

How to "Save Israel from Herself"

by
Mark Bruzonsky

During recent years a few documents on Middle East policy have captured the mood and thinking of a broadly-based segment of the American foreign policy-making community. The Brookings Report ranks first on any list, and Joseph Alsop's "Open Letter to an Israeli Friend" in the *New York Times Magazine* in December 1975 also stands out, for it signaled a more critical American attitude toward Israeli policies as well as Israeli politics.

Most recently, George Ball's lead article in the April issue of *Foreign Affairs*. "How to Save Israel In Spite of Herself," has become the focus of considerable attention. In a recent *New York Times* editorial Rita Hauser, a New York lawyer specializing in international affairs who is known for her close contact with Israeli officials, indicated that "Ball's thesis ... has come to dominate the US foreign policy establishment." Hauser then warned, reflecting the general Israeli approach, that adherence to Ball's approach would "thwart" not further "the prospects for settlement talks". George Ball was writing, of course, before the success of Menachem Begin's Likud party in the Israeli election, which lends additional interest to the ideas which he put forward.

A number of political analysts have written that President Jimmy Carter is considerably influenced by Ball's views. And a high government source has privately indicated that every major position paper Carter has received through the bureaucracy

dealing with the Middle East has stressed Ball's view that dealing with Israeli intransigence will be one of this Administration's greatest foreign policy problems.

Ball, currently a partner in the New York banking firm of Lehman Brothers, was from 1961 to 1966 Under Secretary of State and in 1968 served as Permanent Representative to the United Nations. He has been a consistent and vocal critic of Dr. Kissinger's piece-meal approach to the Middle East quagmire.

After the Sinai II agreement late in 1975, Ball wrote a scathing attack on what he termed "Kissinger's Paper Peace." The sub-title of his article, in the February 1976 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, was "How not to handle the Middle East." Ball indicated then that he felt "deep regret as I watched the United States turn its back on a serious effort to solve the problem in favor of a tactical manoeuvre that bought time at the expense of ultimate peace". The Sinai II agreement, he continued, "has assured a brief season of relief followed, unless we pursue a more active diplomacy than appears likely, by a fearful catastrophe. It is the work of a tactician when the times call for a strategist." In fairness to Kissinger, it should be remembered that the 1975 "reassessment" was in fact designed to yield a comprehensive policy but was blocked by such Jewish lobby efforts as the May letter of 76 Senators to President Ford.

In that earlier foray Ball stressed that "the essential first step" toward a positive Middle East strategy "was for the United States to establish its

own independent position." His April *Foreign Affairs* article seems very much an attempt to outline just what such a position should be and, more importantly, how it can be carried out. This article appeared shortly after President Carter's bold and dramatic statements about the Middle East in March. Indeed President Carter's advocacy of Israeli return to approximately the 1967 borders, the need for a real and lasting peace, and creation of a "Palestinian homeland" are all elements of Ball's vision.

But Ball takes on a number of issues no President of the United States has ever yet dared to discuss in public: Israel's intransigence, the issues of full territorial withdrawal, Jerusalem and a Palestinian state, Israel's absolute and still growing dependence on US aid and arms, and the necessity for the US government to outmanoeuvre the powerful pro-Israeli lobby if it is to develop an independent Middle East policy.

In short, as Ball's title indicates, he believes the time has come to express American friendship for Israel by applying American leverage on both the Israelis and the Arabs to facilitate conditions whereby peace might become politically realistic. For, as Ball sees Middle East politics, there is only one "inevitable conclusion: that the relatively impotent governments of the key Arab countries and in Israel will never by themselves be able to devise a compromise solution...The parties will never come anywhere near agreement by the traditional processes of diplomatic haggling unless the United States first defines the terms of that agreement, relates them to established international principles, and makes it clear that America's continued involvement in the area depends upon acceptance by both sides of the terms it prescribes".

Ball's approach suggests an emerging post-Vietnam American assertiveness which is in competition with the neo-isolationism that has prevailed throughout the 1970's. His blunt talk about the Middle East seems also to represent a step beyond the generalities of a document such as the Brookings Report, which it

must be remembered was a consensus statement signed by 16 panel members representing a broad cross-section of constituencies. It is not Ball's vision of what an eventual Arab-Israeli settlement would look like which differs from the Brookings Report, but rather his view of how much American leadership, pressure and even imposition of terms will be required to bring about such a result.

Ball's starting point is the old Resolution 242 which Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Fahd has recently called outdated. But Ball leaps beyond legal and verbal technicalities and foresees the updating of 242, largely through American fiat. Negotiated return to the 1967 borders, creation of a Palestinian state, Arab plus third-party guarantees for Israeli security and real peace are what Ball has in mind, and in this end-picture there is little new. In fact Ball is quite weak in his discussion of guarantees, about which his comments are general and inconclusive. Rather it is the straight talk about Israel's predicament and the required American response that is so striking and unique. "The national decision Americans must make is quite clear," he insists:

"It is not whether we should try to force an unpalatable peace on the Israeli people, but rather how much longer we should continue to pour assistance into Israel to support policies that impede progress toward peace and thus accentuate the possibility of war... The unhappy dilemma of Israel is that, as long as she refuses to give up the territorial gains from her 1967 conquests and thus prevents possible progress towards peace she must continue as a ward of the United States...The time is ripe for the United States to take a strong hand to save Israel from herself and in the process try to prevent a tragic war that could endanger the economies of the major non-communist powers, separate the United States from its allies and precipitate enormous internal debate, and pose a serious danger of a clash with the Soviet Union."



George Ball points the way

Ball's call to action will remain for many months the object of serious analysis and discussion. While focusing on the Middle East, Ball has thrown down the gauntlet to the new President as regards American willingness to exercise its power and influence for the good of itself and its allies. What Carter decides to do about the Middle East will be the "acid test of political courage and decisiveness", Ball states. For, "if America should permit Israel to continue to reject inflexibly any suggestion of a return to earlier boundaries and the creation of a Palestinian state and to refuse even to negotiate about Jerusalem, we should be acquiescing in a policy hazardous not only to Israel but for America and the rest of the world. That would not be responsible conduct for a great power."

With his dramatic March comments about the Middle East, Jimmy Carter is already off and running formulating the "independent position" that Ball has been calling for. Whether the President will have the strength and sophistication to continue is the real question. Ball rightly warns that "President Carter must be prepared to accept formidable political opposition." "That will not be easy," Ball further notes, "for in the years since (1957) Israeli supporters have greatly increased their political power in Washington".

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end of state of war. But he's prepared, if you read it very carefully, beyond the full peace to think in terms of normalization. When we sit and negotiate and he outlines for us what are the ingredients of normalization that he's prepared to go, we will outline for him what are the territorial adjustments that we are prepared to make. At the present time he shows intentions. We also show — I show very good intentions — Israel is prepared to withdraw substantially from the territories that we hold at the present time in the course of negotiations for a full and meaningful peace with all the ingredients thereof.

Q: I gave Ambassador Ghorbal this analogy, that not too long ago in history there was a confrontation between Germany and France where the two countries were constantly at war and had no normal relations. I asked him if he could conceive that relations between the Arab world and Israel, and specifically between Egypt and Israel, could follow the pattern that has been achieved between France and Germany. He responded, yes, that that was a good example in fact of what normalization is. Now, I may be wrong — other people may interpret it differently — but it does seem to me that we are getting the kind of definitions of normalization that are worth discussing. And somehow I hear from you that they are not really offering anything more than an end to the state of belligerency.

Dinitz: At the present time, yes. But that they are worth discussing, definitely yes. ■