A member of the Jewish community in N.S.W. traces the history of the conflict between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, and points the way to a solution.

THE ARAB WORLD is in a state of continuous social and political revolution, in some of the Arab countries reaching a stage of nationalisation of foreign enterprises and big Arab-owned undertakings. Since 1955 a radical change has occurred in the foreign policy of Egypt and Syria. The Western imperialist powers, to safeguard their enormous oil interests, endeavored to arrest and reverse the Arab revolution, using intrigues, coups, direct aggression and military intervention by the pro-Western Middle East states. These activities have brought an increase of animosity and tensions and could lead to a world war.

This imperialist policy found its expression in the prompting of Israel, Turkey and Iraq to attack Egypt and Syria in 1955, in invasion of Egypt in 1956, in the intervention of the US and Britain in Lebanon and Jordan in 1958 as preparation for intervention in Iraq, and in goading Israel and Jordan to attack Syria in 1966/67. The recent war in the Middle East was basically the outcome of this policy. These plans to topple the revolutionary regimes and to arrest the Arab revolutions have repeatedly failed, due to the actions of the Soviet Union and strong opposition from the Arab and neutral nations.

At the end of the Second World War Palestinian Jewry started a struggle for independence and against restrictions on migration by Britain, the Mandatory Power. The outcome of this struggle was the establishment on November 29, 1947, by decision of the United Nations, of Jewish and Arab states, politically separate but economically joined, a decision fully backed by the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. In the last resort it was the outcome of the struggle of the Israelis, who defeated the Arab armies (armed and officered by the British) which invaded Israel in defiance of the UN decision.

This invasion led to the failure of the establishment of the Arab Palestinian state, and contributed to the creation of the huge number of Arab refugees in areas adjacent to Israel. This refugee problem soon became a stumbling block to establishment of peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors.
Very soon, however, the young Israeli state changed its policy. It received big American grants and loans and entered into close relationship with the United States. In accordance with the philosophy of Ben Gurion and other Zionist leaders that “Israel is situated in Asia only geographically”, the Israeli government soon adopted a one-sided pro-Western orientation which at all times supported the colonial powers against the Asian and Arab nations. Thus Israel supported Britain in 1952 against Egypt, Holland against Indonesia, France against Algeria, the West against China and Tshombe against the Congolese liberation movement.

The military attack on the town of Gaza on February 28, 1955 opened a new page in the Israeli policy towards the progressive Arab states, Ben Gurion claiming that the attack was an answer to the infiltrations of Gaza strip refugees into the Israeli border areas for the purpose of stealing, sabotage and killing. However, the timing of this and other punitive military expeditions against Egypt and Syria (Gaza February 1955, Khan Yunis September 1955, Nitzana November 1955 and Lake Tiberias December 1955), the depth of penetration into Arab territory, the great number of troops involved and the fact that the scope of Arab infiltrations has increased as a result of these military expeditions, bear witness that these attacks served the imperialist aim of driving the reluctant Arab states into the Bagdad pact.

Ben Gurion’s policy aimed at ‘seeking a military pact with the US’. In the Israeli parliament on November 9, 1955 he said Israel aimed at solving the Israel-Arab conflict in ‘an active way’, by military means with the help of the imperialistic powers. This policy eventually led to the (for Israel) disastrous French-British-Israeli invasion of Egypt on October 29, 1956.

In 1955, as a result of their national liberation revolutions, Egypt and Syria abandoned their uncompromising stand against the existence of the Israeli state. Under their leadership, at the Bandung Conference in April 1955, the Arab states adopted a policy of neutrality and coexistence and of ‘peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question on the basis of implementation of the UN resolution on Palestine’. (The Facts of the Bandung Conference: D. W. A. Baker, p. 29.) Moreover, in 1956 President Nasser approached Syria, Jordan and Lebanon with a request that Arab demands for reducing Israeli territory to frontiers allotted to Israel by the UN in 1947 should be discarded in favor of a more moderate and practical plan. (Davar, organ of Mapai, 1/6/1956.)

However, after the invasion of Egypt in 1956 the attitude of the Arab states to Israel changed radically, extremists in Egypt and Syria coming out with the theory that ‘Israel is a creation of imperialism’, that the state of Israel should be eliminated, and
that the Jews who came to the country after 1948 should be deported.

After February 1966, when the left wing of the Baath Party came to power in Syria, the US and Britain again resorted to their old method of using the pro-Western Middle East powers to overthrow governments choosing the non-capitalist path of development. Thus Jordan in 1966 threatened to invade Syria to prevent it going Communist (Hussein’s statement of 8/10/66) and organised several unsuccessful coups in Syria. On the other hand, Israel carried out several mass attacks against Syria (the major ones on July 14 1966 and on April 7 1967, when the Israeli war planes reached Damascus) and against Jordan (on November 13 1966 as ‘a warning against Syria’). Levi Eshkol, the present Prime Minister of Israel, claimed, like Ben Gurion in his time, that the sole purpose of the punitive military expeditions was to stop the activities of Arab sabotage and terror groups operating in the border territory. However, many facts indicate that the ‘retaliatory acts’ were in reality a continuation of Ben Gurion’s policy.

Firstly, soon after the progressive Syrian Government came to power, the US for the first time supplied officially and directly to Israel much military equipment, including tanks and jet bombers, and it is hard to imagine that this act was an entirely disinterested one.

Secondly, two years ago the Israeli Government suddenly prevented Syrian farmers, who in accordance with the armistice agreement used to attend to their plots of land in the demilitarised zone without any permits, from doing so. (Communist Party of Israel Bulletin, January 1967, p. 16.)

Thirdly, the Government of Jordan took some measures to prevent Arab terrorists from entering the Israeli territory, and the Syrian Government, according to the pro-Zionist Israeli journal New Outlook (October-November 1966, p. 4) was unable to prevent partisan actions by the Al-Fatah terrorist organisation, while it could not, for prestige reasons, attack them or refuse to share their ‘glory’ . . . and the Israeli authorities were certainly aware of this situation.

Fourthly, high officers and government officials threatened on many occasions to take military action to overthrow the Syrian Government (General Y. Rabin’s statements in Be Mahaneh of September 10, 1966 and of May 1967), and on May 9, 1967 the Israeli parliament authorised the Government to carry out military actions against Syria.

However, Arab chauvinism constituted a great danger to Israel and has played into the hands both of imperialists and of reactionary circles in Israel. Both reactionary and progressive Arab states have claimed that Israel is simply a creation of imperialism and
should be eliminated, and that all Jews who came to Israel after 1948 should be deported. This view was peddled at anti-imperialist and peace gatherings, even Israeli communist and progressive delegates being often barred from meetings because Arab delegates threatened a boycott.

The Palestine Organisation and Army of Liberation, whose aim is to 'liberate' Palestine by means of war and terror, were active in the Arab countries, and since the beginning of 1965 the sabotage and terror groups of 'Al-Fatah', organised by the pro-Chinese circles following Mao Tse-tung's ideas, operated in the Israeli border areas. Since 1966 they were joined by the 'Heroes of Return' organised by the Army of Liberation of Palestine, and up to the end of 1966 over 70 acts of sabotage and terror took place, involving 11 killed and 58 wounded.

Following the Israeli raids of July 1966, top Syrian leaders, in their statements, supported the terrorist acts and proclaimed that 'people's war for liberation of Palestine' and 'guerilla warfare to liquidate Israel' had started (C.P. of Israel Bulletin, December 1966, p. 29 and November 1966, p. 8.) So although Arab chauvinism was greatly strengthened as a result of the pro-imperialist policy initiated by Ben Gurion in 1955, it was expressed in such a racist and intolerable way that Israelis and Jewish people all over the world had to oppose it strongly, and rightly so.

Arab chauvinism resulted, as chauvinism does, in something very harmful for the Arab people—it provided a justification for aggressive acts of the imperialists and reactionary Israeli circles. It stimulated chauvinism in return and united the overwhelming majority of the Israeli people behind Israel's policy of retaliation.

And yet there are many people in Israel striving for peace. In 1951, 1952 and 1954 half of the Israeli adult population signed peace petitions. In 1957 the C.P. of Israel, Mapam (left socialists), Hapoel Hamizrachi and Agudath Israel (religious workers and orthodox Jews) strongly criticised the whole system of retaliation.

Dr. Nahum Goldman, President of the World Jewish Congress, has for many years urged the Israeli Government to adopt a policy of neutrality and integration into the Middle East. In the years 1966-1967 the two Communist Parties of Israel, Mapam and a substantial number of intellectuals, have urged that the "Israeli Government give up the system of military retaliation" and "adopt instead a high standard of border control, as an answer to Arab sabotage and terror acts".

The Israeli leaders, however, have paid no heed to this call of reason as the only way to peace with the Arabs. They have preferred to proceed with a policy of co-operating with imperialism and of dealing with the Arabs from 'positions of strength'. They
have refused to admit any refugees to Israel. Some time ago, while, on a visit to Washington, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol declared: "The admittance even of 100,000 Arab refugees to Israel would be an atom bomb for Israel."

On the Arab side, up to 1964, Arab Communists took a correct stand in the spirit of internationalism, at their conference in Prague in 1964 adopting a resolution advocating a peaceful solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict based on recognition of mutual rights of all. Unfortunately in 1966 the Arab Communist Parties reversed their stand and adopted at their conference a resolution supporting the Palestinian Liberation Front, which stands for a holy war against Israel. In these circumstances the call of the Communist Parties and progressive forces in Israel and elsewhere to refrain from the use of force was unable to prevent the pro-American and pro-imperialist policies of Ben Gurion and of the subsequent Israeli Government, which strove to solve the Israeli-Arab conflict by military means and with the help of the imperialist powers, leading to the recent Israeli-Arab war, which resulted in much destruction, suffering and bloodshed.

The war solved nothing. It has increased mutual suspicions and hatreds. It has magnified the economic difficulties of Israel and its political isolation. It has made the solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict much more difficult. Some time ago Israel refused to admit even 100,000 Arab refugees; today it has almost one and a half million Arabs in the occupied territories, half of them unemployed.

Sometimes it is said that Israel, which has a weak economy and is surrounded by a hostile Arab world, has no choice but to pursue a partisan pro-American policy. It is pointed out that Israel gets yearly, in addition to American grants, over 100 million dollars from American Jewry in the form of appeals and individual donations. However, in present international conditions, when substantial differences exist on many questions among the Western powers, when the opposition to US foreign policy is voiced from many quarters, when many nations adopt, with benefit, a policy of neutrality, and when more and more Jews all over the world, including in the US, are beginning to realise how necessary it is for Israel to adopt a policy of neutrality, of no identification with either bloc and of integration into the Middle East, adoption of such a policy by Israel is not only possible but is absolutely necessary.

Soviet policy in the Middle East has been open to criticism because unjustified statements were from time to time made by Soviet representatives at the UN and elsewhere, comparing zionism with nazism. Such statements antagonised many democrats and
progressive people throughout the world, and could be interpreted by the Arabs as the green light for their anti-Israel chauvinism. The breaking off by the Soviet Union of trade relations with Israel after the invasion of Egypt in 1956 and non-resumption ever since, while trading with Britain and France, the main culprits of the invasion, could also be interpreted by the Arabs and others to mean that Israel and not the Western powers is the imperialism of the Middle East and the main enemy of the people. And it is said with some justification that more forthright statements indicating that the Soviet Union is not only for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian Arabs but also for the legitimate rights of Israel, might have helped to moderate the influence of chauvinist sentiments among the Arabs.

Nevertheless it is widely recognised that the Soviet Union played a positive and very effective role in the recent events in restraining aggressive and extremist forces. And in general, Soviet policy in the Middle East has been conducted in accordance with the principles of internationalism and support for progressive social development. The Soviet Union has supported the Arab struggle against imperialism, for independence, social reforms and progress by diplomatic and material means. On many occasions it prevented the overthrow of progressive revolutionary regimes of the Middle East. It stood for ‘mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the Middle East’, and ‘for the settlement of international problems exclusively by peaceful means’, (e.g., the Khruschov-Nasser statement in Moscow of May 1958). It stood for ‘improvement of relations with all states of the Middle East’. (Khruschov’s speech at the banquet in honor of Egyptian General Abdul Hakim Amer of 28/10/58, Pravda, No. 14691.)

Mr. Kosygin’s speech at the UN in which, expressing unequivocal support for the Arab states against attack and against imperialism, he categorically said:

Every people enjoys the right to establish an independent national state of its own. This constitutes one of the fundamental principles of the policy of the Soviet Union, may well prove historic. This speech is greatly assisting the reappraisal taking place among the Arabs, and has already been praised in a statement by the ambassadors of twelve Arab states.

This, together with a stronger stand against chauvinist elements by all progressive Arabs, and the continued struggle of peace-loving and realistic forces in Israel, is the only way in which a stable peace in the Middle East will eventually be realised on the only possible basis—mutual recognition of Jews and Arabs of the legitimate rights of both peoples, and joint opposition to imperialist domination and manipulation.