SHOULD THE UNITED STATES PURSUE A MORE BALANCED POLICY WITH THE MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES

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The basic question is should the United States pursue a more balanced policy in the Middle East countries? Current US policy has failed to prevent armed conflict in the Middle East. American prestige has declined while Russian influence has increased. Research was conducted through literature review, attendance at lectures and seminars, and interviews with personnel participating in the foreign area specialist training program. Means of improving US involvement by diplomatic, economic, and military initiatives are explored. The need for continued access and use of the Middle East oil

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fields to preclude a US, Japanese and Western European power crises is considered. Conclusions are that the US should: a) Secure a peaceful and continuing settlement to the Arab-Israel conflict. b) Improve US-Arab relationship by demonstrating an evenhanded concern and desire to assist the Arab world. c) Increase the US influence throughout the Middle East to ensure a continued strong NATO capability.

USAWC RESEARCH ELEMENT
(Essay)

SHOULD THE UNITED STATES PURSUE A MORE BALANCED POLICY WITH THE MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES?

by

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15 October 1973

SHOULD THE UNITED STATES PURSUE A MORE BALANCED POLICY WITH THE MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES?

The United States' reaction to the events that took place in the Middle East, which led to the Arab-Israel war of 1967, was one of confusion. Different factions of the Government heavily influenced by strong political and social organizations and lobby groups, responded to the crises with diverse and often opposing policies, and as a result, no effective US action was taken. As the Middle East crises increased, the US was unable to preclude the ensuing armed conflict, the Six Day War, or influence its significant impact upon territorial boundaries and national policies of the Arab countries. These failures established the political framework for the Arab-Israel War of October 1973. Neither the Johnson nor the Nixon Administrations have been able to establish firm US policy necessary to influence the post-1967 tensions in the Middle East.[1]

A review of Middle East policies need not wait until cessation of the October 1973 Arab-Israel War. Long range US policy must be established to determine National goals and extent of US involvement to accomplish the National objectives. The need to determine the diplomatic, economic and military initiatives of the US are obvious if this government is to influence and benefit from the Middle East governments and the resources they control. Vital developments, in the US and the Mediterranean area, of immediate concern to the future world relationship of the US include: requirement for a fair and quick peace settlement to the

current Arab-Israel conflict; reestablishment of US-Arab relationships; US oil shortage; expansion of Soviet naval influence in the Mediterranean; continuing NATO requirements.

Upon initial assumption of the Presidential office by the Nixon Administration, the twofold policy objectives for the Middle East were identified as: (1) to help achieve a peace settlement; and (2) to maintain an evenhanded policy between Israel and the Arab countries. That policy included supplying Israel with the necessary arms and equipment necessary to maintain a balance of military power with the Arab countries, while at the same time seeking agreements to reduce arms shipments into the area by other powers.[2]

These objectives had not been accomplished for the Six Day War of 1967 and have not, as yet, been achieved for the War of October 1973. After numerous attempts by the US in consort with Britain, France and the Soviet Union to bring about a negotiated peace settlement in the Six Day War, the US was not able to significantly direct the outcome of the interim settlement.

The failure of the United States mediation effort can be partially attributed to a lack of creditability to the US policy on the Middle East. Israel and the Arab countries both charged that the US policy of evenhandedness was not being observed. The US policy of evenhandedness, an attempt to maintain normal relations with both sides, meant treating Israel and the Arab countries alike, showing neither preference for nor inclination to side with either. Israel charged that the US endorsement of some of Egypt's terms

for settlement of the Six Day War, support for withdrawal of Israel forces from occupied territory, and desire to provide a more balanced support to Arab countries clearly demonstrated pro-Arab bias and was detrimental to US-Israel relations. The Arab countries loudly protested their strong resentment and distrust of the US's evenhanded policy. Egypt claimed that in order to get Israeli forces out of the Sinai Penninsula, it had made major concessions in return for US commitments which were never honored. The US not only failed to obtain reciprocal concessions from Israel, Egypt charges, but it provided Israel with military credits and access to advanced weapons technology.[3]

To further aggravate the tension and reduce the creditability in the US policy, the Arab countries are quick to point out that, while the US does provide Jordan and Iran with military and economic assistance, the US will supply supersonic airplanes only to Israel. They claim that continued supply of Phantom F-4 jets and Skyhawk tactical bombers to Israel, while denying the Arab countries this assistance, gives Israel an unfair superiority and violates the spirit and intent of the US evenhanded policy.

Syria attacked the US in the United Nations Security Council for supplying Israel with arms to consolidate its hold on land taken from the Arabs in the 1967 war. The Ambassador of Syria told the council that the US, in addition to aiding in the occupation of Arab territories, has protected Israel from the consequences of these actions. He condemned the US for supplying Israel with overwhelming military superiority over the Arabs. The

African nations threw their support behind the Arabs and demanded that the council take "concrete action to dislodge."[4]

Within similar Middle East policy parameters as previously existed, the US is negotiating with the Soviet Union to settle the current Arab-Israel conflict. The Soviet Union exploited the US involvement in Israel to arm the Arabs and thus gain influence in the area. The situation is infinitely complicated and rendered all the more uncontrollable by the many historic internal rifts among the Arabs. The irreconcilable hopes, fears, beliefs, prejudices, and religious strengths of these varied populace will continue to plague any National influence or direction.

Although the US is not bound by treaty or alliance to support Israel's efforts for national survival, the moral bonds between the two countries are so strong and Congressional pressure so solid that the US will necessarily provide Israel whatever material support required. The current hostilities confront the US and the Soviet Union with crucial decisions. If Israel cannot muster the strength to repulse the Arab countries, how much more assistance can the US provide without placing itself directly in the war? If the Arab countries cannot prevent annihiliation of their forces in the desert, to what extent should the Soviet Union commit itself to directly influence the outcome of the war?

Failure of the US to react to the aggression in the Middle East would shatter US security partnerships worldwide and destroy the economic capability of the nation. Moral and emotional considerations aside, the US has a vital strategic interest in sup-

porting Israel's independence and security. With the Soviet Union expanding its beachhead in Iraq and Syria, it becomes increasingly important for the US to maintain a strong and friendly ally in the eastern Mediterranean. The US should match every increase in Soviet arms deliveries and resupply to the Middle East with comparable aid to Israel and assure its continued military capability, as such her very existance. With Israel's security assured, the US will be in a better position to make concessions with the Arab countries and bring about a permanent peace in the Middle East.

A settlement, whether partial or complete, can best be arrived at by the parties to the conflict. In addition to breaking ground for an overall settlement and reducing the risk of renewed fighting, an agreement reopening the Suez Canal would benefit the US and Western Europe diplomatically, commercially and economically. With the current and forecasted oil requirements and looming energy crisis, Japan, Western Europe, and the US will become more dependent on imports.

Oil is one of the most critical strategic items now in short demand. In 1972 the US imported 10 per cent of its oil with an expected 1985 import requirement of approximately 55 per cent. In 1973 our oil imports will cost $6 billion and it is estimated that the cost will reach $30 billion in 1985. The Arab countries and Iran possess 45 per cent of current oil production in the world and 60 per cent of the oil reserves. The US uses approximately 40 per cent of the world's production of petroleum.

The U.S.S.R. is self-sufficient in oil and all strategic materials. It is significant that Russia now controls, through its alliance with the U.A.R., 2/3 of the oil requirements of western Europe; 9/10 of Japan's needs and 1/4 of US requirements. When U.S.S.R. gains dominance of the sea lanes by 1975, as she will if current trends continue, she can control this vital oil not only at its source but its lines of distribution as well.[5]

On 7 October 1973 Iraq announced the nationalization of the last major American oil holding in the country and directly linked the takeover to alleged Israeli "aggression" in the current Middle East warfare. Radio Baghdad said the Iraqi government had decided to nationalize the oil interests because aggression in the Arab world necessitated a retalitory blow at American interests in the Arab nations.

The nationalization of American interests by Iraq was a surprise to the US since the Iraqi government had been working to improve its relations with Western peace interests. The action was taken to show that "Arab oil may be a weapon in our hands and not in the hands of "Imperialists and Zionists."[6]

Recognizing that the fuel shortages facing the industrialized Western nations give added urgency to a Middle East settlement, President Nixon strongly rejected the theory that threats to curtail oil deliveries to the United States will alter US policy toward Israel. Mr. Nixon stated:

> "For the President of the United States .... to suggest that we are going to relate our policy toward Israel .... to what happens on Arab oil, I think would

be highly inappropriate. Both sides are at fault. Both sides need to start negotiating."[7]

President Nixon's policy of strength, partnership and willingness to negotiate provides guidance for US national strategy. The policy places equal emphasis on a strong America and on the need for all nations to carry their share of the world's peacekeeping burdens. Admittedly, military strength alone will not tip the balance of power, but it is, and will continue to be, a significant means of persuasion at the negotiating table.

The forecasted oil shortage and energy crisis in the US threatens to paralyze activities that, for many present day Americans, are the basis for the American way of life. Comments by some members of the Administration reflect the uncertainty of the US commitment in the Middle East. Mr. Elmer F. Bennett, Assistant Director of the US Office of Emergency Preparedness, in his address at an energy symposium on 11 April 1973 and Senator Fullbright, in a speech in the Senate on 31 May 1973,disclosed their anxiety over the energy crisis. While both these responsible Americans were quick to deny that the US government has any plans of using force to secure an adequate oil supply from the Middle East, the concept is not completely an impossible course of action. They warned that there was a possibility, as they saw it, that the US might try to solve its problem of shortage of oil by conquering some of the oil-rich Arab countries. Senator Fullbright indicated that some of the Middle East countries are relatively militarily defenseless, and that the US might, by supporting a mercenary nation, conquer them without

committing US military forces.[8]

If all other sources of obtaining oil or providing energy fail, the Administration might very well be pressured, by Congress and the American people, to pursue a National course that may lead to a serious US-Soviet confrontation or percipitate a nuclear world war. US policies and procedures must be absolutely clear and definitive to foreign governments, as well as the American people. Peacekeeping efforts by the American Government must be understood in order for the US policy of evenhandedness to be effective.

It can be readily understood why both Israel, which we have strongly supported, and the Arab countries, which we have modestly supported, question the current US Middle East policy. Comments by leading Americans that obviously reflect a loose or lack of definite US policy on issues of worldwide importance do little to further any National objectives.

The strategic significance of the Middle East and our National policy of supporting our NATO commitments to this area remain valid. The United States continues to have paramount interest in the region. NATO may be the instrument which will allow the US to retain the presence required in the area while yet not directly conflicting with any Middle East country. The armed forces and oil requirements in the Mediterranean must be retained. US policies which will clearly demonstrate our strong desire to honor NATO commitments to preserve peace will greatly demonstrate the US's willingness to assist the Middle East

Support of countries
countries./with questioned or unknown loyalties, provokes charges of peace at any price.

It is risky to support establishing a US policy of increasing our military presence in the Middle East during a period when US public opinion seems strong on reducing the US military commitment abroad. Conversely, others argue that it is in the National interest to maintain a continued US presence in the Indian and Mediterranean area to nullify the growing Soviet influence. Another theory proposed is to reduce the US military commitment in the underdeveloped countries and align with the industrialized countries for support of far-sighted US interests.

The anticipated dependence on oil from the Middle East, specifically the Persian Gulf countries of Iran, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia requires a review of National policies. In this area, as in other parts of the world, a demonstrable US military capability would provide a reminder to the Soviets of our concern in the political and economical development of the countries involved.

The US Navy has made only periodical courtesy calls in the Indian Ocean area in years. The only American show of strength came in late 1971 when a carrier task force steamed into the Bay of Bengal during the Indo-Pakistani war over Bangladesh. Soviet squadrons have made an increasing number of visits to East African and Indian ports. The continued presence of these Russian naval squadrons, operating virtually unchallenged across our oil supply routes, warrants initiation of negotiations with countries that would provide the US with forward bases to ensure protective

capability of US interests.

The psychological and political effects of the Russian naval fleet currently in the Mediterranean make a significant impact in Europe and in the Middle East. The simple presence of a Soviet vessel in an area is sufficient to cause a country to hesitate before initiating action for fear of Soviet reaction. The continued supply of war materials, the large number of advisors, the diplomatic ties with many of the Arab countries are definite indicators of continued Soviet interest and support in the area.

In a series of briefings, Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, assured Congress that the military does not currently face a fuel crises and that it would not face the problem of overall petroleum shortages even in a large scale all-out conventional war. He based his statement on the fact that the use of petroleum products by the armed forces has been a relatively small percentage of the total US requirement. Even if the initial requirements were twice as high as at the peak in Vietnam, they would not amount to more than 10 per cent of the total US demand and less than one-fifth of domestic oil production. In 1972, the Defense Department purchased 52 per cent of its petroleum products from domestic supplies. The remaining 48 per cent was bought elsewhere in the world, the bulk of it from the Middle East (20 per cent) and the Caribbean (11 per cent). [9]

In the event of war, it may be necessary to shift from one source of foreign petroleum to another or from foreign to domestic sources. Adjustments in the available markets will determine whether the US economy will receive sufficient petroleum products

from overseas sources.

One projection indicates that by 1980 half of the oil used in this country will be imported and more than 1/3 will come by sea. This could mean as many as four hundred seventy-four 250,000 ton tankers plying the 12,000 mile route between the east coast and the Persian Gulf and other foreign sources of oil. The flow of oil from Venezuela and the Alaskan Northern Slope can reasonably be assured. The major segment of our sea-born imports, these from the Middle East will require a major effort to secure. These imports must travel a very long route, even when utilizing the Suez Canal. Most of the route passes through areas where US forces have little operating experience and bases. Providing the military means to protect this long route would strain our resources severely. There can be no doubt that major diplomatic negotiations remain to be pursued to insure that the US will be reasonably assured of safe access routes to its oil resources.[10]

With the advent of the Israel-Arab war of October 1973 and the significant increase in Soviet military and economic influence in the Middle East, it becomes readily apparent that US Middle East policy requires reassessment. American foreign policy-makers have the immediate problem of securing a peaceful settlement to the armed conflict. Anything less than a cessation of fire will increase the possibility of involvement of outside powers into the conflict. Establishment of future US Middle East policies should consider each country, and its impact on the

total US Middle East objective.

The broad courses of action available to US policy-makers include:

a. Primarily ally with and support Israel with arms and equipment to assist in maintaining a balance of force in military power in the Middle East. Provide equal support to selected Arab countries.

b. Establish programs with selected Arab countries, in conjunction with Japan and Western Europe, which will insure the availability and uninterrupted supply of oil.

c. Develop policies which will bring about a peaceful settlement between Arabs and Israelis by providing both arms and equipment for self-defense and publicly acknowledging that the US will not support any territorial expansion movements.

d. Provide an equal amount of assistance (evenhandedness) to all Middle East countries to demonstrate US nonpartisan interest in establishing a balance of power in the Middle East.

e. Revise current policy to allow the US to take positive measures to immediately replace Russia in providing assistance and support to Egypt and other Arab states and concurrently reduce her presence in the Middle East.

f. Develop policies which would provide for continued support of our NATO requirements and increased show of strength in the Mediterranean Sea and Middle East.

Official American policy in the Middle East must be to stabilize the area, to maintain the flow of oil out of the area to our allies, to keep the Soviet Union out, and to neutralize

the Arab-Israel conflict through diplomacy and through a balance of power.

The outcome and successful conclusion of the current Israel-Arab conflict will not, in itself, reduce the efforts made by the Soviets to increase their influence throughout the Middle East. The Soviets will continue their endeavors to reduce US prestige to a new low.

The US must consider the Middle East as a critical factor in determining American-worldwide strategy. The political, economic and military impact of this area will continue to have international implications. The industrial power of Western Europe and Japan are extremely dependent on the fuel resources of this critical area.

The psychological impact of a strong US naval fleet in the Mediterranean in support of NATO commitments will negate the impact of Russian naval presence. A continued show of force which clearly indicates a desire to assist the people will provide a strong rallying point for the small independent countries. The US policy must clearly indicate that there is no complacency or favoritism, but a genuine interest in the well being of all the Middle East nations.

Aggressive diplomatic action and a display of forward thinking by the US, which will show concern for the well being of the people is desperately needed if the US desires to be the dominant power influence in the Middle East.

The attainment of a cease fire in the Middle East by the US

could be the catalyst that may preclude a world energy crisis and initiate negotiations which will firmly establish a strong US-Middle East alliance.

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FOOTNOTES

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2. "The Middle East after the Soviet Withdrawal from Egypt," Great Decisions 1973, 8 November 1972, p. 91.

3. Ibid.

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6. David B. Ottaway, "Iraq Nationalizes US Oil Holdings", Washington Post, 8 October 1973, p. 1.

7. Laurence Stern, "Oil-hungry US Is No Helpless Giant", Washington Post, 5 October, 1973, p.1.

8. Arnold Toynbee, "Middle East Can Spoil US-Soviet Rapprochement", Philadelphia Inquirer, 15 July 1973, p. 1.

9. Orr Kelly, "Military Fuel Supply", Washington Star-News, 2 October 1973, p. 3.

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