

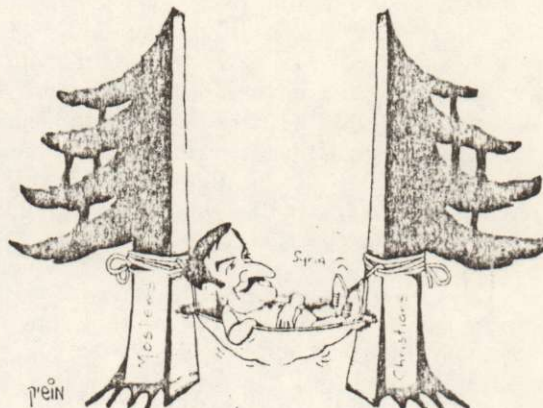
Mark Bruzonski

## Should The U.S. Impose A Mideast Settlement?

As soon as the political niceties of this election year recede, whoever is to occupy the White House must confront the new Middle East stalemate. Following the Yom Kippur War there was near-universal agreement that terminating the progressively destructive cycle of Israeli-Arab warfare had become an imperative for U.S. Middle East policy. Secretary Kissinger, in fact, was considerably criticized for attempting too little, rather than too much, for not attempting an overall settlement choosing instead the slow and delay-prone step-by-step approach. Others say, in defense of Kissinger, that pushing for an overall settlement was what the Secretary of State had in mind with the 1975 Middle East "Reassessment", but he was hemmed in by intense domestic political counter-pressure mainly from the Israeli-Jewish lobby and supporters on Capitol Hill.

### Notion Widespread

The notion that the U.S. might have to "impose" a settlement on both Israel and the Arabs is now rather widespread. Such a settlement would include Israeli withdrawal from nearly all of the occupied territories, creation of a Palestinian state, a novel arrangement for a united but dually-administered Jerusalem, and various forms of international guarantees possibly including a formal U.S. treaty relationship with Israel. Even the Israeli-sponsored *Israel Digest* weekly carried an article in May titled "Will a Middle East Solution be Imposed by the U.S.?" Reflecting on a recent U.S. visit, the columnist (a former Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry) writes that "Formerly, any talk of an 'imposed solution' was taboo; today such a solution is regarded by most



people 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 a former Secretary-General of Israel's dominant party, Arie Eliav, sadly concludes that some U.S. plan might be ". . . rammed down Israel's throat. . . . Given the present relation of forces, I am afraid that this is what is likely to happen."

### Imposition Anticipated

Jimmy Carter seems to agree. Even while catering to 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 Kissinger replacement have strongly expressed the need for prompt and tough U.S. initiatives in the Middle East.

The Israeli-Jewish lobby is preparing, in fact, for 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." In short, the anxiety expressed a few months back by a former Israeli minister defines the potential of the now partially dormant U.S.-Israel schism. "U.S. pressure for an

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overall settlement," Aharon Yariv reported, is swiftly growing. "They are getting fed up. One day they might just lay it down the line to us: take it or leave it."

#### Would An Imposed Settlement Last?

So one major question to be pondered, while awaiting the electoral results, is whether the U.S. in 1977 should move quickly and forcefully with a U.S. outlined agreement, if necessary imposing this solution on the hesitant parties. A thoughtful answer should first reflect on what would likely be the immediate results on such 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. The U.S., through the use of political, military and economic inducements, should rather strongly encourage a gradual process of co-existence which could lead the Middle East combatants to an eventual peace they themselves would have created and would themselves want to maintain.

#### Imposed Settlement Risky For Peace

An imposed settlement would not only unfairly and dangerously force Israel into territorial retreat without reasonable compensation as envisioned in Resolution 242. With today's military and political situation, such an American shift in the face of Arab oil threats and Russian military encroachments might actually create a seriously negative psychology throughout the region. Israel would feel totally isolated; probably swiftly developing a credible nuclear force, as Moshe Dayan has been publicly advocating of late. Various Arab parties, on the other hand, might come to believe that Israel's fate was now sealed, her American life-line tangled, her existence only a matter of awaiting the proper coalescence of circumstances.

Rather than creating real peace, an attempted imposed settlement might only set the stage for future conflict on a scale far more devastating than ever before. Moreover, an imposed settlement, by definition one not reached by mutual compromise of the parties, would require the cement of a credible American guarantee (or even less realistically of credible joint U.S.-Soviet or even U.N. guarantees) 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 America 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 Middle East settlement structured on external assurances.

#### What Then Should U.S. Do?

What then should be U.S. Middle East policy in 1977? It is true that the parties probably cannot or will not make peace if left to themselves. A half century of escalating Jewish-Arab animosity makes reconciliation unlikely without extra-regional 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 a paralysis brought about by a major ideological split between those who would stake the future on toughness toward the Arabs and those who would take the risk of major concessions.

The task for the U.S. should be not to impose but rather to nudge, induce and if necessary coerce. By acting as an involved go-between the U.S. can buttress both Arab and Israeli moderate positions. Then at a reopened Geneva Conference a real process of step-by-step peace could be created by political forces actually desiring to do so for reasons of their own political leanings and vital interests.

#### Sympathetic Coercion

The U.S. will, albeit sympathetically, have to first apply coercion to its Israeli friends. Israeli journalist Matti Golan is perceptive in writing that ". . . Israel has arrived unprepared at the time of decision. . . . Israel has arrived at her moment of truth." Domestic Israeli political stalemate prevents the Jewish State from being responsive to the world political environment. Warnings such as that in the *Jerusalem Post*, "We can no longer afford the luxury of granting primacy to considerations of internal politics," are heard but not translated into actuality. As the delegated spokesman for American Jewry, Rabbi Alexander Schindler (this year president of the umbrella organization which links nearly all major Jewish organizations in the U.S.) puts it, Israeli leaders "would almost be more comfortable,

for domestic political reasons, if the decisions were imposed rather than articulated and accepted from within."

### Three Crucial Issues

In brief, there are now unavoidable issues and still no new Ben-Gurion to take the reins. In this situation, rather than imposing a settlement, the U.S. should rather 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. Consequently a Palestinian State on the West Bank and Gaza Strip should be accepted as a possible outcome of resumption of the Geneva Conference. The Palestinian problem is "the heart" of the conflict as State Department spokesman Harold Saunders testified before the Congress last November. From this essential realization closely follow the two other matters on which the U.S. must convince the Israelis to alter their positions.

2. At Geneva, the Palestinians deserve separate recognition and the PLO, should it agree to negotiate with Israel at the conference, is one of the major elements which will undoubtedly make up the Palestinian delegation. Furthermore, Resolution 242 requires either modification or reinterpretation to acknowledge the political and national rights of the Palestinian Arabs. This resolution is not biblical; its primary author Lord Caradon (who in 1967 was the British representative on the Security Council) has repeatedly spoken of the need for such modification. This is a concession the Palestinians can rightly demand.

3. Israel must be clearly willing to abandon settlements in the occupied territories of Golan, the West Bank and Sinai under appropriate conditions ensuring Israeli security. Minor territorial adjustments are certainly possible and a special arrangement for Jerusalem essential—but territorial withdrawal and abandonment of the settlements must become stated Israeli policy. Both the Arabs and the Israeli citizenry need to be clear on this matter.

### How Arabs Should Reciprocate

Once the U.S. has imposed its leverage upon Israel in this way a comparable imposition should be applied to the various Arab parties. Syria and Egypt must explicitly recognize that Israeli security considerations are legitimate. In exchange for near-total territorial return, concrete and multi-

ple security arrangements must be accepted by the Arabs. These might include Israel presence on the Golan ridge above the Huleh Valley; demilitarization of Golan, Sinai and the West Bank; and permanent peace-keeping forces actually capable of intervention if need be and not subject to removal without the consent of all parties.

In addition, Israel can rightly expect major political concessions. A willingness by the Arab states to begin the long process of creating a normal peace should symbolically begin with stages of progressive economic and cultural contact. There must be as well a termination of hostile propaganda and an agreement for arms limitation and control. Furthermore, the Palestinian movement must understand unequivocally that the U.S. is committed to Israel's survival and welfare; that U.S. willingness to help in the creation of a Palestinian state is predicated at a minimum upon the peaceful coexistence of that state with Israel. Consequently the Palestinians will have to show their good faith by accepting demilitarization, peace-keeping forces, and a process of normalization of relations following on the lead of their brother Arab states.

### U.S. Should Buttress Moderates

Hopefully, Israeli leaders will come to recognize that it is far preferable to begin cooperating with a determined U.S. than to continue throwing road-blocks in the American path. As Abba Eban 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." Hopefully as well, 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. The U.S. should strongly pursue her new course with whatever tools of persuasion and coercion are at her command—and they are numerous and powerful.

"Peace in the Middle East . . . is not a promising subject," writes scholar Malcomb Kerr in the introduction to a new book detailing the attempts and failures since the Six-Day War in 1967. "Everything in the historical record must encourage the most pervasive pessimism." Nevertheless, the Middle East has come to represent a test of the entire world's ability to derail foreseeable disaster. The Middle East as well has become a crucial test of the superpower detente.