Franjiyya and leader of the right-wing Kataeb Party Pierre Gemayyel, indicating an ability to reach across political divides never possessed by communists (Fig. 2).³¹

Fellow-Travelling and Historical Erasure

One reason the Partisans of Peace in Syria and Lebanon have been neglected by scholarship on nationalism and the Arab Left, alongside scholarship on decolonization and postcolonialism, is the ideological closeness among the postwar generation of Lebanese and Syrian intellectuals, between those whom Yoav Di-Capua describes as having “‘graduated’ from Paris’s Left Bank cafes and Moscow’s communist seminars.”³² For European intellectuals, this proximity also posed problems. From 1952–56, Sartre aligned himself with the French Communist Party and the Partisans of Peace movement, a decision that prompted the famed contemporary philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty to dismiss Sartre’s work from this period as “ultra Bolshevism.” David Lethbridge recently described this term, “ultra Bolshevism,” as an “ambiguous category that meant nothing” but which nevertheless functioned within the Cold War context to suppress Sartre’s writings from this period. As a result, Lethbridge argues, scholars miss that the themes of Sartre’s speeches delivered at Partisans congresses were consonant with the political and intellectual projects he had been developing since the mid-1930s.³³

The apparent rupture between anti-colonial and anti-fascist activism of the 1930s and 1940s, and the later 1950s Afro-Asian, non-aligned, and nationalist Left, was the effect of a similar erasure of the Partisans of Peace in Syria and Lebanon. The emphasis on 1956 as a point of rupture in the historiography of the “global” Left and postcolonial studies reflects a particular Eurocentrism of chronologies and geographies in the dominant scholarship. For many prominent European leftists, such as Sartre and Aimé Césaire, 1956 marked a rupture with communism following Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s “secret speech” at the 20th Party Congress and the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Disillusionment after 1956 made such authors’ later work more acceptable to scholars in European and American academies.

For peace activists and other leftists in Syria and Lebanon, however, Soviet military action in Europe mattered less than regional events, such as: multiple regime changes in Syria; the 1952 Egyptian Revolution that ended the British occupation of Egypt and brought Egypt and Lebanon closer together; the 1953 coup in Iran that consolidated the Shah’s authoritarian regime and exposed the Soviet Union’s reluctance to intervene in support of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq or protect the Left; the birth of the Afro-Asian movement at Bandung in 1955, with follow-up conferences in Cairo and Beirut that spurred the emergence of Afro-Asian and non-aligned communities; the Algerian War (1954–62) that invigorated the regional anti-colonial struggle; and, of course, the 1956 Suez Crisis that gave Arabs

their projected future numbers. The first report stated that 29,000 Lebanese signatories had signed a petition calling for the ban of atomic weapons, alongside their expectation that, by late June 1950, that number grew to 100,000; but another report suggested there were only 43,500 signatures by June. State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) f. 9539, op. 21, d. 63, l. 7 (“29,000 Lebanese Signed the Stockholm Appeal,” translation from Arabic); also l. 12 (“On the Growing Lebanese Peace Movement”).

³⁰ Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, 75.

³¹ Michael W. Suleiman, “The Lebanese Communist Party,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no. 2 (1967): 144.

³² Di-Capua, *No Exit*, 24.

³³ David Lethbridge, “Constructing Peace by Freedom: Jean-Paul Sartre, Four Short Speeches on the Peace Movement, 1952–1955,” *Sartre Studies International: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Existentialism and Contemporary Culture* 18, no. 2 (2012): 1–18.



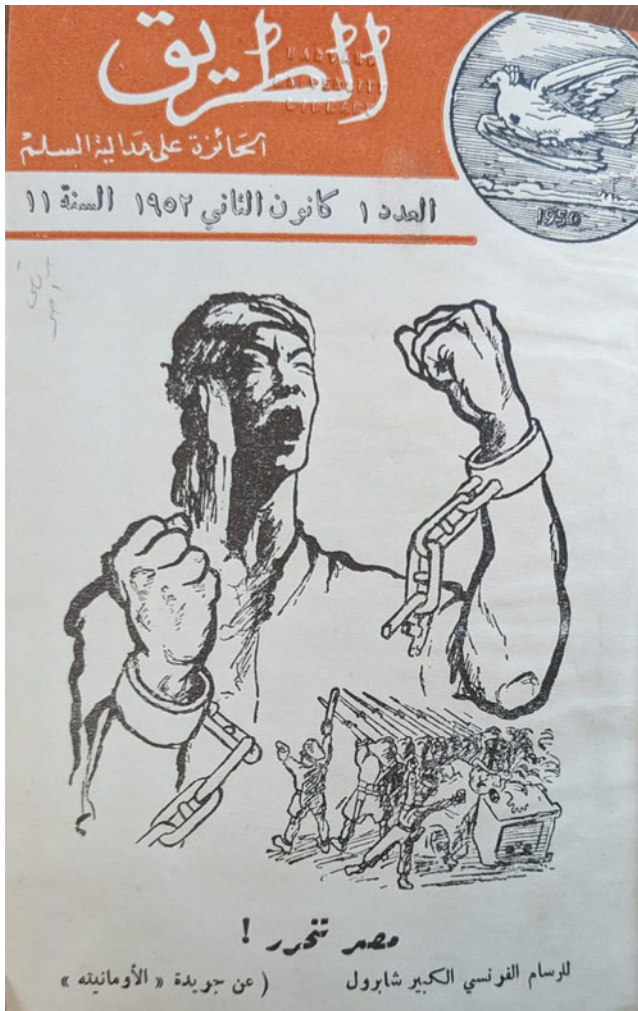
Figure 2. Partisans of Peace Display at the Bikfayya Flower Festival, 1955. Source: *al-Tariq* 8–9 (1955), 110.

an experience of victory against a colonialist military challenge thanks, in part, to support from the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc. The absence of rupture with the Soviet Union in 1956 and, in many cases, a deepening of political commitment to leftist politics and ideas has rendered these ideas less visible to scholars working on decolonization within European and North American area studies paradigms.

Despite these erasures, the Lebanese and Syrian Partisans of Peace received significant international recognition from their contemporaries. At the 1950 World Peace Council meeting in Warsaw, *al-Tariq* was awarded the Gold Medal of Peace, the highest honor given by the Council. In receiving this prize, the editors shared the podium with major European, North and South American, and Asian cultural icons such as the French film director Louis Daquin, Czechoslovak composer Václav Dobiaš, Italian painter Renato Guttuso, and Brazilian painter Candido Portinari. That same year, Pablo Picasso, writers Nazim Hikmet and Pablo Neruda, and the singer Paul Robeson also received International Peace Prizes. *Al-Tariq* featured its Gold Medal of Peace on its cover for three years—throughout 1951, 1952, and through September 1953 (Figs. 3, 4).

For the Lebanese and Syrian Partisans' leaders, acknowledgment of their work and achievements seemed deeply meaningful, as it allowed them to rebuild connections with members of the international Left forged in the 1930s and 1940s, revisit earlier conversations about colonialism, and participate in collective intellectual conversations about its meanings. At the 1949 Paris Peace Congress, Antun Thabit presented the movement in Lebanon as a "logical continuation" of the "wartime work of 'Umar Fakhuri," the Lebanese literary critic who advocated literary realism and co-founded the Anti-Fascist League and *al-Tariq*.³⁴ In the new context of postwar independence and international connection, opposition to new blocs—the "Eastern Bloc" (*al-kutla al-sharqiyya*), the "Fertile Crescent," and "Greater Syria" blocs—was recast as a continuation of earlier colonial patterns of boundary making. Another Lebanese delegate to the Paris Congress, the

³⁴ "Khitab al-Muhandis Antun Thabit," *al-Tariq* 2 (1949), 100–3.



Figures 3 and 4. continue.

students, and housewives” gathered for an International Women’s Day celebration in Beirut in 1949, the feminist peace activist Imile Faris Ibrahim condemned efforts of the “Anglo-American camp... to turn the world into a powder keg and set it on fire that will undoubtedly repeat for our dear Lebanon and our sisterly Arab countries the tragedy of 1914–18.”³⁷ Like other activists in Lebanon and Syria, Ibrahim referenced World War I rather than the destruction of World War II, which was more immediately felt in Europe and Asia. She also framed opposition to “the war blocs and treaties of the owners of investment companies” as a feminist act, concluding that if anyone believed that “in Lebanon and Arab countries we have no land but to equip their [Western colonial] armies, [...] and nothing to do but raise families and children to become fuel for their pyre,” they were mistaken.³⁸ Channeling this anger, Ibrahim called on the women gathered to pledge solidarity with the Intellectuals for Peace. As an anonymous contributor to *al-Tariq* suggested, such solidarity illustrated that “Arab women, especially Lebanese women, do not remain isolated from this progressive

³⁷ “Tahtafil bi-Yawm al-Mar’a al-‘Alami,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1949), 65–70 (Ibrahim’s speech on 67–68).

³⁸ Lebanese Committee for Women’s Rights leaders Surayya Khatib ‘Adra, Mary Thabit, and Alvira Khuri also issued calls in solidarity with European and North American women’s demonstrations for peace. *Ibid.*

wave that moves the masses of the world.”³⁹ Such efforts by Peace Partisans to generate mass support among women marked a departure from the more male-dominated Popular Front, anti-fascist, communist, and anti-colonial nationalist activism of the 1930s and 1940s.⁴⁰

The public acknowledgment of Lebanese and Syrian activists’ cultural achievements produced a powerful sense of inclusion in this alternative international order. The Lebanese illustrator and poet Radwan al-Shaghal described to *al-Tariq* readers the visibility of Arab flags in the colorful convergence of peoples from the five continents fathered for the Peace Congress in Warsaw:

Here were the delegates getting off the crowded buses in the conference grounds. As they ascend in succession, making their way among the great masses of Polish men, women, and children, all clapping with innumerable hands, shouting in one loud voice, “Bukui, Bukui, Bukui” [meaning peace in Polish]. The delegations flowed between them like a river between two green banks... The many flags did not lack the cedar of Lebanon, the three stars of Syria, the two stars of Iraq, the crescent moon of Egypt, or our Arab colors. Is there any need to say what an overwhelming feeling ran through the Arab delegations as they pointed their fingers at their flags? Nothing can express these silent tears in this moment, rich in happiness. Here in this atmosphere of the Second World Conference for Peace, our Arab media can be applauded with joy and hope.⁴¹

For Husayn Muruwwa, the sense of inclusion was reinforced by connections with the intellectual stars of the emerging global front against imperialism, such as Sartre, whom he met at the Peace Congress in Berlin in 1954. Muruwwa wrote, “I saw myself as part of a vast movement that takes on an enormous cause. I felt I grew to represent all these delegations of peoples and nations inside me.”⁴² A year later, he attended the Second Soviet Writers Congress, where he continued to be inspired by socialist realism as a philosophy for life.⁴³ After that, Muruwwa and Sartre’s relationship with the peace movement diverged. As Sartre was leaving the communist party over his dismay at the Soviets’ crushing of the Hungarian uprising, Muruwwa’s commitments to socialist realism and the Soviet Union were deepening.⁴⁴ For Dr. Jurj Hanna, the Berlin Congress exemplified the failure of American propaganda to “paint the war in Indochina with an abstract communist color.” In Berlin it seemed like “the whole world now realizes that it is a war of liberation,” that the “international balance had shifted,” and that it was possible to be understood on one’s own terms.⁴⁵ The Congress’s banquet conversations made him further appreciate Soviet cultural efforts to bring peoples closer together by translating into Russian the works of Arab

³⁹ “Tahtaful bi-Yawm al-Mar’a al-‘Alami,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1949), 65–70 (here: 65); International Women’s Day celebrations in Damascus and Holms in 1949 were reported but not described in detail; *Ibid.*, 70. In Syria, peace work with women was led by the prominent communist writer Falak Tarazi. She had written for *al-Tariq* on women’s political and social status since the early 1940s and was the sister of the Syrian diplomat Salah al-Din Tarazi. Tannoury-Karam, *The Making of a Leftist Milieu*, 207–16; Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 241–43; for her role in the Partisans, see Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, 78.

⁴⁰ For Ibrahim’s participation in a women’s communist wing in the mid-1930s, see Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 157.

⁴¹ Radwan al-Shaghal, “Fi Jabhat al-Salam,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1951), 81–95.

⁴² Di-Capua, *No Exit*, 93; citing Husayn Muruwwa, “Ma’ udaba’ al-Silm fi Barlin,” *al-Thaqafa al-Wataniyya*, August 1954), 1–4, 64.

⁴³ Cited in Di-Capua, *No Exit*, 95–96.

⁴⁴ In a sign of his commitment, Di-Capua argues that he remained “willfully blind about the complacency of most Soviet writers with Stalin’s murderous order.” Yoav Di-Capua, “Homeward Bound: Husayn Muruwwah’s Integrative Quest for Authenticity,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 44 (2013): 43.

⁴⁵ Hanna, *Ana ‘a’id min Barlin* (Beirut: Dar al-‘Ilm lil-Malayin, 1954), 15. Hanna was also inspired by Sartre’s speech on the French loss in Indochina in a war that Sartre called an “attempt to defy history” and an inspiration of the US and the class of investors and colonialists. *Idem*, 58.

authors such as `Umar Fakhuri, Mahmud Taymur, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Amin al-Rihani, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Taha Hussayn, Dhu-l-Nun Ayyub, and Hanna's own writings.⁴⁶

This recognition also strengthened Partisan leaders' claims to represent "Arab media" and "Arab culture" to their Arabic-speaking audiences. At the award ceremony in Warsaw, Antun Thabit claimed triumphantly to "truly represent the public opinion in our country and speak on behalf of the more than three hundred thousand citizens... who had signed the Stockholm Appeal."⁴⁷ Hanna described his sense of pride in representing Lebanon, "a small country on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean" with a distinguished ancient history that "makes every Lebanese proud of his Lebaneseness (*bi-Lubnāniyyatihi*)."⁴⁸ For Hanna, this Lebaneseness was embedded in the historical struggles of the WWI famine and epidemic, which "killed more than a quarter of the population," and WWII, when "the masses fell prey to the greed of the dominating monopolistic few."⁴⁹ These statements from the congresses were interspersed with congratulatory notes from Soviet political and literary authorities. One such letter from the Soviet Orientalist Ignatii Krachkovskii described how Soviet Arabists read *al-Tariq* to get "a correct idea of the present life of the Arab people, their struggle for freedom, democracy, and peace." Significantly, Krachkovskii also thanked *al-Tariq* on behalf of Soviet Arabists for acquainting Arabs with Soviet culture, Russian literature and art, and the Soviet struggle for peace, signaling the two-directional nature of this relationship.⁵⁰

This recognition of *al-Tariq*, and its editors' interpretation of it as an achievement of Arab culture reinvigorated by decolonization, sits awkwardly with histories of the peace movement that rely primarily on European, US, and Soviet sources and tend to reflect Western and the late Stalinist state's Eurocentric approach to international security and foreign policy. Stalin's postwar preoccupation with Europe and its status quo was undoubtedly reflected in the Cominform, and the absence in it of any non-European communist parties (unlike in the earlier Comintern). It was also reflected in Stalin's efforts to maintain and consolidate the Eastern and Western blocs and his competition with US-based initiatives such as US President Dwight Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace and Food for Peace programs. Yet the expansion of the Partisans of Peace movement in Syria and Lebanon, and elsewhere in the decolonizing world, was more than a "Soviet response" to its failure to hinder West Germany's integration into Western Europe.⁵¹ Rejected invitations from Syria and Lebanon asking Soviet Peace Committee representatives to attend their national meetings attest to the agency and initiatives of local branches.⁵² The intellectual approaches of the movement's leaders suggest that their ways of thinking about politics—including about violence, colonial histories, and national identity—were sometimes supported by Soviet resources, but also more concerned with rethinking older questions about culture and colonialism in solidarity with others.

Broadening the Conversation about Peace

The Partisans' ability to reach hundreds of thousands in Syria and Lebanon involved more than clever mobilizations of colonial history. The Arabic translation of the Stockholm

⁴⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁷ "Khitab Antun Thabit," *al-Tariq* 1 (1951), 54–58.

⁴⁸ The British government's efforts to prevent the Peace Conference from being held on its territory forced organizers to move it to Warsaw.

⁴⁹ "Khitab Jurj Hanna," *al-Tariq* 1 (1951), 23–27.

⁵⁰ "Tahiyya ila Majallat 'al-Tariq,'" *al-Tariq* 1 (1951), 64.

⁵¹ This interpretation—that "[This failure] and the struggles which the Soviet Union endured with the UN during the biological warfare campaign all pointed to the fact that the Soviet's needed to expand the movement outside of Europe since the political situation in Europe had already solidified into two camps"—is provided in Dobrenko, "Conspiracy of Peace," 119.

⁵² GARF f. P9539, op. 1, d. 74, l. 67 (Note from Tikhonov to Antun Thabit); l. 101 (Note from Tikhonov to Mustafa al-Ashi).

Appeal called on “every honest person—of whatever political, religious, or social view” to join “the voices of millions struggling for peace.”⁵³ The work of conveying this message of peace across political and social divides, in ways that went beyond anything previously attempted by communist activists, was accomplished partly with the help of religious officials. In Lebanon, the Maronite Patriarch Antun Butrus al-‘Arida and the Metropolitan Archbishop Ilia (sometimes spelled Elijah or Ilya) Karam drew on religious imagery to rearticulate the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons.⁵⁴ Biblical references (e.g., “All who draw the sword will die by the sword” from Matthew 26:52) seemed appropriate when thinking about the problem of evil on such a scale. Karam’s statement of support sounded like a sermon:

Oh God, free us from this word “war” and from all that is said for its sake by man, from the deadly means for killing those close to us, for destroying animals who do not have the ability to speak, for destroying the earth and all its hidden treasures. Man is the creation of the almighty God. Will he dare use a weapon that will destroy not only cultural values but mankind itself? Believers! The reasons for war are greed, hatred, and envy. God has protected us from these destructive spiritual flaws from which there is no medicine except for prayer. Pray to God, and he will distance these inflictions from mankind.⁵⁵

This prophetic tone of admonishment helped attract new audiences and forge transregional solidarities.⁵⁶ Following similar lines, in his report to the Cominform Congress of November 1949, Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti instructed: “In the struggle for working-class unity, particular attention should be devoted to the mass of Catholic workers, working people in general, and their organizations.”⁵⁷ The appeal to Catholic solidarity received the greatest boost when Pope John XXIII supported the movement. Other religious linkages connecting Eurasia with the Arab world revived different solidarities that cut across regional and religious lines.⁵⁸

The unprecedented threat of nuclear war managed to bring religious and atheist thinkers together under a common umbrella. For instance, the 1950 conference in Warsaw was attended by the Syrian shaykh-mujahid Muhammad al-Ashmar, a former commander in the anti-colonial Syrian revolt of 1925, volunteer in the Arab revolt in Palestine of 1936–39, and member of the Naqshbandi Sufi order.⁵⁹ There, he claimed to have experienced a shift in attitude toward Europe:

In Warsaw, we felt we had brothers who, like us, believed it was essential to defend peace in the world...at one point, I fell ill with a chronic ailment and had to get treated by a Polish doctor; the progress of medicine in this country is impressive; only there did I achieve good results; I do not conceal that before I hated Europeans. Perhaps this resulted from not knowing them well enough and judging them based on foreign imperialists in our country. But I am now convinced that there are people there who are honest and kind... Islam proselytizes peace, love, good, and cooperation of all people

⁵³ GARF f. 9539, op. 21, d. 63, ll. 1–6 (Call upon the Lebanese People to Ban Atomic Weapons, translated from Arabic).

⁵⁴ “Naṣṣ al-Manshur al-Ra’wa iladhi Idha’ahu Siyada al-Mutran Iliya Karam Ta’yid li-Mu’tamar Ansar al-Silm,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1949), *nun*.

⁵⁵ GARF f. 9539, op. 21, d. 63, ll. 25–28 (Call by Karam).

⁵⁶ On broader religious conceptualization of peace, see Goedde, *Politics of Peace*, ch. 4.

⁵⁷ Cited in McLachlan, “Partisans of Peace,” 15–16.

⁵⁸ As Elizabeth Bishop has argued, an emerging “Shi’i International” linked Partisans of Peace activists in Soviet Azerbaijan with those in the Arab world; Bishop, “Partisans of Peace,” 67–68.

⁵⁹ On al-Ashmar’s religious education, see *al-Mujahid al-Samiṭ Shaykh Muhammad al-Ashmar: Siratuhu wa Jihaduhu* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 2002), 198–99.

and forbids us to kill and hate just as all religions. What is the fault of peaceful children and women destroyed by bombs from airplanes?⁶⁰

After his return to Syria, al-Ashmar maintained involvement with the peace movement, which took him to China and the Soviet Union, where he was again moved by meetings with Soviet religious officials about the wellbeing of Soviet Muslims and other propaganda of SADUM, the official body overseeing Islamic activities in the five Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union.⁶¹ Later, in Damascus, his conservative support base in his Midan neighborhood of Damascus gave the communists a breakthrough on the eve of the 1954 parliamentary elections, which brought him closer to Khalid Bakdash and the leadership of the Syrian Communist Party.⁶² Bakdash liked to tell a story about how al-Ashmar had tried to persuade him to join for Friday prayer at the Damascene Ummayyad Mosque, which Bakdash refused, thinking that going to pray only on the eve of the election would make him look like a hypocrite.⁶³ The two remained allies and, in 1955, al-Ashmar received the Stalin Peace Prize in a ceremony at the Damascus al-Firdaws Cinema attended by the Soviet Muslim theologian Shaykh Ziya al-Din Burkan, the writer Nikolai Tikhonov, and the Arabist and head of Oriental Studies at Tbilisi University Georgi Tsereteli.⁶⁴ Like the Partisans movement, the award ceremony united religious and atheist authorities around shared commitments to protecting humanity from nuclear destruction.⁶⁵

A more deliberate effort to resolve contradictions between materialist-dialectical thought and religious spirituality was Jurj Hanna's comparison of Marxism and religion:

Marxist ideology is a religion like other religions but a religion of mental conviction, not just of belief. If we look at the world in the past and present, we find many different religions, each with a foundation of values and virtues that may differ from their counterparts... in accusing Marxist ideology of being destructive of religion, the West confuses religion as a set of social and spiritual human values and religion as a set of rituals, phenomena, legislation, and unnatural and unreasonable paranormalities (*khawāriq... ghayr ma'qūla*).⁶⁶

Hanna's appeal was grounded in rational enlightenment principles. His point was that Marxism rejected only unreasonably supernatural phenomena, and only in the name of science, and that this was the main foundation of Marxist ideology. Therefore, it was not Marxist ideology that opposed "fanaticism" but "science and the search for knowledge

⁶⁰ He told this to a representative of *Jaridat al-Hadara* newspaper. GARF f. 9539, op, 21, d. 66, ll. 14–17 (Conversation with Sheikh al-Ashmar, from *al-Hadarat*, December 1, 1950).

⁶¹ His tour of the Soviet Union was cut short by a heart attack, which he suffered after landing in Siberia on his way back from China, causing him to spend much of the trip being treated in a Moscow hospital; *al-Mujahid al-Samit*, 204.

⁶² Al-Ashmar's help was significant after the passing of a 1953 electoral law that "sectarianized," i.e., homogenized, districts. On this law, see Dylan Baun, *Winning Lebanon: Youth Politics, Populism, and the Production of Sectarian Violence, 1920–1958* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 131.

⁶³ *Al-Mujahid al-Samit*, 209.

⁶⁴ For more on al-Ashmar, see Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 176; Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, 152. For the prize ceremony and SADUM Mufti Ziya al-Din Babakhan's congratulatory note, see *al-Mujahid al-Samit*, 205–7.

⁶⁵ The flexibility of the Stalin Peace Prize set it apart from awards such as the King Faisal Prize, which could not be awarded to those working within a Marxist framework or using dialectical arguments to explain historical events. Similarly, Iraqi Partisans of Peace activist Badr Shakir al-Sayyab compared the use of nuclear weapons to Cain's fraternal betrayal in his 1950 poem "*The Dawn of Peace*," calling attention to the atomic bomb's potential for severing the shared bonds of humanity; see Levi Thompson, "An Iraqi Poet and the Peace Partisans: Transnational Pacifism and the Poetry of Badr Shākīr Al-Sayyab," *College Literature* 47, no. 1 (2020): 77.

⁶⁶ Jurj Hanna, *al-Haqīqa al-Hadariyya* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm lil-Malayin, 1958), 89.

and truth.”⁶⁷ Since Marxist ideology, unlike bourgeois philosophies, was not judgmental but evolutionary and creative, Hanna professed a faith he believed to be capable of overcoming the marginal difficulties experienced under socialism.⁶⁸

Building a Regional Network, 1951–53

Although the movement managed to build solidarities across religious and social divides, efforts to organize a transregional network remained vulnerable to political pressures. Since US efforts to draw Arab countries into a North Atlantic alliance signaled expectations of greater proximity to Israel, Turkey, and Greece, the World Peace Council sought to oppose them in 1951 by asking delegates from Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Israel, and Cyprus to set up a regional working group. This group was to have a permanent committee based in Cairo and be comprised of five member delegates: one from North Africa, one from Syria/Lebanon, one from Iran, and two from Egypt.⁶⁹

At the time, Cairo seemed like a natural base. In mid-1951, the Syrian government had taken a more aggressive stand on communist and SPP activity.⁷⁰ The Lebanese government also banned the Partisans, and Antun Thabit spent a few months under arrest.⁷¹ In the same period, the Egyptian Partisans of Peace (Harakat Ansar al-Salam, HAS) were flourishing. HAS had formed in 1950 out of a coalition of communists, members of al-Tali’ a al-Wafdiyya (the more progressive youth wing of the Wafd), the Muslim Brotherhood, and Ahmad Husayn’s Socialist Party. It focused its advocacy on abrogating the 1936 treaty that allowed 10,000 British military personnel to remain stationed in the Suez Canal zone and establishing friendlier relations with the Soviet Union. Support for HAS’s platform among the Egyptian press and members of the political establishment was acknowledged by the Wafdist foreign minister Muhammad Salah al-Din, who assured Soviet diplomats visiting in August 1951 to determine if Egypt might lead the peace offensive in the Middle East that “he was also a partisan of peace.”⁷² In the aftermath of this visit, HAS received greater support from Moscow.⁷³

The leaders of the peace movement in Lebanon, however, were still creatively resisting the North Atlantic alliance by reimagining their region. Antun Thabit described the space as inhabited by people living under a hodgepodge of colonial conditions: areas under

⁶⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 98; Hanna concluded there was no doubt that the difficulties experienced by socialism were marginal, not radical, and must be overcome by socialist reality, which leaves no room for doubt that it will do so, faster than imagined by its enemies. For these contributions, and as part of a longer-term courtship by the Soviet cultural establishment, Hanna was awarded a Gold Medal for Peace at Stockholm in 1959, together with a member of the Iraqi Peace Council, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Karim al-Mashta; “Madaliya al-Silm al-Mudhahhaba Tumnah lil-Duktur Jurj Hanna,” *al-Tariq* 6 (1959), 72–73.

⁶⁹ It would be led by Yusuf Hilmi, with Mr. Gaddirri representing North Africa. GARF f. P9539, op. 1, d. 130, ll. 180–88. (Decisions made at meetings of Near and Middle East representatives in Vienna [November 7, 1951] and Prague [November 16, 1951]).

⁷⁰ Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, 79.

⁷¹ In February 1951, Jurj Hanna, Antun Thabit, Radwan al-Shaghal, and others sent an open letter to Prime Minister Riyad al-Sulh to protest the banning of the Partisans of Peace in Lebanon. RGASPI f. 495, op. 232, d. 6, l.84 (Secret Memo, March 5, 1951).

⁷² In Egypt, the peace movement did not become a mass popular movement, but its ideas were diffused through the well-subscribed weeklies *al-Katib* and *al-Malayin*, and also echoed in the Wafdist *al-Misri* and the satirical weekly *Ruz al-Yusuf*, *al-Musawwar*, and other papers. Rami Ginat, “The Egyptian Left and the Roots of Neutralism in the Pre-Nasserite Era,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 1 (2003): 5–24. Several weeks later the Egyptian government unilaterally abrogated the 1936 treaty.

⁷³ For instance, Egyptian agriculturalists were invited to see what cooperative farming in Russia “had done for the farmer in the agricultural, economic, and social fields.” GARF f. 9539, op. 1, d. 242, ll. (Letter from Congress of Peace in Vienna, 1952). Support was also expressed in the World Movement for Peace’s shift in its discussions of regional peace in ways that allowed for more emphasis on violence in the national liberalational and anti-imperialist struggle. Ginat, “The Egyptian Left,” 23.

colonial influence, “such as Marrakesh and Libya”; states under direct colonial rule, “with the dissolution of all national characteristics (such as Algeria)”; areas where Arabic was officially considered a foreign language, “and where there is protection and occupation (such as in Tunisia and Libya)”; regions controlled by “colonial treaties... (such as Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan)”; places compelled to host military “land, air, and sea bases (such as Turkey and Israel)”; and regions of protected “oil interests (such as in Saudi Arabia, with similar designs set for Syria, Lebanon, and Iran).”⁷⁴ As this convoluted list suggests, solidarity across such disparate areas was awkward in theory and practice, but this did not mean they should stop trying.

Iran had been included in the regional plans due to the strength of its peace movement, growing popular support for oil nationalization since 1951, and Western counterpropaganda presenting it as a “threat to world peace” and “another [potential] Korea.”⁷⁵ Yet stretching regional space beyond the cultural “Arab world” raised questions about language, religion, and the limits of integration. As Thabit reported to Moscow two years later, many participants from Arab nationalist parties preferred the Cairo conference planned for 1953 to be limited to Arab peoples only:

They would prefer to avoid questions about including Israel and other Turkey-related issues. Some also expressed an opinion about the difficulty of ensuring representation from Iran.... We have received positive reports from Jordan and Syria, are waiting for news from Iraq, and are discussing the issue with Iraqi partners. ... Work is generally going well in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, but we are having difficulties in Egypt, Iran, and Iraq. We are concentrating all our efforts on Egypt and Iran, and when we manage to convince some of their representatives, we will be able to organize the conference.⁷⁶

Despite such difficulties in communication, Iran remained on the regional Peace activists’ agenda, especially after Italian socialist Mario Berlinguer’s successful courtship of Ayatollah Abol-Ghasem Kashani, who supported nationalizing the oil industry at the time, but later turned against Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq in 1953. While Berlinguer was in Iran on behalf of the Italian Peace Committee, Thabit was expected to remain flexible and solve any problems that arose if the Ayatollah agreed to sign a version of the Stockholm Appeal that in any way departed from the original.⁷⁷

In Iraq, the difficulties experienced by the Partisans were also shaped by their distinct contexts. There, the movement also started in 1950 and worked closely with the communist party under the leadership of ‘Abd al-Wahhab Mahmud, the president of the Lawyers’ Association and future ambassador to the Soviet Union under ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim. Yet Iraqi Partisans were facing other pressures. For instance, Hanna Batatu describes how Taha al-Hashim, head of the postwar United Popular Front of anti-government forces, worried that including the Partisans in the Front coalition in 1952 ran the risk of them taking it over politically. Indeed, in November 1952, they “supplanted [the others] in the leadership of the crowds.”⁷⁸ Their success was met with another wave of repressions, with hundreds of

⁷⁴ Antun Thabit, “Min Marakash ila Iran,” *al-Tariq* 5–6 (1951), 6–13.

⁷⁵ Abulfath Mumin, “Gazhrah – Hamdan,” 2007, <http://ensani.ir/fa/article/11039/گزاره-همدان> (accessed June 10, 2022).

⁷⁶ GARF f. 9539, op. 21, op. 222, ll. 3–6 (Antun Thabit’ Report, November 1, 1953). By 1953, both Thabit and Hanna also expressed reservations about alliances with activists in Israel and Turkey in GARF f. 9538, op. 21, d. 222, ll.1–2 (Report about a Meeting of Parties and Organizations in Lebanon, April 30, 1953).

⁷⁷ GARF f. 8539, op. 1, d. 171 ll. 5–7 (Giorgio Fenoltea’s note about his trip to Iran, October 24, 1952). Kashani’s eventual agreement to sign the appeal, he claimed, reflected his desire to send a message to all peoples about peace, freedom, and the struggle against colonialism. Ayatollah al-Kashani, “al-Difa’ ‘an al-Salam,” *al-Tariq* 11 (1952), 87–89.

⁷⁸ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 682.

communist and peace activists jailed in 1952 and 1953, making organization at the local and regional levels difficult.

Lebanese and Syrian activists also had to contend with local impediments. For instance, the Lebanese government refused to issue visas to its nationals hoping to travel to a Partisans' congress in Cairo.⁷⁹ The Syrian government of Husni al-Za'im detained peace activists and ignored letter campaigns seeking their release. Accounts of the torture of imprisoned workers, peasants, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, students, and merchants from nationalist, trade unionist, and communist backgrounds were published in *al-Tariq*.⁸⁰ The Soviet Mission in Lebanon and Syria monitored police harassment, imprisonment, and protests against the movement and reported this information back to Moscow, citing such as evidence of a growing regional "struggle for national liberation," but no diplomatic pressure from Moscow was ever applied.⁸¹

The 1953 coup in Iran dealt a profound blow to the regional organization, resulting in the arrest of thousands of National Front and Tudeh party supporters (including many peace activists), the suppression of the National Resistance Movement, and the imposition of draconian press censorship.⁸² The consolidation of the new Iranian regime—with massive assistance from the United States—also proved devastating for some Arab activists, such as Iraqi poet and activist Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, who witnessed the repression while in exile in Iran. The Kremlin's refusal to support Iranian communists and stage a counter coup led al-Sayyab to break with the peace movement and communism. Instead, he became more oriented towards *qawmī* Iraqi nationalism, an orientation that favored Arab culture, history, and language as key markers of national identity.⁸³

In Egypt, the period of neutralism and easy relations with the Soviet bloc also ended with the dismissal of the Wafd government in January 1952.⁸⁴ The July 1952 revolution brought new political uncertainty. The Kafr al-Dawwar labor strike at the Misr Fine Spinning and Weaving Company, which was violently suppressed in August 1952, turned many in the communist movement against the new revolutionary regime.⁸⁵ In January 1953, the Free Officers

⁷⁹ The Lebanese Congress reported that the *Telegraph* newspaper wrote, on February 21, 1952, about an upcoming Congress of Near Eastern and North African countries in Cairo. It noted that the Lebanese government tried to prevent Lebanese citizens from participating in this congress, and the Ministry of Defense refused to give them visas to go to Egypt, setting off a wave of demonstrations and protests. The *al-Sakhra* newspaper published, on February 24, 1952, letters written by protesters from Beirut, the Lebanese Mountain, Tripoli, Saida, and other regions.

⁸⁰ The editors of *al-Tariq* continued to offer support by publishing detailed accounts of the torture of 150 political prisoners in "Kayfa kan Husni al-Za'im wa-Zabaniyatuhu Yu'dhabun al-Mu'ataqalin al-Dimuqratiyyin fi Sijn al-Mazza," in *al-Tariq* 4 (1949), 76–86. The journal also ran a campaign of solidarity with Morocco and generally continued to publish regularly despite these challenges. In 1953, Thabit sought the addresses of potential subscribers in France and England, in addition to the circulation it had in North Africa, and was planning to send many issues to Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, and Syria. The first issue of 1953 was a bit delayed, but Thabit claimed "we are doing everything to make sure it comes out regularly." GARF f. 9539, op. 21, op. 222, ll. 3–6 (Antun Thabit's report, November 1, 1953).

⁸¹ GARF f. 9539, op. 21, d. 152, ll. 1–8 (Report by the 2nd Secretary of the Soviet Mission in Lebanon Bespalov, 1952).

⁸² Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup D'etat in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 278–79.

⁸³ As a *qawmī* nationalist, al-Sayyab was more open to political unity with other Arab states than the majority of leftists, who tended to instead privilege territorial-patriotic nationalism (*waṭaniyya*). Just when Iraqi communists were experiencing another rise under 'Abd al-Karim Qasim's government, the Iranian Tudeh party was unable to do anything that might cause problems for the Soviet Union; Thompson, "An Iraqi Poet and the Peace Partisans," 79–84. On *waṭanī* and *qawmī* nationalism, see Orit Bashkin, "Hybrid Nationalisms: Watani and Qawmi Visions in Iraq under 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, 1958–61," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 2 (2011): 294.

⁸⁴ Ginat, "The Egyptian Left," 23.

⁸⁵ On the Kafr al-Dawwar strike, see Joel Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 62–63, 95–98; Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 442–43.

issued a decree to abolish all political parties. Soon after, they ordered the arrest of the head of the Egyptian Peace Committee, Yusuf Hilmi, for attending a meeting about forming a united front of Wafdists, communists, and others opposed to the Nagib regime.⁸⁶ It would take years for the peace movement to be reconstituted under the leadership of the former Egyptian Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Muhammad Kamil al-Bandari, and writer `Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi.⁸⁷ Despite these setbacks to the movement, individual intellectuals—such as Egyptian philosopher `Uthman Amin and former Minister Ibrahim Rashad—could still travel to Beirut and attend regional conferences with peace activists “In Defense of the Rights of the Peoples of the Middle East” (Fig. 5).⁸⁸

Peace in the Age of Suez, Afro-Asianism, and Non-Alignment

The Soviet Union’s unwillingness to support activists in Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon undermined transregional and local grassroots organization on a mass scale. It also repeatedly pointed to the lack of ideological clarity within the peace movement on matters of political violence. At the 1949 Paris Congress, it had become clear that civil wars would not be condemned, such as the communist success in China and the guerilla campaign in Greece, and that hundreds of thousands of North Koreans could sign the 1950 Stockholm Appeal and then invade South Korea.⁸⁹ Regionally too, the theme came up when, for instance, the Syrian Socialist National Party (al-Hizb al-Qawmi al-Suri al-Ijtima`i) attacked the Peace Partisans by saying that advocating peace during a state of war was “certainly a betrayal of the interest of the nation and can be termed as high treason.”⁹⁰ Ultimately, clarity was not the objective and the violent targeting of communists and peace activists by the newly independent Arab states fell mainly outside the scope of the movement’s mandate.

Sartre partly addressed the ambivalence toward violence at the heart of the peace movement, and at the heart of other anti-colonial politics, during his period of fellow-traveling with the communists. To him, the ethical contradictions of political commitment seemed inescapable:

Any ethic that does not explicitly profess that it is impossible today contributes to the bamboozling and alienation of men. The ethical “problem” arises from the fact that Ethics is inevitable and, at the same time, impossible for us. Action must give itself ethical norms in this climate of non-transcendable impossibility. It is from this outlook that, for example, we must view the problem of violence or that of the relationship between ends and means.⁹¹

Some of Sartre’s ambivalent thoughts on violence and peace were translated into Arabic and published in *al-Tariq*.⁹² In “The Hydrogen Bomb: Weapon Against History” (1954), about the

⁸⁶ GARF f. 9539, op. 1, d. 242, l. 6 (Letter from the Partisans of Peace to Muhammad Nagib, 1953); on Hilmi’s meeting, see Central Intelligence Bulletin, April 28, 1953, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/02893560> (accessed September 13, 2023).

⁸⁷ GARF f. 9539, op. 1, d. 531, ll. 120–123 (Report from Bandari to Tikhonov, March 24, 1957).

⁸⁸ Also attending were Iranian Academy of Science member Saeed Nafisi, former Syrian Prime Minister Zaki al-Khatib, former Syrian minister Sami Kabbara, former speaker of the Syrian Shura Council Said Haydar, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ashmar; Jordanian parliamentarian `Abd al-Qadir al-Salah and Sulayman Pasha al-Suda; Iraqi poet Kazim al-Samawi; Lebanese writer Jurj Hanna and Vice President of the Progressive Socialist Party Fu`ad Razif; “Balagh al-lajna al-tanfidhiyya li-l-mu`tamar,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1954), 2–9.

⁸⁹ Donald McLachlan, “Partisans of Peace,” *International Affairs* 27, no. 1 (1951): 10–17.

⁹⁰ Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, 82.

⁹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. Bernard Frenchman (New York: George Braziller, Mentor Books, 1963), 186.

⁹² Jean-Paul Sartre, “Ma Ra`aytahu fi Viyanna Huwa al-Silm,” *al-Tariq* 2 (1953), 71–85; Jean-Paul Sartre, “al-Qumbula al-Hidrujiniyya Silah didd al-Tarikh al-Bashari,” *al-Tariq* 8 (1954), 74–79.



Figure 5. Defense of the Rights of the Peoples of the Middle East Conference, December 19, 1953. Seated (from right): Dr. Ibrahim Rashad (Egypt), Dr. Jurj Hanna (Lebanon), and member of the World Peace Council Antun Thabit (Lebanon). Standing (from right): Maurice al-Salibi (Syria), Husayn Arafa 'Uthman Amin, Muhammad Abu al-Khayr, 'Abd al-Aziz Bayumi Radwan, and Hilmi Labib (all from Egypt). Source: *al-Tariq* 1 (1954), 38.

new form of atomic warfare that characterized the Cold War, Sartre opined that atomic power was so concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy men and their mercenaries that the masses no longer could restrain them, making the hydrogen bomb a “weapon against history.” By contrast, people’s armies, such as those that had come to the fore in China and Indo-China, could still conduct “a people’s war” against an aggressor, an occupying or colonial power, without the nation “losing its character.” Sartre then concluded that the task incumbent on the world was to “unite against the bomb,” “impose peace,” and “fight against atomic terror.”⁹³ Although Sartre broke with the peace campaign in 1956, this differentiated approach to the colonizer and colonized grew out of his earlier political and intellectual projects and continued to develop as a theme after 1956.

Conversely, for the peace activists in Syria and Lebanon, 1956 brought a sense of greater moral clarity rather than disappointment. In the first issue of *al-Tariq* published after the Tripartite Aggression and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, Antun Thabit stressed Egypt’s triumph over England, France, and Israel’s efforts “to eliminate the independence and sovereignty of Egypt and... all Arab peoples,” and to “bring the world to the brink of a third world war.”⁹⁴ Suez was a “victory for the cause of peace in this part of the world,” even if colonial plots and agents in the region continued to “exploit the incidents in Hungary which were an attempt to overthrow its regime and hand it over to a group of fascists

⁹³ Sartre, “al-Qunbula,” 74–79; for a translation, see Lethbridge, “Constructing Peace by Freedom,” 11.

⁹⁴ Antun Thabit, “al-Wahda al-Wataniyya,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1957), 5–8.

and arms dealers.”⁹⁵ Similar uses of the Suez Crisis to downplay the violence in Hungary or frame Hungary as one in a string of “failed imperialist adventures” echoed at other Partisans of Peace meetings in Europe.⁹⁶ Hungarian peace activists reinforced such connections in their petitions to the UN General Assembly aimed at “end[ing] the provocative aggressive encirclement of Syria and liquidate the tense situation in the Arab East.”⁹⁷ But they resonated more powerfully in Lebanon and Syria. There, the Soviet Union’s support for Egypt in the 1956 war mitigated some of the ethical contradictions stemming from the Soviet Union’s initial support for the partition of Palestine and its repeated reluctance to intervene on behalf of imprisoned comrades.⁹⁸ By 1956, Soviet support for Arab interests vis-à-vis Israel was definitive, allowing Hungary to be recast as part of the global colonial effort that “created [Israel as] an artificial state (*al-dawla al-muṣṭana’a*)” and was attempting to seize the Lebanese market to “eliminate our emerging industry and agriculture,” transforming Lebanon into “into a market for Israeli industrial production.”⁹⁹

This new moral clarity made it easier for peace activists to promote Soviet interpretations of international affairs. For instance, Jurj Hanna stressed the productive potential of Nikita Khrushchev’s “peaceful coexistence” slogan adopted at the 20th Party Congress and the possibility that “a human culture (*al-thaqāfa al-insāniyya*)” might create “a virtuous world... in India, Asia, Europe, Africa, and the farthest islands of the ocean” bringing “peaceful coexistence among peoples.”¹⁰⁰ *Al-Tariq* also published a version of Khrushchev’s speech delivered at the 1958 Conference of Agricultural Workers of the Belorussian Republic on “Aspects of the International Situation.” There, Khrushchev spoke of an improvement in the international situation since the “mistakes committed by the former Hungarian leadership” when “counter-revolutionary elements ... attempted... to restore the capitalist, fascist system.”¹⁰¹ Beyond featuring Khrushchev’s position, *al-Tariq* also covered such cultural diplomacy initiatives as a visit of a Port Said delegation to Stalingrad to bond over their supposedly shared experiences of being attacked and “struggling for peace.”¹⁰²

Expanding Afro-Asian solidarity platforms after the Bandung Conference of 1955, the Cairo Conference of 1957, and more culturally-oriented conferences in Asia and Africa provided new challenges for the peace movement.¹⁰³ Afro-Asian solidarity was about helping countries position themselves outside the ideological conflicts of the Cold War. It also made it more likely that calls to end nuclear testing might include critiques of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ One peace delegation from Hungary visiting Moscow framed the violence as the product of reactionary imperialist efforts to undermine peace in the Near East and Europe and “bring back the capitalist order.” GARF f. 8539, op. 1, d. 506, ll. 16a–19 (Notes from a meeting with Moscow society [*obschestvennost*] of participants of the Train for Peace from Hungary, September 20, 1957).

⁹⁷ GARF f. 8539, op. 1, d. 506, ll. 26–29 (Note to 12th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, September 23, 1957).

⁹⁸ The Soviet Union’s position on Israel had grown more critical in the early 1950s, after Israel strengthened its alliance with the US and after the first Israeli Head of Mission to the USSR, Golda Meir, raised the issue of the emigration of Soviet Jews.

⁹⁹ Thabit, “Al-Wahda al-Wataniyya,” 7.

¹⁰⁰ Jurj Hanna, “al-Thaqafa al-Insaniyya Takhlūq al-‘Alam al-Fadil,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1957), 3–4.

¹⁰¹ Nikita Khrushchev, “al-Ittihad al-Sufiyati al-Must‘amir fi...” [paper damaged] *al-Tariq* 2 (1958), 72–89.

¹⁰² “Harakat al-Silm fi al-‘Alam,” *al-Tariq* 2 (1958), 90–93; also Jurj Hanna, Husayn Sajman, Antun Thabit, Salim Dublis and Husayn Muruwah, “Harakat al-Silm fi al-‘Alam,” *al-Tariq* 3 (1958), 96–98.

¹⁰³ As Goedde, *The Politics of Peace*, 33, argues, the subject of world peace permeated all speeches at Bandung and framed the more immediate goals and aspirations of the delegate nations. See also, Antun Thabit, “al-‘Amal li-Tanfidi Muqarrarat Mu’tamir al-Tadamun al-Asiyawi al-Ifriqi Muhimma Wataniyya Kubra,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1958), 3–5; and Muhammad Khattab, “Mu’tamir al-Tadamun al-Asiyawi al-Ifriqi: Darba Sahiqa lil-ist’imar al-Nihhar wa Di’ama Kubra lil-Salam fi-l-‘Alam,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1958), 6–10.

¹⁰⁴ On the Arab Nationalist Youth and Nasser’s opposition to the Baghdad Pact, see Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 37–45; Baun, *Winning Lebanon*, 133, also describes AUB student protests against the Pact in 1954 and the police firing shots at them.

To address these arguments, regional activists stressed the Soviet Union's alleged willingness to stop nuclear experiments. They fell back on earlier themes of Soviet support for the independence movements in the "Arab East" (*al-sharq al-'Arabi*). As Khalid Bakdash reminded readers of *al-Tariq* and *Pravda*:

Arabs know that the Soviet Union was the only great power (*velikoe gosudarstvo/al-dawla al-'uzma*) that did not participate in the occupation of an economic or political position in the Arab East, never entered into a deal with imperialists for the division of spheres of influence at the expense of national interests of Arab peoples... Arab people know that the Soviet Union did everything possible in the international arena to help the Egyptian people and their struggle against Anglo-Franco-Israeli aggression at the end of last year. They know the Soviet Union is taking steps to prevent armed aggression prepared by American imperialists with the help of Turkey against heroic Syria.¹⁰⁵

Bakdash's comrade, Yusuf Khattar Hilu, focused more on the growth of a global socialist market, the role of socialist economic opportunities for national industrialization, and escape from "the trap of dependency" set by Western aid.¹⁰⁶ Within the USSR, the Soviet Afro-Asian Committee increasingly collaborated with the Peace Committee, and both organizations expressed their support for Afro-Asian economic and writers conferences and sent messages of greeting to their constituents in the Middle East.¹⁰⁷

Some activists emphasized overlaps in the peace and Afro-Asian platforms. For instance, Thabit characterized French plans for nuclear tests in North Africa in 1959 as an "obvious attempt to terrorize African peoples," "extinguish the flames of the national liberation movement of the Algerian people, which over 500,000 regular French forces could not accomplish, and to pressure other African peoples."¹⁰⁸ Hanna stressed how colonial legacies were an easily recognizable source of daily stress.¹⁰⁹

When a person lives on his nerves (*'alā a'sābihā*), the person loses his distinctive features (*mīza*) and clarity (*tamaḥḥusiyya*), which is created by him and he by it. People in the post-war era are... uncomfortable today and unsure about tomorrow. They live with fear and caution. This is because evil forces in the world are making every effort to deprive people living on their nerves.¹¹⁰

Similar connections between the problems of peace, economic stability, and social equilibrium had been made by representatives of other decolonizing countries in the United States.¹¹¹

By the late 1950s, however, peace activists in Syria and Lebanon focused on other questions and challenges. Syria's relative ideological tolerance for communists and leftists ended

¹⁰⁵ Khalid Bakdash, "Arabskii Vostok i Otktiab'skaia Revoliutsiia," *Pravda*, November 10, 1957; Khalid Bakdash, "al-Sharq al-'Arabi wa-Thawra Uktubir," *al-Tariq* 1 (1958), 62–69.

¹⁰⁶ Yusuf Khattar Hilu, "al-Sadaqa al-Sufyaytiyya al-'Arabiyya," *al-Tariq* 2–3 (1959), 38–42; Yusuf Khattar Hilu, "al-Dhikra al-Khamisat 'Ashra li-Iqamat 'Alaqaṭ Siyasiyya bayn Lubnan wa-l-Ittihad al-Sufiyati," *al-Tariq* 8 (1959), 7–10.

¹⁰⁷ GARF f. 9539, op. 1, d. 472, ll. 17–18 (Peace committee's summary of achievements of the Cairo Afro-Asian economic conference); GARF f. 9539, op. 1, d. 925, l. 5 (Note from Soviet peace workers to the Cairo Afro-Asian writers conference, February 10, 1962).

¹⁰⁸ Thabit stressed that these tests required France to seek help from German scientists who "served Hitler in the past" and financial assistance from West Germany; Antun Thabit, "Nidal Shu'ub Ifriqiyya," *al-Tariq* 8 (1959), 3–6.

¹⁰⁹ Racial conflict was less foregrounded than other "artificial internal conflicts produced by the shadow of colonialism." Muruwah's examples suggested it was easier to see race operating in other contexts, such as in India, South Africa, and Kenya; Husayn Muruwah, "Qissat Hadha al-Sira' al-'Unsuri," *al-Tariq* 3 (1953), 34–38.

¹¹⁰ Hanna, *al-Haqiqa al-Hadariyya*, 5.

¹¹¹ Goedde, *The Politics of Peace*, 32.

in 1958, when the formation of the United Arab Republic brought new waves of repression and revived earlier concerns about the cost of political commitment. Lebanon had retained a broadly pro-Western orientation under President Camille Chamoun, who, in 1958, refused to allow Lebanon to join the UAR, leading to civil unrest. This unrest, he claimed, was supported by communists and Syrian arms. The situation escalated into the Lebanon crisis when Chamoun and Charles Malik asked for US military intervention under the terms of the Eisenhower Doctrine, a request that resulted in a few months of military occupation.¹¹² Despite these political shifts, however, peace activists still commemorated the tenth anniversary of their movement, called for solidarity with national liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and covered other international issues such as Khrushchev's 1959 visit to the United States.¹¹³ They also continued to creatively channel their energies into other pan-Arabist and more local forms of nationalism.

The intellectual trajectory of Jurj Hanna, who received a Peace Medal at a session of the World Peace Council in May 1959, illustrates how peace activists' concerns in the post-1956 era continued the tradition of intellectual experimentation of the leftist milieu of the 1930s and 1940s, picking up many of the same key themes. It also illustrates the continuity of these ideas through the early 1950s and into the later 1950s and 1960s engagements with pan-Arabism, nationalism, and non-alignment. His intellectual eclecticism further highlights the array of sources available as a result of translations published by *al-Tariq* in the early 1950s.

Hanna's 1958 return to the problem of colonial legacies in Lebanon involved diagnosing the problems of nationalism. He first focused on "commercialized sectarianism" (*al-ta'ifiyya al-tijariyya*), which he argued had grown out of the imperial competition between Great Britain (supporting the Druze), France (supporting the Maronites), Austria (supporting the Catholics), and Russia (supporting the Orthodox). These conflicts remained unresolved after independence, enshrined in the 1943 independence charter, leaving Lebanon vulnerable to foreign intervention and straining its relationship with the rest of the Arab world.¹¹⁴ He proposed eliminating sectarianism from the state structure and private and public schools, to be replaced by a new secular national charter and curriculum to foster a unified national culture. Compulsory military service could further help break down divisive sectarian, social, class, and regional animosities.¹¹⁵ This national project would be Arabist, anti-confessional, anti-American, and anti-capitalist. Then, like other intellectuals inspired by the formation of the UAR, he revisited the theme of Arab nationalism (*al-qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya*) in another book tracing the "transformation of the Arab, from his individual and tribal existence to a collective national existence." The Arabic language, he argued, served as the "most important common denominator," as it enabled Arab nationalism to depart "from its religious and racist content... and to be placed in the ranks of nationalities that are viable, durable, progressive and free."¹¹⁶ This freedom, Hanna concluded, necessitated the embrace of the UAR and Egypt as a vital part of this "Arab" project.

Hanna's work did not reflect compliance with Soviet or communist directives; it was more an intellectual exploration of culture—including nationalist culture, but also a common "world culture" and "the unity of human society"—that drew on European and Soviet sources. Hanna, educated in France, had previously engaged with British historian Arnold J. Toynbee's approach to world history as a composite of conceptually isolated civilizations.

¹¹² The occupation of Beirut was justified, ironically, in an Eisenhower Doctrine amendment stating: "The United States regards as vital to the national interest and world peace the preservation of the independence and integrity of the nations of the Middle East." On this Senate amendment, sponsored by Mike Mansfield, see Yacoub, *Containing Arab Nationalism*, 112.

¹¹³ Thabit, "al-Isti 'mar 'Udu al-Silm," *al-Tariq* 2-3 (1959), 3-7.

¹¹⁴ Hanna, *al-'Uqdah al-Lubnaniya* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm lil-Malayin, 1957), 38.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹¹⁶ Jurj Hanna, *Ma'na al-Qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Bayrut, 1959), 8-9; Hanna's advocacy for pan-Arabism is also discussed in Di-Capua, *No Exit*, 112-15.

Yet his framing of Arabism as potentially contributing to a new “progressive human civilization” in which no one is deprived of respect as a human being, no matter the color of one’s skin, place of residence, birth, or workplace, suggested a familiarity with the Soviet approach to human development, which took shape as the idea of the original and permanent unity of mankind.¹¹⁷

Labeling Soviet frameworks as “non-European” helped Hanna develop a critique of “Western civilization” as a category of European thought that had “for too long denied the existence of human values to other civilizations and did not interact with them.” In this critique, Soviet culture had several functions. First, it served as another useful East. As Hanna claimed, Western elites presented their heritage as common to all humanity but were “stingy” (*tabkhal*) with other parts of the world, “the lands that gave birth to Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Gorky, Tagore, Gandhi, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Rushd, and others.”¹¹⁸ Such Eurocentrism, Hanna concluded, contributed to intellectual chaos, opportunism, and fear among the colonized, which could be exploited by Western propaganda to mask Western man’s exploitation of his fellow man in the name of democracy.¹¹⁹ This approach to the Soviet Union as an alternative developed, progressive, and modern East echoed the approaches of interwar Lebanese and Syrian intellectuals.¹²⁰ Second, Soviet culture served as a compelling model for how a state might show respect for “culture” by eliminating illiteracy, raising the status of the arts, eradicating epidemics, and achieving scientific, technical, and material excellence.¹²¹ These achievements happened in non-capitalist conditions. As Hanna explained in *al-Tariq*:

Capitalism deprives others of freedom, corrupts their morals, and humiliates their souls. ...Working in the cultural field is the most honorable kind of work. It increases cooperation among workers no matter the differences in their types (*jinsiyatihim*), the distance between their countries, or their systems of social organization. The interaction between cultures is the closest, easiest way to create a virtuous world (*al-‘alam al-fāḍil*) full of virtuous people (*insān fāḍil wa-shu`ūb fāḍila*).¹²²

In these ways, concepts of peace, justice, nationalism, and the new Arab person continued to be rethought with reference to the Soviet model, including its critiques of capitalism, but were not defined by them.

Similar critiques, with references to Soviet intellectual frameworks, were made by others attracted to the peace movement. For instance, in a letter to the Soviet Peace Committee, a Sudanese student of history at Cairo University who visited Moscow in 1957 for the Festival of Youth and Students described his desire to return to Moscow to study history there.

I am already convinced that you, the Soviet people, achieved a real great civilization and a real human culture, and you have helped nations like Egypt and others. You, who work diligently to preserve world peace for all humanity, would not at all mind realizing the dream of a person who loves you and loves your country and your heroic people...to study your national culture, to absorb it, so that it may react with my national culture, like oxygen when it reacts with hydrogen, to give water, which is a necessity for human life. So, sir, when your national culture reacts with my national

¹¹⁷ Hanna stresses the importance of peaceful coexistence in society in Hanna, *al-Haqiqa al-Hadariyya* (Beirut: Dar al-‘ilm lil-Malayin, 1958), 8. On this project and the evolution of Soviet ideas about a common civilization, see Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die*, 30.

¹¹⁸ Hanna, *al-Haqiqa al-Hadariyya*, 12–14.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 77, 81.

¹²⁰ Tannoury-Karam, *The Making of a Leftist Milieu*, 23.

¹²¹ Hanna, *al-Haqiqa al-Hadariyya*, 85.

¹²² Jurj Hanna, “al-Thaqafa al-Insaniyya Takhlūq al-‘Alam al-Fāḍil,” *al-Tariq* 1 (1957), 3–5.

culture, the result will be of great use and importance to my backward and beloved country.¹²³

His letter illustrates the potency of Soviet science and chemistry as metaphors for articulating his dreams and the intersection of individual, national, and civilizational potential.

Similar constellations of ideas continued to shape the search for a stable nationalism, decolonized culture, and postwar peace even after support for the pan-Arabist state cooled. For Hanna, this cooling meant a return to “Lebaneseness,” a theme he had spoken about at the 1950 congress in Warsaw, which became a book-length study in 1966. In *al-Lubnaniyyun* (The Lebanese), he described the Lebanese as sharing “one umma (community nation), one geography, one history, one interest, one destiny, and one psychological makeup (*takwīnuha al-naḥsi*).” This umma was still Arab “in face and tongue,” but had “an independent personality since it descended from the ancient Phoenicians.”¹²⁴ This approach to nationalism remained eclectic. Its stress on psychology was consistent with the European approaches with which Hanna had previously engaged, especially Toynbee’s definition of nationalism as “a subjective feeling in a living people” and the Austro-Hungarian US-based historian Hans Kohn’s as “first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness.”¹²⁵ Yet it also drew on Stalin’s definition of a nation as a “historically constituted, stable community of people, formed based on a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture.”¹²⁶ Arabism seemed to function more as this nationalism’s form and Lebaneseness as its content.

This range of sources—which included but was not limited to Marxist-Leninist ideas about nationalism, capitalism, and Soviet development models—allowed leftist intellectuals who joined the peace movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s to continue conversations ongoing since the 1930s and 1940s and reconnect with members of the global Left. Their conversations continued to revolve around the problems of colonialism and the international order; of nationalism, culture, and political commitment; of violence, security, and prospects of peace for Lebanese and Syrians as individuals, citizens, and Arabs. Such thematic continuities in the concerns of the interwar and wartime eras, alongside the more politically fractured context of the early Cold War, calls for a reframing of the intellectual history of decolonization in the region that takes the early 1950s more seriously.

More broadly, the reconfiguration of the eclectic interwar and wartime anti-colonial, anti-fascist, and communist Left in Syria and Lebanon into a movement that engaged peasants, women, and religious officials illuminates how the lingering shadows of the Cold War and its politics of knowledge have made it difficult to appreciate the agency of the Arab Left.¹²⁷ It shows how the overlooked experiences of decolonizing people can challenge the chronologies, spatial frames, and logics of the histories of the global Left, including leftist trajectories of disillusionment with communism and the Soviet Union. Unlike European leftists and fellow travelers, 1956 did not constitute the same break with communism or Soviet ideas for contemporaries in Syria and Lebanon. Instead, peace activists continued to receive intellectual and material support from the Soviet Union. Hanna and Thabit continued to attend peace conferences, and Thabit was awarded the 1961 International Lenin Prize for

¹²³ GARF f. 539, op. 1, d. 608, ll. 68–69 (Letter to Persians of Peace from Mahmoud El Fatih Alim, February 3, 1957). `Alim claimed he had gotten the idea to write to the Partisans of Peace from a Soviet journalist in Cairo named Shabilova. The chairman of the Peace Committee, Kotov, responded, directing `Alim to address his inquiry to the government of the Republic of Sudan since “admittance of foreign citizens to higher education is affected on the basis of inter-governmental agreements or at the request of the interested government.” Ibid., ll. 82 (Reply to `Alim).

¹²⁴ Jurj Hanna, *al-Lubnaniyyun* (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafa, 1966), 5, 17.

¹²⁵ On Toynbee and Kohn’s definitions, see Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, “Introduction,” in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), x–xi.

¹²⁶ Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936), 5.

¹²⁷ Guirguis, *The Arab Lefts*.

Strengthening Peace Among Nations.¹²⁸ This continued support may have made some ethical ambiguities of political commitment easier to bear, but so did the absence of a lasting post-war peace.

Acknowledgments. Many thanks to Alaa Aldeen Kayali, Abdurrazzak Annaemah, and Zeina Hounain for help with accessing materials at the American University of Beirut library, and to Bilal Orfali for arranging this access and inviting me to present this research at AUB. I am also grateful to Margaret Litvin for getting the images of *al-Tariq* covers from the Harvard Library, and to Joel Gordon and the three anonymous *IJMES* reviewers for their very helpful comments.

¹²⁸ As Goedde, *The Politics of Peace*, 32, notes, India's ambassador to the United States, Gaganvihari L. Mehta, also wrote in 1955 in the journal *World Affairs* that "the problems of Asia—which are basically those of poverty and ignorance and unemployment—are interlinked with the problem of peace."

Cite this article: Masha Kirasirova (2023). "The Partisans of Peace in Lebanon and Syria: How Anti-Nuclear Activism in the 1950s Revitalized the Arab Left." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 55, 650–674. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743823001502>