

Film Guide
SEARCH FOR DESTINY

PART III

The various indigenous peoples' restless search for destiny in the Middle East has too often been negotiated and determined by outside powers. It is a place of broken promises and brokenhearted peoples, of tragedies played out and replayed again. Israel was born of the nightmare of the Holocaust, and the terrorists who fought for its freedom were often survivors sworn by all means to found a Jewish state. They waged ethnic cleansing war against the British occupiers and Arabs, as Arabs did against them. In 1948, after Britain abandoned Palestine to chaos, the Israeli struggle for independence ended with cease-fire lines and not borders. By 1952 there were 750,000 Jews living in Israel; they transformed the largely and land from a refugee camp into a booming, vibrant new state, both ancient in its roots and relentlessly modern in its life-style. Unfortunately there were an equal number of Palestinian refugees who fled to Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. King Abdullah of what had been Transjordan (he renamed it Jordan) claimed Palestine as his; in 1950 he was assassinated and his son Hussein ascended the throne. In 1952 Oman was occupied by the Saudis, but they were driven out by the British, who still regarded the area as their preserve. A non-Arab nation, Iran was ruled by a shah (actually an army officer who had seized power and tried to legitimize his rule with archaic Persian terms). Britain had ruthlessly invaded Iran during World War II, and much of its oil production was controlled by Britain. The shah was a British collaborationist, a military dictator masquerading as an ancient monarchy. When in 1951 Britain unilaterally cut its payments to Iran for its oil, an Iranian patriot named Mossadegh nationalized his country's oil; when the shah plotted to remove him, and forced his resignation, popular indignation compelled the shah to recall him to office. In 1953 a CIA plot achieved Mossadegh's dismissal. At the same time Egypt, whose kings had been a dynasty of Turkish officials imposed and manipulated by Britain, had endured a British army of occupation of 80,000 men after the end of World War II. A clash between resentful Egyptians and occupying British troops resulted in the deaths of 50 Egyptian policemen. At last a coup in July of 1952 brought a charismatic Egyptian Arab colonel, Nasser, to power and relegated corrupt King Farouk to his pleasures. Nasser was a philosopher of Arab nationalism and a charismatic orator. Nasser's Egypt was the first colony in Africa to break free of British colonialism. He negotiated an agreement in 1954 whereby all of England's army of occupation was to be withdrawn by 1956, but Britain's Prime Minister Eden retained a colonialist's proprietary pretensions in the area. Nasser's burning Arab nationalism threatened Britain's ally King Hussein in Jordan, and Nasser's neutrality in the cold war was portrayed by John Foster Dulles as enmity. Because Egypt could not purchase modern weapons from the US, he turned to the USSR. One of his great if controversial ideas was to build a giant dam on the River Nile at Aswan to aid in irrigation and produce hydroelectricity. In February 1956 Britain and the US both agreed