

## WASHINGTON

## Will America Impose a Settlement?

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When the political niceties of this election year end, the future President will have to confront the new Middle East stalemate.

He will do so amidst the increasingly widespread conclusion that the U.S. should urgently pursue an overall Middle East settlement and even consider imposing it. When spelled out, such an overall possible imposed 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, and various forms of security arrangements and "guarantees" for Israel. The Lebanese bloodbath seems to have exacerbated the now often-expressed need for movement toward an overall regional settlement.

American advocates of such a course are numerous and vocal. Israelis who visit the U.S. are especially sensitive to this trend. In May, *Israel Digest*, published by the World Zionist Organization in Jerusalem, even titled an article "Will a Middle East Solution Be Imposed by the U.S.?" Written by Walter Eytan, former Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the article concluded that while "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."

Whether or not the next Administration actually chooses to implement such a course, it is now beyond doubt that an imposed settlement has become one of the scenarios being developed by American policy-makers. It is especially noteworthy that Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Alfred Atherton, delivered what can be read as a veiled warning of just such a pos-

sibility in a June speech before a B'nai B'rith audience in Nebraska: **"It would be tragic if the world community despaired of the hope that Arabs and Israelis could find the answers to their own destiny and concluded that peace should be imposed on the nations of that troubled region. This is not our way. We prefer to work instead for a peace through negotiations among the parties themselves—with whatever assistance we and others can provide, in whatever forums prove the most practical and acceptable. But in the absence of a negotiating process, and of the compromises that will be necessary to make such a process possible, pressure will grow to seek an alternative way."**

Attempting an imposed settlement is recognized, even by most advocates, as undesirable—but such a policy is now seen by many to be preferable to a new stalemate. As Assistant Secretary Atherton put it, "Whatever the risks of moving toward peace, the risks in not doing so are infinitely greater."

Unfortunately, the very term "imposed settlement" has become an obstacle to the minimum policy of strong attempts to convince both sides of the absolute need to take the risks for peace which could finally lead to an eventual settlement. These are really two very different policies. While imposing a settlement does have very serious drawbacks, there is an alternative way to proceed—one less direct but in the long run probably more productive. Persistent advocacy of concessions from both sides is not the same as imposing a settlement—though those opposed to such advocacy constantly try to confuse reasonable pressure with attempts at blatant coercion.

The great danger which must be avoided is that a major U.S. policy shift toward imposition, especially today in the face of Arab oil threats and Russian military encroachments, might actually create a negative psychology throughout the region, achieving the very opposite of what was intended. Israel wrongly might come to perceive itself as totally isolated, and respond by swiftly developing a credible

nuclear force, as Moshe Dayan and others have been publicly advocating of late. And a number of the Arab countries might come to delude themselves into perceiving Israel's fate as now sealed, her American life-line tangled, her existence only a matter of awaiting the proper coalescence of circumstances.

Moreover, an imposed settlement would require the cement of a credible American guarantee to counteract the expected strains and tensions. There is neither the will nor maybe even the power in post-Vietnam America for such a long-term protectorate role in such a distant and unstable area. Those advocating guarantees—and nearly all who suggest an imposed settlement do—have yet to convincingly argue the strategic feasibility or the political possibility of forging a lasting Middle East peace structured on American assurances.

The goal of American policy in 1977 is not likely to be one of imposing a settlement but rather of nudging, inducing and, if necessary, gently coercing to obtain the compromises necessary for negotiation. Too often, essential U.S. pressure for policy changes are challenged as attempts to impose when they are rather attempts to avoid the possibility of having to impose. Through the use of political, economic and military inducements, the next Administration should strongly encourage a gradual process of co-existence which could lead the Middle East combatants to a peace they would themselves have created and would want themselves to maintain.

Hopefully, Israeli leaders will come to recognize that it has become preferable to join with a determined U.S. rather than to continue throwing road-blocks in the American path. As Abba Eban acknowledged in an interview in *The New York Times* (April 19, 1976): "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."

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