Chapter 2

Development of Arab Nationalism in Syria and Iraq

Creation of Israel

Ba'th and the Palestinian Question

The Impact of Nasirism in Syria & Iraq
2.1 Creation of Israel:

The early part of the twentieth century witnessed a dramatic growth in both Jewish and Arab Nationalism. Arab nationalism sought independence from Ottoman rule and latter from British and French rule. Jewish nationalism sought a homeland for the Jewish people. Both peoples were to quarrel over the territory of Palestine.

During World War I the British made a series of ambiguous and contradictory promises to both Arabs and Jews in support of their national aspirations. Thus the Balfour Declaration of 1917 promised a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, which the Arab maintained was inconsistent with the McMahon-Hussain pledge of 1915 whereby the Arabs would be given independence in Palestine subject to certain conditions.

The British military forces occupied Palestine during 1917-18, by an agreement between the victorious allied powers, Palestine was placed under British Mandate. The terms of the Balfour Declaration were incorporated in the British Mandate for Palestine, which was ratified by the council the League of Nations on 24 July 1922.

The ambiguity of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate for Palestine caused increasing strife between the Arab and Jewish communities in Palestine, each of which interpreted
the ambiguities to support its vision of the future of Palestine. The Jewish people interpreted the mandatory obligation as leading towards a Jewish state. The Arabs on the other hand, interpreted the obligation as creating only a Jewish national home within Palestine. Further Arabs were profoundly convinced that the Mandate was an injustice to the Arab people of Palestine, and a violation of the league promise. These differences, and resentment of continued Jewish immigration into Palestine provoked Arab riots in Palestine in the twenties and thirties. A royal commission chaired by Lord Peel was appointed in 1936 in response to the Arab revolt earlier that year. Its report in 1937 contended that the Arab desire for national independence and their opposition to the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine were the principal causes of the rioting. Finding the Arab and Jewish positions irreconcilable under the terms of the Mandate, it recommended the partition of Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish States. The Peel commission plan was opposed by the Arabs, and although the Jewish Agency approved the idea of partition, it opposed the details of the plan. With the opposition of both Jews and Arabs, the plan was not implemented.¹

With the failure of the Peel proposals the London Conference of 1939 was convened to work out an agreement between the two sides. During the conference the British Government adopted a more restrictive policy towards Jewish
immigration and announced that an independent palestine state would be created within ten years. The Jewish community opposed this shift in British policy, which had been announced in a white paper of 17 May 1939, particularly in view of the events taking place in Nazi Germany, which made it urgent for special efforts to be made for the establishment of a Jewish national home.  

The Nazi persecution of European Jews both before and during World War II forced Jews to emigrate to Palestine in greater number than ever before, especially after 1945. As Jewish immigration into Palestine accelerated after 1945, conflicts between the Arab and Jewish communities, together with restrictive British immigration policy grave rise to increase terrorism and civil strife. During this post-war period, several additional British proposals for a compromise plan were rejected by both sides. Thus in 1947 the British Government had had enough of the situation and handed over the problem of Palestine to the United Nations.  

One of Arab group viewed Zionism as an extension of European crusades, whose object had been to humiliate the Arabs and Islam. Exponents of Secular Arab nationalism, on the other hand, considered sectarian politics a threat to the unity of the Arab nation, and a divisive factor which tended to 'weaken the position of the Arabs internationally, and paralyze their civil and social activities'. The
views of the latter group gained momentum among the rising middle classes, including the army and increasing following among the University students and intellectuals of Beirut, Damascus and Baghdad. In later years, this tendency was reinforced by the rise to power of the Ba‘th party in Syria and the pragmatic conversion of the Egyptian military regime to the ideas of Arab nationalism.

The Zionist question, at the same time, aroused their serious concern and determined their attitude toward the west and their own governments. Almost without exception, the new generation of Arab nationalist, better known as the "generation of the disaster", viewed the establishment of the State of Israel as a major threat to the existence of the Arab nation. The events of 1948 seemed to confirm the worst fears entertained by the Arabs (since the Balfour Declaration in 1917) that the newly founded Jewish state was bent upon annihilation of its neighbors. The Zionists had not satisfied themselves with the realization of Jewish sovereignty in Palestine, but had sought successfully to displace the indigenous Arab population. Thus the development of the political situation which emerged after 1948 was the manner in which the new exponents of Arab nationalism interpreted the causes of implications of the defeat.
The establishment of Israel was seen by the Arabs as a phase, an initial step, in the advance of Zionism to its ultimate objective — the subjection of the whole Arab nation to the worst kind of imperialism. Arabs further realized that the success of Zionism in Palestine was closely related to the interests of the West in the West Asia. The dominant view among the radical Arab nationalists was that Israel formed the spearhead of Western imperialism in the area on the other hand, a moderate group who in most cases had spent some years in institutions of higher education in the United States and Europe, attempted to show that the West was as much the victim of Zionist schemes and conspiracies as was the Arab world. They claimed that international Zionism could not only muster the votes of a large section of the electorate in the United States, but also wielded an enormous influence over the economies of Western nations.

The major change which occurred in the Arabs attitude towards the West in 1948 was that their antagonism to the traditional imperialists powers, France and Britain, was extended to include the United States. Active American support for the Zionists in 1947 and 1948 appeared to have been instrumental in the process of the establishment and consolidation of the position of Israel. Arab moderates were thus left with no substantial grounds to defend the policy of the US in the region, and their efforts were limited to
occasional pleas to American officials to adopt an even-handed approach to the Palestine problem. They pointed out that it was in America’s long term political and economic interest to reach a friendly understanding with the Arabs rather than with Israel. By and large, though, the impact of 1948, tended to intensify and perpetuate Arab feelings of hostility and suspicion toward the Western powers and especially the US.

Thus, a more practical form of Arab cooperation and a greater measure of political integration were advocated. A number of proposals were made, ranging from a league of Arab peoples to a federation, and finally to an organic union of the Arab countries from the Gulf to the Atlantic. Since the beginning of the first world war such schemes had been the subject of controversy throughout the Arab world. The events of 1948 gave more weight to a new political tendency which appeared in the early 1940s. The new drive for unification was now based on the concept of the solidarity of the Arab peoples rather than on the agreement of their governments or ruling dynasties. The political structure of the suggested unified Arab states was to be democratic, popular and progressive. Its aim was to mobilize Arab political, economic and military capabilities to free Palestine from Zionism and liberate the rest of the Arab world from the yoke of Western imperialism.
2.2 Ba'th and the Palestinian Question:

For the Ba’th, the issue of Palestine has been viewed within the context of the advancement and consolidation of the Arab revolution at the Pan-Arab level. After Arab Israel war in 1948, the Palestinian question was taken up as the main issue before the Arabs. The Ba’th constitution draft in 1947 had no mention of the Palestine question. However, the party organized volunteer units that participated in the Palestinian war of 1948 and opened a permanent Palestinian Bureau in the same year.

The struggle against Zionist colonialism in Palestine was considered the integral movement by the Arab Ba’th socialist party (ABSP). The Ba’th however maintained that “the liberation of Palestine could only be visualized in the integral framework of an overall struggle of the Arab masses.”

The Ba’thists were the first to point out clearly and categorically that it would be futile to accept a piecemeal solution of the Palestinian problem. Zionism in Palestine, as maintained, has been a part of a longer plan of the imperialist powers to maintain a direct foothold in the West Asia, so that they could only exercise a direct control over the oil rich Arab lands, but may also have a dominating position in such strategic regions as that of Suez canal,
Golan heights, and Mediterranean sea.

Maintenance of "Israel" thus became one of the most important parts of the imperialist strategy to maintain their hold for exploitation of the entire Arab World. The Zionists, for reasons of their own had an eye on the colonialist of Palestine, this might be considered only as a symptom and not a cause of the real problem. The Arab nationalists had maintained consistently that the liberation of Palestine could only be achieved by the struggle of the masses -- not only for unification and independence of the Arab homeland -- but also for liberation of the Arab people from economic exploitation and social backwardness.12

According to Arab nationalists (Ba'thist) approach, Israel would amount to permanent acceptance of the fact of aggression on the Arab homeland and open the way for further and massive penetration of the entire Arab world. Even if the Arabs were willing to forego their national right on a major part of Palestine currently under the Zionist occupation, it would be extremely naïve to hope for a stable settlement with a political entity which aspires incorporating areas which are more than a hundred times than what it occupies that too illegally-today. It may be pertinent to recall that while the United Nations resolution carried out through a slender majority in May 1947 had allocated less than 9000 square miles of territory to
Israel, it is today occupying more than ten times that area.

The Ba'thists, analysts particularly Vice Chairman Saddam Hussain, had repeatedly stressed the point "that it is not the Zionist who have been exploiting the Americans, but rather American vested interests who have been using Zionist fanaticism as a tool to penetrate into the Arab Homeland".

Given these ideological parameters, the Ba'th party had been advocating a unified Arab struggle for the liberation of Palestine. It does not, however, mean that revolutionary Iraq stands for an internal overthrow of reactionary Arab regimes as a pre-condition to a United action on Palestine. On the contrary the Ba'th party, whenever the occasion has arisen, has been in the forefront of calling for a united action from all the Arab Governments against the Zionist enemy and their promoters and protectors. Even though it had differences with governments bordering the Zionist entity, the revolutionary government in Iraq believing firmly in the ideals of Arab unity had never hesitated to provide fullest support to these countries when ever they have been faced with the threat of aggression from the Zionist enemies.

The Ba'thists rejected all the solution legitimisation of the so-called "Israel" as a state. According to Ba'thist
If this state is accepted, it would open the way for further penetration in the entire Arab Homeland. It was foolish of some Arab leaders to think that if properly persuaded, the leaders of the Western imperialism would opt for supporting the Arabs against Israel. Many Arabs were hoping that given the tremendous Arab potential of oil wealth and their strategic position, it should not be difficult for the Arab lobbyists to divert the Zionists influence in America.

Keeping these ideological facts, the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (ABSP) had been advocating a unified Arab struggle for the liberation of Palestine. The ABSP, whenever the occasion had arisen, had been in the forefront of calling for a united action from all Arab Governments against the Zionists enemy and their supporters.

The emphases on imperialism as the principal enemy was particularly strong in leftist literature and among the radical Ba'th. For them, the liquidation of imperialism in the Arab World -- of Western influence -- and of reaction took priority over the campaign against Israel, not only in theory, but also in the programme of action in connection with the conflict.

The Arabs viewed Zionism as an extension of the European crusades, whose object had been to humiliate the Arab and
Islam. A return to the rules of Islam was thus envisaged as the only way for the Arabs to save itself from a total collapse. Exponents of Arab nationalism on the other hand, considered sectarian politics a threat to unity of the Arab Nation, and a divisive factor which tended to weaken the position of Arab internationally, hence paralyzed their civil and social activities.  

The crusaders, either in older times or the British and the French in modern times - all held only superficial, and therefore temporary sway. But Israel, however, is a more dangerous form of imperialism, since it marked the introduction of another nation which has been settled in place of the Arabs. This was frequently emphasized by Nasir. To him Zionism or World Zionism was a more dangerous enemy than Israel or imperialism for it was the source of Israel's strength.

These views gained growing circulation among the rising middle classes, including the military, and an increasing following among the university student and intellectual of Beirut, Damascus and Baghdad. In latter years, this tendency was reinforced by the rise to power of the Ba'ath party in Syria and Baghdad, and the pragmatic conversion of the Egyptian military regime to the ideas of Arab nationalism. Equally relevant to the development of the political situation which emerged after 1948 and onwards,
was the manner in which the new exponents of Arab Nationalism interpreted the causes and implications of the defeat. The intellectual activity of Arab Nationalists, at this stage, centered on a reconsideration of three interrelated issue, the magnitude of the Zionist threat, the relationship of the Arabs with the West, and the nature of the Arab regimes which evolved after the second world war.  

The decisions of the Ba'th Party on the Palestinian issue was theoretical. The party's involvement with this issue was marginal. Its attitudes towards it developed in two main stages. First which lasted till 1960, the party's stance was on the one hand to avoid any definite attitude relating to conflict and on the other hand to stress that a Palestinian entity must be based on the Pan-Arab level. Therefore, Ba'th party's announcement on 16 February 1960 was a determined stand regarding the division of the Jordan river by Israel. The evasion of the issue of the Palestinian entity was interesting, since during this period the leaders of the Ba'th had been active participants in the discussion of the UAR government. Obviously at this time, they were all well acquainted with nasir's policies in the field. But few of Ba' th leaders of Lebanon & Iraq made criticism on the party's stand related to this issue.  

The National Command's declaration of 15 May 1960 was a criticism of the plans for a Palestinian entity by Egypt and
Iraq. It emphasized that any Ba'th Party position concerning these plans would have to accord with the Pan-Arab level which saw the Palestinian issue as 'Arab Nationalism' problems and not merely a regional one. The Ba'th Party held that "the problem of Palestine would not be solved in any way other than a revolutionary Pan-Arab Struggle".

The second stage, began with a change in Ba'th position as the Palestinian entity that occurred at the 4th N.C. (August 1960). This was the first NC after the formation of U.A.R., and it was held whilst the issue of the Palestinian entity was assuring centrality in inter-Arab discussion. Two basic documents defined the party's stand on this issue, that the resolutions of 4th N.C., and the January 1961 memorandum of the Ba'th National Command "Concerning the problems of Palestine and Algeria", which was dispatched to the Arab Foreign Ministers Conference.

These two documents stated, first, "that the correct way to establish the entity of the Palestinian people is by the establishment of a popular National Front for the liberation of Palestine the Algerian liberation front". Such a front must represent the Palestinian people in its entirety, and must also "Unite all the revolutionary elements among the Palestinian including popular organization and rely on strong trade union of workers, Professionals and
intellectuals". The Ba'ath Party demanded that the Arab States permit the Palestinian to organize themselves freely in the framework of this front, and said that it should be regarded as "directly responsible for all matters concerned with the Palestinian problem". Second, this front must be "independent in its organization, its work and its struggle and must remain detached from struggles between the Arab States". And third, in the context of its struggle against the Egyptian, Iraqi and Jordanian regimes the Ba'ath Party opposed "all initiatives from any Arab states to establish Palestinian organisms connected to them and constituting a tool for their propaganda and their Arab regional policy".\(^\text{23}\)

After the August 1960 4th N.C., the Iraqi Ba'ath opposed the Qasim plan for the establishment of a Palestinian republic. Therefore, the party stated in September, that "the establishment of the Palestinian republic is the aspiration of the Arabs everywhere". This would not be supported due to the enormous material means". Therefore, this plan would not be realized except through a unified Arab plan.

The contribution of the Ba'ath Party during this period towards promoting a Palestinian entity was insignificant. Its alternative plan of late 1960 did not create any reaction in the Arab world as did the plan of Nasir or Qasim. It does not even, seen to have to made an impression
on the Palestinians themselves. The plan was essentially attached to the Ba'th doctrine which itself did not stand the test of fulfillment. Still it was a necessary stage towards a more concrete stand when the issue of establishing the Palestinian entity's institutions became actual and practical during 1964. 24.

Thus, in the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, the Ba'th Party had a profound influence, direct and indirect, on the minds of Arab youth, and on the development of events in the region. However, although it eventually advanced a plan for a Palestinian entity, it failed to implement its political ideas in General or those concerning the Palestinian entity in particular because it concentrated, precisely at the height of its achievement on internal problems.

The Ba'th party basically faced a dilemma on the Palestinian issue, which was in fact also Syria's dilemma, between the Pan-Arab aspiration (Qaummiyya) and the tendency or regionalism for its branches (Iraqi branches, other also even the Syria branch which controlled the National Command). Ba'th Party leaders who were in the United Arab Republic (UAR) government in 1958-61 took great pains in dealing with this dilemma, especially after they had realized the "Unity" as as the principle of their doctrine. This dilemma was the context of their resignation from UAR.
government, and in the last analysis was also the main cause of the disintegration of the UAR in September 1961, hence, the solution of the dilemma by precisely strengthening the Separatist regionalist tendency at the expense of the Pan-Arab principles.

2.3 Impact of Nasirism in Syria and Iraq:

The context in which West Asian politics was conducted was transformed once again by the consequences of second world war and its aftermath: notably the achievement of national independence in Syria and Lebanon and the Arab regimes; failure to prevent the establishment of Jewish state in Palestine. This immediately provided the setting for new forms of political activity including, in several states, the attempt by various parties and movements to mobilize an increasingly wide section of the population behind the potent slogan of anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism and Arab unity, as well as for and against the radical economic and social programme put forward by parties like the Syrian Ba'ath or Nasir's Free officers.

After World War II, when direct control through mandate was replaced by indirect control through unequal treaties, Arab Nationalism found its major expression in Nasirism. It was by degrees, and largely in response to external pressures, that Nasir moved into radical Pan-Arabism almost as thoughtlessly as the British had once acquired an empire.
Much has been made of the fact that neither the static measures nor the populist rhetoric of Nasirism constituted real socialism which is true enough. But the Nasir era revealed most fruitfully the necessity and the limitation of radical Pan-Arabism as a stage in the struggle against western imperialism in the West Asia. It was only in the 1950s that one could begin to speak of the seizure of power by anti-bourgeois elements who were in theory more committed to the concept of an Arab political community, independent, formally and in reality, from external constraints. Proponents of Nasirism and members of the Ba’th Parties of Iraq and Syria were perhaps the best representatives of this anti-Bourgeois class of nationalists which was more willing to intervene in the affairs of other Arab states in order to achieve the goal of Arab unity. And it was in the context of the struggle between the bourgeois and their opponents that other formulas for unity emerged. For while the anti-bourgeois nationalists activity campaigned for unity, the others spoke of confederations or greater regional cooperation. More frequent talks concerning the Nile Valley and the Greater Syria as natural regions within Arab World, indicated the presence of competing theories based on the reality of class control of the Arab World.
The military revolutionaries of 1952 were the direct heirs of the Egyptian nationalism fashioned by Mustafa Kamel, Saad Zaghlul and Mustafa al Nahas. However, this nationalist ideology which had been the motive force behind the Egyptian nation-building process, was becoming outmoded in terms of the political and social conditions of mid-twentieth century Egypt. These were traditional elites, operating within the confines of a traditional nationalism, and the absence of new ideology, hindered the socialization process and therefore nation-building. Their conception of nationalism not only lacked specific context beyond the achievement of complete independence from imperialist power, but also a concrete programme to achieve this aim. Due to unsatisfactory achievement, one could infer that the attitude at lower levels was more ambivalent. Alienated from the West they admired, these professionals manifested deep feelings of self doubt and social inferiority -- these all indicative of a serious crises in identity.29.

The military organizers of the July 1952 coup were fired essentially by the same ambiguous nationalism that had motivated the traditional elite group they had overthrown. Without any doubt their primary purpose in taking power had been to realize the main ideals of Egyptian nationalism -- the building of a strong, independent nation state. The military incorporated its inherited Egyptian nationalism into the Six principles of the revolution published in
January 1953 by Jamal Abdul Nasir. Two of these principles - the liquidation of imperialism and the building of a strong army were pursued almost immediately as a post of the officers nationalist creed.

The subsequent shift in revolutionary action from the domestic to the international stage was accompanied by a parallel redirection of ideological development where Egyptian nationalism evolved into Pan-Arabism. While the pre requisite conditions to effect this evolution already existed in the Egypt in late 1954, the final and official adoption of Pan-Arabism was due to Abdul Nasir's subsequent diplomatic success.

As Nasir's victories evoked overwhelming Arab approval, his policies were propagated in the name of Pan-Arabian. This initiated a change of beliefs and identity among Egyptian who started adopting their popular leaders' new ideology and regarded themselves as Arabs living in Egypt. To the extent that this transformation occurred among the populace, Abdul Nasir had became Charismatic.

Unlike his predecessors Nasir structured Egypt's external policy around a few principles that remained constant:

- termination of British military presence,
- leadership both in the Arab Unity Movement,
- and in the Arab hostility to Israel,
However the fact remains that even after the formation of the Arab league in 1945, Egypt was not committed to a vigorous Arab Policy until 1954. The neutralist tendency was continued during 1954 reflecting the preoccupation with the Nasir-Naguib power struggle. Also Egyptians had expectations of economic and military aid from the West. The Baghdad pact in February 1955 between Iraq and Turkey, further accerlated Egyptians toward neutralism. Viewing the Baghdad pact as a Western attempt to destroy the Egyptian led security system of the Arab League, Nasir was provoked into a more aggressive policy than he had chosen to follow previously. After mid 1955, Nasir's neutralist policy acquired a more pro-soviet (anti-western) orientation as the USSR began to extend generous amounts of military aid (September 1955), diplomatic support (1956 Suez War), and economic assistance for Aswan dam.

The first major address in which president Nasir appeared to had led special emphasis upon Arab nationalism as opposed to Egyptian nationalism took place on August 12, 1956. According to Nasir .......

"..... Then the Voice in the Arab World began to say that it is not Suez Canal, but the Arab Canal."
Arab Nationalism began to appear in its best form and clearest meaning. Various kinds of Support began to come from Arab Kings and presidents and Arab peoples. Arab Nationalism began to show its existence and its truth. I read an article on Arab Nationalism in a foreign newspaper and it said "Arab nationalism became a danger after 1952 and after the writing of the philosophy of the revolution". Then I thought we as Arabs must be a single nation we must fight as for a single cause".

At the end of the Suez Crisis, Nasir was no longer under great personal pressure. The manner in which the nationalization of British and French firms provided the basis for a new economic effort from 1957. It had been seen that Nasir's need for Arab allies against the Baghdad pact and the Arab Nationalists need for leadership combined to present Egypt with a Pan-Arab policy.

The early months of 1957, which saw the defeat of Eisen Hower Doctrine, can be singled out as the turning point for Egypt, both domestically and externally. The Ba'ths ideas of comprehensive Arab Unity suddenly became a realistic possibility as one watched the reaction to the Suez Crisis in Jordan Syria Lebanon and Iraq. The fact remains that both super powers had supported Egypt during the Crisis, in
opposition to their support of the Palestinian resolution of 1947. Hence, it was from this date that one could note a new purposefulness in the UAR's pursuit of positive neutrality.

The evacuation of the canal zone in June 1956 was another occasion on which the Arab nationalist Movement expressed its full support for Egypt. The event was celebrated as a great victory for the Arabs, because it terminated Egypt's long isolation from the rest of the Arab countries, and paved the way for its increasing participation in the Arab struggle for "Unity, Liberation and Peace". The nationalization of the Canal and its consequence confirm the movement's confidence in the positive role which Egypt appeared to play against Zionism and imperialism. And finally, the formation of the UAR in 1958 under Nasir's leadership dispelled any of the remaining doubts which the Movement had earlier entertained regarding the sincerity of Nasir's regime. The Arab Nationalist Movement viewed the newly formed state as "the formal leadership of the struggle for Arab Unity and liberation". It claimed that the UAR qualified for such a role because it enjoyed an absolute control over its own political and economic resources, and was also endowed with an exceptional leadership which was "sincere determined and courageous."
From 1958 onwards, the movement willingly associated itself with the policies of the UAR, and paid absolute allegiance to Nasir's leadership. Consequently its notion of Arab Unity gained a practical dimension. It implied that the credibility of any process of political unification in the Arab world depended on Nasir's approval and his participation in its realization.

In Yemen a revolution led by anti royalist army officers broke out and eventually led to the establishment of the republic of North Yemen in 1962. The deposed ruler, the Imam Badr, who had narrowly escaped death, rallied his tribesmen in a counter-revolution, aided by funds and weapons supplied by Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the revolutionary, led by Abdullah al-Sallal, turned to Egypt for assistance. Egypt, which had been preaching change to more progressive regimes, could not avoid lending support to Sallal, who hoped to modernize his country. Nasir however made the mistake of under-estimating Yemeni royalist resistance and sent Egyptian forces to Yemen. Had Nasir ever read any history of the region he would have known what a mistake it was to send forces to that country, for no one but a native had ever won a war there. The Egyptian forces became embroiled in a rugged, mountainous terrain that had no roads and which was ideal for guerrilla warfare and ambush. The Imam and his tribesmen inflicted heavy causalities on the Egyptian army which at one time numbered
70,000 men. That adventure slapped Egyptian funds, slowed down the country’s economic growth and waisted its scarce resources. It also brought Egypt and Saudi Arabia into open animosity and nearly to the brink of war.37

References

2. Ibid., p. 2.
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8. Ibid., p. 6.
9. Ibid., p. 11.
12. Ibid., p. 91.
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28. Ibid., p. 78.
30. Ibid., p. 51.
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34. Ibid., p. 211.