

Attempting the Middle Road in the Middle East: US Policy 1945-1988

By Paul D. Tanner

Before World War II, the US had few interests and no obligations in the Middle East. It was then seen as an area dominated by the British. By 1945, the situation had changed. The region had seen an American military presence and the development of petroleum resources to aid the American war effort. Zionists were working feverishly towards the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. With the collapse of US relations with the Soviet Union, the Middle East became a focal point for their respective competing spheres of influence. Britain's decline dictated America's increasing involvement, which took place gradually and irreversibly over a period of years. Strategically and economically the Middle East had become an important part of Washington's world commitment. This paper explores US policy towards Israel and the Middle East from the Truman administration through the Reagan presidency between 1945-1988.

Postwar Aims, Recognition of Israel and the Early Cold War

The most important issue facing Truman in the Middle East was whether (or when) to recognize the state of Israel. The issue had been proposed during the war. At the Biltmore Conference in New York in May 1942, American Jewish leaders called for Palestine to be made into a Jewish Commonwealth. In 1944, endorsement of the Biltmore programs was part of both the Democratic and Republican platforms. In a letter to Senator Robert Wagner of New York, President Franklin Roosevelt wrote, "If re-elected, I shall help to bring about its [a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth] earliest realization." (Fraser x, xi) FDR was aware, however, that the Zionist claim to Palestine was rejected throughout the Arab world. In February 1945, on his return from Yalta, FDR met Ibn Saud, and assured Saud he "would do nothing to assist the Jews against the Arabs and would make no move hostile to the Arab people" (xi). FDR died in April, leaving Harry S. Truman to sort out the ambiguity of FDR's Middle East policy.

Truman officially recognized the State of Israel 11 minutes after its declared foundation on May 14, 1948. Despite the quick recognition and firmness of Truman's convictions, the decision did not come without debate. Most State Department officials opposed recognition, or at least called for its delay. Vocal critics of recognition included Policy Planning Staff Director George Kennan and Secretary of Defense James Forrestal. Forrestal opposed any policy that might antagonize the oil producing states of the Middle East (Fraser 37). Secretary of State George Marshall said that if Truman recognized Israel, he would vote against Truman in the next election (Grier; Fraser 47). Truman's support of Israel was far from

unconditional, however. When Israeli independence was declared, five Arab nations attacked the fledgling state. The US provided neither troops nor arms to help the new nation (Grier). Since the US recognition of Israel, the US has juggled support of Israel with a desire for access to oil fields controlled by Israel's neighbors.

Israel quickly defeated the Arab attackers, and by 1949, Arab Palestine had ceased to exist, or more accurately, it had never taken root since being proposed in the 1947 UN Partition Resolution (Fraser 56). What remained, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, was severed economically to what was now Israel. America tried to secure immediate relief for refugees and put pressure on Israel and the Arab states to face up to the more permanent problem of the refugees future. On November 19, 1948 the US jointly sponsored a UN resolution setting up the United Nations Relief for Palestinian Refugees (57). This was followed by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNWRA), Intended to function for 18 months. 5 decades later the UNWRA remains the sole means of sustenance, shelter, education, and medical provisions for hundreds of thousands of refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria (59).

The Soviet Union also recognized Israel, but the Americans and Soviets were already at odds in the Cold War. The US adopted a policy of containment as articulated by George Kennan (Patterson 55). In July 1947, he publicly called for "a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies" (Gaddis 4). In 1950, the National Security Council produced its NSC 68 report, which gave a different definition of containment and what must be done to combat the Soviets: The US must lead a program for peace "which will frustrate the Kremlin design for world domination." (Patterson 314) The free peoples of the world must recognize that "the cold war is in fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake" (315). From the immediate postwar years, Cold War issues dominated American foreign policy until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The most significant divergence in the early debates over containment was between the strategy articulated by Kennan and that put forth by NSC 68 (Johnson 21).

Truman and Eisenhower attempt to stay neutral in the Middle East

Truman attempted an economic approach to peacemaking in the Middle East with the Locke Mission. In late 1951, a regional office to coordinate US economic activity in the Middle East was opened in Beirut. The program included capital assistance from the Mutual Security Program (MSP), refugee assistance channeled through the UN Relief and Works Administration (UNRWA) and technical assistance from the Technical Cooperation Administration (TCA), commonly known as Point Four. The Point Four plan in particular was considered slow and inefficient, especially compared to the large sums of capital assistance the US was providing to Israel (Kingston 37, 38). Decisions about where and how to spend the funding went through a bureaucratic maze of paperwork and chains of command. Edwin Locke Jr. was put in charge of the project with the title of Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, and he was given the rank

of ambassador with direct lines of communication to President Truman (30). He felt the regional economic approach to securing peace and stability in the Middle East would “finally be given a chance to work.” (33) Dean Acheson (Secretary of State at the time) was neither optimistic nor supportive of the plan, later calling the Point Four program “the Cinderella of the foreign aid family.” (36)

Locke’s recommendation to Truman was the establishment of a \$100 million Arab development fund designed to provide capital assistance to the Arab states, especially the non-oil states of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. The purpose of the fund was to finance the completion of several high profile projects in the fields of transportation and/or river development. He presented nine possible projects. In order to make it more appealing to Congress, Locke presented it as a “one-shot” deal that would pave the way for greater involvement of the World Bank and private capital (38).

In effect, Locke’s ideas were a significant shift in US policy toward the Arab world. He called for aid to be raised to a level of that given to Israel, and it was to be given on an unconditional basis, free from linkages with the Arab refugee issue (38). His proposal was rejected ostensibly on the grounds that its passage could not be passed through Congress. Actually, the Truman Administration was not inclined to consider any dramatic change in policy in the Middle East. Truman wanted action but was not willing to be actively involved in promoting such changes (40). He had a number of domestic battles to face and was working with Republican Congress hostile to any Truman initiatives.

By publicly championing the Arab cause in the Truman administration, Locke won tremendous popularity in the Arab world. One refugee leader described him as “Ambassador to the Arabs” (41). Locke resigned in frustration within a year of his appointment without causing any changes in US economic policy in the region, and the Beirut-based regional office was closed (31).

Former General Dwight Eisenhower came into his two-term presidency with a familiarity with the Middle East and its problems. As allied commander in North Africa, he had seen something of the Arab world for himself, and as Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, he had been directly confronted with the fate of many Jews. In May 1953, Eisenhower’s Secretary of State John Foster Dulles undertook a substantive tour of the region, visiting Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. He met spokesmen for Palestinian refugees and tried to cultivate better relations with the Arabs (Fraser 62).

Eisenhower also sought to use economic means to achieve goals in the Middle East. On October 16, 1953, Eric Johnston was appointed special negotiator, with the task of seeking a comprehensive program to develop the Jordan River’s water resources on a “regional basis” with Middle Eastern states (Alteras 118). The Johnston mediation effort was carried out in four rounds of negotiations with Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel between October 1953, and October 1955. Johnston was a public servant with years of successful negotiating experience in business and government, and possessed extraordinary persistence.

Like Locke, Johnston encountered friendliness in Arab capitals (120). At one point the Arab League Expert Committee recommended approval of Johnston's program to the Arab League Council (123). This was a remarkable feat for Johnston considering it was achieved at a time of mounting border violence between Israel and its Arab neighbors, although ultimately the Arab League decided to "postpone" the plan for "further study," avoiding outright rejection (119-123).

The agreement failed to materialize for political reasons. Arab League members realized that the purpose of the plan ran counter to their political objectives towards Israel. If the plan were carried out, it would have resettled refugees in their countries of residence, rather than the fulfillment of what Arab governments called "Palestinian right of return." Finally, and most importantly, agreement meant recognition of Israel and extension of economic benefits to that country; precisely what the Arab economic boycott was supposed to prevent.

Eisenhower wrote about the failure of the Johnston plan: "the mission totally came to naught because of the refusal of political leaders [within the Arab world and Israel] to let their respective peoples learn of any project involving cooperation effort among the opposing camps." (124)

Eisenhower and Dulles also tried a highly ambitious and top-secret peace mission between Cairo and Jerusalem, whose 'covert intermediary' was Robert B. Anderson. Anderson was Deputy Secretary of Defense who had the complete confidence of Ike (Alteras 164). His mission was to mediate the Arab-Israeli dispute and achieve a rapprochement between Egypt and Israel through direct talks with Gamal Nasser and David Ben-Gurion. Anderson was assisted by the State Department and CIA officials under utmost secrecy, and no US ambassadors were involved. Once rapprochement were achieved, generous economic aid would be forthcoming (165).

The US would guarantee the borders of the two countries and extend generous financial help in building the Aswan Dam. The US would also help Israel compensate Palestinian refugees for the properties they left behind in Sinai (164). He tried to convince both leaders to conclude a peace agreement that would form the basis for peace throughout the region (165).

Anderson met Nasser in Cairo on January 19 and March 6, 1956, and Ben-Gurion in Jerusalem on January 23 and March 9. In the first meeting, Nasser first wanted Israeli concessions on territory and refugees before he would consider making peace (170). A quick settlement would be impossible since an "atmosphere" conducive to a settlement must first be established and accepted by all Arabs (166). Ben-Gurion did not trust Nasser, but was willing to discuss the possibilities of peace with Egypt, but only in face-to-face negotiations. He offered to meet at any time in a place of Nasser's choosing (167). He cajoled the US to end its embargo of arms to Israel. Ben-Gurion felt that selling arms to Israel would counterbalance the Soviet-supplied weapons Egypt possessed.

In the second meeting, things did not go any better. Anderson left Cairo with nothing except a vague

promise from Nasser that Egypt would not take part in an aggressive war against Israel (169). Ben-Gurion limited the talks to Israel's need for US weapons (170).

The mission failed because of the nature of the Arab-Israeli dispute, and the distrust between Nasser and Ben-Gurion. The attempt itself was as surprising as it was secret. Eisenhower never supplied Israel with weapons; he preferred to see the US-Israeli relationship as one of "friendly impartiality." (Alteras xv) However, in 1955 and early 1956, the US secretly approved the limited sale of arms to Israel by the French and British in an effort to keep the regional balance of power (Ben-Svi 10).

From his rise to power in a 1952 military coup until his death in 1970, President Nasser had a tremendous impact on the Middle East. In the context of the Cold War, he promoted a policy of "positive neutrality" which held that Arab nations were entitled to enjoy profitable relations with both Cold War blocs (Yaquab 573). Nasser was one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which came about at the Bandung (Indonesia) Conference in 1955. Leaders from 29 Asian and African countries attended the conference, which sought cooperation between developing countries "on the basis of mutual interest and national sovereignty" and opposed imperialism by any nation ("The Bandung Conference"). Nasser made frequent efforts to spread revolutionary nationalism. The US recognized him as a formidable and influential leader, and for that reason felt it necessary to deal with him. Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy tried to work with him, also more out of necessity than choice.

When Egypt granted recognition to the People's Republic of China, purchased Soviet weapons through Czechoslovakia, and moved closer to the Soviet Union in 1956, Secretary of State Dulles canceled promised funding for the Aswan Dam, a reversal of previously pro-Egyptian policies (Schulzinger 250). Nasser then nationalized the Suez Canal. On October 29, Britain, France, and Israel went to war with Egypt 'to protect the Suez Canal,' despite the US view that the Canal fell clearly within Egyptian sovereignty (Fraser 69). The US pressured England and France to withdraw. Israel agreed to stop fighting and leave the Sinai and the Gaza strip when Eisenhower suspended economic aid to Israel and threatened to embargo the millions of dollars in aid that American Jews sent to Israel (Kaplan 127; Schulzinger 252). The US emerged from the crisis as an important presence in the region and solidified America's dominance as a superpower.

Eisenhower and Dulles were still uncomfortable with Nasser's leadership. They were deeply alarmed by Nasser's neutrality and felt it could not go unchallenged, particularly in light of how the US had supported Egypt in the Suez Crisis. They saw Egypt's actions as showing a lack of gratitude (574), and a potential threat to the containment policy.

As a result of Nasser's attitude, Eisenhower and Dulles met with leading congressmen to persuade them that the vacuum in the region created by the decline of British power and prestige "must be filled by the US before it is filled by Russia" (Fraser 73). Eisenhower gave a major speech to Congress announcing

the Eisenhower Doctrine in January 1957. He asked Congress to authorize programs of economic and military assistance for the countries of the region, and asked for the power to use armed forces to maintain the independence of any country in the Middle East "requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism" (73). Passed into law on March 9, the Doctrine confirmed that Western interests in the Middle East from now on would be the prime responsibility of the Americans.

The doctrine was applied first in Jordan, when King Hussien's dismissal of the pro-Nasser government led to a general strike, demonstrations, and riots. In April 1957, Hussein charged that international communism was responsible for the efforts to overthrow him. The US announced that it "regarded the independence and integrity of Jordan as vital," dispatched its Sixth Fleet to the eastern Mediterranean, and gave Jordan \$10 million to support its army and economy. The Hussein government survived (Spanier 101).

Eisenhower continued to follow the doctrine by sending troops to Lebanon to sustain the pro-Western government of President Camille Chamoun. Marines landed on July 15, and withdrew on October 25 with a pro-Western successor to Chamoun in place (Fraser 75, 76).

However, by the summer of 1958, Eisenhower's policy was not having its desired effect. Egypt had merged with Syria to form the United Arab Republic (UAR), increasing Nasser's power. The king of Saudi Arabia, whom Ike had courted, virtually abandoned his throne in favor of a brother close to Nasser (Yaquub 575). Ike recognized the trend of Arab nationalism, distinguishing between 'constructive Arab nationalism,' which sought to improve living standards through cooperation with the West, and 'radical Arab nationalism.' Radical nationalism welcomed Soviet aid and stirred up anti-Western sentiment. (573). In late 1958, the Eisenhower Administration quietly abandoned the Eisenhower Doctrine, deciding instead to seek political accommodation with the Nasserist movement (575). In the fall of 1958, Dulles commented on the futility of going against Arab nationalism: "We must regard Arab nationalism as a flood which is running strongly." At best the US could "put up sand bags around positions we must protect, the first group being Israel and Lebanon and the second being the oil positions around the Persian Gulf." (Yaquub 578)

Eisenhower himself was widely respected in the Arab world. Arab leaders had come to expect Washington to be even-handed on the Arab-Israeli issue (Yaquub 587). His desire and ability to keep Israel at arm's length won favor with non-Jewish Middle Easterners. One black eye in this regard was Eisenhower's authorization of the CIA overthrow of the elected prime minister of Iran in 1953. Eisenhower supported the ouster of Premier Mosadegh after he nationalized Iran's oil fields in 1951. The CIA then helped to re-install the pro-Western Shah of Iran (Grier; Ambrose 221).

The Eisenhower years also marked the low-point of the American-Israeli relationship (Fraser 76). In

addition to siding with Egypt in the Suez Crisis, The Eisenhower Administration had earlier gone against Israel in late 1953. Following Major Ariel Sharon's (the current Israel Prime Minister) notorious raid on the West Bank town of Qibya, Washington suspended aid to Israel and sponsored a UN Security Council Resolution censuring the attack (Yaquob 590).

One more significant historical event occurred during the Eisenhower presidency. In 1959, the oil producing states Venezuela, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq formed the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Their objective was to halt a worldwide slump in the price of crude oil. The US was still a net exporter of oil in 1959 (Ambrose 221). By the mid-1960's, the US still received less than 10% of its oil from the Middle East, although increasing domestic consumption meant American imports were bound to increase (Little 296).

Kennedy and Johnson move Towards Israel

When Democrat John F. Kennedy became president in 1961, he tried to create an identity distinct from Eisenhower's. One of the major dimensions in Kennedy's foreign policy was to try to improve relations with the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Nasser's Egypt was an important part.

Concerning Israel, Kennedy both publicly and privately reiterated the US's assurance of assistance to Israel in the event of an attack against it (Cohen 281, 282). Kennedy became the first president to sell arms to Israel when he authorized the sale of Hawk missiles to Israel in 1962 (Cohen 281). Kennedy felt that by reducing Israel's feeling of "insecurity and vulnerability" by providing arms, Israel would be more accommodating towards peacemaking (Ben-Zvi 38). Kennedy assumed Israel would respond with "expected reciprocity" concerning the Johnson Plan for Palestinian resettlement (76, 77). Joseph Johnson of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace proposed that Israel should consider taking back 100,000-150,000 Arab refugees "if the Arab countries are cooperating in resettlement of the remainder...and there is assurance of generous US support in meeting costs of repatriating and settlement in Israel" (Ben-Zvi 68).

Another issue where Kennedy expected reciprocity was Israel's development of nuclear weapons in Dimona (78). Kennedy felt the Hawk deal would help to "prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons" (92). The US wanted the Israelis to permit outside inspectors at Dimona (Ben-Zvi 92; Little 287).

After receiving the Hawk missiles, Israel made no concessions whatsoever. Successive administrations learned from Israel's disdain for diplomatic reciprocity, establishing "tight and concurrent" linkage as bargaining tools with Israel (Ben-Zvi 92, 94).

Meanwhile, regional tensions escalated, putting the Johnson plan into the background and oblivion. President Nasser's response to the Hawk Missile sales was "gloomy and unenthusiastic" (73). Nasser continued to stir up trouble in the Middle East. In September 1962, pro-Nasser Yemeni officers overthrew Iman Mohammed al-Badr, proclaimed a republic, and laid claim to disputed territory next door in Saudi Arabia. The US shared Saudi concerns about Nasser's intervention and threats to the kingdom. By October,

Egypt had a 70,000 man expeditionary force in the region (Little 289). The crises escalated when Egyptian MIG's struck at royalist base camps. Kennedy responded by sending a squadron of F-100 jets plus several dozen Green Berets inside Saudi Arabia.

The Nasserist movement was undeterred. When pro-Nasser demonstrators nearly toppled Jordan's King Husein in April 1963, Kennedy moved the Sixth Fleet into the Eastern Mediterranean and warned Egypt to stop meddling in Jordan (290). By October, Kennedy was backing off from his even-handed approach to the Middle East, warning Nasser that unless UAR troops pulled out of Yemen and unless Arab radicals ceased their anti-Israel diatribes, Washington's rapprochement with Egypt was in jeopardy (291). By the time of his assassination in November 1963, Kennedy had shifted to an approach based on closer relations with Israel and the Muslim conservatives (291).

Kennedy's successor Lyndon Johnson was also troubled by Egypt's flirtation with the Kremlin and vocal support of anti-Western movements, such as the newly founded Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 (Fraser 78). He sought to isolate Arab radicals. By the spring of 1967, the US aligned itself with Israel and Nasser's conservative rivals. His "three pillars" of Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran were his hope for security in the Middle East (Little 284).

From the start, Johnson was a strong supporter of Israel. After Kennedy's death, he told an Israeli diplomat, "You have lost a very great friend, but you have found a better one." (Little 294) Israel's powerful influence on US policy is evident from a policy memo sent by NSC staff member responsible for Middle Eastern affairs Robert Komer to LBJ in 1964. He bluntly advised the president to assure Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol of American support and to tell him that "one thing we ask of Israel is not to keep trying to force us to an all-out pro-Israel policy." The US has to keep a "superficial balance" in its public posture to protect its oil interests and keep the Soviets out of the Middle East. Would the Israelis try to understand that it was in their interest for the US to keep good relations with the Arabs?" (Cohen 293)

The U.S. was ineffectual in preventing or halting the 1967 Six-Day War. In May of 1967, President Nasser of Egypt evicted the United Nations forces from the Sinai Peninsula and closed the Straits of Tiran to ships bound to and from the Israeli port of Eilat. To the chagrin of Johnson *none* of the fifty nations approached was willing to join the U.S. in challenging the blockade, mostly for fear of Arab oil embargoes (Ambrose 222, 223). Johnson pleaded with Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban for more time to reach a settlement. After two weeks, Israel realized the U.S. could not get Nasser to back down, so Israeli warplanes attacked and destroyed Egypt's Air Force, gaining a stunningly quick and decisive victory. Israel had conquered all of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, driven 12 miles into Syria, seizing the Golan Heights, and taken all of Jerusalem plus the West Bank of the Jordan River. Israel had won, but added enormously to its problems. A swift victory, the disarray of the Arab states, and an increasingly unwavering support from the US made an overconfident Israel less interested in exchanging land for

commitments from Arabs. As one Middle East specialist put it, “Israel’s appetite has grown with eating” (Gerges 198; Ambrose 224, 225).

The Suez Canal was blocked, the Americans had failed to deter war, the Arabs had placed an embargo on oil, and the Palestine refugee problem had grown significantly. The immediate consequence was the expansion of the PLO and an increase in the scope and number of terrorist acts carried out by desperate Palestinians (Ambrose 225). The oil embargo ended within months due to the growing friction between the conservative Arabs who controlled oil production and the radical Arabs who “brandished the oil weapon” (Little 305).

There were two other significant consequences of the war for US policymakers. Johnson decided to fully support Israel, so the US became the principle supplier of Israel’s military equipment for the first time (Cohen 292). This included sophisticated weaponry starting with the sale of 50 Phantom F-4 fighters in 1968. (Ambrose 225). As a result, Arab nationalists no longer trusted the US to act as a neutral mediator and turned to the Soviet Union for political and military support (Gerges 198).

The UN Security Council helped bring about a meaningful cease-fire, resulting in Security Council Resolution 242, adopted on November 22, 1967. The resolution attempted to reconcile the vital interests of the opposing sides. For Israel, it promised peace with her neighbors, secure and recognized boundaries, and free navigation of regional waterways. For the Arabs, it promised Jewish evacuation of the conquered territories and a national homeland for the Palestinians. Both Arabs and Israelis accepted 242, but Israel with the understanding that firm, guaranteed peace treaties must be signed before there would be any withdrawal, while the Arabs insisted that 242 meant full Israeli withdrawal must precede any other diplomatic move (Ambrose 226). Resolution 242 is still an integral part of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process.

Nixon, Kissinger and “Shuttle Diplomacy”

President Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger’s foreign policy was framed in Cold War objectives. They used the word *détente* (French for “relaxing of tensions”) to characterize their policy. Nixon took pride in not being beholden to the pro-Israeli lobby, since relatively few Jews had voted for him, and since Kissinger was Jewish (Quandt 66). He did, however, use the threat of Israeli military intervention to keep Syria from invading Jordan (Polk 163). Kissinger spoke bluntly in his declaration in 1970 that, “The US is committed to defend Israel’s existence, but not Israel’s conquests.” (Ambrose 266)

A few key events helped to spur Kissinger into action in the Middle East. One was the emergence of Anwar al-Sadat as Egyptian President. Sadat sought peace with Israel, and distanced Egypt from the Soviet Union by expelling 200 Soviet advisors. Sadat started the Yom Kippur War, in part because of Israel’s refusal of Egyptian peace initiatives (“Anwar Sadat Biography”). With a chance to exclude the Soviets from the Middle East, and help make peace in the region, the Nixon-Kissinger team made the region a top

priority. Israel had still not reached an accommodation with the Arabs over the 1967 war. Egypt and Syria invaded Israel and met with some early success. The Nixon-Kissinger plan helped Israel repel the attack by allowing for the airlifting of replacement arms and ammunition while pressing the Israeli government to acknowledge its dependence on the United States (Schulzinger 305). In October 1973, The US put forth a cease-fire proposal, which Israel ignored. Kissinger issued an ultimatum threatening to stop the flow of US arms to Israel (Ambrose 276).

On October 24, Soviet Party Chairman Leonid Brezhnev proposed sending a joint Soviet-American expeditionary force to the Suez to save the Egyptian Third Army from Israel's General Moshe Dayan. Kissinger insisted the UN peacekeeping forces must come from non-nuclear powers. Kissinger made it clear he would do anything to keep the Russians out of the area. He pressured Nixon to proclaim a worldwide alert of American armed forces, including nuclear strike forces (Ambrose 276, 277). The nuclear alert probably ranks among the tensest moments of the Cold War (Grier).

This brought an end to the Yom Kippur war, but the US role in the Middle East had changed. Egypt and Syria were defeated militarily, but won political gains. Egypt's Anwar Sadat was now taken seriously as a world statesman. The US began crafting policies that paid serious heed to non-oil Arab states. Negotiations for the return of lands captured by Israel became inevitable (Grier).

One final repercussion to the war was the military support that the American Congress provided to Israel. In the remaining 2½ years of the Nixon-Ford administration, the US provided Israel with more than 3 billion dollars in weapons. As one Pentagon official expressed it, "Israel wants one thousand percent security and she's getting it" (Ambrose 279).

Kissinger began a policy of 'shuttle diplomacy' in the spring of 1974, flying from Cairo to Jerusalem and back to effect disengagement between the two armies, and prod them to agreement. After Nixon's resignation in August 1974, Kissinger continued to shuttle between Syria and Jerusalem, and in the spring of 1975, he negotiated disengagement of the two countries occupying the Golan Heights. Part of the intensity with which he worked was due to a Middle Eastern embargo on exporting petroleum to the US as punishment for its support of Israel. Between 1967 and 1973, the US had moved from being a net exporter to a net importer of oil (Ambrose 274). In 1973, OPEC, which included all Arab oil-producing states, ceased oil shipments to the US, causing an oil shock and disrupting the American economy (Polk 418-420), surprising the Americans who had assumed the Arab nations were incapable of coordinated endeavors. From this time forward, insuring a steady, stable supply of oil became a policy imperative for America. Kissinger's efforts and negotiating skills paid off, reducing tensions, and laying the foundation for progress in later years.

Two Years of 'World Order Politics' then Back to the Cold War: The Carter Years

Democratic President Jimmy Carter tried to differentiate his ideas from those of the secretive

Kissinger-Nixon years, yet built upon the foundations laid by the pair. He campaigned to “replace balance of power politics with world order politics” (Schulzinger 317). Carter saw Nixon-Kissinger’s approach to international politics as using sovereign states to balance each other’s power. Carter’s formula for world order also included a stable distribution of power among the major states, but looked at relations among peoples as well as states. He saw order coming from the promotion of broad values like democracy and human rights as well as from international law and institutions such as the United Nations (Nye). More than any other foreign policy issue, the Middle East occupied his time and energies (Quandt 329), at least until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. He then stated “the implications of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan could be the most serious threat to peace since World War II” (Ambrose 299). The Carter Doctrine (1979) stated that the US would use military force to prevent the Russians from controlling the Middle East or disrupting the flow of oil (Ambrose 317, 318).

Carter brokered a settlement between Egypt and Israel at Camp David in September, 1978. It was set up by the actions of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who shocked the world by going to Israel on his own initiative and addressing the Knesset in an attempt to negotiate a peace (Fraser 147). The US then entered the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations as mediator. Carter himself visited Israel and Egypt and mastered every detail of the geography of the Sinai Desert (Schulzinger 326; Fraser 156). He preferred informal private, personal contacts, which worked well with Begin and Sadat (Polk 430). After much foot-dragging, Begin finally agreed to a total Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and the dismantling of Jewish settlements there, and promised to suspend new Jewish settlements on the West Bank of the Jordan River. In return, Egypt officially recognized Israel (Ambrose 304). Israel also recognized the “legitimate rights” of the Palestinian people and agreed that the Palestinian problem should be solved in all its aspects (Grier). After six more months of negotiations, Carter, Begin, and Sadat signed a treaty on March 26, 1979. While a triumph for Carter, it had some negative repercussions. No other Arab state joined the peace process, and all broke relations with Egypt except for Sudan and Oman. Carter was sympathetic to the plight of Palestinians, becoming apparent after Israeli intelligence uncovered an “unauthorized conversation” between Carter’s Ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young, and representatives of the PLO. appeared that he had secretly conferred with the permanent advisor to the young was forced to resign because of the conversation, which was held in a private home (Polk 430).

The Camp David Treaty had a number of long-term effects. Egypt grew closer to the US and received large amounts of financial and military aid as did Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and countries of the Arabian Peninsula (Hourani 421). Additionally, Arab states realized the usefulness of the US in developing their economies. Loans and investments could help develop resources. America could provide technology and training. Western enterprise could help in development as countries moved away from state socialism. Meanwhile, the US wanted to ensure a steady supply of oil. The Arab-US relationship became more

solidified after Camp David.

The Iranian revolution and hostage crisis contributed to Carter's downfall. US presidents had an uneven relationship with the Shah of Iran, who had been put back into power by a CIA coup in 1953. Eisenhower supported the Shah enthusiastically, Kennedy and Johnson less so. Nixon and Kissinger saw the Shah as America's best friend in the Middle East: a reliable supplier of oil to the US and a staunch anti-Soviet. During the 1979 revolution, the US wanted the Shah to survive, but refrained from taking tougher action to save his throne. Following the revolution, Carter tried to make contact with moderates in the regime, provoking radicals into action (Rubin 76). On November 4, 1979, Iranian "students" took over the American Embassy, initially taking 100 (later reduced to 52) hostages. They feared a repetition of the US sponsored coup in 1953, and saw the hostage taking as a way of defending Islam (Houghton 57). Also, the hostage taking was a response to the Shah's admission to the US for medical treatment in September 1979. The de facto leader of Iran, the Ayatollah Khomeini, condoned the takeover. Carter inadvertently enhanced the value of the hostages to the Iranians by making it clear that the lives of the hostages were his first priority. Carter allowed the hostage crisis to dominate American foreign policy for the next 14 ½ months. (Houghton 7). He authorized a disastrous military rescue attempt in April of 1980. His inept handling of the crisis led to his defeat in the 1980 election, the worst defeat ever suffered by an incumbent president (Ambrose 314). The Iranians became more receptive to resolving the hostage crisis after the Shah's death in Egypt and Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1980. After Reagan's victory and before his inauguration, successful negotiations began with the assistance of Algerian intermediaries. The hostages were released on Reagan's inauguration day, January 20, 1981.

The Reagan Years: Dealing with 'misfits, loony tunes, and squalid criminals'

President Ronald Reagan presented a stark contrast to Carter in style and substance. He viewed the Middle East through the prism of the US-Soviet rivalry (Quandt 338), and according to Dumbrell, US policy was "driven by an alarmist and unrealistic assessment of Soviet intentions" (Dumbrell 87). By emphasizing the need to counter the Soviet agenda in the region, US policy downplayed the central Arab-Israeli conflict (Spanier 319). Being little concerned with the nuances in the Middle East, he was very dependent on his staff for advice (Quandt 336). Reagan sharply increased defense expenditures and arms sales (Ambrose 315), took a firm anti-communist stand, and made tough public statements, his most famous being "Soviet Communism is the focus of evil in the modern world" (Spanier 268; Ambrose 315).

One of Reagan's first actions in the Middle East was an attempt to "upgrade" the US-Saudi Arabia relationship by agreeing to sell the Saudis fuel tanks and air-to-air missiles they had requested for their F-15 fighters, in addition to 5 Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWAC) sophisticated radar planes. Reagan promised he would not allow Saudi Arabia to "be an Iran," implying the US would protect the Saudis against internal insurrection (Spanier 319; Quandt 339).

The first crisis in the Middle East during Reagan's term was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. Israel used an attempt to assassinate Israel's ambassador to London by a PLO agent as an excuse to justify an assault on Palestinian positions in Lebanon (Fraser 162; Quandt 342). Reagan's Secretary of State Alexander Haig had said that the US would accept a military move by Israel only in response to an "internationally recognized provocation" (Quandt 340). Some Israelis have claimed that Haig's statements were interpreted as a green light for the invasion of Lebanon (Quandt 340).

The crisis led to thousands of deaths (Fraser 165), the resignation of Haig as Secretary of State, and a harsh rebuke to Israeli Prime Minister Begin from Reagan: "A refusal by Israel to accept a ceasefire will aggravate further the serious threat to world peace and will create extreme tensions in our relations" on June 9 (Quandt 342). Still, Israel carried out systematic and heavy shelling of PLO camps in West Beirut until August.

The new Secretary of State George Schultz was well-informed on the Middle East situation. As the former president of Bechtel, he had extensive contacts with Arab countries. He tackled the problems of Lebanon with Reagan's "fresh start" initiative, which combined elements of UN Resolution 242 and the Camp David Accords. It called for Israel to withdraw its troops from occupied territories and freeze its settlements there in exchange for PLO recognition of Israel's right to exist (Little 293). In September, the Arab states held a summit in Fez, Morocco and adopted the Saudi-proposed Fez Plan. They did not endorse the Reagan initiative, although both plans called for the acceptance of UN Resolutions 242 and 238. The Fez plan reflected a shift in Arab policy in its implied recognition of Israel and the possibility of negotiating a peace agreement of some sort ("Eight Point Fahd Plan, 1981"). At minimum, it gave the Arab states and the US "something to talk about" (Quandt 344, 345). In September, Israel agreed to lift the siege of Beirut while a trilateral force of French, Italian, and American troops supervised the withdrawal of the PLO army from Beirut to Jordan and Tunisia (Ambrose 320).

On October 23, 1983 suicide car bombs from Shi'ite South Beirut were driven onto the US Marine compound and the French headquarters, resulting in 241 American and 58 French servicemen's deaths. US Marines were then "redeployed" to ships offshore. This policy reversal was seen by America's friends in Lebanon as a kind of betrayal. Pro-Western governments were left to wonder about US resolve (Fraser 183; Quandt 348, 349).

By 1986, the US was becoming more and more involved with Iran, with the Israelis serving as a conduit for negotiations. The Iran-Contra scandal, the biggest crisis of the Reagan presidency contributed to the erosion of American credibility in the region and undercut Reagan's stated policies (Quandt 378, 379). The US traded arms to Iran for the release of hostages of Tehran's allies in the Middle East, with proceeds from the secret sales being diverted to Nicaraguan *Contras* (Dumbrell 120). The US was exposed as hypocritical, ignoring its own embargo against Iran and Reagan's condemnation of Iran as an "outlaw

state” run by “misfits, loony tunes, and squalid criminals.” (Spanier 333) It violated stated administration statements that the US would never make concessions to terrorists (Dumbrell 84). It also shocked and dismayed Arab friends who were fearful of an Iran victory over Iraq. It would endanger Egypt, Jordan, and perhaps Syria and Saudi Arabia (Spanier 333).

In 1982, partially in support of Iraq in its war against Iran, the Reagan Administration took Iraq off the list of nations charged with sponsoring terrorism. Iraq became eligible for high-tech items suitable for military purposes (Kaplan 226), a decision that was to haunt the US when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990.

Reagan’s bombing of Libya alienated some Arabs opposed to Reagan’s preference for a show of force in confrontations (Polk 466). The US believed Libya was sponsoring terrorism, and tried to impose sanctions against the rogue state. After none of the European powers would support the boycott, the US exercised a limited bombing campaign to punish Libya (Spanier 333).

The Palestinian *intifada* began in December 1987 as a spontaneous protest against what they believed were Israeli-perpetrated injustices, which left over 300 Palestinians dead (Polk 376; Fraser 184). The U.S. supported a UN resolution condemning Israeli use of excessive force against the *intifada* (Polk 475). Traditionally, the US rarely votes against Israel in the United Nations. The *intifada* led to the Schultz Initiative, announced in March, 1988. Called a “blend of ideas” it outlined the goal of a comprehensive peace to be achieved through direct bilateral negotiations based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338. It added a new element, “interlock,” between negotiations on the transitional period for the West Bank and Gaza and the negotiations on the “final status” (Quandt 365, 435). Schultz felt the Palestinian issue should be addressed in negotiations between an Israeli delegation and a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

Schultz’s plan had little chance of success; however, it won widespread support of American public opinion (Quandt 367). Even in failure, the plan influenced Israeli public opinion and helped shape the political debate in the future. When PLO leader Yassir Arafat renounced terrorism, recognized the state of Israel, and accepted UN Resolutions 242 and 338 in a speech on December 14, 1988, the US lifted its ban on dealing with the PLO. US-PLO discussions could finally and officially begin (Quandt 367).

The Reagan years were the last to see the Middle East in Cold War terms. The US showed many inconsistencies in policy, which was more a reaction to events than proactive. Still, thanks in large part to the efforts of George Schultz, progress was made on some crucial issues, particularly the Palestinian issue.

Conclusion

While attempting to support the state of Israel, keep the supply of Middle East oil flowing to the US, and promote peace in the region, the US Middle East policy can be characterized as inconsistent.

One reason for this has been the reactive nature of American policy. Much of the history of American policy in the Middle East has been one of reacting to events rather than initiating policies. America’s power in the region has been limited, despite the financial and military clout the US possessed in the post-war

years. The US could not prevent or avert the wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, or the Iran-Iraq War. US reactive policy was unable to provide a long-term solution to the problems of the Middle East. According to Quandt (9), no senior policymaker in American history has come to power with a well-developed understanding of the nuances of the Arab-Israeli dispute and its history, which has made for an inconsistent policy.

Another reason for US inconsistency was the predominate focus on Cold War issues among differing administrations, and sometimes within the same administration. The Eisenhower, Carter, and Reagan Doctrines all formulated Middle East policy in the context of countering the Soviet Union's influence there. Examples are abundant: Eisenhower virtually abandoned his Doctrine in 1958, in favor of compromising with Arab nationalism. Kennedy worked very hard to improve relations with Non-Aligned countries of the Middle East, but eventually moved toward supporting the conservative Arab states. The Nixon Administration wavered between *détente* and Cold War rhetoric. Carter's policy of 'world order politics' was abandoned after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In his last years in office, he came to view the Middle East in a Cold War perspective. There were also huge differences between the rhetoric of containment voiced by Presidents and *de facto* policy.

Yet another explanation for American inconsistency has been the US relationship with Israel. While America has always been committed to Israel's survival, Israel has come to dominate America's Middle East policy to a degree which would have seemed unlikely in the 1950's. The US did not sell military weapons to Israel until the Kennedy Administration in 1962, and becoming a major supplier only after the 1967 war. With the end of the Yom Kippur war in 1973, the American Congress authorized unprecedented military support of Israel. Israel's intelligence ties, strength of its lobby and activity of its supporters throughout the US have helped to weigh the balance of US policy towards Israel. Israel is now financially, militarily, and diplomatically dependent on the US to a degree that many of her own citizens find frightening (Fraser 187). The US tilt towards Israel has made it more difficult to act as mediator in Middle East disputes and has caused animosity in the Arab world. It is not coincidental that the terrorist acts perpetrated against the US have increased as the US has increased support for Israel.

A final reason for American inconsistency in the region is the inconsistency of the Middle East itself. It is difficult to establish a consistent policy in an unstable region. Who could have predicted that Nasser would have been succeeded by the progressive Anwar al-Sadat? Likewise, who could have predicted his unfortunate assassination in 1981? Unstable, unpredictable governments and leadership often change very suddenly and unexpectedly.

Still, the post-war presidential administrations have some characteristics in common. One has been the inability to settle the Palestinian issue despite all presidents from Truman to Reagan at least recognizing the problem. Attempts were made through efforts such as the Locke Mission, Johnston

Mission, Johnson Mission, and UN Resolutions 242 and 238. The Palestinians feel themselves to be the principal victims of American foreign policy. Americans assumed the principal burden of providing assistance for Palestinian refugees through the UNRWA. This funding has not been nearly enough. Additionally, Israel has been successful at freezing the Palestinians out of American policy, contributing to Mid-Eastern tensions (Fraser 187), although this changed somewhat when the US began officially dealing with the PLO in 1988, leading to some progress in the 1990's.

Despite inconsistencies, the US *has* made some significant contributions towards peace in the Middle East. Eisenhower's handling of the Suez Crisis showed an even-handedness and decisiveness rare for the US in the region. Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy reduced tensions in the region and laid a foundation to ease the enmity between Egypt and Israel. George Schultz took initiative and proved adept at crisis management, helping improve US standing in the region, particularly with regard to the Palestinians.

Other missions were ultimately unsuccessful, but showed initiative and balance. The Locke Mission, the secret Johnston Mission between Ben-Gurion and Nasser, and the Johnson Plan for Palestinian refugees were bold initiatives despite ultimately failing.

At the end of the Reagan presidency, the Middle East showed some promise towards achieving peace in the region. With the end of the Cold War, the 1990's brought the region to the forefront of American policy, while terrorism has kept it there in the 21st century. One thing is certain about future US policies in the Middle East: the region will be more of a priority than it has been in the past. Hopefully, the road taken will be a more consistent one, building on the experience gained in the immediate postwar years.

Bibliography

- Alteras, Isaac. *Eisenhower and Israel: US-Israeli Relations 1953-1960*. Gainesville FL: University of Florida Press, 1993.
- Anwar Sadat Biography*. Online. Internet. 16 June 2003. Available <http://www.lbiblio.org/Sullivan/bios/Sadat-bio.html>.
- Ambrose, Stephen E. *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938*. New York: Penguin Books, USA, 1991.
- "The Bandung Conference." Online, Internet. 13 August 2003. Available [http://www.unesco.org/delegates/g77/history/historical background.html](http://www.unesco.org/delegates/g77/history/historical%20background.html)
- Ben-Svi, Abraham. *John F. Kennedy and the Politics of Arms Sales to Israel*. London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002.
- Cohen, Warren I. And Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, eds. *Lyndon Johnson Confronts The World – American Foreign Policy 1963-1968*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Dumbrell, John. *American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton*. London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1997.
- "Eight Point Fahd Plan, 1981." *Palestine Facts*. Online. Internet. 8 August 2003. Available http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_1967to1991_fahd_1981.php
- Fraser, T.G. *The USA in the Middle East Since World War II*. London: MacMillan Press, 1989.
- Gerges, Fawaz A. *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics 1955-1967*. Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1994.
- Grier, Peter. "The US and Israel" in *The Christian Science Monitor*. From the October 26, 2001 edition. Available

- <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1026/pls1-uspo>.
- Houghton, David Patrick. *US Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Hourani, Albert. *A History of the Arab Peoples*. New York: MJF Books, 1991.
- Johnson, Whittle. "Reagan and America's Democratic Mission." In *President Reagan And the World*. Eric J. Schmertz, Natalie Datlof and Alexej Ugrinsky, eds. Westport CT (Hofstra University): Greenwood Press, 1997.
- Kaplan, Robert D. *The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite*. New York: The Free Press, 1995.
- Little, Douglas. "A Fool's Errand: America and the Middle East, 1961-1969" in *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade*, Diane B. Kunz, ed. NY: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Nye, Joseph. "What New World Order?" in *Foreign Affairs Spring 1992*.
- Polk, William R. *The Arab World Today*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Rubin, Barry. "The Real Roots of Arab Anti-Americanism" *Foreign Affairs*, Nov-Dec 2002.
- Quandt, William B. *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*. Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1993.
- Schulzinger, Robert D. *American Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Spanier, John. *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*. Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1988.
- Yaqub, Salim. "Imperious Doctrines: US-Arab Relations from Dwight D. Eisenhower To George W. Bush" in *Diplomatic History* Fall, 2002.