Portnoy Psychoanalyzed
Therapy notes found in the files of
Dr. O. Spielvogel, a New York psychoanalyst
BRUNO BETTELHEIM

Balance and Imbalance
in America's Middle East Policy
SHLOMO SLONIM

The Other Soviet Literature
MAURICE FRIEDBERG

Jewish-Arab Coexistence
MOSHE DAYAN
midstream
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Balance and Imbalance in America's Middle East Policy

By SHLOMO SLONIM

The question of balance in America's Middle East policy has recently become the focus of considerable attention. The subject was particularly highlighted by several remarks made by former Governor Scranton during, and at the conclusion of his December 1968 tour of the Middle East conducted on behalf of the then incoming Nixon administration. After visiting Cairo and Amman, Scranton declared that he expected "a more even-handed policy" from the United States in the area that would "take into consideration the feelings of all persons and all countries in the Middle East and would not necessarily espouse one nation over another." Similar opinions have been expressed by various American commentators including one special study group on the Middle East.

The underlying assumption of current critics of American policy in the Middle East is that this policy has been geared primarily, if not exclusively, to the protection and preservation of Israel. According to this interpretation the security claims of Israel have so dominated American thought and action that other, and clearly no less vital, American interests in this region have been neglected and even sacrificed. As a result of such a one-sided policy, the United States, it is said, has become increasingly isolated from the Arab world with resultant loss of influence among the leaders of those states.

De Gaulle's attempts to woo the Arab world are cited as confirming evidence of the imbalance of American policy. Over-commitment to the Israeli side only enables the Soviet Union, together with France, to become more deeply entrenched in the Arab states. History, tradition, economics and even American security call for recognition of the fact that Israel is only one of many divergent American interests in the Middle East and must not be over-emphasized at the expense of other essential interests. A more even-handed United States policy is therefore in order.

According to this interpretation, the Israel raid on Beirut airport, during which twelve Arab planes were destroyed, pointed up the divergence of the interests of the United States in the Middle East. In reaction to the raid, the United States, with considerable economic, educational and social ties to Lebanon, felt compelled to condemn the Israel action in the sharpest of terms. This episode served, so to speak, to drive home the point being made by the "revisionist" school—that American policy has been distorted out of shape and must be currently broadened to include once again the wider and more general interests of the United States in the Arab world. In line with this view it is advocated that the United States seek to re-establish diplomatic relations with Egypt and other Arab states, severed since the Six-Day War, and exert pressure on Israel to moderate its position and accept
something less than a full-fledged peace treaty. Others would go even further and declare that Israel should be compelled to accept a settlement worked out independently by the four major powers. This form of settlement would, it is claimed, reflect the "neutral" attitude of the United States and would thereby help to restore the United States to its rightful place of influence in the Arab world.

A more realistic examination of American policy in the Middle East, however, indicates that these criticisms are based on a double fallacy: 1) that American policy has been geared solely to the protection of Israel, and 2) that the protection of Israel has been maintained at the expense of more overriding United States interests in the Arab world. Both fallacies appear to be based on a more fundamental misconception: the simplistic notion that the Arab world is a monolithic unit, with a single set of interests. The facts, however, reveal a far more variegated Arab world composed of a divergence of states representing a multiplicity of often conflicting interests. In light of this division of interests within the Arab world itself, there are grounds for assuming that the security of Israel may actually coincide, rather than clash with, certain vital interests of particular Arab states; and the protection of Israel, far from operating counter to other American interests in the Middle East, has in fact served to strengthen and secure some of the very interests which the aforementioned critics see as threatened.

Oil and security represent the primary interests of the United States in this part of the world. The first needs little explanation. The second involves several aspects, both positive and negative: ensuring the freedom and independence of the states of this region; preventing the Soviet Union from dominating the area so as to threaten the under-belly of Europe on the one hand, or tropical Africa and the Indian subcontinent on the other; and keeping the Suez Canal from becoming a channel of Soviet penetration into the Indian and Pacific oceans.

As regards United States oil interests in the Middle East, it is noteworthy that these are more or less concentrated geographically in the more conservative Arab states. For better or for worse, the Arab world is divided into two groups of states. One group is composed of conservative, generally monarchist, states with close ties to the West; the second group is made up of radical socialist states with strong links to the Soviet Union and the East generally. The causes for this division within the Arab world are not readily apparent. For one thing, the cleavage does not seem to be directly related to the degree of involvement in the Arab-Israel conflict, as is clear from a comparison between Jordan, on the one hand, and Algeria—one of the most stridently anti-Western States in the third world—on the other. Likewise, the division does not seem to be premised upon the duration of colonial subservience, as evidenced by the contrast between Iraq, a radical state which obtained independence as early as 1923, and Tunisia and Morocco, both of whom were freed from French control only in 1956.

Nor can the line-up between radical and conservative Arab states be attributed to the nature of the former colonial regimes, whether French or British, as is demonstrated by the contrast between Syria and Lebanon, both formerly under French domination, and between Yemen and Kuwait, both previously under varying degrees of British control. It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that the division in the Arab world between conservative, Western-
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orientated states and radical Eastern-oriented states is the product of internal and historical factors within the Arab states themselves. But in noting this distinction it is also essential to realize that it represents not simply a historical and political fact, but that it has been the source of considerable tension, and at times bitter strife, among the various groupings of Arab states.

Much of this strife has resulted from Nasser’s attempts to extend his grip beyond the confines of Egypt alone. Regardless of the patched-up state of affairs today in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the fact is that for years previously Nasser openly strove to topple the Ibn Saud dynasty in Saudi Arabia. Cairo radio regularly charged the Saudi Arabian regime with plots against Nasser personally, and the Cairo regime generally. In a very real sense the two countries were at war with one another for over five years in their respective involvement in the royalist-republican struggle in Yemen, which even today is not really ended. The stormy atmosphere which governed relations between Nasser and Hussein—and likewise between the Syrian leaders and Hussein—are matters of public record. Charges of plots and counter-plots were day to day affairs. As for Lebanon, the 1958 crisis in that country was largely precipitated by Egyptian attempts to effect there a Nasserite revolution. In brief, the Arab world has been characterized far more by internecine rivalry than by brotherly solidarity.

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merican oil investment and development is centered in the more conservative Arab states, notably in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which between them possess one third of the world’s known oil supplies. According to The New York Times, the Persian Gulf area today produces 27 per cent of the world’s petroleum and has proved reserves of 60 per cent of all world reserves. United States firms have a gross investment of more than $2.5 billion in the region. As regards Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, therefore, it is abundantly clear that United States policy aims first, to secure their unencumbered independence, and second, to secure an uninterrupted flow of oil from their territories. Both of these Arab states, it is to be noted, were only marginally involved in the Arab-Israel conflict. Despite some shrill radio broadcasts, their involvement was, to all intents and purposes, merely pro forma. Kuwait has no military force of consequence to commit; nor could Saudi Arabia be expected to despatch its limited forces to a remote Palestinian battlefield, only to leave its own territory defenseless in the face of potential hostile moves by its more radical “allies.” As a result, both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait remained, and still remain, largely on the sidelines. Their contribution to the cause has been limited to philanthropy: contributions toward the upkeep of the nearly bankrupt Egyptian and Jordanian economies.

In contrast, the states most consistently and uncompromisingly involved in the aggressive military campaign against Israel have been Egypt and Syria, neither of which has been a major oil producer to date and in neither of which the United States has extensive investments.*

Viewed in the context of intra-Arab divisions and of Nasser’s imperialist designs, it becomes evident that Nasser’s threatening moves against Israel in May 1967 constituted, in effect, the

* Recent oil finds in Egypt do not alter this picture basically since American developers are only marginally involved there. Moreover, the presence or absence of oil in Egypt would hardly make Egyptian control over Saudi Arabia any more palatable to the United States.
opening shot in a campaign directed not only against Israel but, in a very real sense, against rival Arab states as well. Israel was, indeed, the most obvious and immediate target, but there is no doubt that the entire Fertile Crescent and the Arabian subcontinent were no less threatened by Nasser’s aggressive designs. It was this realization which undoubtedly prompted King Hussein’s hasty and fateful journey to Cairo on May 30, 1967, to sign a mutual defense pact with Egypt. For years previously Cairo radio had loudly proclaimed Hussein’s treachery to the Arab cause and had repeatedly called for his violent overthrow. Now the moment of truth was at hand. To Hussein (as indeed to so many others) it appeared that Nasser was advancing on all fronts and that Israel’s defeat was imminent. When, on May 23, 1967, Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran (thereby restricting access to Jordan’s port, Aqaba, no less than to Israel’s Eilat) Hussein sensed that the noose which was drawn around Israel’s neck had somehow fastened itself around his own neck as well. He had the choice of waiting on the sidelines and yielding only when Nasser’s mastery was established, or joining Nasser at once as a junior partner in the enterprise in the hope that both his crown and his head would thereby be spared. He chose the latter course, with consequences that are only too well known.

It would be appropriate at this point to speculate at greater length on the probable consequences were Nasser to have succeeded in cowing, even if not actually destroying, Israel. The whole Middle East would very likely have fallen into Nasser’s lap. The domino theory might have received its strongest confirmation in the Middle, rather than the Far, East. As a result of combined internal and external aggression, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, both Yemen, the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms, and probably Libya and Lebanon as well, would have soon become enveloped in a vast new Nasserite Empire. The Egyptian leader would have held sway from the borders of Turkey in the north to Libya and perhaps beyond) on the coast of Africa, from Iraq on the Persian Gulf to Sudan and Somalia in the heart of Africa. Nasser’s hegemony over the major part of the Arab world would have been complete. (It is interesting to speculate whether considerations of this nature entered into Nasser’s resolve to withdraw the Egyptian forces engaged in Yemen. He could not achieve a victory there by direct intervention; but by paralyzing and dominating Israel he could attain the same goal indirectly. The imperial design was the same.)

It is not difficult to appreciate what drastic consequences the creation of such a new imperial power in the Middle East could have on the Western framework of defense. NATO’s Eastern flank would be gravelly undermined, since Turkey would now be directly menaced from both north and south. Iran would, to all intents and purposes, be completely isolated from the West. Its oil policies would no doubt be subject to critical pressures, still further menacing the supplies available to the West. Internal developments within either of these two states could very well wrench one or both of these states from the Western alliance, as was the case with Iraq in 1958. In short, the entire first line of Western defense in Asia would have been turned, had Nasser succeeded in his ambitions. Moreover, all the centers of Middle East oil production would have been detached from their traditional alliance with the West at one stroke. Had Nasser succeeded in his campaign, he would have become master of much more than Israel; he would have dom-
the Persian Gulf, though Libya and could have soon become a new Nasserian leader would soon claim the borders of Libya and periphery of Africa. The Persian Gulf too, being at the heart of the middle world would have been interesting to Nasser and his resolve Egyptian forces entrenchments could not achieve direct intervention; nor dominating Israel with the same goal initial design was the only one to appreciate what the creation of a new power in the Middle East was. NATO’s Eastern alliance was now being undermined, and now some of the smaller states available for further ecological developments could both of these states, the Eastern alliance, as in Iraq in 1958. The first line of Western defense would have been a political one, all the centers of production would have been threatened by their traditional Western allies. America’s Middle East Policy, in 1967, was perceived as menacing the entire range of American economic and security interests in the Middle East. As one distinguished American journalist put it, “In 1967, oil and Israel were for once on the same side.” Institution of the Eisenhower doctrine in 1958, whereby United States marines landed in Lebanon to thwart Nasserite designs on that country’s independence, was an early indication that a change had come about in America’s thinking about peace and security in the Middle East. Henceforth, the Soviet Union and the nations of the region were put on notice that the United States could not sit idly by and allow an avaricious power to dominate the area by overwhelming smaller states one by one through subversion or direct aggression.

In its present Middle East policy the United States is, in effect, pursuing a line comparable to that which has guided American action in Europe for the better part of this century. Twice in this century the United States has intervened in a European conflict in order to preserve stability among the states of Europe and to prevent that continent from falling under the hegemony of a single expansionist power. American intervention was seen as serving the United States’ own interests and security. In like manner, ever since 1958, the United States has served notice that it would regard it as detrimental to its own interests to have the Middle East come under the sway of an aggressive power in the region. Nasser’s Egypt could not be allowed to establish a monopoly of power in the Middle East in 1967 any more than it could in 1958. Israel’s vigorous action in defense of her own security restored the balance that had been so rudely threatened, and spared the United States any thought of direct intervention.

United States interest in a state of equilibrium in the Middle East does not imply that the United States is, or need be, opposed to a peaceful coalescing of states in the Middle East, any more than it is opposed to a peaceful process of unification in Europe. But military aggressive designs bent on establishing a monopoly of power under one head and one capital
in the Middle East are quite different from a regional confederation of states mutually agreed upon. It is the latter goal to which United States policy in the Middle East aspires: a confederation of states interlocked in mutually rewarding economic arrangements which would make maximum use of the region's water, agricultural and mineral resources and which would find the price of internecine strife far too expensive to pay. The Johnston plan for optimum use of the area's water resources, and the Eisenhower-Strauss atomic-desalination scheme are vital parts of this overall plan for economic interdependence in the Middle East. But, needless to say, the first prerequisite for any of these development schemes is peace, and the basis for peace is the mutual respect of states for one another. The road to peace lies through mutual agreement.

Viewed in this light, it will be readily appreciated why the United States, despite active interest in Big Four discussions, remains justly skeptical of the idea of an enforced settlement in the Middle East. Not only does such an enforced arrangement assume an absolute identity of views and interests among the enforcers and a supine submissiveness on the part of the states of the area, but an enforced settlement can hardly form the basis for a mutually accepted economic scheme of regional development. Yet it is precisely in the development of such future economic interdependence that the best security for an enduring peace lies. An enforced settlement, by its very nature implies the absence of mutual consent between the parties, and represents but a broken reed as far as long-range hopes for peace and stability in the area are concerned. In this connection it is interesting to note that it is precisely those who so categorically opposed genuine European integration—de Gaulle and the leaders of the Soviet Union—who most avidly promoted the idea of a Middle East settlement enforced by the Big Four Powers. De Gaulle had even gone so far as to suggest direct Big Four involvement in the peace-keeping process with the stationing of Big Four contingents in different parts of the Middle East. All of this has the familiar ring of marking-out and administering "spheres of interest," so highly reminiscent of 19th century and early 20th century big power diplomacy. It has often been noted that de Gaulle lives in the past and it is, therefore, not really surprising that he dreamed of a renewed sphere of French authority in the Middle East. He cannot contemplate the progressive elimination of divisive antagonisms on that part of the globe any more than he could envisage a Europe minus the divisiveness of nationalism. However, such archaic notions cannot serve the interests of peace in the Middle East any more than they can serve its interests in Europe.

In implementing its policy in the Middle East, the United States seems dedicated to searching for the terms of an abiding peace, rather than for conditions that would only set the stage for further and more dangerous conflicts. It is obvious, therefore, that it will find no advantage in blithely placating Nasser so as to provide him with a fresh launching pad from which to unleash new campaigns of violence and imperialism in the Middle East. Both Presidents Johnson and Nixon have emphasized that peace—genuine peace—can only be reached by mutual agreement between the parties involved. In the light of recent events it does not seem that Nasser is set upon any such course. It may, therefore, be in America's interest to ignore the issue of Israel-Egyptian relations for the moment and to attempt instead to achieve some sort of accommodations between Israel and Jordan, possibly including Leb-
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anon as well. If a measure of understanding could be attained among
these three parties, which would also take into account the interests of the
Palestinian Arab population, the resultant isolation of Egypt and Syria
might ultimately induce them to fall
into line and to join in an accepted
overall settlement.

As regards Israel-Jordanian relations
there seems to be considerable room for
maneuver and adjustment. Jordan vit-
tally needs the production and trade of
the West Bank, and Israel can make,
as it has indeed made since the Six-Day
War, beneficial economic arrangements
with this area and population.
Terroristic and security arrange-
ments are not insurmountable hurdles.
A first step could be an agreement to
restore the rich farmland adjoining the
Jordan River on the East Bank to its
former productivity by allowing and
encouraging the return of the farmers
who fled this area. This would require
Israel’s agreement not to shell the area

and firm determination by Jordan to
prevent the terrorists from using this
area as a staging site for attacks against
the Israelis. Banishment of the terror-
ists from Jordanian and Lebanese ter-
tory, accompanied by Israel’s restraint
in regard to the East Bank farming sec-
tor, could be a significant and healthy
step toward a mutual accommodation
in the Middle East. Jordan has recently
been receiving increased military
supplies from the United Kingdom and
the United States; if these supplies are
used to advantage by the relieved
Hussein regime to suppress the terror-
ists, an opening wedge will have been
made for the cause of peace in the Mid-


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