

THE MIDDLE EAST

U.S. Policy, Israel, Oil
and the Arabs

THIRD EDITION



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Editor's Note

THE MIDDLE EAST: U.S. POLICY, ISRAEL, OIL AND THE ARABS (Third Edition) provides an up-to-date, in-depth analysis of the issues and disputes involving the countries of the Middle East. Emphasis is upon United States involvement in the entire region, historically and at present.

This Third Edition covers the dramatic events which have been shaping political and economic realities throughout the area. The controversial Palestinian question, the tragic events of the Lebanese civil war, the continuing debate about the future of the Israeli occupied territories, the Carter administration's evolving Middle East policies, and the issues surrounding Middle East oil are all highlighted. In addition, background information contained in the previous two editions, published in 1974 and 1975, has been incorporated.

THE MIDDLE EAST (Third Edition) is divided into three parts:

Part I contains country-by-country profiles and a chapter on Arab history.

Part II provides analyses of the major issues affecting Middle East political and economic life: Middle East diplomacy, U.S. Middle East policy, Middle East oil, the Palestinian problem, chapters on the Arab and Israeli lobbies in Washington, and a background chapter on the Arab-Israeli wars during the past three decades.

Part III is a three-section appendix. Biographies of leading figures from Middle East history during the 20th century come first. A detailed chronology covering major Middle East events from 1945 through August 1977 follows. Last is a comprehensive bibliography noting books, articles, reference sources and Congressional documents.

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Introduction

Peace between Israel and the Arabs remains exceedingly difficult to accomplish. While the Arab-Israeli tragedy may have reached a turning point in the late 1970s, there appears to be little agreement on what to expect. Rarely has the future of an entire region seemed so promising and yet so dangerously uncertain.

The Changing Middle East

Unprecedented historical changes are taking place throughout the Middle East. Saudi Arabia and the four mini-states bordering the Persian Gulf are the centers of a fantastic money explosion created by the ever-rising world demand for petroleum. Egypt, with the largest population of any Arab country, desperately seeks an escape from poverty through the infusion of massive amounts of foreign assistance and the application of Western technology. Lebanon remains fractured after the recent years of chaotic destruction and may never reclaim her position as a center of commerce and the playland of Arabdom.

Israel and Iran, the two non-Arab countries in the area, are also in a period of transition. The Jewish state, still living in isolation from its Arab neighbors, will face largely altered conditions should a peace settlement be achieved or should another war erupt. Iran, already the regional superpower, is attempting to make the leap to a European level of industrialization.

The other countries covered in this volume are also undergoing rapid change. King Hussein's Jordan has prospered despite the loss of territories on the West Bank of the Jordan River. Yet the future for the three million Jordanians continues to be uncertain, especially with Palestinian nationalism now asserting a claim in the area. Syria's regime, deeply involved in turbulent Lebanon, faces internal challenges and remains the least willing of the four confrontation states bordering Israel to consider normalization of relations with Israel.

Iraq and Libya nurture and finance what has come to be termed "the rejection front," a coalition of Palestinian factions, leftist intellectuals and Moslem fanatics unwilling to accept any form of Jewish state in their midst.

Some of these changes occurring throughout the region have made a compromise peace between Israel and the Arabs possible, maybe for the first time since the conflict flared as British forces withdrew from Palestine three decades ago. Yet, despite the enormous diplomatic efforts underway, such a peace continues to be, at best, elusive.

Even if achieved in principle, a compromise settlement along the lines the Carter administration began advocating early in 1977, would be only a gamble. Still, to simply allow the massive arms build-up to continue within such a volatile political environment would be even more risky.

American Involvement

Politically and economically, there has been a significant turn toward the West by the Arab Middle East in the mid-1970s. Egypt and Saudi Arabia have led the way. The United States has become, indisputably, the key outside participant in the affairs of the entire region. Whether the measure be political involvement, arms sales, economic and technological aid, cultural interchange, or efforts to

U.S. Policy Statement

"What of the future? Is it a future in which Israel's three million people try by force of arms alone to hold out against the hostility and growing power of the Arab world? Or can a process of reconciliation be started—a process in which peace protects Israel's security, a peace in which the urge for revenge and recrimination is replaced by mutual recognition and respect?"

"America has a special responsibility and a special opportunity to help bring about this kind of peace. This comes about first of all because of our unique and profound relationship with the state of Israel since its creation more than a generation ago. Our sense of shared values and purposes means that, for Americans, the question of Israel's survival is not a political question but rather stands as a moral imperative of our foreign policy...."

"It is precisely because of our close ties with both Israel and her Arab neighbors that we are uniquely placed to promote the search for peace, to work for an improved understanding of each side's legitimate concerns, and to help them work out what we hope will be a basis for negotiation leading to a final peace in the Middle East."

Vice President Walter F. Mondale
June 17, 1977

resolve Arab-Israeli tensions, the United States plays a pivotal role in today's Middle East.

The Carter administration's efforts to prevent another Arab-Israeli explosion point up crucial American national interests which would be seriously jeopardized should a new war occur. (*Carter administration policy*, p. 80) These interests include access to the region's petroleum resources and trade markets, the survival and welfare of Israel which enjoys a unique relationship with the United States, continuing friendly relations with most states in the area, and minimization of the Soviet Union's political and military influence.

Economically, Saudi Arabia and Iran dominate the region with a combined Gross National Product approximately half that of the entire area. American involvement with both countries is considerable and still growing. Each is engaged in a rather frantic rush to modernize, and each is experiencing changes from traditional ways which are as unavoidable as they are unpredictable.

Iran's preoccupation is with internal diversification and industrialization in anticipation of the expected depletion of her oil reserves by the turn of the century. The Shah is building a gigantic military machine to protect his country from external challengers, as well as from internal subversion. American arms, technological transfers and political support are crucial to the Shah's plans.

Saudi Arabia's preoccupation is with regional stability and a healthy international economy. Without both, there would be a potential for serious tension in the still growing American-Saudi friendship—the cornerstone of all Saudi policies. U.S. support is a bulwark for the Saudi political order against potentially hostile neighbors or possible internal disorder.

Since 1974 the American-Egyptian friendship has blossomed. President Anwar Sadat has twice visited the United States and the American economic aid program to Egypt now surpasses all aid being channeled to the rest of Africa and Latin America combined. Sadat's Egypt has made a basic decision to align itself with American and Saudi interests.

Though American-Israeli differences have become more pronounced since leadership changes brought Jimmy Carter and Menahem Begin to office, the American-Israeli partnership remains strongly rooted and sure to weather the current storms. Israeli vitality has attracted the American spirit and Jewish history has nurtured both sympathy and admiration. Though the U.S. may seem to some to be pushing Israel into an undesirable, unfair and dangerous settlement, others believe Israel is tenaciously clinging to positions the U.S. cannot accept. (*U.S. policy*, p. 80; *Middle East diplomacy*, p. 65)

Culturally, the modernization taking place throughout the Arab Middle East and Iran, made possible by the industrial world's thirst for petrochemical products and by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) price rises, involves a curious blending of traditional Islamic ways with modern Western life-styles. London, for example, is being partially recreated as a modern-world Arab capital and meeting ground. While the Britishers seek the summer sun, many Arabs prefer to vacation in the English fog and mist. Meanwhile, students from throughout the region flock to American and European universities where they experience new ways of life in addition to academic instruction. And Western businessmen and tourists bring to the Middle East more than raw technology and Western standards.

U.S. Palestinian Policy

As this book went to press the administration took steps to give meaning to President Carter's advocacy of a "Palestinian homeland," first made in a statement March 16, 1977.

At a news conference July 28, 1977, President Carter indicated that "The major stumbling block" to the Geneva Conference and an attempt to work out a comprehensive settlement "is the participation of the Palestinian representative." The President followed this statement with an offer to begin formal and direct discussions with the Palestine Liberation Organization and to endorse a role for the PLO at peace negotiations once a goal of coexistence is accepted.

This basic alteration in American Middle East policy did not begin with the Carter Administration. Henry Kissinger, in many ways the architect who made possible the contemporary quest for a comprehensive settlement, considered the need for a new approach to the Palestinian predicament during the 1975 "reassessment" of U.S. Middle East policy. But he chose to pursue more limited goals. Questioned by journalist Edward Sheehan as to why he did not devise a new American Palestinian policy, Kissinger responded, "Mr. Sheehan, do you want to start a revolution in the United States?"*

But President Ford and Kissinger took a major initiative in November 1975 when State Department official Harold Saunders testified before Congress. "In many ways, the Palestinian dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the heart of the conflict," said Saunders. Because the PLO "has not stated its readiness to negotiate peace with Israel; and Israel does not recognize the PLO or the idea of a separate Palestinian entity," Saunders continued, "we do not at this point have the framework for a negotiation involving the PLO." In his conclusion, Saunders noted that "It is obvious that thinking on the Palestinian aspects of the problem must evolve on all sides. As it does, what is not possible today may become possible."

Less than two months after becoming President, Carter decided to formally endorse the idea of a "Palestinian homeland." In doing so, he chose a phrase which brought back memories of the 1917 Balfour Declaration which first gave international recognition to Zionist aspirations with a call for a "national home for the Jewish people."

Carter's statement came at the very time the Palestine National Council, the supreme policy-making body of the PLO, was holding its thirteenth meeting in Cairo. The President's initiative was clearly designed to encourage Palestinian policies emphasizing goals of negotiations and a settlement rather than unending struggle.

President Carter's July and August positions gave further signs that the United States had decided to continue efforts to achieve new PLO policies that would justify direct diplomatic contacts, Palestinian participation at peace negotiations, and eventual creation of a Palestinian state in some form.

* *The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger* (Reader's Digest Press, 1976), p. 167.

Psychologically, the Arabs are finding it imperative to adjust to a world where they must take account of other views. The reality of Israel coupled with the sheer strength and determination of Jewish nationalism have recently begun to penetrate Arab thinking, raising the previously unspoken possibility of peaceful coexistence with Israel in the context of an overall settlement. For the first time, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and other Arab leaders have begun to speak of a complete and permanent peace with Israel, including diplomatic relations, within a few years of a political settlement. Pursuing such a settlement has become the dominant political effort the U.S. is making in the region. Having willingly accepted a role as intermediary and conciliator, the U.S. now finds itself being thrust into an arbitrator's capacity as well.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

The deeply entrenched conflict between Israel and the Arabs is the central focus of this book. The confrontation is broadly affected by the historical transformations taking place in the countries of the region as well as by the mounting influence of oil and petrodollars. Yet, the basic clash of aspirations remains much as it has been since the early decades of this century. Many years before the actual outbreak of international warfare between Jews and Arabs in 1948, it had become evident that Palestine would be a major arena of conflict. Zionism and Palestinian nationalism had developed in near-complete isolation from each other. Competing Western imperial interests further exacerbated differences. At the end of World War II, the Cold War grafted Great Power politics onto the local and regional clashes.

Since the Yom Kippur War in October 1973 the conflict has partly returned to its original form—a struggle between competing national movements. One, Zionism, inextricably rooted in Jewish history and religion, has already achieved phenomenal results. The other, Palestinian nationalism, arising from a feudalistic, colonial past, has been a mounting response to the Zionist challenge.

The Palestinian national movement has made tremendous strides and suffered serious setbacks during the past decade of its rebirth.

Almost universally considered homeless refugees just a few years ago—as in the famous 1967 reference in Security Council Resolution #242 to “a just settlement of the refugee problem”—the Palestinians are now widely recognized to be stateless, even though some of them have found temporary homes. President Carter's advocacy of a “Palestinian homeland” represents a historic shift in American Middle East policy. With Carter's recognition of the legitimacy of the movement for Palestinian self-determination has come an increasingly widespread awareness of Palestinian aspirations.

It was Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the 1967 Six-day War which caused resurgence of the idea of a separate Palestinian state. From 1948 through 1967 the West Bank had entered a process of Jordanization, and the Gaza Strip existed as a largely forgotten, mostly destitute, Egyptian-administered ghetto. With Israeli occupation came the rebirth of a dormant Palestinian identity, one for which the Palestine Liberation Organization has achieved a large measure of international legitimacy.

Still, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been considerably more than a competition between Zionism and what can now be termed Palestinianism. Ever since Israel's creation, Arab states have championed the Palestinian cause. And this cause, until recently, has been the elimination of a separate Jewish national existence in historic *Eretz Israel* (the Biblical Land of Israel). As long as that had been the goal for which the most powerful Arab leaders were willing to sacrifice, there was no possibility for a negotiated settlement.

Zionism, the belief in Jewish peoplehood and the right to a national existence in *Eretz Israel*, is a widely shared aspiration of Jews throughout the world. Moreover, America's commitment to Israel is a unique one, transcending more transient foreign policy concerns. As English author Henry Fairlie has stated, “If America does not ensure the survival of Israel, the American people will endure a despondency of spirit beside which their defeat in Vietnam will appear as one restless night.”

Today, the possibility of a Palestinian state coexisting with the Jewish state—an approach debated and approved by the United Nations after World War II—has again returned to the agenda of international diplomacy. If Jewish and Palestinian aspirations can each be given partial fulfillment, possibly the hatreds and phobias of past decades can be contained.

The Historic Opportunity

In the introduction to the second edition of this book, it was noted that during Henry Kissinger's “shuttle diplomacy” in 1974 and 1975 that “such fundamental questions as permanent boundaries, international guarantees, the future of the Palestinians and the status of Jerusalem have deliberately been shelved while the Egyptian president and the Israeli premier have haggled over a few kilometers of desert in the Sinai Peninsula.”

The Carter Administration entered office aware that a historic opportunity had presented itself for reversing the bitter course of Arab-Israeli relations through seeking a comprehensive political settlement. Turning the parties away from a fifth war has become a major challenge for Washington.

What is envisioned is not good neighborliness within a period of months, but a commitment by all the parties to a coexistence which can then be molded into a firm, lasting peace within a period of years. Israeli scholar Shimon Shamir has said: “A comprehensive settlement is not necessarily identical with a historical termination of the Arab-Israeli dispute and a complete normalization of relations between the two societies—for those can be achieved only through a protracted process which a diplomatic act is more apt to initiate than to conclude.”

Surely the time has come in the Middle East when reason should control emotions, when intercultural empathy should transcend chauvinistic impulses, and when a vision of a productive future should finally triumph over memories of the fiery past.

Mark A. Bruzonsky
August 1977

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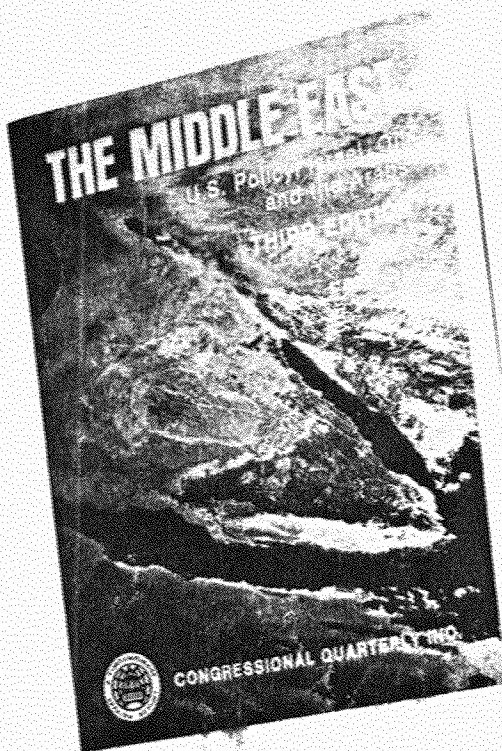
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Note: Most hearings were held before the appropriate subcommittee of the House or Senate Committee. All documents are available from the U.S. Government Printing Office.



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