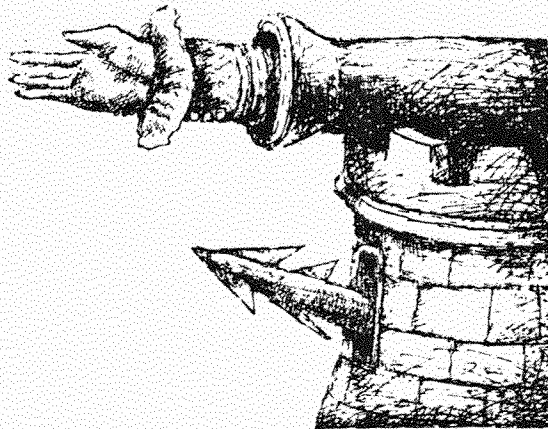
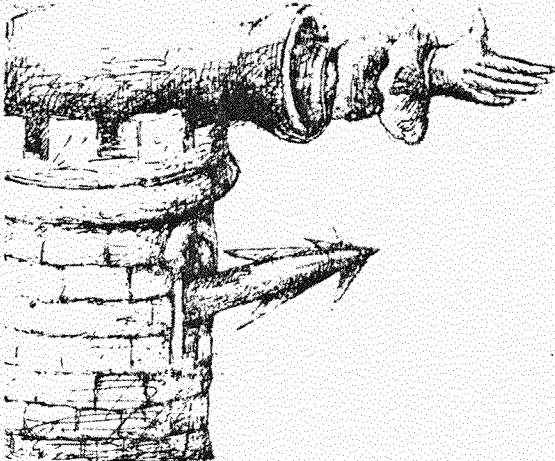




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Should U.S. impose Mideast settlement?

By Mark A. Bruzonsky

When the political niceties of this election year fade, the future president must confront the new Middle East stalemate.

Tragic events in Lebanon and the possible eclipse of PLO leadership in the Palestinian national movement have not removed the Israeli-Arab conflict from Washington's priority spotlight. Domestic politics during the election campaign has done that -- but it is a deceptive, temporary respite.

The incoming president will be approaching this Middle East quagmire amidst the increasingly widespread conclusion that the United States should urgently pursue an overall Middle East settlement and even consider imposing it. When spelled out, such a settlement usually includes Israeli withdrawal from nearly all occupied territories, creation of a Palestinian "entity" or state, a novel arrangement for a united but dually administered Jerusalem, significant Arab economic and political concessions giving substance to their recognition of Israel and various forms of security arrangements and "guarantees" for Israel.

American advocates of such a course are numerous and vocal. Israelis who visit the United States are especially sensitive to this trend. In May, the Israeli-sponsored

Israel Digest magazine even carried an article by a former director-general of the Israeli foreign ministry titled "Will a Middle East Solution Be Imposed by the U. S.?" Walter Eytan perceptively concluded that "Formerly, any talk of an 'imposed settlement' was taboo; today such a solution is regarded by most (Americans) as likely, and by many as the only way out of the impasse. It is taken for granted that whoever is elected president this November will not let matters drift as they have for so many years in the past." And the editor of the Jerusalem Post wrote in July that "Washington and Jerusalem are headed toward an inevitable collision." "The year 1977," he concluded, "will also be a year of a real American push towards a solution of the Middle East conflict. The United States will lean heavily on Israel, even to the extent of imposing a settlement."

But it is unlikely escalation of American-Israeli feuding will enhance prospects for peace. The Israelis might wrongly come to perceive themselves to be totally isolated and defiantly turn to nuclear weapons. The Arabs might delude themselves into believing that a tangled American life-line calls into question the basic U.S. commitment to Israel's welfare. An imposition strategy could thus seriously backfire and even many promoters are aware of the serious drawbacks. Yet such a policy has come to be considered preferable, by many, to the fast hardening new stalemate.

A much more desirable alternative to the imposition strategy would be a joint U.S.-Israel initiative to test all possible openings for that elusive path toward coexistence. One important roadblock is Israel's reluctance, for reasons of both domestic politics and international geopolitics, to risk offering the specific concessions that could make a historic peace initiative attractive to the Arabs.

The task for the United States in 1977 then should be not one of imposing but rather one of convincing -- first our Israeli friend of the necessity to firmly reverse the burden of peace with major, historic concessions and then our new Arab friends that this is a burden they must accept.

The United States should not be a ruthless godfather asserting its will -- we have learned at great cost our own capacity for error -- but America should be a powerful catalyst buttressing both Arab and

Israeli moderate positions. Through the use of political, economic and military inducements the next administration should unrelentingly advocate mutual concessions, nurturing a process of gradual coexistence leading the Middle East combatants to a peace they would themselves have created and would want themselves to maintain.

Recognizing the subtle but real distinction between imposing and advocating, the United States, albeit sympathetically, will have to first apply mounting persuasion to Israel on three crucial matters.

1. Palestinian nationalism must again be recognized as historically and politically legitimate, as it was with the U.N. partition plan in 1947 that would have divided Palestine into a Jewish and a Palestinian Arab state.

2. At Geneva, the door would then be open to comprehensive discussions aimed at an overall settlement. The Palestinians would deserve separate recognition and the PLO, should it agree to negotiate with Israel at the conference, would undoubtedly make up part of the Palestinian delegation.

3. Israel must be unambiguously prepared to abandon settlements in the occupied territories under appropriate conditions insuring Israeli security. Some territorial adjustments are certainly possible and a special arrangement for Jerusalem essential -- but neither "created facts" (the settlements) nor chauvinistic ideologies (right-wing Zionism as well as the more militant Palestinian outlooks) can be allowed to block attempts at reconciliation.

Once the United States and Israel, hopefully acting together, have thus cleared a path to Geneva, a comparable exercise of American diplomacy will be required with various Arab parties. Syria and Egypt must explicitly recognize that Israeli security considerations as well as Israel itself are legitimate. Furthermore, willingness by the Arab states and the Palestinians to begin the long process of creating a normal peace should symbolically begin with stages of progressive economic and cultural contact. Termination of hostile propaganda cou-

pled to an agreement for arms limitation and control will also be required along with some form of supplementary American security treaty with Israel.

In general, the framework outlined in the Brookings Institution report, "Toward Peace in the Middle East," should be the basis for American policy in 1977. In recent Senate hearings on U.S. Middle East options this report received unusually broad-based support and it has been well received by many in the American Jewish community.

Hopefully, Israeli leaders will soon come to agree with Abba Eban, the former foreign minister, who insists that "Time is of the essence and unhappily for us, time is running out. We ought to grasp the central issues and involve the United States in resolving them." Hopefully as well, various Arab parties will come to see in U.S. efforts their own enlightened self-interest. But failure to cooperate by some can no longer prevail. The United States should pursue this forceful but essential new approach with determination and resolve.

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