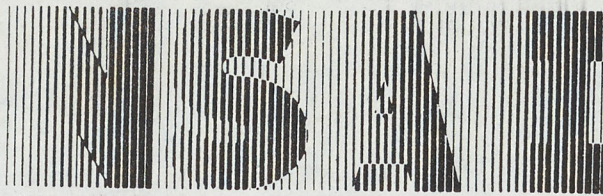


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THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTHWEST ASIA:

WHAT STRATEGIES FOR THE US?

by

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THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTHWEST ASIA

WHAT STRATEGIES FOR THE U.S.?

by

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the challenge to U.S. interests in the Middle East and Southwest Asia in the 1980s, to pose the key issue in determining our strategy toward the area, and to lay out as the take-off point for discussion alternative strategies toward this area that will integrate the full range of political, military, economic, and psychological resources that the U.S. can bring to bear.

On the way, I will discuss how the Middle East fits into our national priorities and what elements are essential to formulation of a national consensus as a basis for policy in pursuing the nation's interests there.

The Middle East in World Perspective

I start with the proposition that the United States' role as a world power in the 1990s and beyond will be shaped heavily by how we handle the Middle East problem in the 1980s. America's global position will be tested more severely in the Middle East and Southwestern Asia than it was in Vietnam because much more is at stake there.

The Middle East and Southwestern Asia will dominate the world stage for Americans in the 1980s as Europe did in the 1940s, Northeast Asia in the 1950s, and Southeast Asia in the 1960s. I am not saying we will have half a million



troops in this area by 1990. But the area will claim as high a level of national attention, engage a broader range of American interests and emotions, and have an even greater capacity to divide us.

In stating this proposition so starkly, I in no way intend to diminish the continuing critical importance of our relations with the other superpowers and with our allies. I acknowledge the significance of other potentially profound changes such as those which may now be underway in Eastern Europe.

But in terms of repeated shocks to major interests, continuing engagement of our highest officials, potential effect on our daily lives, and capacity to provoke nationwide controversy, this area will be center stage.

This is neither an idle nor a parochial statement. It is the starting point I suggest for a statement of priority.

The question it leads to is this: What priority in the scale of national interests should we assign to the involvement of our government in efforts to minimize or resolve conflict in the Middle East and Southwest Asia?

Answering this question is the first step in forming a national consensus on these issues. Without a clear and consistent political mandate, it will not be possible to conduct a coherent policy toward this complex area in the 1980s.

#### American Interests in the 1980s

My proposition about the importance of the Middle East in the 1980s may or may not seem overly dramatic. It should be the subject of discussion. Your judgment must take account of the fact that more globally vital issues -- and more important U.S. interests -- come together in this area than in any other part of the developing world today.



I might say at the outset that two points strike me as I review these interests:

- First, the list of American interests in this area has remained relatively constant over the last two decades, but the way we perceive these interests and talk about them changed dramatically in the mid-1970s. It is still changing. The challenge to our interests will become greater -- not less -- in this decade.
- Second, unlike the situation in the 1970s, all of our interests today are under active, simultaneous challenge. This creates a problem for the policy-maker more different and more serious than we may have recognized.

Noting very quickly what could happen to each of these interests in the near 1980s will give us a way to look at the dynamic area we are talking about and the dangers it poses for us.

First: We have an interest in the independence, stability and political orientation of the key states in the area -- independence because of our interest in seeing these states in a critical area remain free of Soviet domination, stability and political orientation because of the difficulty of pursuing the full range of our interests in unstable or hostile conditions.

The rapid pace of economic, technological, social, and political change brings with it the threat of instability that can profoundly alter the character of a nation and its orientation among the superpowers. It can jeopardize independence by inviting the involvement of the superpowers.

The pace of change in this area has accelerated sharply since the mid-1970s. Rarely has such a variety of developments hit one region in less than



one generation. That acceleration will continue. The revolution in Iran dramatized how the position of the United States, the global strategic balance, the economic health of poor and industrialized nations alike can be threatened by explosive internal change and superpower reaction to it.

There is also revolutionary change of a different kind in the evolving peace process between Israel, the Arab states, and the Palestinian movement. If the peace and normalization of relations could be expanded, the door to new opportunities for regional order would be opened.

Our second complex of interests can be stated this way: We have long recognized the strategic importance of preventing Soviet predominance in this area and of avoiding the confrontation which would result from a Soviet effort to achieve predominance there. In the 1980s, apart from the independent development of American and Soviet military power and barring a major reorientation in Eastern Europe, this volatile area could well be the principal arena for shaping the global balance of power in the 1990s.

The lines between East and West have been clearly drawn by precedent and practice in Europe and Northeast Asia, less clearly in Southeast Asia. There are no lines in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, and Soviet expansionism threatens the Free World's lifeblood there in a way that we have not experienced in more than three decades -- just at a time when the energy crunch is moving toward its peak.

Against that background, a new security system will have to emerge in this central area. That new system will require both the strengthening of the key countries in the area to resist external attack and internal subversion and a relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union that avoids



confrontation while blocking further Soviet aggression. It will also require clarity about the readiness of the United States to support the independence of these nations, and one of the most difficult issues we face is to define exactly what our security position and relationships should be.

Our third interest is in assuring the security and prosperity of Israel. The future of Israel and perhaps even of the Jewish people is at stake.

The U.S. has long had a firm commitment to the security of Israel. That commitment -- itself undiminished -- has taken on new dimensions. Israel's military setbacks in the first days of the 1973 War caused Israel itself to feel new fear and respect for growing Arab military strength. The oil embargo of 1973-1974 demonstrated how the growing economic power of the Arab states could also be used in ways that would both jeopardize global economic stability and drive sharp wedges between the United States and its closest allies. With the military option less viable since the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, use of the "oil weapon" may be more likely over time.

With all of these increased dangers, President Sadat's trip to Jerusalem and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty demonstrate that a fundamental shift in Arab attitudes has begun, that progress has been made in gaining acceptance for Israel, and that peace is possible. At the same time, the Palestinian liberation movement has won the recognition of most of the members of the United Nations, including our European allies. In the developing world, the Palestinians have become a symbol of many of the injustices which they feel they have suffered at the hands of the industrialized world. We can expect mounting pressures from new quarters against Western interests on behalf of the Palestinians.



We must be careful to say that neither a Palestinian settlement nor an Arab-Israeli peace will assure stability in the Middle East. Instability within the Arab states and conflicts among them will continue. Nevertheless, it is also true that a total deadlock on the Palestinian problem and utter lack of hope for these three million people who call themselves Palestinians will virtually assure perpetuation of the war against Israel. A continuing deadlock may well gradually force moderate governments into the rejectionist camp out of desperation, thereby influencing the political shape of the Middle East for the remainder of this century. It could produce a confrontation between the U.S. and its allies and leave the U.S. isolated from them, the Soviet Union, and much of the developing world.

Our fourth interest relates to the steady flow of oil and to Arab economic power derived from substantial financial reserves. Not only has the ever-growing need for a steady supply of vital oil made this area a tempting target for Soviet aggression. How the oil-producing states of the Middle East use their oil and money will have profound economic and political consequences both for the U.S. and global economic stability and for the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world in the industrialized and developing nations alike.

The coming decade may be the period in which the global supply-demand equation is under the greatest pressure. Although projections on this subject are constantly being discussed, it seems reasonable to say that the overall production of oil supply is unlikely to increase as much in the 1980s as overall demand for energy. It is also a period when shocks external to the supply-demand system are highly likely. We have already experienced the consequences



of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the Iranian revolution, and the Iran-Iraq War, and the possibility for further unexpected "shocks" is extensive.

The oil of the Middle East and the revenues derived from its sale at high prices have thrust the oil-producing nations of that area into a world position that they did not design for themselves. In addition to the questions of global energy supply, the problem of stabilizing the economies of nations in heavy debt from financing oil imports is one of the critical issues facing the world today. The possession of surplus revenues in large amounts puts the oil-producing governments squarely in the middle of a wide spectrum of North-South issues.

Our fifth interest is the newest comer to a prominent place on our list of interests in its own right: We have long had an interest in preventing an arms imbalance that would make war more likely, but in this decade we will have to face a collection of problems surrounding the build-up of advanced technology weapons, including nuclear weapons.

The U.S. has since the 1960s been a significant supplier of conventional arms to moderate nations in the Middle East. Through the same period, the U.S. has worked against the proliferation of nuclear weapons into this area and has urged our industrialized allies to join us in this effort. But the manufacture of conventional arms in the area and the development of nuclear devices are advancing.

On the one hand, it is difficult to deny nations of the region access to reasonable supplies of advanced weapons necessary to their own defense. It is unrealistic to think of formal arms limitation without peace -- Arab-Israeli peace, reduction of tension among Arabs, some limitation of the Soviet threat,



and restraint by all suppliers of arms. On the other hand, there are compelling arguments for looking toward some effort at arms limitation, especially in the nuclear area.

Our sixth interest is our concern for the credibility of American support for principles essential to strengthening world order. Principles like the peaceful resolution of disputes, freedom from discrimination on grounds of religion or ethnic background, self-determination of peoples, the inadmissibility of taking territory by force have been accepted by the world community as principles essential to world peace.

There will be no argument that "credibility" is a critical element of American power. But there will be argument when someone asks: "Credibility about what?"

-- One school will reply that it is important that adversaries see U.S. military power as a believable threat and that friends believe we will use it in their support. There has been much talk about restoring credibility in this area.

-- Another school asks what America stands for in the world. Does it support the principles of the United Nations Charter? In the eyes of many, both in the industrialized and in the developing worlds today, American credibility in this area is in grave jeopardy.

We have had a long debate in this country about the role of principle in American foreign policy. The time has come in a world where power is increasingly diffused to see both military might and principle as critical elements of American power. The principles of the Charter were written from the experience of two world wars on the threshold of the nuclear age for the literally vital purpose of preventing a war that would genuinely engulf the entire world.



### A Particular Question About the Threat

As I said in introducing this review of our interests, what is different in the 1980s is that all of them are under challenge at the same time. We will discuss that point in more detail later. In the meantime it is important before discussing possible policy approaches to give special attention to the interrelationship between two of our interests and the threats to them.

We have an interest in the independence, stability, and political orientation of the key states in the area and an interest in preventing Soviet domination of the area. Today those interests are challenged both by the rapid pace of economic, technological, social, and political change and by the constant efforts of the Soviet Union to enhance its position in the area by exploiting change for its own purposes. It is essential in any given situation to understand exactly what the cause of a threat to U.S. interests is -- whether the cause is indigenous or whether it originates in Moscow. We need to take a moment to look at the exact nature of the threat as these two sources -- regional change and Soviet pressures -- are involved.

When we speak of our interest in the independence of key states, "independence" is a way of saying "freedom from Soviet or other outside domination." But it's worth noting three specific concerns:

- First: The breach of any nation's independence as in Afghanistan has profound consequences for the future of order in the world. I do believe it is one of the hard, cold interests of the United States to uphold the principles of the United Nations Charter.



-- Second: Expansion of Soviet control in any form affects the global strategic balance. Even though there are no strategic commodities like oil in Afghanistan, it makes a difference that the world sees the Soviet Union as the advancing and the U.S. as the retreating power. In addition, the presence of Soviet military forces in Afghanistan increases the direct threat to Pakistan, Baluchistan, parts of Iran, and ultimately the Persian Gulf.

-- Third: Specifically in Southwest Asia, Soviet control in the oil-producing countries or at the Strait of Hormuz would give the Soviet Union control over the flow of oil literally vital to our allies.

Before we leave this concern for the independence of these countries, we must examine briefly exactly how their independence might be curbed and exactly how our interests would be affected. In other words, exactly what is the threat to our interest?

-- The Soviet administrative and military invasion of Afghanistan is easy to identify as loss of Afghan independence. The invasion came a year and a half after a takeover by an indigenous Communist-style party. They were imbued with the Marxist-Leninist ideology and approach, but the coup seemed to grow out of Afghan social and political dynamics and did not seem to be engineered from Moscow. The Afghans today, however, are denied the freedom to set their own policies and to determine their own relationships. The U.S. is denied freedom to work out with Afghan authorities acting freely in their own interests a relationship built on whatever interests we have in common.



- In South Yemen, the degree of Soviet influence is substantial, but the degree of Soviet control is less clear. The Soviet military have formal access to naval facilities. Soviet, Cuban, and East European advisers play a significant role in South Yemeni military capability. In addition to the Soviet presence there is an indigenous Marxist government, as there was in Afghanistan after the April 1978 coup. Soviet control is by no means certain, but the combination of the government's own posture and the Soviet presence has so far prevented a normal relationship.
- In Iraq and Syria, also signatories of Soviet friendship treaties with Soviet-equipped military forces, the governments are controlled by the Ba'ath party, a non-Marxist Arab party with a socialist bent. While they may listen to the Soviets because on occasion they want Soviet support or arms, Moscow cannot be said to exercise any degree of control.
- In Iran, two questions arise:
- There is the long-term possibility that a leftist group might control the government there and involve the Communist party, which has markedly improved its organization and position since the revolution. Depending on the political composition of such a government, Soviet influence would be greater or less.
  - The weakening of central authority opens the door to declarations of autonomy by local authorities and invitations of Soviet support which could lead to establishment of puppet regimes.



-- Finally, there are the liberation movements like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) which the Soviets support materially because of their attack on the established order and their widespread popular support. In my judgment, those movements wish to retain their independence as any nationalist movement but also will pay some price for support.

The net of this is that our interests are seriously affected mainly when Soviet influence reaches the point where indigenous leadership no longer independently makes final decisions -- where to sell oil, how to relate to neighbors and other powers, how to use their military forces. As long as indigenous leadership retains the capacity to assess its own interests and make its own decisions, the problems we have to deal with in our relationship with them are not all made in Moscow; they are a combination of local forces and Soviet influence.

The Soviets have most commonly come close to that degree of influence by working politically through internal social and political dynamics. The direct total takeover on the Afghan model is a threat that cannot be ignored, but concentrating on that as the most likely danger will risk overlooking the broader techniques by which the Soviets have gained influence. It would seem to be worth a good deal more effort than we have expended to understand what makes countries vulnerable or resistant to this kind of Soviet-supported influence.

Moving on to our second area of concern -- stability and political orientation -- poses a definitional problem right at the outset. How can we speak of "stability" in the midst of change which is almost inevitably destabilizing to some degree? Yet we use the word repeatedly, so we need to reach some



understanding about what our interest isn't and what it is. I am also coupling the question of "political orientation" with stability because, in the end, that has a lot to do with determining how we judge the results of political change.

On the one hand, there are some Americans who seem to operate from assumptions suggesting that the U.S. interest lies in protecting the status quo. For instance, some argue that we should somehow have used force or supported the use of force to bring the Iranian revolution under control. The same people argued against any form of U.S. intervention in the earlier 1970s to try to address potential causes of revolution. Others argue that the correct U.S. posture is to back established friendly regimes and to keep opposition elements at arms length. This is often put in terms of "supporting our friends" or "not letting our friends down." Still others see various nationalist or liberation groups mainly as subversive arms of the Soviet Union to be blocked.

The questions raised by this approach are whether some movements can be stopped, whether trying to block them is worth the cost, and what if any would be the exact U.S. role if a blocking effort were made.

On the other hand, there are those who argue that our future in this region will be jeopardized if we use our power to resist change. Secretary Vance, for instance, addressed this issue in Chicago on May 1, 1979, after a year of revolution in Iran and mounting resistance in Afghanistan to the Communist-style government there. He spoke on meeting the challenge of a changing world: Our future, he said, will be endangered if we react in frustration and use our power to resist change in the world or if we employ military power when it would do more harm than good. If we Americans appreciate the extraordinary



strengths we have, he went on, and if we understand the nature of the changes taking place in the world, then we have every reason to be confident about our future. Our challenge is to use effectively the various kinds of power and influence we possess in order to insure the evolution of these events in the manner least disruptive and most congenial to our interests.

The questions raised by this approach are how the U.S. can help insure the evolution of events in non-disruptive ways and what our role should be if events reach the point of imminent threat to our interests.

In other words, there are some who would find stability in coming as close as possible to protecting the status quo by supporting existing regimes. There are others who would find stability in trying to shape change in an orderly way even if this means some change in the character of regimes. In each case, there is a commitment to the independence and integrity of nations; the difference lies in the approach to the political management of internal change.

Two basic questions, therefore, are (1) where does stability lie and (2) what is the proper focus of the American commitment to support stability.

When we try to determine what we mean by "internal stability" we come to observations like the following:

- First of all, we ought to acknowledge honestly that the degree of our concern for stability is partly determined by a government's political orientation. If instability moves it toward the West, our interest is different from that in the more common situation where violent change moves a regime toward closer affinity with the U.S.S.R. Our attitude toward the present resistance movement in Afghanistan and our concern about the course of the revolution in Iran make this case.



-- Next, we should put out in the open our premise that the U.S. has more going for it than the U.S.S.R. in a straightforward competition for influence in this region. We simply have more of what the people in the area want in terms of our potential cooperation in their development, including an ideology rooted in the elements of self-determination and protection of their full independence in contrast to the Soviet objective of imperial domination. Another way of putting the point is in the familiar statement that Americans are builders and thrive on stability while the Soviets do better exploiting instability to destroy the established order. From this premise flow two key points about our interest in the internal stability of nations in this area.

- First: Negotiated political change is more likely to produce change that is less threatening to our interests than change suppressed by violence or change brought about by violence. One reason for this is that negotiated change is more likely to produce a situation in which common interests are assessed rationally -- a situation in which the U.S. has maximum opportunity to exercise its comparative advantage.
- Second: If negotiated political change is a key element in the kind of stability that serves our interests, it follows that the U.S. has a strong interest in the peaceful negotiated resolution of internal conflict. I say, "We have an interest...." I do not say that we will be able or have a right to play a



role in resolving internal conflict in all cases. I do say that our policy should lead us immediately to questions about how internal conflict can be resolved as early as possible and what role the U.S. can play. Peacemaking -- in this case, internal peacemaking -- can shape events in a way that may protect common interests.

### Key Policy Issues

This brings us to the critical question of how far the U.S. can properly go in addressing the causes of potential internal conflict in other nations.

We certainly should not get ourselves in a position of looking as if we think we know more about how to run another country than its own leaders do. In practical political and diplomatic terms, it is also very difficult for our leaders to tell other leaders that they should or shouldn't be managing their elections in one way or another, or that they need to crack down on corruption, or that they should draw opposition elements into the government.

But there are critical times when our advice and help are asked, as in Iran in 1978 and in Lebanon today.

### The First Issue: Determining a Policy Approach

If this analysis of our interests leads to the conclusion that an active U.S. policy in this area is justified, the next question is to devise a policy approach -- a strategy for pursuing these interests.

Let me underscore at the outset those words "policy approach." We cannot in this conference do the Secretary of State's job for him and devise detailed policy to pursue each of the main interests I have mentioned. The questions