

America's Two Options For the Mideast

Second of two parts.

By Mark Bruzonsky

As soon as the political niceties of this election year fade, the future President must confront the new Mideast stalemate.

Following the Yom Kippur War three years ago, there was near consensus that terminating the progressively destructive cycle of Israeli-Arab combat had become an imperative for U.S. Mideast policy. Secretary Kissinger, in fact, was often criticized for attempting too little, rather than too much; for not attempting an overall settlement, choosing instead the slow, step-by-step approach. Others now say that pushing for a general agreement was what the secretary of state had in mind with the 1975 "reassessment." But Kissinger was hemmed in, his defenders conclude, by intense domestic counterpressure from the Israeli-Jewish lobby.

The notion that the United States might have to "impose" a settlement—one which would include Israeli withdrawal from nearly all occupied territories, creation of a Palestinian state, a novel arrangement for a united but dually-administered Jerusalem and various forms of international guarantees—has become rather widespread. Even in the May issue of the Israeli-sponsored *Israel Digest*, Walter Eytan, a former director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, reflecting on a recent U.S. visit, writes that "Formerly, any talk of an 'imposed solution' was taboo; today such a solution is regarded

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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."

Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter seems to agree. Even while catering to excessive Jewish emotionalism, he has let it be known that "I favor early movements to discussion of the outline of an eventual overall settlement." Furthermore, a number of those spoken of as Carter's secretary of state have strongly expressed the need for determined U.S. initiatives in the Mideast.

The Israeli-Jewish lobby is, in fact, preparing for the likelihood of renewed confrontation in 1977. The editor of the lobby's Washington publication, *Near East Report*, writes candidly (but in the *Jerusalem Post*), that "The real crunch for Israel will probably come during 1977 if Ford is elected—it will be delayed by only a few months if a Democratic candidate wins."

So one major question to be pondered, while awaiting the electoral results, is whether the United States next year should conceptualize a potential settlement and, if necessary, impose it. A thoughtful answer should first reflect on the likely immediate results of such a U.S. dictate and then on whether such a settlement would be likely to last.

Such a thought process yields a "probably no" answer. For a U.S.-imposed settlement would not bring resolution of the conflict's multiple dimensions nor would it stabilize the Balkan-like conditions which inspired it. It would unfairly and dangerously force Israel into territorial retreat without reasonable compensation, as envisioned in UN Security Council resolution No. 242. Also, with today's military and political situation, such an American shift in the face of Arab oil threats and Russian military encroachments, might actu-

ally create a serious negative psychology throughout the region. Israel would feel totally isolated; probably swiftly developing a sizable nuclear force as Moshe Dayan has been publicly advocating. Various Arab parties, on the other hand, might come to believe that Israel's fate was now sealed, her American lifeline tangled.

Moreover, an imposed settlement would require the cement of a credible American guarantee to guide the solution through the strains and tensions which must be expected. There is neither the will nor maybe even the power in post-Vietnam American for such a long-term protectorate role in such a distant and unstable area of the world. Those advocating guarantees—and nearly all who suggest an imposed settlement do—have yet to indicate the strategic feasibility or the political possibility of forging a Mideast settlement structured on American assurances.

What then should be U.S. Mideast policy in 1977, given escalating Jewish-Arab animosity which makes reconciliation unlikely without extraregional efforts? Israel's existence is not as yet fully accepted by most of the Arab states or by any major segment of the Palestinian movement. And within Israel there is paralysis brought about by a major ideological split between those who would risk the future on toughness toward the Arabs and those who would take the risk of major concessions.

The task for the United States should be not to impose but rather to nudge, induce and, if necessary, coerce. By acting as an involved go-between, the United States can buttress both Arab and Israeli moderate positions. The next administration should strongly encourage—using political, economic and military inducements—a gradual process of coexistence which could lead the Mideast combatants to an eventual peace they would themselves have created and would want themselves to maintain.

The United States will, albeit sympathetically, have to first apply mounting persuasion to its Israeli friends who, as Israeli journalist Matti Golan writes, have "arrived unprepared at the time of decision." Israel's domestic political stalemate prevents the Jewish state from being responsive to the world political environment. Warnings—such as the *Jerusalem Post's* "We can no longer afford the luxury of granting primacy to considerations of internal politics"—are heard but not

translated into actuality. Rabbi Alexander Schindler (president of the umbrella organization which links nearly all major American Jewish groups) concludes that Israeli leaders "would almost be more comfortable, for domestic political reasons, if the decisions were imposed rather than articulated and accepted from within."

In short, Israel faces unavoidable issues but has no Ben-Gurion to take the reins. In this situation, rather than attempting imposition of a settlement, the United States should impose its leverage on Israel regarding three crucial matters.

1. Palestinian nationalism must be recognized as a legitimate expression of the will of the Palestinian Arab people. A Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip should be a possible outcome of resumption of the Geneva Conference.

2. At Geneva, the Palestinians deserve separate recognition. (The PLO, should it agree to negotiate with Israel at the conference, will undoubtedly make up a part of the Palestinian delegation.) Furthermore, resolution No. 242 requires either modification or reinterpretation to acknowledge the political and national rights of the Palestinian Arabs.

3. While minor territorial adjustments are certainly desirable, and a special arrangement for Jerusalem essential, Israel must accept as principles the necessity for near-total territorial withdrawal and abandonment of the settlements in occupied territories. Neither "created facts" (the settlements) nor chauvinist ideologies (right-wing Zionism, as well as the more militant Palestinian outlooks) can be allowed to block a possible settlement.

Once the United States has acted in this way to clear a path to Geneva, a comparable exercise of diplomacy will be required with various Arab parties. Syria and Egypt must explicitly recognize that Israeli security considerations are legitimate. In exchange for near-total territorial return, concrete and multiple security arrangements are required. These might include demilitarization of the Sinai, the West Bank and the Golan Heights (with a possible Israeli military presence on the Golan ridge above the Hula Valley); permanent peace-keeping forces capable of intervention if need be and not subject to removal without the consent of all parties; and bilateral and multilateral guarantees for Israeli security.

In addition, Israel can rightly expect major Arab political concessions: stages of progressive economic and cultural contacts, termination of hostile propaganda and an agreement for arms limitations and control. Furthermore, the Palestinian movement must understand unequivocally that the United States is committed to Israel's survival and welfare, and that U.S. willingness to help in creating a Palestinian state is based upon the peaceful coexistence of that state with Israel.

It is to be desired that Israeli leaders will soon recognize that it has become preferable to begin cooperating with a determined United States than to continue throwing roadblocks in the American path. As Abba Eban, former foreign minister acknowledges, "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." Perhaps, then, too, various Arab parties will come to see in U.S. efforts their own enlightened self-interest. But failure to cooperate on the part of some of the parties can no longer prevail.

"Peace in the Middle East . . . is not a promising subject" writes UCLA scholar Malcolm Kerr. "Everything in the historical record must encourage the most pervasive pessimism." Nevertheless, a desperation attempt at imposing a settlement motivated by the bleakness of the historical record is not likely to result in stable and lasting peace. But a decision to impose U.S. leverage on all parties, and buttressing the moderate positions on all sides, might.



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