

# Behind the Slogans: US Policy in the Middle East

by  
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Expectations for 1977 are nearly universally gloomy. It is likely that, were it not for the confusion generated by Arab disunity and Palestinian disarray, there would be more clear analysis of American Middle East options. But political developments in the Arab world, as well as the resurgence of strong pro-Israeli pressures in the United States, have created something of a wait-and-see attitude. However, the simple truth is that even the confusion of today exists within a framework of policy whose direction has been carefully determined in the three years since the Yom Kippur War.

## The Brookings Report

That direction has been publicly outlined best in the Brookings Institution Report released in December 1975, under the title "Toward Peace in the Middle East." The conclusions of the report have steadily gained exposure and respectability since then. During the summer they were strongly endorsed by a parade of Middle East experts who testified before the McGovern Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on "Prospects for Peace in the Middle East." According to Senator McGovern, these hearings will provide "sound advice to the Senate as a whole and to the executive branch on future initiatives in U.S. policy."

Though the report was written with some deliberate ambiguity, it basically

supports the conclusions reached in the 1975 "reassessment" as outlined by Edward R. F. Sheehan in his excellent study *The Arabs, Israelis and Kissinger*, recently published by Reader's Digest Press.

As Sheehan reports, the first option to emerge from the "reassessment" was that "The United States should announce its conception of a final settlement in the Middle East based on the 1967 frontiers of Israel with minor modifications, and containing strong guarantees for Israel's security. The Geneva Conference should be reconvened; the Soviet Union should be encouraged to co-operate in the quest to resolve all the outstanding questions (including the status of Jerusalem) which should be defined in appropriate components and addressed in separate subcommittees."

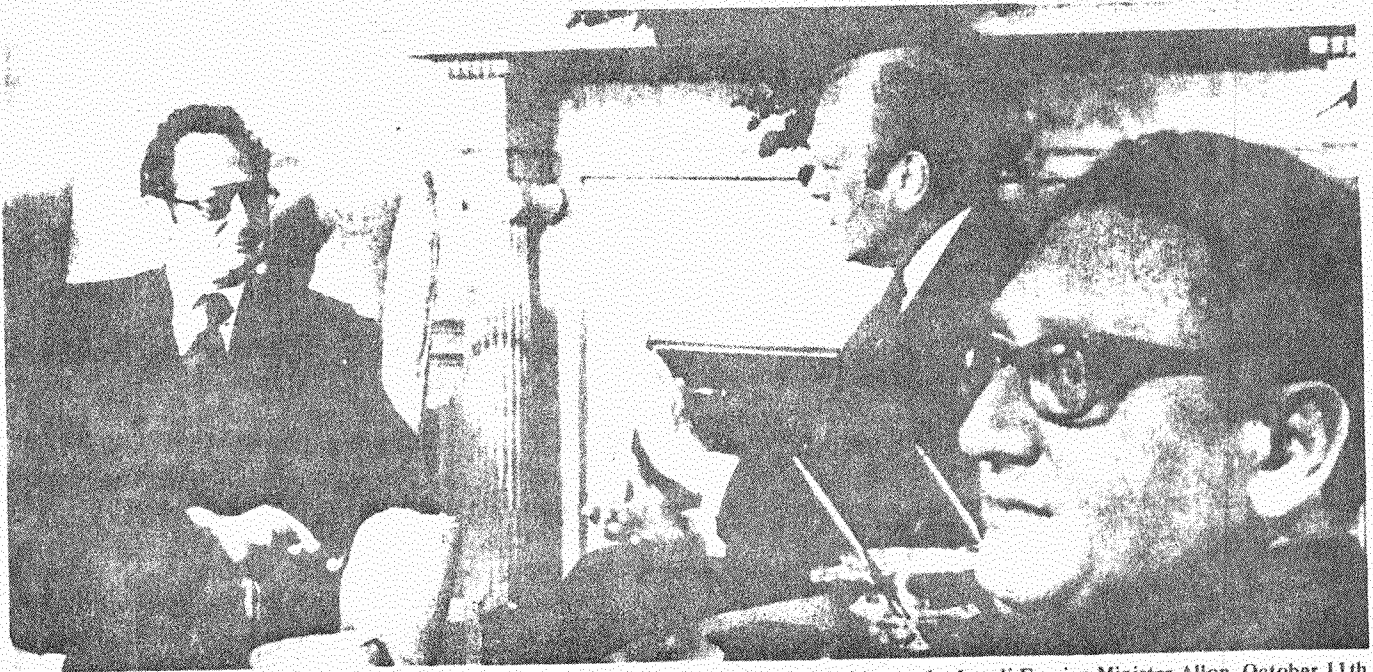
To get around Israeli and Jewish lobby attempts to frustrate the implementation of such a policy, Sheehan reports that "Kissinger's advisers envisioned Ford going to the American people . . . pleading the necessity for Israeli withdrawal in exchange for the strongest guarantees." But Kissinger soon decided this was politically too dangerous and that he would pursue the much more limited step-by-step approach, awaiting "some future time when the President is stronger, when his prospects are more auspicious . . ." The problem, as things developed, was to find the next step after Sinai II was finally pushed through. Then came the Lebanese firestorm and the election-year respite.

The Brookings Report resulted from a broad-based study group which, interestingly, was initiated within

weeks of Kissinger's realization that his first option could not be pursued or even publicly revealed at that time. So six months after the "reassessment" this report, which one Israeli newspaper termed "officially sanctioned," revealed what amounted to a new post-1973 consensus on what U.S. policy should be. In brief: gradual Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders; recognition of the 'principle of Palestinian self-determination'; resolution, probably at Geneva, of all outstanding issues including Jerusalem; implementation of the agreement over a period of several years; multilateral and bilateral guarantees for Israel's security, including a unique commitment from the U.S.

The Brookings Report has not been attacked (as such things usually are) by the Israeli government or by American Jewish organizations acting as surrogate. But this should not be taken as an indication of support or even of acceptance. For behind the scenes the Israeli Embassy, including Ambassador Diniz himself, worked hard to prevent the seven Jewish members of the panel from endorsing the report's conclusions — especially on 1967 borders and Palestinian rights. Bertram Gold, Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee and the only "Jewish professional" involved (most of the others hold academic appointments) did refuse. But Philip Klutznik, one of American Jewry's most respected elder statesmen, approved and in so doing immunized the report from public attack. Among the sixteen signatories were Zbigniew Brzezinski (Columbia University), John C. Campbell (Council on Foreign Relations), Malcolm Kerr (University of California, Los Angeles), Nadav Safran (Harvard), and Charles Yost, who acted as co-director of the study group and whose influence on the report was substantial.

In recent months, Congressional endorsements (besides the McGovern hearings a bi-partisan organization known as Members of Congress for Peace Through Law is seeking support) are giving the Brookings Report the kind of promotion which could provide the incoming administration with the "excuse" to press hard with policies similar to those outlined in



The latest announcement of US arms aid to Israel followed a visit to Washington by Israeli Foreign Minister Allon, October 11th

the report.

#### American Jewish Turmoil

Into this web of political manoeuvring comes another factor whose impact has only recently been recognized. It is the turmoil within the American Jewish community over Israeli policies and proper American strategies—a turmoil which has enormous potential political ramifications. "One of the most significant developments in years is the growing willingness on the part of American Jews to criticise publicly Israeli policies," wrote Stanley Karnow, formerly foreign affairs editor of *The New Republic*, in July. "This development is important," he continued, "because it means U.S. politicians need not endorse Israel's behavior automatically, as many have in the past, out of concern that they will be confronted by an antagonistic American Jewish community whose political influence is considerable." What this means is "that the U.S. may be able to exercise more flexibility with Israel as it seeks a settlement to the constantly worsening situation in the Middle East."

Another Washington political columnist, Stephen S. Rosenfeld, writing in the American Jewish Committee quarterly on world Jewish affairs, *Present Tense*, has also drawn

attention to the changing nature of American Jewish influence. The "stirrings in the American political outlook and specifically in American Jewish opinion (are) extremely important", Rosenfeld wrote during the summer, and they constitute "a major political fact sure to affect the Middle East policy of the administration that will take office in January 1977." "In brief", Rosenfeld continued, "a new administration would be under more pressure from the general public, and under less restraint by American Jews, to push more vigorously for a comprehensive Middle East settlement despite the certainty that such a push would severely tax the complex relationship between Israel and the United States."

American Jewish writer Irving Howe, author of the best-selling new book *World Of Our Fathers*, has cut through the chatter and uneasiness within American Jewry and put forward the logical question which American Jewish intellectuals may soon have to face. "Suppose America is pushing toward a proper kind of settlement?" he asked recently in a *Jerusalem Post* interview. "What I would do then I honestly don't know. Would I say: Israel has the right to self-determination even if it is mistaken? Or, would I say, if Israel continues along this course, it's going

to back itself into a position where there might be a disastrous war which it might even lose because America wouldn't support it?"

Though this is a live question and Howe is right to point out that even most dissenting Jews have yet to deal with it, it is also important to realize that American Jewish criticism of Israeli policies cannot be interpreted as a lessening of basic support for Israel's existence as a Jewish state. Rosenfeld is correct to warn those who might think just this that there is "no falling away of support for the security and survival of Israel, despite the tendency of some anxious partisans to read just that result, if not that purpose, into the capital's increasingly frank political dialogue."

1977 will be a tough year in Israeli-American relations. But the editor of the *Jerusalem Post*, Ari Rath, was probably too dramatic when he returned from a visit to the United States in July and wrote that "Washington and Jerusalem are . . . headed toward an inevitable collision." For one thing, "inevitable" should be as taboo a word for journalists as "never" is for politicians. Rath was closer to the mark in simply pointing out that the two capitals were "drifting apart" and that this could (emphasis on *could*) result in confrontation. ■