

## UNITED STATES' INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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The topic assigned to me concerns United States' interests in the Middle East with specific reference to the issues at stake between Israel and its Arab adversaries.

The concept of *interests* is somewhat ambiguous. Interest is what we pay out in money for a joint stock venture. Interest is what we collect on savings and securities. Interest is what arouses our attention and concern. The word also stands for the attention and concern aroused. Interest denotes a hope of sharing in gain. It also denotes an obligation, a liability incurred, or a responsibility.

In testifying before a committee at the Capitol, just over a dozen years ago, not long after the 1956 hostilities in the Suez Canal area, a United States Under Secretary of State, Mr. Herbert Hoover, Jr., since deceased, vehemently disavowed any United States motivations related to considerations of interest in the Middle East. The implication was as if it would be unworthy of a nation to have interests or to pay heed to them in projecting its policies.

Now our discourse is not burdened by any such dodges and obscurations. Last autumn, in addressing the United Nations General Assembly, President Nixon described the Middle East candidly as a place where United States' interests are involved. Indeed, he described the interests concerned as vital interests—a standard euphemism in international affairs for those interests held to be serious enough to warrant fighting for in the final analysis. The President acknowledged that the Soviet Union had similar interests at stake in the area. The 1971 version of the President's annual summation entitled *U.S. Foreign Policy in the 1970s* contains more of the same weighty evaluation of the area.

The President's pronouncements do not labor the sum total of reasons why the U.S. Government feels materially and psychically concerned over what happens in the region. These reasons are not hard to figure out.

The Middle East is an inherently strategic region. Let me elucidate that word "strategic." It denotes an inherent relevance to the matters which those in authority must take into account when they class other countries and regimes according to their degrees of friendliness or animosity and ponder possibilities of hostilities. The mind of man runneth not back to a time when the Middle East was otherwise than a strategic region. The trait is inherent in its position embracing the connections among the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. The characteristic is underlined by the bearing of the Middle East on the southern flank of NATO.

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A second circumstance is that the Middle East contains some 65 per cent of the world's known petroleum reserves. It should be pointed out that petroleum, constitutes some 90 per cent of the energy supply for industry over the world. The petroleum resources of the Middle East are enormously important—I think one can accurately say vitally important—to great positions with which the United States is allied in Europe. Petroleum is an indispensable factor in relation to economic development in the emerging states, the so-called Third World. Command of access to the region is therefore of great importance to the United States, irrespective of whether the Middle East's petroleum is directly needed in this country. American-based companies are concerned in the production and marketing of Middle East petroleum, which is an important source of profit and foreign exchange for the U.S.

Thirdly, the United States has a special concern for the welfare and the survival of the state of Israel. I do not need to elaborate on the point that the security and continuity of that country have a bearing on political conditions within the United States. No political party with hopes of coming into responsibility for national policy here can profess or practice indifference with respect to Israel's future.

President Nixon's foreign policy summation does not touch very penetratingly, or even at all, on these aspects of our concern for the Middle East. The statement accords the area the "grim distinction" of being the scene of "our most dangerous" problem—this in view of its "potential for drawing Soviet policy and our own into a collision that could prove uncontrollable." Furthermore, Nixon states, "America's interest in the Middle East—and the world's interest—is that the global structure of peace not be allowed to break down there."

In other words, we have an interest in abating risks which are entailed as consequences of our other interests. The President's statement strikes me as somewhat oversimplified in focusing on peace as an interest—I should say, *the* interest—which we have in the Middle East. If peace were our only interest, then we could realize it merely by capitulation. It is accurate enough to say that we have a strong preference, or interest, in trying to make sure that our interests in the area are maintained without our having to engage in hostilities, but to single out peace as our interest, as if it were a sole concern, represents the problems as simpler than they really are. The United States and the Soviet Union are, I should think, alike in wishing to avoid the condition of war as they pursue their interests in the Middle East, but to say that tells us little about the contest which focuses on that area.

I see little, and I have little to propose, in the way of solutions for the problems of the Middle East, if one takes a solution to mean a formula for neutralizing the causes and bringing to an end to the basic issues. Here I am reminded of something said a generation ago by Paul Valéry, the now deceased French poet and literary critic, who had great insights into the problems of international politics.



In times past, Valéry observed, policy gambled on the isolation of events. History consisted of events susceptible of being localized. A disturbance had the possibility of creating in one point on the globe a boundless medium in which to reverberate. Its effects were nil at a sufficient distance. Prediction, calculation, and successful action were feasible then. The globe afforded room enough for one or even several great policies well planned and well carried out.

In contrast, Valéry went on, conditions as they have developed in the contemporary world ensure interaction over an enormous scope. Henceforth, he said, every action was bound to be re-echoed on every side. The effect of effects would be felt almost instantly at any distance. The expectations of any predictor would always be disappointed. Duration, continuity, and recognizable causality would diminish in the situation of multiple relations and contacts. Accident and disorder would tend to predominate. Accordingly, an expert or inspired game would no longer be possible. Prudence, wisdom, and genius would be baffled by such complexity. The profound thought of a Machiavelli or a Richelieu would not avail in such an environment.

I believe that the conditions whose emergence was perceived by Valéry now tend to predominate globally, and particularly in relation to the Middle East. There, one may say, the conditions perceived by Valéry to be developing over the world in general have long prevailed. In the words of a report issued a few years ago by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, ". . . the area remains a most disorderly part of the world; geographically, racially, culturally, economically, and above all, politically, there is a profound inconsistency about the area. For every rule there is an exception, for every premise a contradiction."

Such an area is inherently aberrant to American preconceptions. American approaches to world affairs are inclined to be rationalistic. Rationalism puts a premium on symmetry and balance. That attitude assumes all human problems to be solvable. It banks on a postulated inherent harmony of interests among human groups. The attitude goes hand in hand with a supposition that communication will unflinchingly resolve differences. "Getting to Know You," a song in *The King and I* puts the idea, "getting to know all about you, getting to like you, getting to hope you like me." This approach, applied to international politics, vests great faith in negotiation. It is impatient of history's obduracy. It tends to relegate cultural and ethnic differences to secondary or tertiary importance.

I suppose that these assumptions were evident in the alacrity with which this Government, a quarter century ago in Mr. Truman's presidency, joined with other powers in sponsoring the emergence of the state of Israel in Palestine in succession to the expiring League of Nations mandate exercised by Great Britain. I refer explicitly to the lack of recognition then of the consequences of that action in relation to Arab ambitions and sensibilities. There certainly were within the Government a considerable group of officials who sensed that the Arabs would take deep offense, nevertheless, the prevailing assumption was that the Arab response would be one of pique which



would be assuaged fairly readily by time, by development projects, and by a demonstration of even-handedness on the part of U.S. policy. The assumption was that, with time, the Arabs would become reconciled to the existence of Israel.

Subsequently, the United States has persistently sought to practice that attitude of even-handedness. Yet in the circumstances that goal has been beyond reach. What the Arab attitude objects to basically is the existence of Israel. Of all the sponsors of the creation of Israel, the U.S. is one with the resources and the disposition to continue to be a mainstay of support for Israel's existence. This Government is the one which is stuck with the role of being sponsor and guarantor of Israel. It is the mainstay of that to which the Arab states object most strongly and persistently. In that situation, the even-handed role is difficult, even to the point of impossibility.

Michael Adams, in his *Chaos or Rebirth: The Arab Outlook*, spells out the consequences:

It goes without saying that Israel's penetration of the Arab world, with the displacement of an Arab population to make room for Jewish settlers, constitutes the central Arab grievance. But what is interesting is that the Arabs . . . often feel a keener resentment against Israel's western sponsors than against Israel herself. In a sense . . . the explanation lies in the fact that they can at least understand the motives of the Israelis who, after all, are only fighting to gain a place in the sun; what they cannot understand, except in terms of hostility to the Arabs or of some kind of conspiracy by Zionist interests in America, is the American attitude of professing neutrality in the middle east while giving automatic and unequivocal support to Israel, even at the expense of America's own substantial interests in the Arab world.

Our national attitude toward external problems is greatly affected, at the present time, by recent experiences. A pertinent word is fatigue. The tired mood is linked to a sense of bafflement about strategic endeavors. Our reputed best minds in an Administration which made much of its devotion to intellectual excellence took charge in relation to Viet Nam a decade ago. The consequences were not such as to inspire confidence in the role of intellect in handling great affairs. A companion factor is discontinuity of memory, a phenomenon related to generational change. The assumptions and perceptions underlying a broad array of United States commitments and obligations in the world are not persuasive to significant portions of the population. It is not enough to say that they have forgotten the reasons for national involvement, because they probably never have understood and accepted them.

All of these considerations have a bearing on a circumstance of very deep importance. For perhaps the first time in our national history, the general welfare has become a claimant against the common defense. The major political parties are in substantial agreement that the current rate of diversion of resources into the public sector, that is to say, the present rate of taxation, shall not be exceeded. In the absence of some drastic and unforeseeable change in circumstances, any change in that consensus seems



most improbable. In other words, taxes are not going to go up within the calculable future.

Meanwhile, however, demands upon the public sector have been growing dynamically. That is so because of the general acceptance of an unprecedentedly large conception of basic rights. In a sense unknown to the past, government has come to be held responsible for the fulfillment of a great range of needs and aspirations entertained by large numbers of the population—an array embracing sustenance, medical attention, housing, training, and even subjective aspects of well-being. Every one of these things requires money. In view of the consensus on the present level of taxation, how are the great expenses imposed to be met? The pressure is on to meet them by displacing military expenditures. That part of the budget is, so to speak, on the defensive as never before, and certainly in a way that marks a drastic shift from the situation as it was only a few years ago.

Because of a variety of interrelated circumstances, the United States, I think it accurate to say, does not project as formidable an image in the military or strategic aspects of policy as it did only a few years ago. Keep in mind also that it was only fifteen years or so ago that the United States' policy respecting the Middle East was devoted to the idea of keeping Soviet influence out of the area. Such was the aim, for example, of the Baghdad Pact, which the late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles sponsored as the cornerstone of our policy in that area. In contrast, the United States now pins hopes on some sort of a settlement in collaboration with the Soviet Union. There is a tendency to extend that wishful line of thought to the point of postulating that, because of a shared desire to avoid direct military engagement between the United States and the Soviet Union, the two powers have come into a sort of partnership in regard to the Middle East.

As for the Soviet Union, I claim no great insight concerning a regime which is so far away, in whose territory I have never been, whose language I do not understand, and which has not imparted to me any of its secrets. Indeed, I have a hard enough time interpreting and predicting the course of my own government, in whose jurisdiction I live, whose language I share, and which seems to have much trouble keeping its secrets at all.

I suspect that the Soviet regime does mean what it says in regard to national liberation wars; that is to say, with respect to its assertion of the inherent historic legitimacy of any forcible development within other countries conducive to the Soviet Union's advantage. I am sure of the Soviet Union's sincerity with respect to the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine, which asserts the special prerogative and duty of the Soviet Union to maintain, by intervention when necessary, socialist rectitude and momentum in any country which has come within the socialist fold.

Yet it is not necessary, and indeed it would lack pertinence, to invoke either of these basic elements of Soviet policy to explain Soviet interests and undertakings in the Middle East. A point is often made—and I tend to believe it without being able to prove whether it is true—that the Russian state would probably take about the same attitude toward the Middle East



even if the revolution of 1917 had never occurred and the Czar's rule were still in effect. This point is plausible. State reasons, as distinguished from revolutionary purposes, would surely cause Russia to be concerned for the future of an area that lies athwart Russia's maritime connections with the outer world.

The Soviet Union's interests in the Middle East tend to be the obverse of United States interests, not only with respect to the importance of the Middle East as a great crossroads but also with respect to its huge potential in petroleum. That aspect presents a possibility of getting leverage on the fuel supply of Central and Western Europe in particular, thus to abet the process of Finlandization—a term representing the goal of rendering the European countries to the west of the Communist-dominated area not necessarily Communist but at least pliable and anxious to please.

Surely the Soviet Union's appraisal of the area is linked to the new importance as a naval power in rivalry with the United States. For the background of this, one should go back to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. The outcome was much cheered at the time as an achievement for the United States. It still is credited as such. I do not see it in that perspective, but I acknowledge that the outcome might have been worse. The Soviet Union did give way in some respects because of two factors. First, the Soviet Union's missile capability was distinctly inferior to that of the United States—a fact which could not be concealed or compensated for by bluff. Second, the Soviet Union was distinctly inferior to the United States in strength available at the scene of action—that is to say, naval strength.

While the Soviet Union has not imparted the secrets of the assumptions behind its decisions, I think we can safely infer that, in the sequel to the missile crisis, those in charge of Soviet policy became resolved not to be caught in such disadvantageous circumstances again. Rather, they attempted to ensure that in any future confrontation the United States rather than the Soviet Union would be the one under major pressure to yield. The results of this decision in the nuclear realm are surely a huge factor in the changed strategic circumstances of the United States as of now in comparison with a few years ago. The naval aspect is manifest. The Soviet Union has been devoting great resources and effort to challenge United States' primacy at sea. The effects are especially apparent in waters appurtenant to the Middle East.

The role aspired to there is not possession of the region. Rather, I should say, the Soviet Union aspires to become arbiter of the region. It would like to establish itself as heir to the primacy in influence which, in a former epoch in Middle Eastern affairs, was exercised by Great Britain. A corollary of this is the reduction or elimination of United States influence in the region. The aim calls for Soviet cultivation of the Arab states. The Soviet Union strives to establish itself as the champion of Arab interests. It seeks to alienate the Arab states from the United States and vice versa. As a corollary, the Soviet Union wishes to have the United States identified in a singular way, for the short run, as protector and advocate of Israel's interests. For the longer run, the Soviet Union probably wishes to put the Israeli state



in position of having to sue for Soviet intercession with the Arab states on behalf of Israeli security and interests.

However little I can be absolutely certain of in regard to Soviet perceptions and purposes, I must confess to knowing less even about the Arab states. With respect to them the need of distinguishing between appearance and reality is strong. Great activity and reactivity are apparent within Arabdom. Recurrent unity conferences, from which ringing statements of common goals and joint determination, are held. Great projects for political amalgamation or combined commands are announced from time to time, with rhetorical flourishes of implacable hostility to the very existence of Israel. How much of all this is real, and how much merely rhetorical?

Arab bitterness against Israel's existence is certainly not mere pretense. Israel's existence impinges on the Arab's asserted goal of reinvigorating the great past when Arab order and Arab unity dominated from the Atlantic shores of northwest Africa to the Persian Ocean. The establishment of Israel occurred concomitantly with the general emergence of Arab peoples into independence following World War II. Israel crystalized into reality at the very center of the Arab zone, bisecting it, at the historic moment of the casting off of Arab subordination to outside states. Israel was established and was subsequently aggrandized by military conquests in face of Arab hostility and despite Arab advantages in numbers, an insulting circumstance.

Pride compels the attribution of these events to outside factors. Israel must be accounted for as an artificial, aggressive presence, imperial in character and self-aggrandizing, a foreign presence lacking in legitimacy.

Self-fulfilling prophecies operate here. The Arab insistence on regarding Israel as expansionist and aggressive is linked with the refusal to legitimize its position by recognition and formal peace. Israel's response, given the inherent insecurity of living in the midst of hostile neighbors, confirms the accusation. Israel's military efficacy, verified in war, induced that degree of shame which issues in intransigence. On the basis of Arab protestations of irreconcilability to Israel's presence, Israel professes to be justified in mistrusting its Arab neighbors. Israel, taking Arab hostility as unappeasable, feels compelled and justified in insisting on conditions which are humiliating to Arabs and thus tend to render them implacable even if they were not so already.

Israel is in many respects the most interesting element in the situation. The state represents a nation maintained in the consciousness of its members over many millenia. As a nation in the sense of being the territorial embodiment of a people, Israel has existed about a quarter of a century. It stands as an amalgam of peoples drawn from a diversity of lands and backgrounds by their consciousness of the ancient identity and by the vicissitudes of contemporary times. Their main problem in trying to exist as an organized entity is the lack of legitimacy in so far as adjoining neighbors are concerned. Hence, psychically, as well as in fact, the Israelis are a beset and besieged people.



Its governing institution is a parliament elected by universal suffrage. The system of representation is fashioned to concepts of proportional representation associated with continental Europe in an age when politics reflected rationalistic assumptions. The result is a prolixity of parties. A stable preponderance as a basis of government is lacking. A basic factor of discontinuity affects the political institutions. *Le Monde* has described the basis of the regime as "a tenuous synthesis of often contradictory views." The result is a degree of ambiguity and ambivalence in policy. The main elements of that ambiguity and ambivalence have tended to be contrasting habits of thought and attitude toward the exterior world, both habits rooted in the historic past.

One outlook is a reflection of the centuries of experience in the dispersion. It is an outgrowth of the adaptations necessitated by having to get along amid divergent environments in minority positions. It puts stress on finesse, temporizing, abatement, avoidance of confrontation, and the need of coming to terms with neighbors. It reflects also awareness of the correlation of forces in the exterior world.

The other outlook regards the dispersion as a parenthesis in history. It emphasizes a conception of Israel as a reembodyment of the ancient kingdoms of the same. This outlook shuns any hint of clientage to the outside world or any part of it and rejects the notion of Israel's origin as a creature of the United Nations or any other combination of outsiders. In this view, the rebirth of Israel was, as with the historic kingdoms of old, due to willingness to fight for territory. It sees militancy as the basis of whatever chance for survival Israel may have. It puts a premium on audacity under seige, as recounted in an ancient context in Josephus' history of *The Jewish War*. This approach puts great faith in tactical shrewdness and celerity in the modern tradition of Ord Wingate.

These two attitudes are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes both are evident in Israeli policy simultaneously, as when the Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, voices the conventions of negotiations while General Dayan, the Defense Minister, vaunts the territorial acquisitions of the 1967 war as permanent facts.

In a general way the 1967 war was a triumph of the second attitude as I have described them, in contrast to the conduct of policy in the period immediately preceding, which had been marked by caution almost to the point of obsequiousness particularly in dealing with the Soviet Union. The degree of accommodation seemingly manifested in the preceding phase may very likely have emboldened both the Soviet Union and its Arab clients into assuming the existence of opportunity to score heavily against Israel by threats turned on and off and on again. The suddenness of the shift from one attitude to the other as the dominant one within Israel was a main circumstance in catching both the Arab adversaries and the Soviet Union off guard and opened the way for the great military successes in operations conducted with extraordinary intrepidity and sense of timing.



Boldness, however, was combined with a prudent regard for the correlation of exterior forces. In a canny way, the Israelis counted on the U.S. to neutralize the Soviet Union. To quote Michael Howard and Robert Hunter:

Above all it will be seen how Israel observed a principle which appears in few military textbooks and which armed forces neglect at their peril: the Clausewitzian principle of Political Context, which the British ignored so disasterously in 1956. The Israeli High Command knew that it was not working in a political vacuum. It worked on the assumption that it would have three days to complete its task before outside pressures compelled a ceasefire. In fact it had four and needed five. . . . The lesson is clear. So long as there remains a tacit agreement between the superpowers to cooperate in preventing overt conflicts which threaten international peace and security, a nation using open force to resolve a political problem must do so rapidly, if it is to succeed at all. Once it *has* succeeded, the reluctance of the great powers to countenance a second conflict means that it is likely to preserve its gains. The lesson is a somber one, placing as it does a premium on adventurism and preemption.

One of Israel's purposes in launching the attack in 1967 was to get rid of the necessity of intermittently having to stand to arms at the dictate of Israeli's Arab enemies whenever it suited their preferences to put on the pressure. This purpose was achieved, and the benefits for Israel continue.

A second purpose was to shore up Israel's security by extending the radii of defense in order to overcome the necessity of having to stand on tactically unfavorable ground. This purpose also was achieved. The improvements gained, from the Israeli standpoint, are impressive. The warning time for the core of Israeli's land base, in event of an air attack launched from the Arab side, has been extended from twelve to thirty minutes. On the other hand, the time for launching an air attack from the Israeli side on Arab positions has been cut from a half-hour to five minutes.

A third purpose which Israel had in mind was to establish such a situation as would compel Israel's Arab neighbors, notably Egyptians, the ones that count mainly, to negotiate directly. Thus the Egyptians would be forced into diplomatic dealings and, in effect, into recognition and legitimization of Israel's existence. As a corollary, the business of having third-party interposition between Israel and the Arab states, and the effects in cluttering up their relations, would be avoided. This purpose has been disappointed. The Arab states, and notably the Egyptians, have not budged.

Instead, there has occurred the renewal of war by attrition in the abandonment by Egypt, that is to say, the United Arab Republic, in March of 1969. In retaliation the Israelis carried bombing into Egypt in an attempt to press the Egyptian armed forces to seek relief from their hazards by overthrowing President Nasser, regarded by Egypt as the mainstay of Arab intransigence. Therein the Israelis displayed willingness to experiment with high danger. Perhaps here the Israelis departed from their usual regard for



the correlation of forces, for every humiliation for Nasser involved also a humiliation for the Soviet Union, whose pride and arms are staked on the Arab cause.

Let me sum up the Israeli attitude as it manifests itself. One element is disdain for the United Nations. This element is understandable. In view of the record, especially with respect to the sudden dissipation of the United Nations Emergency Force in the spring of 1967, the United Nations is strictly unreliable as an instrument for Israeli security. A second element is disdain for guarantees. Foreign Minister Abba Eban is wont to refer to "the inefficacy of guarantees."

Let me quote, in that connection, an answer by Professor Bernard Lewis of the University of London to a pertinent question put at a hearing before Senator Henry Jackson's subcommittee on National Security and International Operations at the Capitol a few weeks ago:

Experience isn't terribly encouraging, is it? In Cyprus, and Kashmir, and Palestine, it hasn't worked terribly well. The difficulty is — who is to provide troops? If they come from small countries, obviously there is no real authority behind them. The governments of those small countries would almost certainly want to snatch them away as soon as there is a risk of their being involved in anything unpleasant. If they come from major countries, there are two possibilities. Either the major countries would become involved in every border skirmish, which would be extremely dangerous to world peace, or they would not become involved, which ultimately would mean that the guarantee is worthless.

Here again the record lends confirmation.

As a corollary, what counts, in the Israeli estimate, is territory, position. I doubt that Israel is going to budge merely in deference to some new arrangement akin to what failed in 1967.

Israel's negotiating position is that it does not explicitly renounce all theoretic chances of getting a reliable peace and a concession of legitimacy from its Arab antagonists, but it does insist that the bargaining be direct.

Israel's purpose with respect to the United States, I believe one can say with some certainty, is that whatever strings may entangle the United States in the Middle Eastern situation must lead directly from this country to Israel, rather than tying the United States in as one guarantor among others in some bilateral arrangement with the Soviet Union, some quadrilateral arrangement involving Great Britain and France as well as the Soviet Union as co-guarantors with the U.S., or some other collective arrangement with U.N. blessing. Israel is obviously against any system of guarantees subject to veto. It wants a direct and unequivocal U.S. involvement in underwriting Israel in distinction to one which is full of contingencies and complexities.

Israel relies on the assumption, which is probably correct, that the United States in the last analysis cannot afford to let Israel down. The United States is, as it were, ineluctably Israel's sponsor, but Israel, in return,



will not be a client even though the Soviet Union and the Arab governments insistently regard Israel as a U.S. client.

Thus curiously, in a way, Israel's policy is parallel to that of the Soviet Union in trying to get the United States absolutely on Israel's side, with no hint of even-handedness in practice. The United States obviously wishes that circumstances were otherwise. It covets an opportunity to work its way convincingly back into the mediatorial position which it essayed before the 1967 war and away from which it has been forced by the developments of that war and its sequel. This aspect of the matter seems to me the most paradoxical viewed from the standpoint of United States preference and interests.

Will the United States, through diplomatic assiduity, be able in the next few months to work toward the realization of some arrangement more akin to its preferences? I suspect that there will be much more activity than accomplishment along that line.