THE US-ISRAELI PARTNERSHIP & AMERICA'S SEARCH FOR STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 1945-1974

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ABSTRACT

Contrary to popular academic assumption, the story of US Middle East strategy may be summarized by two key characteristics: reaction and incoherence. These descriptors are especially true of Washington's strategic partnership with Tel Aviv – an arrangement that emerged relatively late in the development of US regional strategy, in response to the stagnation of primary efforts to establish a strategic arrangement centred on US-Arab partnerships. The US-Israeli partnership was therefore not an inevitable evolution of US strategy, but rather a product of the political pragmatism of the Johnson and Nixon administrations (not to mention a highly spurious interpretation of the events of the Jordanian civil war of September 1970). Only in 1973, following yet another round of Arab-Israeli hostilities, did the US begin to revise its arrangement with Israel to redress the balance between US-Israeli and US-Arab relations.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DDRS	Declassified Documents Reference System
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
IDF	Israeli Defence Forces
NSC	National Security Council

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INTRODUCTION

AMERICA'S SEARCH FOR STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Since 1949, the United States has given more financial aid to Israel – a wealthy, industrialised country, geographically smaller than the state of New Jersey – than it has to all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean combined.[1] In fact, in the year 2003 alone, American aid to Israel equated to an astonishing $10,393,258 every day.[2] In addition to this massive economic support, the US has also shown great loyalty to Israel diplomatically, most recently over the Israeli Defence Forces' controversial war with Arab guerrillas in southern Lebanon and Gaza.[3]

The remarkable scale of this assistance is reflective of the strategic value that Washington attaches to its partnership with Tel Aviv – a value that, while of questionable merit, is repeatedly emphasised to Americans by the influential Israel lobby, as recently discussed by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt.[4] However, contrary to popular assumption, American Middle East strategy has not always centred upon close partnership with Israel. It is the intention of this thesis to explore the process by which America's Middle East strategy developed into the staunchly pro-Israeli approach which dominates today.

Much of the literature that explores America's activities in the Middle East has assumed that the development of American regional strategy – from Truman's Northern Tier shield to the modern alliance with Tel Aviv – represents an inevitable and coherent evolution. Certainly, it is fair to say that

[1] Richard Curtiss, Centre for Arab Culture and Dialogue (1998), 'The Cost of Israel to the American People', *Al-Hewar Magazine*, July/August, http://www.alhewar.com/CurtissEtAl.html (accessed 13.06.06).

[2] United States Agency for International Development (n.d.), 'Greenbook', http:/qesdb.cdie.org/gbk/ (accessed 09.11.05).

[3] Daniel McGrory, Beirut Correspondent (2006), 'Why do they give weapons to Israel and food to us?', *The Times*, July 26.

[4] John J. Mearsheimer & Stephen M. Walt (2006), 'The Israel Lobby', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (March).

America's strategic objective remained constant. That objective was regional stability: the precondition required for containment of Communist influences, suppression of 'radical' Arab nationalism, the continued security of US economic interests (interests that included, but were not limited to, oil), and the preservation of Israel.[5] However, it is the hypothesis of this author that, aside from consistency of objective, the only other common theme to be found in American Middle East strategy is a tendency for incoherent, reactive bilateralism.

Despite the obvious strategic significance of the Middle East, at the close of the Second World War the United States did not have a clearly defined strategy for achieving its ambition of stability in the region. Indeed, as late as 1953, the US still considered the Middle East to be a primarily British responsibility; Truman only engaged in the Northern Tier because it was unavoidable.[6] Under the strategic dynamism of the Eisenhower administration, the US finally took a lead in the core states, but, frustrated in its attempt to realise a comprehensive regional strategy, Washington's approach swiftly reverted to incoherence. Pointedly, these early efforts were not focused upon developing a partnership with Israel, but achieving a strategic arrangement with the Arab bloc. In fact, it was only in the late 1960s, once the pro-Arab option had been comprehensively exhausted, that the concept of a strategic arrangement with Tel Aviv came to the fore.

The emergence of the US-Israeli partnership was therefore not an inevitable development, but rather a pragmatic reaction to the strategic uncertainty which had plagued Washington since the collapse of Eisenhower's pan-Arab efforts in the late 1950s; a 'next best' option, promoted by Israel's remarkable victory in the Six Day War of 1967 and apparent contribution to the pacification of Jordan following the outbreak of civil war in September 1970. More importantly, as a strategic solution for Middle East instability, the US-Israeli partnership was as incoherent (and therefore inadequate) as previous models had been. The issues which plagued the Middle East were sensitive and required nuanced, region-wide engagement if they were to be resolved successfully. In light of these needs, Washington's controversial alliance with Tel Aviv – blunt and bilateral – was entirely ill-suited to advanced America's objective of lasting stability. In fact, it actually threatened to exacerbate existing problems. Blinded by its unique interpretation of the Jordan crisis, the White House failed to identify this danger and therefore made no effort to amend its approach, thereby leaving the American Middle East system vulnerable to shock, but also laying the foundations of a strategic model that continues to dominate Middle East geo-politics to this day.

[5] Avi Shlaim (1988), 'The Impact of U.S. Policy in the Middle East', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter), 16; NSC (1953), 'United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East, July 14', *Declassified Documents Reference System*, hereafter *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100083997, 3-4.

[6] Halford L. Hoskins (1953), 'Some Aspects of the Security Problem in the Middle East', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (March), 189.

CHAPTER ONE

AMERICAN STRATEGY AND THE MIDDLE EAST, 1945-1969

From the late 1940s it was increasingly clear that the United States needed to redefine its approach to the Middle East in order to compensate for Britain's deteriorating position. Six years of total war with Germany had severely drained Whitehall's resources, both economically and politically, to the inevitable detriment of Britain's imperial vitality. Although America's nascent anti-Soviet strategy predicated a continued British role in the Middle East, such a reality could not be guaranteed. Certainly, Britain enjoyed considerable influence in the region, thanks to its traditional overlordship and extensive military presence. However, with the Foreign Office facing mounting pressure from indigenous movements to withdraw Britain's colonial control and the Exchequer questioning its capacity to meet the financial burden of maintaining bases in Cyprus, Jordan, Iraq and Suez, Britain's strategic primacy in the Middle East was waning.

The United States did not replace Great Britain as the strategic guardian of the Middle East overnight however. The strategic redefinition was a lengthy and piecemeal process, which saw the United States take a number of small steps towards regional primacy. In the first instance, Britain's abdication of Greece led Washington to adopt increasing responsibility for the strategically significant Northern Tier states. Directly bordering the Soviet Union, Greece, Turkey and Iran formed the basis of an enduring American security strategy that sought to shield the Middle East from an anticipated Soviet expansion. However, there was no effort to incorporate the core Middle Eastern states into an American system at this stage; the Northern Tier strategy simply provided a barrier between the Soviets and the Middle East and made no effort to usurp Britain's primacy in the core states.

In fact, Washington did not seek to expand the American system into the heart of the Middle East until the mid-1950s and, as before, the strategic expansion was reactive rather than proactive. Despite Truman's hopes that British primacy could be restored in the Middle East, vigorous anti-

colonial and nationalist movements within the region were making London's position increasingly untenable. When Egypt – the cornerstone of British power in the Middle East – fell in a nationalist revolution, it was clear that the United States could no longer rely on Whitehall to deliver security in the heart of the region. In light of this revelation, Washington resolved to assume responsibility for the core states and so set about cultivating an American system to replace the ailing British position. Because of the reactive nature of this transition, the US 'defence in depth' strategy echoed key elements of the British system, not least the strategic imperative to establish partnerships with leading Arab regimes.

Given the general direction of American Middle East strategy from 1945, the eventual decision to investigate the option of strategic partnership with Israel was by no means an inevitable development; despite steadily expanding US-Israeli ties, Washington's early involvement with Tel Aviv had been predominantly a matter of silencing Israeli sabre-rattling, rather than grooming Israel for regional leadership. The strategic reorientation towards Israel therefore represented a significant shift in American foreign policy. Pointedly however, this change in direction was not a consequence of strategic pro-activity, but the same reactionary policy-making that had characterised the earlier Northern Tier and pro-Arab 'defence in depth' strategies: As early as 1956, the difficulty of establishing a suitable US-Arab partnership was putting Washington under pressure to further revise America's Middle East strategy. Disillusioned by the Arab option but lacking viable alternatives, the United States was left wandering in a wilderness of strategic uncertainty which stretched through several administrations. It was only in 1967, following Israel's startling victory in the Six Day War, that the United States finally identified partnership with Israel as a viable solution to its strategic search and began to re-orientate its foreign policy accordingly.

THE NORTHERN TIER SHIELD STRATEGY

As early as 1945, the US State Department feared that Moscow's strategic ambitions included an expansion into the Middle East. This concern was confirmed during post-war negotiations, when the Soviets sought to consolidate their Eastern European buffer by securing access to Turkey's strategic Dardanelles Straits, as well as the Iranian oilfields which had fuelled the Red Army's sweeping Westward advance.[1] Facing massive military and political pressure from the Soviet bloc, the Northern Tier states – Greece, Turkey and Iran – appealed to the US for protection. Although it would be eight years before President Eisenhower would elaborate his Domino Theory, in 1946, Truman's Undersecretary of State, Dean Acheson, warned that a failure to support the Northern Tier supplicants would bear catastrophic results for America. The primary concern was Greece, where the

[1] Douglas Little (2002), *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (IB Tauris & Co. Ltd: London), 121; Scott Lucas (1999), *Freedom's War: The US crusade against the Soviet Union, 1945-56* (Manchester University Press: Manchester), 7; DOS (1945), 'Draft Memorandum for President Truman', attached to 'Dean Acheson to Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, October 9', *FRUS: 1945*, 8, 45-8.

nationalist regime had been engaged in civil war with Soviet-backed Communist forces since 1944. As Acheson warned, "the corruption of Greece would infect Iran and all to the east. It would also carry infection to Africa though Asia Minor and Egypt".[2]

Pre-empting George Kennan's proposal for a strategy of containment by almost a year, Truman reacted to the Communist threat by authorising considerable support for the Greek nationalists, as well as the vulnerable Turkish and Iranian regimes, establishing strategic partnerships with the three states and the foundations of an anti-Soviet shield. In February of the following year, Britain was forced to discontinue its sponsorship of several clients in the Eastern Mediterranean. In light of Britain's abdication and the very real Soviet pressure on the Northern Tier, the US had no choice but to respond directly to the threat if Washington wished to see Greece, Turkey and Iran remain Western assets. Before long, the Northern Tier had become the backbone of America's security strategy for the region directly south of the USSR. By 1970, over ninety percent of American military aid to the Middle East – some $5,417 million – had been spent developing and maintaining the capacity of the Northern Tier troika to resist and deter a Soviet advance.[3]

It is noteworthy that America's initial strategy for the Middle East did not extend beyond those states which had already come under direct threat from the Soviet Union. The reason is simple: although the State Department believed that the Soviets aspired to hegemony throughout the oil-producing Middle East, there was little evidence of an immediate threat to the core states and therefore the administration saw no reason to extend its strategic commitment beyond the Northern Tier shield.[4] Although short-sighted, this decision matched the conventional wisdom of the day. As Kennan explains, Americans believed that the Communist threat could be "contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force" at strategic locations.[5] By consolidating the Northern Tier troika, Truman had created a Western-orientated militarised frontier – a counter-force capable of containing the Soviet Union's expansionist ambitions for the Middle East – and therefore could reasonably assume that strategic engagement elsewhere in the region was superfluous.

In April 1949, Washington established another anti-Soviet shield: the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Unlike the Northern Tier, NATO was a pre-meditated strategic development; a sophisticated umbrella alliance that not only provided a shield at the critical Soviet frontier, but also engaged the wider region in collective defence. In addition to military security, NATO was instrumental in developing the economic and political security of Western Europe through its

[2] Dean Acheson (1969), *Present at the Creation* (W.W. Norton & Co. Ltd: New York), 219.

[3] Aid figures correct for 1949-69. Cathy Tackney (1972), 'Dealing Arms in the Middle East. Part 1: History and Strategic Considerations', *MERIP Reports*, No. 8 (March-April), 4.

[4] DOD (1947), 'The Situation up to 1957: Ten Year Projections, a note by the Secretaries for the Joint Strategic Plans Committee, December 11', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number CK3100346262, paragraph 9d.

[5] George Kennan (1947), 'Sources of Soviet Conduct', *Foreign Affairs*, July, 566-82, Part III.

association with Point Four Aid and the European Recovery Program. The success of the NATO model created the potential for a transformation of the Northern Tier shield from a simple barricade into a more comprehensive regional umbrella. However, reticent to become entangled unnecessarily in the Middle East, Washington did not exploit this opportunity.

The following spring, Truman's own National Security Council published a new global strategy document that urged the administration to become more widely committed to strategic leadership. Emphasising the threat of Soviet ideological warfare, NSC 68 demanded that America frustrate the "hostile designs" of the enemy by committing to "the steady development of the moral and material strength of the free world" as a whole.[6] The United States responded to this rally cry by diversifying its strategic commitments around the globe, especially in areas like Southeast Asia and Latin America which had been considered strategically peripheral by Kennan.[7] However, despite its newfound mandate to global leadership, the Truman administration still did not seek to extend America's role in the Middle East. Ultimately, the administration saw no reason to take a lead in the core states; despite his foray into the Northern Tier, the president still considered the Middle East to be a British responsibility. Whitehall's well-established relationship with the region, not to mention its sprawling base in the Suez Canal Zone – then the largest military installation in the world – made Britain the obvious guardian of Middle Eastern security.[8] In 1946, Britain's post-war condition had forced America to take responsibility for a Soviet threat in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, once the strategic vacuum along the Soviet frontier had been filled and the immediate threat neutralised, the United States saw no reason to further erode the British position. With war brewing in Korea and tensions rising in Europe, the Americans were content to spread the strategic burden and leave the heart of the Middle East in the hands of their British allies.[9]

TOWARDS A STRATEGY OF DEFENSE IN DEPTH

The problem with relying on Britain to stabilise the Middle East was that the deterioration of Whitehall's influence in the region was not limited to the Northern Tier. As early as the autumn of 1945, British officials were publicly questioning the future of Britain's role in the region's core states.[10] The post-war government had hoped to revive its primacy in the Middle East through sponsorship of the Arab League, a post-colonial collective centred on Britain's client regimes in Egypt, Iraq and

[6] NSC (1950), 'NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security, April 14', *FRUS: 1950*, Vol. 1, 'Conclusions and Recommendations'.

[7] John Lewis Gaddis (2005), *Strategies of Containments: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Oxford University Press: Oxford), 89.

[8] Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *British Documents at the End of Empire Project*, Series B, Part 4, Vol. I, http://commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/british.htm (accessed 04.10.06).

[9] DOS (1950), 'Minutes of the US-UK Political Military Conversations, October 26', *FRUS: 1950*, 5, 233-38; Douglas Little (2002), *American Orientalism*, 126.

[10] DOS (1945), 'Draft Memorandum for President Truman', 45-48.

Transjordan. In partnership with the Middle East Supply Centre – an economic development agency established by Britain in 1941 – the League was expected to perpetuate Britain's influence as well as form the "basis of stability" in the Middle East.[11] However, these expectations were soon frustrated. The creation of Israel in 1948 sparked a blaze of Arab nationalism which challenged not only the Israeli imposition but also the continued presence of Britain and France. Rather than defending British interests, the Arab League had become the champion of anti-colonialist nationalism. Even Egypt, the cornerstone of Britain's power in the Middle East, was growing increasingly hostile to Whitehall's primacy.

By 1949, Britain knew that it could not continue its duties in the Middle East without American assistance. Indeed, during the US-UK talks that November, the British delegation expressly invited the United States "to assume greater responsibility in the region".[12] The US was reticent to accept the invitation, but did agree to participate in several cooperative projects, beginning with the Tripartite Declaration of 1950, which placed a limit on arms sales within the fractious Arab-Israeli Middle East. Although joining the Declaration was little more than a diplomatic gesture by Washington, the months that followed saw the United States drawn into ever greater strategic engagement with the region, as Britain's growing inability to fulfil its strategic responsibilities in the heart of the Middle East forced Washington to increase its own involvement. However, despite this escalating American participation, Truman did not move towards establishing an American strategy for the heart of the Middle East. As far as the administration was concerned, American activity in the Middle East was a temporary expedient; a provisional arrangement which would refortify the British position with a view to returning full responsibility to Whitehall as soon as possible.

It is no surprise therefore, that Whitehall's proposed Allied Middle East Command (MEC) received mixed support from Washington. Hoping to replicate the NATO model, the MEC was intended "to integrate Egypt and the Suez Base into a collective security pact" that would dominate both the Middle East and Africa.[13] The Truman administration endorsed the British-led project on the grounds that such an alliance would indeed be strategically advantageous, arranging "modest amounts of military assistance to key Arab states" to facilitate its formation.[14] However, while Washington was happy to provide economic resources and diplomatic gravity to support Britain's strategic alliance, the Americans still expected Britain to shoulder the primary burden. As official documents record, US objectives during the December 1951 deliberations included the "maintenance of UK primary military responsibility for the Middle East within the broader framework of the currently

[11] Halford L. Hoskins (1953), 'Some Aspects of the Security Problem in the Middle East', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (March), 190.

[12] 'Statement by the US and UK Groups', 14 November 1949, *FRUS: 1949*, 6, 61-64; Douglas Little (2002), *American Orientalism*, 124.

[13] Barry Rubin, 'America and the Egyptian Revolution, 1950-1957', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Spring), 76.

[14] Douglas Little (2002), *American Orientalism*, 126.

quadripartite proposed Middle East Command".[15] Clearly, though the United States was in favour of establishing a defence in depth for the Middle East, the idea of taking a lead in achieving that strategy was alien to the Truman White House.

As it transpired, America's ambivalence was not the only obstacle to establishing the MEC. Despite Egypt's anticipated central role in the Command, Cairo was not invited to initial negotiations. This mistake coincided with a string of diplomatic blunders that aggravated the Egyptians, leading Cairo to reject the MEC project outright.[16] The State Department resolved to pursue plans for a Middle East collective despite Egypt's disinterest, but the project faced an uphill struggle.

After several months of fruitless negotiation, hopes of establishing an anti-Soviet collective for the Middle East and Africa were rekindled by the Egyptian revolution of July 1952. Despite damaging relations with Whitehall by forcing the British-installed monarchy into exile, General Muhammad Naguib's nationalist regime showed considerable interest in aligning Cairo with the US. If the United States could convince Britain and Egypt to pool their resources, a firm foundation would be established from which to build a pro-Western alliance. To allay Cairo's fears of Egyptian subordination, revised proposals for the regional pact dropped the term 'command' from the name in favour of 'defence organisation'. Meanwhile, both the Marshall Plan and Point Four aid were extended to friendly regimes in the Middle East, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Israel, in an effort to promote the embryonic Middle East Defence Organisation (MEDO).[17] Despite this apparent dynamism, however, Washington was slow to capitalise practically on Naguib's interest.[18]

While negotiating an alliance between London and Cairo seemed an excellent idea, achieving such an agreement was quite different. Promoting Naguib's Egypt would inevitably undermine America's existing arrangement with Britain by eroding Whitehall's capacity to influence the region, as well as further aggravating those who had installed Egypt's now exiled monarchy. Moreover, post-colonial Anglo-Egyptian hostility threatened the status of the primary Western security interest in the region – Britain's sprawling Suez base.[19] Of course, if Britain could be encouraged to cede the Suez facilities to Cairo, then the Anglo-Egyptian contest would be resolved and Cairo would be strong enough to dominate the region on America's behalf. However, the Arab nations, including Egypt, had yet to demonstrate willingness to employ their resources in defending the region from the Soviets. As a White House report observed in January 1953, "it is doubtful whether the [Arab] leaders even with the best of intentions – so far largely absent from a Western point of view – can bring about the orderly

[15] 'Steering Group on Preparations for Talks between the President and Prime Minister Churchill, Negotiating Paper, TCT D-4/1 c, December 31, 1951', *DDRS*, Document Number: CK3100392121.

[16] Halford L. Hoskins (1953), 'Some Aspects of the Security Problem in the Middle East', 194.

[17] Halford L. Hoskins (1953), 'Some Aspects of the Security Problem in the Middle East', 190.

[18] Barry Rubin (1982), 'America and the Egyptian Revolution, 1950-1957', 76-7.

[19] Halford L. Hoskins (1953), 'Some Aspects of the Security Problem in the Middle East', 197.

changes desirable to the West".[20] Indeed, it seemed eminently likely that Cairo would not simply renege on its duties as regional guardian, but actually abuse its power to make good on its threats against Israel.

Truman's fundamental belief that Britain should be responsible for the Middle East, combined with the complicating factor of the Arab-Israeli conflict, prevented the administration from shifting regional strategy away from the traditional British arrangement favoured since the mid-1940s. Certainly, America was much more involved in the Middle East than before, but this increased activity was inspired by the desire to rebuild Britain's influence, not replace it. Consequently, when Naguib's ambassador, Major Ali Sabry, left the MEDO negotiations for Cairo, he returned "empty-handed and personally embittered" by Washington's failure to elevate Egypt at the expense of Britain.[21]

THE EISENHOWER DEFENCE IN DEPTH STRATEGY

The accession of the Eisenhower administration in 1953 marked a significant new direction in American strategy, particularly in the Middle East. In terms of global strategy, the new team argued that Truman had not done enough to challenge the Communist threat, but noted that the financial demands of a prolonged conflict were damaging America's vitality.[22] Determined to win the Cold War without sacrificing the American way of life, the Eisenhower-Dulles New Look strategy sought to increase pressure on the Communist bloc through nuclear brinksmanship and covert operations, including "propaganda, political action; economic warfare [and]… subversion", while simultaneously reducing the cost of the Cold War for average Americans.[23]

The Middle East was certainly an area in which the United States could increase the pressure on the Soviets. However, America's existing strategy for the region had failed to establish systems capable of such a task. The ongoing inability to achieve a convincing Middle East defence in depth under Britain's strategic leadership forced the new administration to recognise that Whitehall was incapable of dominating the Middle East in the manner that had been previously believed. Indeed, America's reliance upon Britain's position seemed to have caused the US more harm than good. While it was true that "the UK [had] the only easily available Western military forces for the initial protection of the Middle East in case of sudden attack", John Foster Dulles' meeting with President

[20] 'White House report on a US psychological warfare strategy program for the Middle East: Annex A (PSB D-22), January 8, 1953', *DDRS*, Document Number CK3100474054.

[21] Barry Rubin (1982), 'America and the Egyptian Revolution, 1950-1957', 78.

[22] 'Solarium Project: Principle Points made by JFD, May 8, 1953', *US National Archives*, Department of State, Lot 64 D 563: Records of the Policy Planning Staff, 1947-1953, Box 64, NSC 131/141/153; 'Eisenhower speech to American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 16, 1953', *Public Papers of the Presidents: Dwight D. Eisenhower: 1953*, 183.

[23] 'NSC 5412, Covert Operations, March 15, 1954', *Eisenhower Papers*, White House Office Files: Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Box 7; 'Eisenhower press conference, November 11, 1953', *Public Papers of the Presidents: Dwight D. Eisenhower: 1953*, 760.

Naguib in the spring of 1953 convinced the Secretary of State that Britain's ongoing colonial presence, rather than being an asset to be preserved, was in fact the primary obstacle to achieving peace and stability in the region.[24] Moreover, America's efforts to maintain British primacy in the Middle East had been interpreted by some as an endorsement of colonialism, thereby tainting America's image in the eyes of the local population. For these reasons, Anglo-American cooperation in Middle East strategy was deemed to be "of increasingly doubtful value".[25] In light of these revelations, Secretary Dulles abandoned the Anglo-centric MEDO plan in favour of a new approach that would incorporate the heart of the Middle East directly into American strategy.

In January, a report submitted to the White House had observed that the Middle East had become "a military vacuum, an economic slum, a political anachronism, and a house divided against itself. The area [was] ripe for revolutionary change." The important question was whether the inevitable revolution would result in progress "favorable to the West" or whether it would follow a "path leading to chaos, fragmentation, and eventual Soviet control". Noting that "the ultimate end of US policy [was] to insure that the area and its resources [were] available to strengthen the free world", the report concluded that the "the US [could] no longer play the role of the detached middle man or honest broker in [the region's] political or international disputes".[26] If the Soviets were to be denied an opportunity to expand their influence, then America would have to take a more decisive role in the heart of the Middle East.

In order to fill the Middle East vacuum, the administration needed to develop strategic partnerships within the region independent of Whitehall; just as the North Tier troika acted as America's deputies along the Soviet frontier, the US now needed to cultivate an American system in the core states. Crucially, despite the transition from British to American leadership, the strategic focus remained firmly on developing partnerships with the Arab states, not the Israelis. To this end, the administration deployed comprehensive propaganda campaigns to reverse the tide of Arab anti-Americanism.[27] In those states where mere propaganda was insufficient to restore US-Arab relations – specifically Iran and Syria – covert operations sought to replace hostile incumbent regimes with pro-American clients.[28] Once a tentative pro-American position had been established, the administration set about cultivating an American-sponsored Middle East collective to provide stability and security to the region.

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[24] 'White House report on a US psychological warfare strategy program for the Middle East: Annex A (PSB D-22), January 8, 1953', *DDRS*, Document Number CK3100474054; Fayez Sayegh (1959), 'Arab Nationalism and Soviet-American Relations', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 324 (July), 104-6.

[25] Halford L. Hoskins (1953), 'Some Aspects of the Security Problem in the Middle East', 196.

[26] 'White House report on a US psychological warfare strategy program for the Middle East: Annex A (PSB D-22), January 8, 1953'.

[27] 'NSC 155/1: US Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East, 14 July 1953', *FRUS: 1952-54*, 9, 397-98, 401-2.

[28] Stephen E. Ambrose (2003), *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (Pocket Books: London), 342; Douglas Little (2003), '1949-1958, Syria: Early Experiments in Covert Action', *Press for Conversion*, No. 15, 13.

Although Egypt was the Middle East's primary geo-strategic prize, the United States was uncertain how to harness Naguib's nationalist regime to American strategy. In an effort to develop closer ties with Cairo, the Eisenhower administration endorsed petitions for Britain to cede control of the Suez Canal base to Egypt. In truth, the advent of thermonuclear weapons had rendered Britain's sprawling installation indefensible and therefore largely "obsolete".[29] Nevertheless, America's pro-Egyptian position on this popular issue allowed Washington to identify itself visibly with Arab self-determination, creating vital political capital for future diplomatic efforts. In February 1954, the charismatic Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser replaced Naguib as leader of Egypt. Nasser's ability to dominate regional affairs, including the disolution of the radical Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, impressed the Eisenhower administration.[30] However, the United States remained hesitant to move too swiftly towards a partnership with Cairo; such a development would have risked antagonising the Arab-Israeli conflict, not to mention the British government. Consequently, with US-Egyptian relations now established, America turned its attention to the region's second geostrategic pivot: Iraq.

Given the intense rivalry between Egypt and Iraq, Eisenhower's ambition of an American system that encompassed both states was deeply problematic. The Baghdad Pact, an anti-Soviet collective that emerged in 1955, seemed to promise a solution to these problems and therefore received considerable attention from the administration. The Pact welcomed any power interested in the promotion of "peace, stability and well-being" in the Middle East, but, to Washington's frustration, a rare few actually took up the invitation.[31] One reason for this limited interest was Britain's participation in the Pact – a presence that gave the collective an unhelpfully neo-colonial image. Ultimately, only those states ranged along the Soviet frontier – Turkey, Iran and Pakistan – showed any interest in joining the anti-Soviet collective (and even these only signed up following the promise of American aid); despite Washington's best efforts, the influential Arab regimes of the lower Middle East remained entirely detached from the project.[32] In light of this failure, the US disentangled itself from the enterprise in pursuit of more productive opportunities elsewhere in the Arab world.[33]

Having failed to draw the core states into an American system through Iraq, the administration returned its focus to Egypt and Colonel Nasser. However, while the State Department had been championing the Baghdad Pact, US-Egyptian relations had seriously deteriorated. In August 1954, Washington had promised Nasser a gift of $40 million in military and economic aid as a reward for his

[29] Douglas Little (2002), *American Orientalism*, 128.

[30] Ambassador Caffrey (1954), March 31, cited in Barry Rubin (1982), 'America and the Egyptian Revolution, 1950-1957', 80.

[31] Harry N. Howard (1972), 'The Regional Pacts and the Eisenhower Doctrine', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 401 (May), 88.

[32] Douglas Little (2002), *American Orientalism*, 129; Harry N. Howard (1972), 'The Regional Pacts and the Eisenhower Doctrine', 86.

[33] M.A. Fitzsimons (1957), 'The Suez Crisis and Containment Policy', *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 4, (October), 433.

dissolution of the radical Muslim Brotherhood and peaceful annexation of Britain's Suez base. However, to the consternation of Nasser (as well as President Eisenhower and CIA Director Alan Dulles), the Secretary of State subsequently decided to withhold the package as leverage towards securing an Egyptian-Israeli settlement and establishing an American Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Cairo. Since acquiesence to these conditions would have inevitably provoked domestic opposition in Egypt, Nasser was forced to reject the new arrangement.[34] To make matters worse, on the last day in December, 1954, Secretary Dulles responded to Nasser's ongoing non-compliance by suspending arms shipments to Egypt.

The inauguration of the Baghdad Pact was the final insult. Despite America's decision not to join the Pact, Nasser saw the alliance as an American effort to promote the Iraqi regime at the expense of Egypt's traditional pre-eminence. In September 1955, angered by America's empty promises and facing mounting domestic pressure to modernise the antiquated Egyptian military, Nasser made the controversial decision to approach Moscow for assistance. To Washington's dismay, the Kremlin welcomed Nasser's appeal and swiftly arranged for Czechoslovakia to trade "$200 million in [Soviet] military equipment for Egyptian cotton".[35] Eisenhower's hopes of a strategic partnership with Egypt were fading fast. In 1956, Congress flatly refused to finance construction of the Aswan Dam, despite the fact that the project had the potential to either "tie Egypt to America for a decade", or push Cairo further towards the Soviet Union.[36] By late spring it was clear that, if America was ever to secure a partnership with Nasser, something radical needed to be done; if Nasser could not be seduced by promises, perhaps he could be coerced into compliance?

Project Omega was intended to pressurise Nasser into renouncing the Soviet Union by threatening to excommuniate him from the Free world. However, the State Department had seriously overestimated Nasser's desire to join the West and underestimated the vitality of the Soviet Union as an alternative patron. Rather than convincing the wayward Nasser to abandon his pretensions of friendship with Moscow, Project Omega pushed Cairo further towards the Kremlin. In July 1956, Eisenhower's hopes of a US-Egyptian strategic partnership were finally shelved when Nasser forcibly nationalised the Suez Canal. Although the administration chastised Britain, France and Israel for their subsequent invasion of Egypt, firmly emphasising that the United States was now the leading player in the Middle East, it was clear that America had lost patience with the unruly Nasser. However, not only was Nasser America's best hope, he was also their last.

[34] Barry Rubin (1982), 'America and the Egyptian Revolution, 1950-1957', 81-2.

[35] Barry Rubin (1982), 'America and the Egyptian Revolution, 1950-1957', 84.

[36] Barry Rubin (1982), 'America and the Egyptian Revolution, 1950-1957', 87; Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Executive Sessions*, Vol. 8, 46.

STRATEGIC UNCERTANTY

The Suez crisis was simply the prologue to a string of events that seriously weakened American hopes of establishing a US-Arab partnership and undermined Washington's confidence in the prevailing strategy. In 1958, Egypt and Syria merged to form the United Arab Republic (UAR). Despite the fact that the union was championed by Syrian nationalists, intent on reducing the influence of the Syrian Communist Party in Damascus, the United States interpreted the new arrangement as a further descent into radicalism. That same year, in Baghdad, Nasserite officers launched a bloody coup against the Hashemite regime, decapitating not only the Iraqi royal family, but also the Baghdad Pact. The collapse of nascent American positions in Egypt and Iraq left American Middle East strategy bereft of direction. In keeping with his pro-active approach to the region, Eisenhower responded to the spate of revolutions by dispatching American forces to Lebanon in 1958 in defence of the moderate government of Camille Chamoun. However, while this intervention was successful in preserving the pro-Western position in Beirut, America's regional strategy had suffered a considerable blow. With the geopolitical pivots of Egypt and Iraq unavailable, where else could Washington hope to find a suitable strategic partner? Plagued by strategic uncertainty and foreign distractions, the American ambition of establishing a prevailing position in the heart of the Middle East seemed futile.

The primary challenge facing the American defence in depth strategy was bridging the distance between Washington's understanding of the Cold War, and that of the Arab world. Unlike Americans, most Arabs did not consider the Soviet Union to pose a serious threat to the Middle East. Still finding its feet after centuries of colonial subjugation, the Arab world was largely pre-occupied with regional politics, not global affairs; regional enemies were considered of much greater concern than Moscow and the lingering remnants of colonialism more troublesome than the spectre of International Communism. Consequently, Washington's energetic efforts to 'secure' the Middle East for the Free world were met with scepticism by indigenous audiences, which frequently interpreted America's ambition as neo-colonialism. Fearing a return to foreign subordination, the Arab world sought refuge in the anti-imperialism of militant nationalist and pan-Arabist movements.[37] More controversially, several regimes followed Nasser's lead in making overtures towards Moscow, including the Syrians, who signed a "wheat-for-weapons deal with the Kremlin" in August 1957.[38] It should be noted that very few Arab regimes displayed real sympathy for Communist ideology; the arrangement with Moscow was simply a practical outworking of "active positive neutrality".[39] However, as far as the US was concerned, such details were inconsequential – then (as now) Arab radicalism was primarily defined in terms of opposition to US policy.[40]

[37] George Lenczowski (1971), *Soviet Advances in the Middle East* (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research: Washington DC), 102.

[38] Douglas Little (2002), *American Orientalism*, 133.

[39] Fayez Sayegh (1959), 'Arab Nationalism and Soviet-American Relations', 108.

[40] Bonnie F. Saunders (1996), *The United States and Arab Nationalism: The Syrian Case, 1953-1960* (Praeger: Westport), 14.

America's strategic uncertainly continued unabated during the Kennedy years, not least because the administration was preoccupied with pressing situations elsewhere in the world; amidst crises in Berlin and Cuba, and wars of national liberation in Africa and Southeast Asia, the new administration had little time for the question of strategic direction in the Middle East.[41] That being said, the Kennedy team did not abandon the Middle East. Despite Nasser's ongoing trouble-making, the instability of America's strategic position and shortage of serious alternatives, forced the Kennedy White House to renew efforts to engage Egypt in American strategy, albeit with equally limited success. Having lost Iraq and frustrated by Egypt, Washington's attentions turned briefly to Saudi Arabia.

Politically conservative and diplomatically pro-West, Saudi Arabia seemed an ideal candidate for American partnership. Unlike most Middle Eastern states, Saudi Arabia had achieved independence early, breaking free of Imperial Britain in 1927. This had not been the end of Anglo-Saudi relations however and the discovery of oil in 1938 cemented a lasting bond between Riyadh and the Western powers. In 1951, the US airfield at Dhahran, constructed in 1944 to safeguard the nearby ARAMCO facility, was incorporated into the Strategic Air Command network, making it "the largest US installation between Germany and Korea".[42] During the Kennedy era, Saudi Arabia was ruled by King Saud bin Abdul Aziz. Despite his debauchery and domestic unpopularity, Saud's staunch opposition to radicalism – as demonstrated by his response to the Yemeni civil war – attracted the attention of the US.[43] On 27 September 1962, Nasserite revolutionaries deposed the newly-crowned King Muhammad al-Badr in North Yemen, sparking a six year conflict between conservative and radical elements. Eager to further Arab nationalism (and reassert his radical credentials among his critics), Nasser dispatched seventy thousand Egyptian troops to assist Yemen's Republican forces. The Kennedy administration feared not only the potential loss of another state to radical nationalism, but also that Nasser's deployment could "serve as a springboard for further Egyptian adventures in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, or Britain's Aden protectorate".[44] To Washington's relief, King Saud was equally determined not to see a proliferation of radicalism, dispatching Saudi troops to reinforce the Yemeni Royalist camp.

However, with radical nationalism sweeping the Middle East, the longevity of a US-Saudi partnership could not be guaranteed. Jordan, another key Western position, had narrowly survived a radical Palestinian coup that year. How long could Riyadh resist revolution? Whilst fighting in the Yemeni civil war, some Saudi pilots had defected to Cairo. Even some members of the royal family were believed to have Nasserite sympathies, raising serious questions over the future of Riyadh's

[41] Lawrence Freedman (2000), *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos and Vietnam* (Oxford University Press: Oxford).

[42] Joe Stork (1980), 'The Carter Doctrine and US Bases in the Middle East', *MERIP Reports*, No. 90 (September), 10.

[43] Anon (n.d.), 'Saud of Saudi Arabia', Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saud_of_Saudi_Arabia (accessed 04/09/06).

[44] Douglas Little (1993), 'The Making of the Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 25, 569.

suitability as an American strategic partner.[45] In light of these questions, partnership with Saudi Arabia was not pursued with full vigour by the US; Washington did continue to supply arms to Riyadh, but those arms were deliberately limited towards counter-insurgency rather than foreign intervention.[46] America's quest for a strategic partnership was back to square one. It was not until 1967 – over a decade after the Suez crisis threw American Middle East strategy spiralling – that a new direction was finally identified; strategic partnership with Israel.

JOHNSON, ISRAEL AND THE 'NEXT BEST' STRATEGY

The state of Israel was founded in May 1948. However, despite playing an integral role in Israel's creation, and contrary to popular belief, the United States did not embrace the fledgling state as a strategic asset until the late 1960s. Truman's involvement with Israel's creation was not inspired by the desire to establish a pro-American platform in the Middle East, but simple humanitarian need. After all, Truman had already established an American strategy for the Middle East – the Northern Tier – prior to 1948, and showed little interest in further strategic expansion. Situated firmly within Britain's strategic remit, the creation of Israel was not the work of American strategists, but the result of extensive lobbying by Zionist groups and the beleaguered British government.

Even during Suez crisis and subsequent nationalist revolutions, when US-Arab relations were at their worst, Washington made no effort to abandon the Arabs in favour of an arrangement with Israel; America may have been committed to Israel's survival, but it did not consider Tel Aviv a viable alternative for strategic partnership. In the context of the modern US-Israeli arrangement, it is surprising to discover the extent to which the United States sought to distance itself from Israel. For example, following the first Arab-Israeli war, Washington was so concerned "that Israel controlled too much territory", that "State Department officials quietly encouraged the United Nations to draw boundaries more favourable to the Arabs".[47] Truman's successor was even less enthusiastic about supporting Israel. President Eisenhower, a veteran of the North African campaigns and committed Arabist, believed that Israel's conflict with the Arab world had allowed the Soviet Union to "leapfrog" America's carefully constructed Northern Tier defences and "establish a foothold" in the Middle East. In this way, Israel, far from being considered a strategic asset, was deemed "an obstacle to the global strategy for the containment of communism".[48]

[45] Richard H. Nolte (1964), 'United States Policy and the Middle East', Georgiana Stevens, ed., *The United States and the Middle East* (Englewood Cliffs), 178; Cathy Tackney (1972), 'Dealing Arms in the Middle East. Part 1: History and Strategic Considerations', 11.

[46] Cathy Tackney (1972), 'Dealing Arms in the Middle East. Part 1: History and Strategic Considerations', 11.

[47] Douglas Little (2002), *American Orientalism*, 88.

[48] Avi Shlaim (1988), 'The Impact of U.S. Policy in the Middle East', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter), 17.

America's desire to remain detached from Israel continued throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, US-Israeli ties became increasingly unavoidable as Israel's traditional patrons – Britain and France – gradually withdrew their support for Tel Aviv, seeking renewed influence in the Arab world. The declining Anglo-French contribution to Israeli security was especially problematic in light of the escalating Soviet patronage of Israel's Arab enemies: by the end of the 1950s, arms shipments to the Arab bloc had rocketed from a value of $40 million per annum to some $200 million.[49] Tel Aviv looked to America for support, but the Eisenhower administration – committed to establishing a US-Arab arrangement – proved unforthcoming.[50] Eventually, the US grudgingly agreed to provide Israel with radar technology to compensate for Egypt's Soviet-supplied all-weather bombers, but staunchly refused to supply offensive systems, such as Hawk surface-to-air missiles. Dissatisfied, the Israelis resorted to diplomatic manoeuvring in an effort to secure comprehensive US support.

In the spring of 1961, the Kennedy White House was alarmed by reports that Israel was engaged in purchasing sophisticated medium-range French bombers capable of delivering nuclear weapons.[51] Aside from the fact that introducing nuclear devices to the Middle East risked transforming Arab-Israeli skirmishing into a global crisis, Washington feared that the presence of an Israeli nuclear deterrent would drive the Arab regimes further towards the Soviet Union. While the CIA noted that Moscow was unlikely to provide its Arab clients with nukes of their own, the threat of an Israeli bomb would certainly see the Arabs becoming more dependent on Soviet arms shipments and could even facilitate the deployment of Soviet personnel on Arab soil.[52] This eventuality could not be permitted; Israel needed to be discouraged of its nuclear ambitions at all costs. In fact, Tel Aviv was well aware of America's concerns. At talks in May 1961, Ben Gurion reminded Kennedy that Israel would have no need to develop a nuclear deterrent if the US were willing to supply the IDF with the necessary arms to defend Israel from Arab aggression, specifically, Hawk surface-to-air missiles to combat the Soviet MiGs which had recently arrived in Cairo. Like his predecessors, Kennedy was reticent to see America become Israel's arsenal, for fear of alienating strategically useful Arab regimes, but the potential consequences of Israel's nuclear ambitions were equally unpalatable. Fourteen months later, after much negotiation and the arrival of substantial new shipments of Soviet

[49] Cathy Tackney (1972), 'Dealing Arms in the Middle East. Part 1: History and Strategic Considerations', 7.

[50] State Department memcon, 'Israel's Need for a Security Guarantee', 31 October 1957, *FRUS 1955-57*, 17:779-85, cited in Douglas Little (1993), 'The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68', 565

[51] Roger F. Pajak (1983), 'Nuclear Status and Policies of Middle Eastern Countries', *International Affairs*, 590; Douglas Little (1993), 'The Making of the Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68', 567.

[52] Sherman Kent, Chairman of the Board of National Estimates (1963), 'Memorandum to the Director: Consequences of Israeli Acquisition of a Nuclear Capability, 6 March', *DDRS* (Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number CK3100416959, paragraph 9.

arms in Egypt, Kennedy agreed to provide Israel with the missiles, setting a precedent that effectively "opened the floodgate of weapons sales to Israel".[53]

The assassination of JFK in 1963 brought Lyndon B. Johnson to power, a man who owed much of his political success to America's Jewish voters. However, while Johnson is correctly remembered as a firm friend of Israel, his administration did not immediately pursue a strategic arrangement with Tel Aviv. Despite the ongoing failure to establish a prevailing American position through the Arab bloc, not to mention America's blossoming relationship with Israel, LBJ did not consider Tel Aviv a viable strategic ally during the mid-1960s, as emphasised by his non-cooperation with Israel over the controversial project to divert the Jordan River in 1964.[54] Still haunted by the fear that Israel might introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East, American arms sales continued to expand, but such deals were intended to silence Israeli sabre-rattling rather than equip Tel Aviv to lead the region; the idea that the tiny Zionist state could dominate affairs beyond its borders was as yet unthinkable.[55] However, events in 1967 would radically alter America's regional paradigm.

In June 1967, Israel launched a massive pre-emptive strike against Arab military positions in Egypt and Syria, destroying three hundred Egyptian aircraft and some two-thirds of Syria's air force on the ground.[56] After six days of heavy fighting, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) had captured the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights and the entire Sinai Peninsula, thereby tripling the size of Israel's territory. In a marked contrast to Eisenhower's response to Israel's 1956 Suez enterprise, the Johnson administration applauded the campaign. Indeed,

> Johnson seems to have taken vicarious pleasure from Israel's ability to thwart an Arab war or national liberation not unlike the one America faced in Vietnam. Nor was the Texan unhappy about Tel Aviv's humiliation of Nasser, who "had used the issue of Israel and the tragic plight of the refugees to advance personal ambitions and to achieve the dominance of Arab radicals over Arab moderates".[57]

Although declassified British documents reveal that the Egyptian military was significantly weakened by its involvement in Yemen and the Syrian armed forces were barely sufficient for peace-time, the swift and decisive nature of the IDF's victory in the face of apparently overwhelming odds and sophisticated Soviet-supplied weaponry generated a belief – as popular in the US as in Israel – that

[53] Philip M. Klutznick (1970), Recorded interview with Dennis J. O'Brien, 7 December, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, 53, cited in Ethan Nadelmann (1982), 'Setting the Stage: American Policy Towards the Middle East, 1961-1966', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 14, 539; Kathleen Christison (1999), *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on US Middle East Policy* (Berkley: University of California Press), 105; Douglas Little (1993), 'The Making of the Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68', 568-9.

[54] Douglas Little (1993), 'The Making of the Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68', 573.

[55] Air Force Attaché (Tel Aviv) to Air Force Intelligence, telegram, 30 March 1965, cited in Douglas Little (1993), 'The Making of the Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68', 576.

[56] Jeremy Bowen (2003), *Six Days: How the 1967 war shaped the Middle East* (Simon & Schuster UK Ltd: London), 13; Anon (n.d.), 'Six Day War: Warfare', *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_day_war#Warfare (accessed 06/09/06).

[57] Douglas Little (1993), 'The Making of the Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68', 578, citing Lyndon B. Johnson (1971), *Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency, 1963-1969* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston: New York), 303-4.

the IDF was virtually invincible on the battlefield.[58] After decades of assuming that the numerically superior Arab states held the key to Middle Eastern geopolitics, Israel's startling victory forced US policy-makers to re-evaluate America's emphasis on a strategic arrangement with the Arab bloc. This is not to say that the administration immediately transferred its allegiance to Tel Aviv, but the potential for a US-Israeli partnership was finally realised. Following the war, Johnson tacitly endorsed Israel's occupation of the captured territory by delaying settlement negotiations on the basis of the Israeli argument that the Arabs were not ready to accept a lasting peace.[59] Meanwhile, the victorious IDF were rewarded with new weapons contracts, including America's top-of-the-range F4 Phantom jets.

CONCLUSION

For more than twenty years after the formation of Israel, American administrations had sought to achieve establish a prevailing position in the Middle East through partnership with the Arab bloc. However, by the late 1960s, the repeated failure to properly engage an Arab regime in this manner had effectively rendered the strategy obsolete. In fact, between 1958 and 1967, there was no clear candidate for American strategic partnership. Finally, in 1967, Washington was presented with an alternative option: the possibility of strategic partnership with the 'invincible' Israelis.

Having identified the potential of a US-Israeli arrangement, the Johnson administration went some way towards developing this 'next-best' strategy. However, when the administration left office in December 1968, American Middle East strategy was still hazy. Certainly, cooperation between Washington and Tel Aviv had expanded significantly since 1967, but the US had yet to commit to a formal partnership with Israel. If the US was to preserve Western influence and achieve its objective of stability in the Middle East, this ill-defined approach needed to be developed into a coherent region-wide strategy. With Johnson gone, the task of delineating this new strategy fell to his successor, Richard Milhous Nixon.

[58] Jeremy Bowen (2003), *Six Days: How the 1967 war shaped the Middle East*, 39, 16.

[59] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24' *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100545667, subsection 6(a).

CHAPTER TWO

AMERICAN MIDDLE EAST STRATEGY UNDER NIXON, 1969-1970

On Nixon's accession to the presidency, the State Department presented the White House with a series of documents urging the new administration to build on Johnson's legacy and transform America's hazy, prevailing approach to the Middle East into a coherent regional strategy. Three developments were of particular concern: escalating Soviet opportunism throughout the region, the continued proliferation of 'radical' Arab regimes, and the problem of Palestinian nationalism. Although hardly novel issues, these developments had blossomed since 1967, exploiting fertile circumstances to further their causes and threaten America's continued position in the region.

Delineating a decisive regional strategy for the region was an essential first step towards countering this three-fold threat, but remarkably, Nixon – distracted by ambitions in Southeast Asia and perhaps unconvinced by the strategic direction pioneered by Johnson – did nothing to answer this urgent need during the first year and a half of his presidency. Indeed, despite the recommendations of the State Department, Nixon sidelined the issue of Middle East strategy entirely, leaving American activity in the region to drift aimlessly. As a result of this negligence, the various threats identified by the State Department continued to expand unchecked, with Soviet opportunism reaching unprecedented levels by the summer of 1970 and Arab-Israeli hostilities threatening to destabilise the entire region.

THE THREE-FOLD THREAT

Soviet Opportunism

The Soviet Union was constantly seeking to advance Moscow's position at Washington's expense and found plentiful opportunities to do so in the Middle East thanks to America's prolonged

period of strategic uncertainty towards the pivotal region. While Washington struggled to maintain cordial relations with all but the most conservative regimes, the Kremlin had cultivated extensive influence through the provision of military and economic assistance to Arab nationalists like Nasser and Salah Jadid of Syria. This arrangement was further consolidated in 1967 by the Six Day War and the advent of Johnson's 'next best' strategy. Despite going some way towards founding a firm American position in the Middle East, Johnson's move towards a pro-Israel posture had an antagonistic effect on US-Arab relations.[1] Disillusioned by America, but in dire need of economic and military assistance, the Arab bloc was forced to move towards greater dependence on the Soviet Union. By the start of Nixon's presidency, the leading Arab states – Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Algeria – had received "an estimated 3.1 billion dollars" in Soviet military investment.[2] Significantly, this investment included an increasing number of Soviet personnel being deployed in Arab states; following the war, the number of Soviet "military technicians and advisors stationed in the UAR and Syria more than doubled". These deployments, which totalled "over 3,500" in January 1969, advanced the regional influence of the Kremlin considerably and were of grave concern to State Department officials.[3]

The glaring imbalance between American and Soviet diplomatic successes in the Middle East was a real problem for the US. As one State Department staff study lamented:

> Moscow enjoys close ties with the UAR, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and the People's Republic of Southern Yemen... It has normal relations with Lebanon, Jordan, and Kuwait and is probing to develop a position in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf. While the United States has no diplomatic relations with any radical Arab regime, except PRSY, the Soviets are extending significant aid to all.[4]

Pointedly, this energetic Soviet diplomacy was not limited to consolidating Moscow's position in established anti-American regimes like Egypt and Syria; it also sought to exploit Washington's lack of strategic clarity to undermine America's relationship with its own regional allies. Consequently, in 1969, the Soviet Union's ongoing "good neighbour policy" towards Turkey gave rise to "high-level visits, increased commercial relations and acceptance of Soviet economic aid" by NATO's easternmost member-state.[5] In Greece, Moscow sought to exploit tensions between Washington and Athens, whose allocation of US military assistance had been sharply reduced in recent years, by fostering "trade, aid, cultural exchanges and diplomacy" with the Greek government.[6] Even Iran, America's key client in the Persian Gulf, developed relations with Moscow. By 1972, despite close

[1] Stephen E Ambrose & Douglas G Brinkley (1997), *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938*, 8th revised edition (Penguin: London), 211.

[2] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100552758, section I, subsection 3c.

[3] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section I, subsection 3c.

[4] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100545667, subsection 2A.

[5] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24', subsection 3A.

[6] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24', subsection 3A.

links with Washington, Tehran had become "the fourth largest recipient of Soviet economic aid and the second largest recipient of East European aid".[7]

In addition to developing indirect influence through the diplomatic offensive, the Soviets also sought to counter US influence through direct displays of power. Since the Second World War, the American Sixth Fleet had dominated the Mediterranean Sea and served as an imposing reminder of US power. During the late 1960s however, the Kremlin established its own Mediterranean fleet to rival and harass the American force. Not only did this new Soviet fleet limit the flexibility of American naval activity, it also served to advance Soviet influence in Arab states. Although Moscow did not seek formal base rights along the Mediterranean coast, an informal agreement with the UAR opened "operating facilities to Soviet naval units at Alexandria and Port Said, and permitted the use of airfields to Soviet units".[8] State Department analysts predicted that other Arab governments would follow suit, notably the Algerians, who possessed the former French naval facility at Mers-el-Kebir.[9] Such developments were of genuine concern to Washington. A 1969 Staff Study of regional developments noted that "the hostile orientation of the UAR and Algeria [was] already seen as a significant threat against NATO lines of communication through the Mediterranean"; the combination of that hostility with a "more or less permanent" Soviet military base "would constitute a serious risk to Western security", especially if that facility possessed nuclear missiles.[10]

The Soviet naval expansion was inspired, at least in part, by the British announcement in January 1968 that Whitehall planned to abdicate its possessions east of Suez by 1971. Hoping to exploit the power vacuum created by Britain's impending retreat, "Soviet fleet units… paid two visits to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports" within twelve months of Whitehall's announcement; "the first manifestation of Russian naval strength in these waters in over sixty years".[11] With Washington paralysed by strategic ambiguity, the Kremlin undoubtedly hoped that the presence of a Soviet fleet in the Gulf would symbolically mirror the British Royal Navy, thereby encouraging a straightforward transition from British to Soviet hegemony when the time came. As in the Mediterranean, the key to the success of this strategy was naval bases. These bases would not only provide shelter for Soviet vessels, they would also serve as geo-political beachheads from which Soviet influence could spread throughout the region. The two largest players in the Gulf, Iraq and Iran, had already developed ties with Moscow; the coming retreat of the British from Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States would create further opportunities for Soviet ambition in the oil-rich peninsula.[12] Without a decisive regional

[7] CIA (1972), 'Intelligence Memorandum: Moscow and the Persian Gulf, 12 May', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Hills, Michigan), Document Number CK3100228370, paragraph 2.

[8] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24', subsection 3A.

[9] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24', subsection 3A.

[10] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24', subsection 3A, subsection 1B.

[11] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section I, subsection 3e.

[12] CIA (1972), 'Intelligence Memorandum: Moscow and the Persian Gulf, 12 May,' paragraph 11.

strategy to counter the Soviet diplomatic offensive and naval expansion, the future of America's position in the Middle East looked bleak.

'Radical' Arab Nationalism

The Soviets were not alone in perceiving Britain's colonial retreat as an opportunity to expand; as State Department analysts warned Nixon, Arab nationalists were equally keen to exploit Whitehall's abdication. Earlier in the decade, Yemen had been granted independence from Britain, only to be plunged into civil conflict by opportunistic nationalist elements. Western analysts feared that the soon-to-be independent Gulf states might suffer the same fate, leaving Western oil interests at risk. These fears were compounded by the ongoing collapse of moderate positions elsewhere in the region. Indeed, by the end of the decade, almost every significant Arab state was subject to a 'radical' regime.[13] As Under-Secretary of State Walt Rostow commented in a retrospective article:

> A continuation of the process, which could involve the Nasserization of Jordan, the Lebanon…, Tunisia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf, would present… a security crisis of major, and potentially catastrophic, proportions.[14]

If Washington hoped to avoid such a security crisis, the new administration would need to identify a firm, coherent strategy which was capable of countering the march of nationalism and revitalising the ailing Western position. Moreover, it would need to develop an effective response to the greatest source of nationalist aggression within the Middle East: the issue of Palestine.

The Palestinian Problem

The controversy over ownership of Palestine had raged since Israel's creation in 1948, but reached a new intensity following Israel's annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the Six Day War. In 1964, Nasser had established the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to champion "the right of the Palestinian Arab people to its sacred homeland".[15] Although the Egyptian's intention was to establish a "noisy but relatively harmless organisation" which would satisfy the ideological expectations of his nationalist brethren, without "translating his own anti-Israeli rhetoric prematurely into action", the PLO and the plethora of *fedayeen* splinter groups which emerged from it refused to be

[13] See Figure 1.

[14] Eugene V. Rostow (1971), 'The Middle Eastern Crisis in the Perspective of World Politics', *International Affairs*, April, 280; cited in Cathy Tackney (1972), 'Dealing Arms in the Middle East. Part 1: History and Strategic Considerations', *MERIP Reports*, No. 8 (March-April), 10.

[15] Palestine Liberation Organization (1964), 'Statement of Proclamation of the Organization, Jerusalem, 28 May', http://www.palestine-un.org/plo/doc_three.html (accessed 05.12.06).



Figure 1: Map of 'radical' Arab regimes, 1970.
Territories due for independence in 1971 depicted by dotted line.
Primary oil-fields depicted by dashed line.

contained.[16] Following the war, with approximately a million Palestinians now living under Israeli rule and a further million in exile, *fedayeen* activity escalated dramatically.[17] Indeed, during the few short months between the end of the war and January 1968, forty-eight "serious" terrorist attacks were perpetrated by Palestinian insurgents, as well as countless minor operations.[18] As the situation worsened, State Department officials feared for the stability of Middle Eastern geopolitics.

Although the "active strength" of the *fedayeen* was fairly limited – probably less than five thousand – their symbolic significance was far greater.[19] After June 1967, Palestinian *fedayeen* were the only Arabs still engaged in the armed struggle with Israel, a fact which by itself was enough to attract sympathisers from throughout the Arab bloc. More significantly however, the *fedayeen* were enjoying considerable success in their struggle against the Israeli occupation, as the PLO's fierce stand during the battle of Karameh demonstrated.[20] Arab nationalists, bruised by their experiences in the Six Day War, revelled in the *fedayeen*'s ability to harass the IDF and inflict injury on Israel. Eager to assist the iconic *fedayeen* in their fight, the Egyptian, Syrian and Iraqi regimes each supplied arms and training to the guerrillas, while financial support flooded in from "governments and individual donors all over the Arab world".[21] By the time Nixon arrived in the White House, foreign sponsorship had transformed the Palestinian problem from a minority cause into a major issue. With "miserable refugee camps" brimming with embittered young Arabs and military hardware readily available, *fedayeen* terrorism knew no limits.[22]

Traditionally, the West had relied upon moderate Jordan to curb Palestinian nationalism. However by the end of the 1960s, with violence intensifying, this arrangement was becoming increasingly inadequate. Despite his participation in the Six Day War, King Hussein's pro-Western posture and eagerness to establish a peace with Israel had drawn heavy criticism from Hussein's nationalist neighbours. The most vocal of criticisms however, sprung from within Jordan, where Palestinian refugees railed against Hussein's efforts to suppress their nationalist ambitions. With his credibility as an Arab leader waning, and sixty-five percent of his country's population gunning for him, Hussein faced a simple choice: appease the nationalists or lose his throne.[23]

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[16] Jeremy Bowen (2003), *Six Days: How the 1967 war shaped the Middle East* (Simon & Schuster UK Ltd: London), 22; Douglas Little (1993), 'The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 25, 574.

[17] The Palestine Centre (n.d.), 'Distribution of the Palestinian Population and Jewish Settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Since 1967', http://www.palestinecenter.org/cpap/stats/dist_pop_67.html (accessed 06.01.07).

[18] Jeremy Bowen (2003), *Six Days: How the 1967 war shaped the Middle East*, 354.

[19] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section I, subsection 5.

[20] For more on this battle, see Jeremy Bowen (2003), *Six Days: How the 1967 war shaped the Middle East*, 356.

[21] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section I, subsection 5.

[22] Jeremy Bowen (2003), *Six Days: How the 1967 war shaped the Middle East*, 355.

[23] Shelia Ryan & Joe Stork (1972), 'US and Jordan: Thrice-Rescued Throne', *MERIP Reports*, No. 7, February, 5.

The State Department was well aware of the vulnerability of Hussein's position. In January 1969, a report warned that "if within the coming year the Jordanian government is unable to negotiate an acceptable peace settlement [with Israel], the *fedayeen* can be expected to make a move against the Hashemite regime".[24] Such a development could prove catastrophic for America's regional ambitions. In addition to containing Palestinian ambitions, King Hussein had been very effective at discouraging nationalism elsewhere in the Arab bloc, thanks to the considerable influence of Jordan's legendary Arab Legion, which provided training and advisors to several fledgling Arab states.[25] If the *fedayeen* succeeded in toppling Hussein and Jordan collapsed, then America's already weakened regional position would lose an important ally. More importantly however, the collapse of the Hashemite regime would throw the geography of the Middle East into chaos, as different groups sought to benefit from Hussein's demise. Regardless whether it was Palestinians, Syrians or Iraqis who succeeded in annexing territory from Jordan's ruins, the State Department expected Israel to respond by securing a "territorial advantage on the East Bank", thereby "precipitating a crisis which could well lead to a great power confrontation".[26] Since such a confrontation was obviously undesirable, it was in America's interests to prevent a Palestinian uprising. However, if this was to be achieved, the new administration needed to delineate a decisive strategy that could either resolve or more effectively contain the Palestinian problem.

NIXON'S STRATEGIC NEGLIGENCE

State Department officials made it abundantly clear to Nixon that America was approaching a crisis in the Middle East. Over a decade of strategic uncertainty, followed by several years of strategic ambiguity had created the dangerous illusion that the United States was not fully committed to the pivotal region. As Henry Kissinger observed,

> because of our obvious past and present reluctance (with the one exception of Lebanon in 1958) to back up diplomatic agreements or political friendships with a US military presence [our enemies have come to believe that the US is]… either unwilling or unable to do anything [to preserve our regional interests].[27]

Encouraged by Washington's apparent disinterest, Soviet opportunism had become increasingly ambitious, even to the point of targeting the very foundations of American regional influence – the Northern Tier and Sixth Fleet. Meanwhile, Washington's failure to respond firmly to nationalist

[24] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section III, subsection C1.

[25] By the late 1960s, Jordan was providing "over 100 military engineers and advisors to Oman, an undisclosed number of advisors and officers to Bahrain, 50 officers to the Yemen Arab Republic, and over 400 officers, including the armed forces' chief of staff, to the United Arab Emirates. Joe Stork (1980), 'The Carter Doctrine and US Bases in the Middle East', *MERIP Reports*, No. 90 (September), 10.

[26] William B. Quandt (1971), 'The Middle East Conflict in US Strategy, 1970-71', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 48; DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section I, subsection 1d.

[27] Henry Kissinger (1969), 'Attachment to Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs to President Nixon: The Modern World, A Single "Strategic Theatre", September 29', *National Archives: Nixon Presidential Material*, NSC Files, Box, 397, Subject Files, A Strategic Overview, section B. III: 1, 4.

subversion had allowed a continued proliferation of radical regimes and weakened American credibility amongst its remaining clients; "from the point of view of the moderate Arabs it must [have appeared] that friendship with the US [did] not offer protection and [did] not pay".[28] Perhaps most worrying however, was the growing problem of Palestinian nationalism, which threatened not only the security of Israel, but also of America's moderate Jordanian client. The solution was obvious; if the new administration was to revitalise Western hegemony in the Middle East – to stand up to the Soviets, contain the radicals and avert a regional crisis – then Nixon needed to implement a decisive strategy for the region immediately. However, despite the urgent advice of the State Department, the new president did nothing to resolve the prevailing strategic need.

When Richard Milhous Nixon became president in January 1969, the United States had been involved in the Vietnam conflict for fifteen years, at the expense of over thirty-six thousand American lives.[29] During the 1968 election campaign, Nixon had promised a new strategy to "end the war and win the peace in the Pacific".[30] Although he did not explain how he intended to achieve this goal, his sentiment was received enthusiastically by voters. Once in office, he committed himself to fulfilling his promise by micro-managing America's campaign and personally authorising controversial new strategies, including the secret bombing of neighbouring Cambodia. However, despite this concerted desire to release America from the burden of Vietnam, the administration was not willing to retreat from the conflict at the expense of American credibility. In a world where the "perception of power had become as important as power itself", it was not feasible for the US to simply pack up and abandon the country to Communism.[31] As a result, the long retreat from Vietnam required as much, if not more, attention from the White House as had the US been committed to staying in the war indefinitely.

In addition to the Vietnam distraction, the administration was also engaged in the time-consuming task of Triangularisation. By exploiting the much-publicised Sino-Soviet split to open relations with the People's Republic of China, the White House hoped to create a multi-polar world system which would effectively turn the two leading Communist powers against each other. This project promised to dramatically increase Washington's political leverage in the Communist world, as well as enhancing American national security by dividing Soviet resources between multiple enemies. However, like the retreat from Vietnam, it demanded considerable attention from the administration.

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[28] Henry Kissinger (1969), 'Attachment to Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs to President Nixon: The Modern World, A Single "Strategic Theatre", September 29', section B. III: 4.

[29] Anon (n.d.), *The Wall, USA: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial website*, http://www.thewall-usa.com/summary.asp (accessed 23/08/06).

[30] Richard M Nixon (1968), cited in 'Richard Nixon', *Wikipedia* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Nixon#1968_Election (accessed 19/07/06).

[31] John Lewis Gaddis (2005), *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War, Revised and Expanded Edition* (OUP: Oxford), 275; Dr Henry Kissinger (1979), *The White House Years* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson and Michael Joseph: London), 228.

With such major ambitions in Southeast Asia, Nixon simply did not consider the issue of American Middle East strategy to be a foreign policy priority in 1969. Certainly, the president made dramatic speeches on the importance of preserving Gulf oil and countering radicalism, but no strategy document emerged from this rhetoric; no serious effort was made to develop the vague policies inherited from Johnson into a coherent regional system. In fact, despite the threats facing America's position in the Middle East, Kissinger claims that Nixon expressly forbade him from advancing a strategy for the region.[32] Ostensibly, this edict was inspired by concerns that the challenge of elaborating a Middle East strategy would have proven a distraction to Kissinger, thereby undermining progress on the administration's 'more important' Southeast Asian objectives. However, Nixon's full motivation becomes apparent in light of his decision to delegate responsibility for the Middle East to his unlikely Secretary of State, William Rogers.

Rogers was an unlikely choice for Secretary of State principally because he lacked any experience of foreign policy. A lawyer by training, he had served in the Eisenhower administration as Attorney General alongside then Vice-President Nixon. Truth be told, Rogers was not Nixon's first choice; Ambassador Robert Murphy, a distinguished retired diplomat, had already declined the post when Nixon offered it to his old colleague.[33] Nevertheless, Rogers' inexperience did have a certain attraction. Since the president possessed a strong mistrust of the Foreign Service, largely as a result of his inherent bitterness towards the moneyed East Coast families from which much of the American bureaucracy hailed, he wanted to appoint a Secretary of State whose primary loyalty would be to the White House, not the Foreign Service. Nixon hoped that Rogers' inexperience would leave the Secretary no option but to tow the White House line. As it transpired however, Rogers was too easily swayed by his subordinates and so, rather than dominating the State Department as Nixon had hoped, he became a pawn of the bureaucracy. Consequently, the Secretary found himself sidelined from policy-making, especially when it came to critical decisions or delicate negotiations.[34] With the majority of foreign policy being run from the White House, Rogers' remit was reduced to marginal arenas "where success seemed elusive [or]… where the risks of domestic reaction were high".[35]

From the very start of his presidency, Nixon was under considerable pressure to do something about the Middle East. The delegation of responsibility to Secretary Rogers was his response to this pressure. At face value, this gesture gave the impression of active engagement with the turbulent region. However, bearing in mind Rogers' political marginality, it becomes clear that Rogers' commission was merely a diplomatic smokescreen. Had the president genuinely intended to develop a coherent strategy for the Middle East, he would surely have put an experienced and respected official in charge of the project. By delegating to Secretary Rogers, Nixon revealed that his primary

[32] Henry Kissinger (1979), *The White House Years*, 348.
[33] Henry Kissinger (1979), *The White House Years*, 26.
[34] Henry Kissinger (1979), *The White House Years*, 28.
[35] Henry Kissinger (1979), *The White House Years*, 348.

aim was not to encourage strategic clarity, but simply to create a façade of activity. That being said, Nixon was by no means indifferent towards the issue of strategy in the Middle East. An apathetic Nixon would have allowed the Secretary of State to pursue whatever limited policies his marginal influence could muster; progress towards a pro-Israel arrangement, a pro-Arab arrangement, or no progress at all would have been equally acceptable. In reality, Nixon was constantly intervening to frustrate Secretary Rogers' efforts, included his flagship project, the Rogers Plan. Upon the announcement of this settlement proposal, which called for Israel to withdraw "to the old international frontier between Egypt and Palestine and from nearly all of the West Bank of Jordan", as well as further concessions on Gaza, Jerusalem and Sharm el-Sheik, Nixon shared a private telephone conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir to reassure her that the plan was exactly what its name implied – the private project of Secretary Rogers – and had nothing to do with the White House.[36] These interventions reveal that, far from being disinterested in the problem of strategic clarity, Nixon was determined to resist developments that would dispel the cloud of ambiguity surrounding America's relationship with the Middle East.

In 1969, America's most valuable asset in the Middle East was its promising relationship with Israel. Therefore, while the State Department's unashamedly Arab-friendly policies promised to improve regional stability by tempering Arab aggression, their negative repercussions for US-Israeli relations were considered unacceptable by the White House. Pointedly however, while Nixon objected to Secretary Rogers' efforts to advance a pro-Arab strategy, he was equally opposed to the emergence of an explicitly pro-Israel strategy; despite frequent affirmations of Israel's importance to America as "the current most effective stopper to the Mideast power of the Soviet Union", Nixon made no effort to commit Washington to a formal strategic partnership with Tel Aviv during the first year and a half of his administration.[37] Exactly why is uncertain. Perhaps the idea of a strategy that made American interests reliant upon Israel did not sit well with the president. After all, Nixon's previous experience of strategy-making had been in the Eisenhower administration – a White House more committed than most to the pursuit of US-Arab partnerships. Whatever his concerns about a US-Israeli partnership may have been, by preserving ambiguity in American Middle East strategy, Nixon was able to maintain the valuable working relationship with Israel, without being forced to commit to a formal partnership with Tel Aviv. However, just as the State Department had warned, there was a serious price for choosing ill-defined ambiguity over strategic coherence. Ultimately, whatever limited benefits ambiguity may have offered, the prevailing *ad hoc* arrangement was insufficient to counter the serious threats facing America in the Middle East.

[36] William B. Quandt (1971), 'The Middle East Conflict in US Strategy, 1970-71', 42; Henry Kissinger (1979), *The White House Years*, 376.

[37] Pat Buchanan (1970), 'Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant to Nixon, February 18', *National Archives: Nixon Presidential Materials*, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 80, Memoranda for the President, 1970, Jan-May, 31.

CONSEQUENCES OF NIXON'S STRATEGIC NEGLECT

During the course of Nixon's first twenty-one months in office, America's already serious problems in the Middle East grew inexorable worse. By not advancing a clear strategy that would fill the regional power vacuum, Nixon failed to present a firm response to the Kremlin's escalating opportunism, leaving Soviet penetration of the pivotal region to continue unopposed. The full extent of this penetration was particularly evident in Egypt, where Nasser's War of Attrition with Israel quickly facilitated the deployment of unprecedented levels of Soviet personnel on Arab soil. Meanwhile, the continued deterioration of the region's moderate enclaves demonstrated that vague bilateral arrangements alone were insufficient to combat the spread of aggressive Arab nationalism.[38] This was especially true of Palestinian nationalism, which, through its ongoing conflict with Israel, threatened the very stability of the region. Despite this danger, Nixon turned a blind eye to the conflict and, by failing to advance a strategy that could tackle the Palestinian problem at its root, allowed violence between the *fedayeen* and IDF to spiral.

Appeasing the Soviet Union

The president was very clear on what he thought the Soviets were doing in the Middle East. As he told his Special Assistant, Pat Buchanan in February 1970: "They want control of the Middle East; they want the oil it contains; they want a land bridge to Africa".[39] However, despite this conviction and the visibly escalating threat, Nixon made no effort to counter Soviet opportunism by resolving America's strategic ambiguity.

In March, Moscow supplied Nasser with a massive shipment of Soviet arms, "including the most advanced Soviet antiaircraft system – the SA-3 surface-to-air missile. This [weapons system] had never before been given to a foreign country, not even north Vietnam".[40] This alarming delivery (which was deliberately engineered to coincide with the start of an important ceasefire) not only threatened to escalate the conflict between Egypt and Israel, but was also taken as evidence of the ever closer bond between Cairo and the Kremlin. Nixon however, paid little attention to the controversial shipment; his thoughts were fixed exclusively on Cambodia, where American forces were conducting a secret offensive against Communist guerrillas. In fact, it took six months and a considerable political debacle before Nixon finally agreed to provide Tel Aviv with American Shrike missiles to compensate for Egypt's Soviet-supplied SAM-3s and not once during that time did he

[38] In September 1969, King Idris of Libya was exiled and replaced by a Revolutionary Command Council which ordered the closure of America's Wheelus Air Base, part of the US Strategic Air Command. The following month, Somalia – strategically situated to dominate the Gulf of Aden and therefore Western access to the Arabian Sea – also fell to nationalists following the assassination of President Shermarke.

[39] Pat Buchanan (1970), 'Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant, February 18'.

[40] Henry Kissinger (1979), *The White House Years*, 569.

chastise Cairo for its part in escalating hostilities.[41] Secretary Rogers on the other hand, did seek to respond to the mushrooming Soviet presence. Rogers hoped that a conciliatory approach would foster a peace settlement between Israel and Egypt, which in turn would extinguish Cairo's interest in Moscow. However, as Bill Hyland, an NSC Soviet expert, advised at the time:

> The Soviets respect power and strength. They understand military strength best of all… But they do not understand restraint; it confuses them and in the end leads them to conclude that there is room for forward movement.[42]

Rather than undermining the Kremlin's position therefore, Rogers' hesitant appeasement served to convince Moscow that the US was willing to concede the Middle East to Soviet domination.[43]

As the summer progressed and Washington's position remained undefined, the Soviets took full advantage of America's apparent abdication: by early July, Nasser's arsenal of SAM-3 missiles had multiplied several times and there were in excess of ten thousand Soviet combat personnel stationed in Egypt, cementing Moscow's foothold in the influential Arab state.[44] With this foothold in place, foreign observers feared that the Kremlin was only a step away from establishing Soviet hegemony throughout the region. Moreover, by deploying such massive numbers of combat personnel in Egypt, the Kremlin risked becoming directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, thereby transforming Nasser's local war into a potential superpower confrontation.

Ignoring the Plight of Palestine

The situation on Israel's eastern border was equally serious. In his determination to prevent the emergence of a clear regional strategy, Nixon thwarted several attempts to advance a settlement on the Occupied Territories which might have soothed Palestinian anger towards Israel.[45] As a consequence, *fedayeen* activity continued and indeed, intensified.

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[41] DOS (1970), 'Deterring Possible Major Unilateral Violation of the Middle East Ceasefire by Israel, September 6', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills), Document Number CK3100548307, section VI, subsection B1.

[42] Bill Hyland (1970), June 8, cited in Henry Kissinger (1979), *The White House Years*, 570.

[43] Rogers' ill-advised appeasement is doubly frustrating in light of contemporary reports regarding the limitations of Soviet power in the Middle East. As John Foster and Harold Saunders of the NSC noted in 1968, Soviet Middle East strategy revolved around "masquerades of power", not actual power. Another official, this time from Roger's own department, observed that "the Soviet intention, often successful, has been to convince the Arabs that they would support them if the situation so required, without actually doing so". Had the Secretary of State had the wisdom to respond to Soviet advances with a show of American determination, the Soviet Union would have been revealed as no more than a "paper tiger" and Moscow's grip on the region would have crumbled. John Foster & Harold Saunders (1968), 'The Middle East and North Africa, 1963-1968: A New Balance Emerging? June 4', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100506967, 2; DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section I, subsection 2, subsection 3b.

[44] Henry Kissinger (1979), *The White House Years*, 572.

[45] Henry Kissinger (1969), 'Memorandum for the President: The Middle East – Some Policy Considerations, February 3', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100122913, section A2.

It should be noted that the physical power of the *fedayeen* did not pose a direct threat to the integrity of Israel; despite minor victories against IDF units, the guerrillas possessed nowhere near enough resources to challenge the sophisticated Israel military.[46] That being said, the constant guerrilla activity did represent a problem for Tel Aviv. Although the IDF had repeatedly proven its superiority in conflict with Arab forces, Israelis remained widely convinced of their own vulnerability and the ongoing threat of annihilation. Guided by this misplaced sense of vulnerability, Israel responded to *fedayeen* insurgency with a zero tolerance policy characterised by violent reprisals against Palestinian refugee camps and those Arab states which supported and sheltered the insurgents. Pointedly, these Israeli reprisals were often considerably more violent than the original attacks. This disproportionality had two purposes. Firstly, it sought to convince Israel's enemies that supporting *fedayeen* terrorism was too costly a strategy to maintain. Secondly, it sought to assuage domestic anger towards the insurgents. As the State Department observed in 1969:

> To say that Israel has the political and military means to respond to Arab provocation without resort to massive retaliatory actions, however, misses the main point… If the Government cannot prevent the Arabs from taking Israeli lives, it must… demonstrate dramatically that it can make the Arabs pay heavily.[47]

The obvious problem with the strategy of disproportionate retaliation was that, in seeking to quash the insurgency, Israel's reprisals actually served to exacerbate the conflict; the more violently Israel responded to *fedayeen* activity, the more sympathetic the general Arab population became to the Palestinian cause. Indeed, even the moderate Lebanese and Jordanians were growing weary of tolerating Israel's high-handed aggression towards their populations. In both countries, the combined pressure of internal unrest and Israeli reprisals threatened to topple the incumbent regimes in favour of more radical leaders – a development that would undoubtedly lead to further conflict and perhaps even a return to open warfare in the region.

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Nixon's failure to advance a coherent strategy for the Middle East during the first year and a half of his administration had not simply disabled the United States from engaging dynamically with the Arab bloc and its neighbours. This development was itself a major problem for US-Middle East relations, but the true impact of strategic ambiguity was more serious still. In fact, Nixon's penchant for strategic ambiguity had directly contributed to a visible deterioration of America's position in the turbulent yet strategically significant region. Unopposed by the US, the Soviet Union established a comprehensive regional presence at America's expense, Arab nationalism continued to menace the region's remaining moderate regimes and Palestinian guerrillas – who simply wanted justice for their

[46] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section I, subsection 1d.

[47] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section II, subsection 5.

people – threatened to ignite a new round of Arab-Israeli hostilities. With crises of potentially global proportions brewing in the region, the United States could not afford to continue this ill-judged strategic ambiguity any longer, but what would it take to convince the president that a strategic re-evaluation was in order? As it transpired, a catalyst for change lay just around the corner.

CHAPTER THREE

STRATEGIC REPERCUSSIONS OF THE JORDAN CRISIS

CRISIS IN JORDAN

During the summer of 1970, in accordance with the Rogers Plan, Jordan's Hashemite regime tightened security along the long Israeli-Jordanian border, denying the fedayeen access to Israeli targets.[1] For anti-Hashemite radicals, this betrayal was the last straw. On the first of September, the fragile truce between Palestinian guerrillas and the Jordanian regime was shattered by an assassination attempt against King Hussein. Hussein survived the attempt, but his country was plunged into civil conflict as the full extent of Palestinian unrest was unleashed. In the days that followed, further (unsuccessful) attempts were made on Hussein's life and fighting broke out in the streets. Guerrillas from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked four commercial aircraft, eventually exploding them in front of the assembled media and declaring Irbid, Jordan's second largest city, a 'liberated region'.[2]

On the 16 September, the King responded by declaring martial law and, the following morning, unleashing his loyal Bedouin-led military on the Palestinian insurgency. In America, President Nixon gave a "tough law-and-order speech" denouncing the guerrillas.[3] While Jordanian tanks shelled the headquarters of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in Amman, ground forces began a

[1] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis: Correcting the Record', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 100, No. 1, Spring, 122.

[2] Anon (n.d.), 'Jordanian Removal of the PLO', *GlobalSecurity.org*, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/jordan-civil.htm (accessed 16.02.07).

[3] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 123.

comprehensive purge of fedayeen facilities in Irbid, Salt, Sweileh and Zarqa. Heavy urban warfare between the Jordanian army and uncoordinated *fedayeen* fighters resulted in massive Palestinian casualties, both guerrilla and civilian. It seemed that Hussein had regained the upper hand and Washington applauded his decisive course of action. However, there remained a risk that other Arab regimes might move to reinforce the ailing Palestinian insurgency. Consequently, Nixon "discretely" informed newspapers that the US would intervene on behalf of their client if "Syria or Iraq were to join the fighting on the side of the Palestinians".[4] Despite these stern warnings, on the evening of the 18 September, "small contingents of Syrian armoured divisions crossed into Jordan, followed [the next morning] by a massive Syrian invasion".[5] As some two hundred Syrian tanks rolled to the aid of the insurgents, King Hussein asked Washington to make good on its promise of intervention.

Although the administration had largely neglected the Middle East prior to the Jordan crisis, Nixon was deeply concerned by the Syrian invasion. In recent months, "Soviet diplomatic recalcitrance" and reports of a secret submarine base at Cienfuegos in Cuba had led the new administration to believe that it was being tested by the Kremlin.[6] The invasion of Jordan by Moscow's Syrian client was interpreted in light of this belief, as a further test of America's mettle. Suddenly the Middle East had become the centre of a "superpower psychodrama" and Nixon was "determined to signal to the Soviets that he would stand firm".[7] Despite warnings from Pentagon officials that America's considerable commitments in Southeast Asia would severely limit the US capacity to intervene in Jordan, Nixon reaffirmed his commitment to Hussein's survival by placing the Sixth Fleet on a war footing.[8]

Crucially however, the administration's failure to establish a coherent strategy and prevailing position in the region prior to 1970 meant that Nixon's subsequent options were extremely limited. Thanks to Nixon's preference for maintaining strategic ambiguity in America's dealings with the Middle East, Washington possessed no allies of consequence in the immediate vicinity of Jordan. Meanwhile, America's European allies were proving exceptionally uncooperative. Even the mighty Sixth Fleet was of limited use thanks to the presence of its new Soviet counterpart.[9] There was, of course, an option for the United States to intervene unilaterally in Jordan, but this clearly would have been a dangerous move; US

[4] William B. Quandt (1971), 'The Middle East Conflict in US Strategy, 1970-71', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 47; Peter Lisagor (1970), *Chicago Sun-Times*, 17 September, cited in Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 123.

[5] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 124.

[6] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 121, 124.

[7] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 118, 121.

[8] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 123.

[9] Admiral Isaac Kidd, Jnr. (1972), 'View from the Bridge of the Sixth Fleet Flagship', *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, 92, February, 27.

Marines and air power could certainly make the Syrians reconsider their invasion, but such an enterprise would undoubtedly draw the Soviets into the fray. With Soviet MiGs stationed in Egypt and reinforcements only a short distance away, American forces would be totally inadequate. Having put his nation's prestige on the line, Nixon needed to follow through on his rhetoric, but without a coherent strategy, it was unclear how he could do so. As Adam Garfinkle comments, "It was at this point that a standing Israeli offer to coordinate policy attracted serious consideration".[10]

Israel was initially asked to provide local intelligence on the crisis, which Washington could relay to Hussein. The Israelis however, were keen to take a more active role. What if, Rabin asked Kissinger, the intelligence warranted an airstrike? Was Israel authorised to implement such a response, or were they "simply playing postman"?[11] On the 20 September, having discussed the matter with Nixon, Kissinger informed Rabin that America would "look favourably upon an Israeli air attack".[12] Rabin, further pressing the matter, asked if the same authorisation applied to Israeli ground forces and if so, would the US protect Israel in the event of an Egyptian counterattack? Apparently, Nixon agreed to endorse Israeli ground strikes without consulting the National Security Council (NSC) or Washington Special Advisory Group (WSAG), but Kissinger delayed informing Tel Aviv of Nixon's decision and later convinced the president to reconsider the matter with the aid of the WSAG.[13] Popular mythology suggests that Nixon remained committed to an Israeli ground assault during these discussions, even agreeing to provide a nuclear umbrella in the case of Soviet intervention, but this was not the case. As Garfinkle astutely comments:

> Not more than fifteen hours elapsed between the supposed US decision to work out a joint contingency plan with Israel and the plan's supposed approval. Working out all the details of a joint plan to mutual satisfaction in such a short time, especially if it included an American umbrella against the Soviets, would have been quite a feat.[14]

The truth was that America was highly reticent to become entangled in a Middle East conflict – whether by committing to defend either the Jordanians or the Israelis – especially if it would mean a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union. Consequently, Washington procrastinated in its response to Tel Aviv, providing the Israelis with the same "constant but vague assurances it gave to Hussein".[15] While Israel was still waiting for Washington's response, Hussein once again took matters into his own hands and, on the 22 September, repulsed the Syrians. Five days later, Hussein and Arafat met with other Arab leaders in Cairo to agree a settlement. The day after that, 28 September 1970, Gamal Abdul Nasser suffered a sudden heart attack and died.

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[10] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 126.

[11] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 127.

[12] Henry Kissinger (1979), *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co.), 623.

[13] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 127.

[14] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 130.

[15] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 130-1.

STRATEGIC REPERCUSSIONS OF THE CRISIS

After a year and a half spent ignoring the warnings of the State Department, the dramatic events of September 1970 finally convinced Nixon that the United States needed to define a clear and coherent strategy for the Middle East if it was to preserve its position in the region. However, the crisis did more than simply catalyse an American strategic revision; as well as opening Nixon's eyes to the dangers of an ambiguous strategic posture, the events of the Jordan crisis – especially its swift resolution – were influential in shaping the character of the administration's new strategy. As the dust from the retreating Syrian tanks was still settling, the president's imprudent and ambiguous response to the Palestinian uprising was reinterpreted as a "determined, forceful… posture" which had contributed directly to the swift restoration of stability.[16] While the Pentagon breathed a sign of relief at the evasion of a catastrophic confrontation with Moscow, those indecisive officials who had bluffed America to the brink congratulated themselves on a job well done. Thanks to their actions,

> The United States had [supposedly]… faced down the Russians and had shown that the US pre-occupation in Southeast Asia did not paralyze US policy elsewhere. Hussein's throne had been saved, the 'terrorists' defanged, the Syrians bloodied, and the Iraqis embarrassed by their own passivity. The Chinese – with whom the administration was trying to establish relations – were shown that the United States was an ally worth having.[17]

However, America could not have achieved these victories alone: Israel was also believed to have played a pivotal role in resolving the crisis, leading Nixon to reserve a special place for Tel Aviv within his administration's newly-defined strategy for the Middle East.

Decline of the Arabist camp

Traditionally, American administrations had accepted the theory that Arabs represented the predominant power group in the Middle East. This theory, propagated by a variety of academics, oil men and military experts who may collectively be referred to as the Arabist camp, was based not only on Arab control of oil resources but also the Arabs' considerable demographic advantage compared to other Middle Eastern groups. Guided by this theory, Washington had spent decades pursuing Arab allies, even in the face of radical nationalism and Arab-Soviet liaisons. Although the influence of the Arabist camp was gradually weakened by America's frustration with the Arab bloc and, after 1967, Johnson's decision to pursue a strategic arrangement with the region's 'next best' power, the ongoing belief in Arab predominance had continued to limit America's progress towards a US-Israeli partnership. However,

[16] William B. Quandt (1971), 'The Middle East Conflict in US Strategy, 1970-71', 48.

[17] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 135.

Israel's performance during the Syro-Palestinian uprising fundamentally challenged the Arabists' argument. Having received permission for aerial operations from Washington, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) had staged flyovers to intimidate Syrian divisions in Jordan. In light of the subsequent Syrian retreat, American policy-makers swiftly attributed the cessation of hostilities to these demonstrations of Israeli power. The IAF had never fired a shot, but it was believed that the mere threat of an Israeli intervention (which could be expected to result in yet another humiliating Arab defeat) had caused the insurgents to reconsider their revolution. According to this remarkable interpretation of events, the traditional concept of Arab regional predominance was incorrect; despite their relative minority, the Israelis had seemingly intimidated the Arabs into submission, thereby demonstrating that Tel Aviv, rather than Cairo, Damascus or Baghdad, was the real seat of predominant power in the Middle East.

Pointedly, the second strut of Arabist theory – the belief in a potential Arab-Soviet axis – was also discredited during the Jordan crisis. Motivated by their belief in the strategic imperative to establish US-Arab partnerships, Arabists were alarmed by Washington's increasingly pro-Israeli posture from 1967. Fearing that the Kremlin would take advantage of the deteriorating relationship between America and the Arab bloc, Arabists warned Washington to revive US-Arab relations or face losing its "remaining bases of influence in the Eastern Arab world" to the Soviet Union.[18] To counter the threat of Soviet ambition, Arabists even recommended building partnerships with the powerful Arab nationalist regimes:

> Distasteful as the nationalists are, they will be a major factor in shaping the future of the Near East. Tying ourselves just to our current Arab friends, an alignment resting *inter alia* on the remaining Arab monarchies of a fast-changing area looks like a risky bet.[19]

By partnering with Nasserite regimes, Arabists hoped that the US could harness radical nationalism, turning the movement which had been eroding America's regional influence since the mid-1950s against the Soviets. Naturally, this would mark a controversial departure form America's prevailing strategy, but as one NSC survey observed: "We have little stake in what systems emerge – provided they are genuinely independent and pursue legitimate interests by peaceful means. Strong nationalism is the main block to Communist expansion".[20] Although few policy-makers bought into the idea of exploiting nationalism to America's advantage (it was simply too unpredictable to be harnessed constructively), the possibility of fostering a Soviet dominated Arab bloc was cause for concern and a major obstacle to US-Israeli partnership prior to the autumn of 1970.[21]

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[18] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100545667, subsection 5(1).

[19] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24', subsection 4(b), subsection 1A, subsection 5(1).

[20] John Foster & Harold Saunders (1968), 'The Middle East and North Africa, 1963-1968: A New Balance Emerging? June 4', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100506967, 1.

[21] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100552758, section I, subsection 1e.

Of course, Arabists were correct in believing that the Soviet Union hoped to dominate the Middle East through the Arab bloc; the Kremlin had been seeking to establish a stronghold in the region since the 1940s. Early efforts in Syria were frustrated by political instability (thanks in part to covert CIA operations under Eisenhower), forcing Moscow to settle for piecemeal influence in Damascus. During the early 1960s, the Kremlin targeted Iraq, but soon found Baghdad to be equally uncooperative. On this occasion, it was not political instability that frustrated the Kremlin's designs, but political dynamism in the shape of indigenous nationalist movements like the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party which forced the Communists out of power in 1968. By the late 1960s, Moscow's attention had turned to Egypt. Under Nasser's leadership, Cairo had become the driving seat of the Arab world and a worthy candidate for Soviet partnership. Indeed, by the summer of 1970, Soviet forces were well-established in Egypt and Arabist fears of an Arab-Soviet stronghold looked close to becoming a reality.

However, Nasser's sudden demise that autumn revealed another reality. The intense War of Attrition had left Egypt economically dessicated and politically unstable. With the charistmatic figurehead of Arab nationalism gone and Cairo severely weakened, the portended Soviet-Egyptian axis now seemed highly unlikely. In light of this analysis, Arabist-inspired efforts to secure Arab states against Communist domination seemed largely redundant; without a Soviet stronghold in Egypt, native anti-imperialism would likely provide a sufficient limiting effect on Moscow's ambitions. Indeed, by retiring from the competition over the Arab World, Washington could effectively saddle Moscow "with support of the turbulent Arab states who [faced] generations of evolution and modernization before they [could] serve as dependable bases for power".[22] In other words, while the Soviets wasted resources trying to transform the unruly Arabs into useful clients, the West would be free to concentrate its attentions on more productive enterprises elsewhere.

With the two principle Arabists arguments seemingly discredited by the events of September, the influence of the Arabist camp in American policy-making withered rapidly. This political power vacuum created an unprecedented opportunity for both America's pro-Israel lobby and the Israeli government to increase their respective influence in Washington's corridors of power. It is no surprise therefore that, following the Jordan crisis, Nixon's new approach to the Middle East was centred upon a formalised US-Israeli partnership.

[22] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24', subsection 4(a)

The US-Israeli Strategic Partnership

The Israelis and their American sympathisers had long sought to establish a strategic arrangement between Washington and Tel Aviv. As early as 1957, Ben Gurion appealed to Washington for "American military hardware, a formal US guarantee of Israeli security, and Washington's agreement 'that the NATO commitment [i.e. a nuclear umbrella] should be extended to the Middle East'".[23] However, it was not until the end of the 1960s that such a relationship became a genuine possibility.

In July 1969, at a conference in Guam, President Nixon unveiled a new strategy rather inaccurately recorded in history as the Nixon Doctrine.[24] This 'doctrine', the result of decades of American military over-extension, centred on the following principle:

> The United States will participate in the defense and development of allies and friends… but America cannot – and will not – conceive all the plans, design all the programs, execute all the decisions, and undertake all the defense of the free nations of the world. We will help where it makes a difference and is considered in our interest.[25]

In keeping with this principle, America sought to identify strong local partners who could assume responsibility for maintaining regional security on behalf of the US in exchange for closer relations and comprehensive arms deals. Initially, this meant the South Vietnamese, to whom Nixon intended to transfer the burden of the continued Vietnam War, but the process of 'Vietnamisation' was not limited to Southeast Asia. Seeing this as an opportunity to obtain a security guarantee from the US and advance Israel's international status at the expense of the Arab bloc, Tel Aviv worked hard to present itself to Washington as the very "embodiment of the Nixon Doctrine".[26]

The primary requirement for a Regional Guardian was the possession of a strong, self-sufficient military, capable of exerting influence over a regional sphere. Israel had already demonstrated that it possessed considerable military prowess through its ongoing conflict with the Arab bloc. Indeed, in 1969 the State Department noted that "the Israeli military [were] confident of their ability to defeat any

[23] State Department memcon, 'Israel's Need for a Security Guarantee', 31 October 1957, *FRUS 1955-57*, 17, 779-85; Douglas Little (1993), 'The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-69', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 25, 565.

[24] The term was inaccurate since, as a pedantic Zbigniew Brzezinski noted at the time, it referred to the beginning of a "process of redefinition of American foreign policy", rather than the fully-realised culmination of such a process, as the Truman Doctrine had been. Moreover, it was not Nixon's own creation, but the work of Melvin Laird, then Secretary of Defence. Zbigniew Brzezinski (1971), 'Half Past Nixon', *Foreign Policy*, No. 3 (Summer), 20-1; A. James Reichley (1981), *Conservatives in an Age of Change: The Nixon and Ford Administrations* (The Brooklings Institute: Washington DC), 110.

[25] Richard M. Nixon (1971), 'Speech in Guam on Vietnamisation, July 25', *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Richard Nixon: 1969* (Government Printing Office: Washington DC), 544-48.

[26] Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 99.

combination of Arab states".[27] When Nixon came to power, any number of analysts would have agreed that the IDF had more than proved its ability to vanquish any Arab force it faced in battle, but if Israel hoped to be granted a strategic partnership with the US, Tel Aviv had to demonstrate that its military power extended to maintaining regional stability, as well as offensive-defensive operations. Tel Aviv's commitment to the ruthless strategy of Deterrent Force – a doctrine that demanded that Israel not only possess an "overwhelming military superiority" vis-à-vis its Arab neighbours, but also "the determination to strike first" when necessary – had certainly cultivated the potential for the IDF to impose a stabilising effect on the Middle East; with memories of the Six Day War still fresh in Arab minds, the certain knowledge that Israel would pre-empt any further acts of aggression with overwhelming force must have fostered caution amongst even the most radical circles. US officials, who were painfully aware of America's own failings in Vietnam, applauded Israel's apparent success in frustrating Arab nationalist ambitions (and by implication, Communist subversion).[28] However, measuring the direct influence of Deterrent Force on regional stability was problematic. How could the US be sure that Israel's military strategy was responsible for containing destabilising elements when skirmishing and violence was a daily occurrence in the Middle East? Arguably, large-scale attacks had been deterred by the threat of an Israeli counterattack, but there was no way to know this for a fact. Lacking tangible evidence, the IDF's capacity to impose regional stability remained unproven until September 1970.

According to the White House interpretation of events, Israel's contribution to the suppression of the Syro-Palestinian uprising in Jordan provided clear evidence that Israel did indeed possess the ability to exercise a stabilising influence over the Arab bloc. Nixon himself took the swift resolution of the crisis as "evidence that the Nixon Doctrine worked" and Tel Aviv was immediately rewarded with a full strategic partnership.[29] To accompany this promotion, America moved to further increase Israel's already significant allocation of aid. Military aid soared from $140 million in 1968-70 to an incredible $1.15 billion in 1971-73.[30] The increase in total US aid to Israel from the 1960s to the 1970s was nearly two thousand percent.[31] Congress had already passed a bill authorising the supply of armaments to Israel sufficient to

[27] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section II, subsection 1c.

[28] Barry Rubin (1973), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 100; For their part, the Pentagon celebrated the fact that US weapons systems, as used by the IDF, were proving themselves superior to the Soviet versions employed by the Arabs. Not only was this a source of immense pride for the American military-industrial complex, it also provided an invaluable demonstration of "what could be expected in [the event of] a NATO-Central Europe area war". Joe Stork (1980), 'The Carter Doctrine and US Bases in the Middle East', *MERIP Reports*, No. 90 (September), 9; Senate Committee on Armed Services (1974), *Hearings on FY 1975 Authorisation for Military Procurement, Research and Development, and Active Duty, Selected Reserve and Civilian Personnel Strengths, Part II* (February), 380-381.

[29] Adam M. Garfinkle (1985), 'US Decision Making in the Jordan Crisis', 135.

[30] Martha Wenger (1990), 'US Aid to Israel: From Handshake to Embrace' *Middle East Report*, No. 164/165 (May-Aug.), 14.

[31] 1960-69: $834.8 million, 1970-79: $16,309.2 million. Martha Wenger (1990), 'US Aid to Israel: From Handshake to Embrace', 14.

offset "past, present and future Soviet deliveries to Arab states".[32] Legislation passed subsequent to the Jordan crisis, including the Master Defense Development Data Exchange Agreement of December 1970, widened this provision still further, granting the administration "absolute authority to supply Israel [with…] 'virtually any conventional American arms Israelis might desire'", including "armoured vehicles, air-to-air and air-to-surface weapons, electronic warfare and surveillance systems".[33] Equipped with these sophisticated arms, Israel was truly fit to take its place as America's proxy in the Middle East.

A System of Sentinels and Spheres

Nixon's move towards a formal partnership with Tel Aviv placed Israel at the core of a new supra-regional system intended to establish American hegemony throughout the Mediterranean, Middle East and Indian Ocean. Unlike previous pacts, this new system was not guided by a strategy of comprehensive defence in depth. Outside of the core European battleground, the traditional defence in depth model had achieved little success, as local developments like nationalism – buoyed either by the Soviets or the Non-Aligned Movement – repeatedly frustrated Washington's efforts to construct a unified front against Communist subversion. The Nixon system was a response to these failings, drawing lessons from the model which had preserved Britain's global predominance for over two hundred years, to advance an approach founded not upon a general colonisation of power, but upon sentinels and spheres of influence. This new approach allowed the United States to refrain from chasing friendly relations with every country in a given region and concentrate instead on building partnerships with states of strategic value. Once these states were empowered with American arms and diplomatic authority, they became sentinels of American hegemony, radiating spheres of influence which served to draw the region's remaining states – friends and rebels alike – into the American system.

Seven sentinels were selected for Nixon's new strategic alliance. Pointedly, neither France nor Italy made the list, chiefly because of Washington's anxiety over leftist tendencies in both countries. Indeed, during his first European tour in 1969, Nixon made no more than a formal visit to Rome and actually "skipped France altogether".[34] Great Britain was also excluded from the new alliance, although given London's economic insecurity this is hardly surprising. Nixon's seven sentinels were Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Iran, and, of course, Israel. The strategic value of these states is obvious: the Iberian sentinels controlled access to and activity within the western Mediterranean, while Greece played a similar role in the central Mediterranean region. Turkey – who, despite increasing independence during

[32] Eqbal Ahmad (1971), 'Israel and USA: Towards a New Pact', *Pakistan Forum*, December-January, 8.

[33] Eqbal Ahmad (1971), 'Israel and USA: Towards a New Pact', 8; Shelia Ryan (1987), 'US Military Contracts in Israel', *Middle East Report*, January-February, 17.

[34] Eqbal Ahmad (1971), 'Israel and USA: Towards a New Pact', 7.

the 1960s, had remained loyal to the US due to a "mutual opposition to Soviet expansion" – continued to provide an essential frontline defence against the Soviet Union, as well as a pro-American influence over the eastern Mediterranean.[35] Further east, the Shah of Iran – another well-established American ally – maintained US interests in the oil-rich states of the Persian Gulf. Combined with the ever-present Sixth Fleet and the newly-expanded US Middle East Force (based in Bahrain), these states formed a network of interlocking spheres capable of exerting American hegemony from the Azores to Bangladesh.[36] At the heart of the system – custodian of the vacuum formerly occupied by Imperial Britain – sat Israel, sentinel for the Middle East and "chief constable" of America's new regional police force.[37]

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By late 1970, America's approach to the Middle East had undergone a radical transformation. After years of strategic ambiguity, the reality of Soviet-sponsored Syrian tanks in friendly Jordan had finally convinced the White House that a more decisive regional approach was required. The character of this new approach was defined by the administration's own peculiar interpretation of the crisis. According to the White House, the suppression of the Syro-Palestinian uprising by Israeli air power had discredited the legitimacy of lingering Arabist inclinations in American policy-making, paving the way for a new regional conception centred on Israeli predominance. Catalysed by this paradigm shift, the United States abandoned efforts to restore working relations with the Arab bloc and looked instead towards a formalised arrangement with Tel Aviv. However, while the transition from ambiguity to clarity was an undeniably radical development in America's dealings with the Middle East, the advent of a formal US-Israeli partnership in the autumn of 1970 should not be mistaken for the emergence of a coherent American strategy for the region.

The guiding principle behind the US-Israeli alliance was pragmatism. A prolonged policy of strategic ambiguity had left Washington ill-prepared and ill-equipped to respond to major developments in the Middle East and consequently, when civil war broke out in Jordan, the White House was plunged into strategic crisis. The establishment of a formal partnership with Tel Aviv in the aftermath of the Palestinian uprising was a direct response to this strategic crisis. With the American Middle East system in rapid decay, Washington needed to identify ways to revitalise its regional influence. Israel, now understood to

[35] John Foster & Harold Saunders (1968), 'The Middle East and North Africa, 1963-1968: A New Balance Emerging? June 4', 9.

[36] In 1972, the newly-independent government of Bahrain granted the US Navy base rights, formalising an unofficial agreement that had existed since 1948. This facility – the only foreign military base in the Gulf – was home to MIDEASTFOR, a fleet that manoeuvred "from East Africa to Bangladesh". Buzz Theberge (1972), 'US Base in Bahrain: Guarding the Gulf', *MERIP Reports*, No. 8 (March-April), 15.

[37] Eqbal Ahmad (1971), 'Israel and USA: Towards a New Pact', 8.

be the predominant power amongst the core states of the Middle East, was an ideal ally for an administration which operated on the neo-Machiavellian axiom that "peace is based on strength".[38] In concert with the nearby Turkish and Iranian sentinels, the US-Israeli alliance fortified the ailing American system, swiftly creating the impression of US hegemony within the contested region.

Despite appearances however, Nixon's new approach was totally ill-equipped to respond to the myriad destabilising influences present within the Middle East; regardless of IDF strength, a strategy that relied upon the non-Arab (indeed, non-Middle Eastern) states of Israel, Turkey and Iran could never hope to resolve the intrinsically Arab issues which faced the fragile region: How exactly could Tel Aviv counter the spread of radical Arab movements, when history had shown that Israel's very existence was a prime catalyst for militant nationalism and Arab-Soviet partnership?[39] How could Israel be expected to put an end to *fedayeen* terrorism, when its government was unwilling to recognise fundamental Arab grievances and its armed forces were perpetuating the spiral of aggression? How would America's remaining Arab allies respond to Washington's support for the expansionist Israeli and Persian regimes? In short, Nixon had not established a coherent *regional* strategy, but simply a modified version of the Northern Tier; after decades of upheaval, US Middle East strategy had simply retreated to its default setting.

[38] Richard Nixon, cited in Eqbal Ahmad (1971), 'Israel and USA: Towards a New Pact', 8.

[39] Indeed, Tariq Ali observes: "If the Zionist state had not existed it is likely that Arab nationalism would have disappeared with the withdrawal of Britain and France from the region". Tariq Ali (2003), *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (Verso: London & NY), 113.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONSEQUENCES OF THE US-ISRAELI STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, 1970 - 1973

Inevitably, America's transition from strategic ambiguity to a firmly pro-Israel posture had significant consequences for the geo-politics of the Middle East. For a start, Washington's new approach put significant strain on US-Arab relations. Not surprisingly, Arab leaders were deeply frustrated by Nixon's contempt for traditional Arab pivots and formal alignment with Israel. This frustration was further aggravated by another consequence of the US-Israeli partnership: Nixon's controversial decision to withdraw Washington's long-standing support for the Arab-Israeli peace process.

The United States had been actively committed to establishing territorial justice in the Middle East since the Israeli War of Independence in 1948. Even following the Six Day War, with American interest in the development of a US-Arab arrangement waning, the White House had remained at least theoretically committed to achieving a settlement. However, by the autumn of 1970, the Arab-friendly idealism of the peace process had been deemed incompatible with Nixon's pragmatic, Israel-centred policy. As a consequence, the White House elected to quietly stall progress towards a settlement until such a time as the incompatibility between security and justice could be resolved.

With the White House visibly committed to stalling the peace process, Arab frustration intensified. State Department analysts feared that these tensions would polarise the region and lead to further instability, as disenchanted Arab states sought to resolve their unanswered complaints by violent means. Even America's moderate clients were believed vulnerable to such polarisation, either through a radicalisation of the prevailing establishment – disillusioned by the experience of courting an American administration committed to protecting Israeli interests over Arab grievances – or a usurpation of power by opportunistic elements, as almost took place in Jordan in 1970. Critics warned

that the longer Washington relied upon its blunt, Israel-centric approach and ignored Arab grievances, the more polarised and unstable the region would become; a development that would place American interests, not least the flow of oil, in jeopardy.

The White House, on the other hand, was far less concerned by the risk of polarisation in the Middle East. Guided by its belief in the impotence of Arab regimes and the eternal lure of American patronage, White House staff dismissed State Department warnings, arguing that even if radical regimes were frustrated by recent developments, they posed no threat to regional stability. Meanwhile, they argued, America's interests would remain secure, since the moderate and oil-producing Arab regimes would necessarily remain loyal to the United States "in the interests of their own survival". As an earlier survey of regional projections put it, "The economic interest of the Arab governments in the flow of oil is so strong that, despite temptation to act irrationally, they are unlikely to cut it off for an extended period".[1]

In fact, the Nixon administration had significantly underestimated the vigour of Arab resentment towards the US, Israel and the non-existent peace process. However, blinded by its mistaken assumptions, the White House saw no reason to modify its regional approach. As it transpired, Washington continued in this false sense of security right up until October 1973, when Arab forces revealed the flaws in the prevailing paradigm by uniting to launch a devastating attack against an unsuspecting Israel.

STALLING THE ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS

The formation of the US-Israeli strategic partnership in the autumn of 1970 was accompanied by a flurry of diplomatic activity intended to convince the Arab bloc that Washington was still eager to achieve a settlement regarding the Israeli occupied territories. One key element of this campaign was the State Department's proposal in the winter of 1970 to reopen the Suez Canal. State Department officials argued that an agreement on the canal would be the first step towards more comprehensive settlement negotiations. Since the canal's closure was depriving Cairo of "some $250 million in revenue a year", as well as its symbolic status as "custodian of the world's busiest international waterway", its proposed reopening was welcomed with interest by Nasser's successor, Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat.[2] However, Sadat was anxious that an agreement on the canal would lead to a fossilisation of the *status quo*, rather than further Israeli concessions. In February 1971, to demonstrate his desire to achieve a meaningful settlement, Sadat announced a one-month extension to the Suez cease-fire and dispatched an official note to UN Ambassador Jarring in which he "publicly

[1] DOS (1969), 'Staff Study: US Interests in the Middle East, January 24', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100545667, subsection 5(2), subsection 1B.

[2] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100552758, section II, subsection 3.

acknowledged… his willingness to make peace with Israel".[3] Washington responded to these overtures with an official visit from Michael Sterner, head of the Egyptian Desk in the State Department, followed by a similar delegation to Tel Aviv. Despite this flurry of activity however, it was increasingly clear that Sadat's anxieties were correct; the United States had no intention of pressing Tel Aviv into meaningful territorial concessions. The canal proposal, along with other elements of the administration's diplomatic campaign, was simply propaganda designed "to give the Arabs the impression that [America] might yet intervene in their favour while in fact doing nothing but making time, allowing the Israelis to further consolidate their position".[4] In the summer of 1971, determined not to be "tricked into a partial settlement which would never lead to further Israeli withdrawal", Sadat rejected the canal plan and began seeking alternative solutions to Arab grievances.[5]

A Strategic Decision

The Nixon administration's decision to stall progress towards a territorial settlement in the Middle East was a strategic resolution and a direct consequence of Nixon's sentinel strategy. The principle argument was that a settlement would cause injury to America's new strategic partner without bringing any significant advantage in exchange. In other words, since the White House no longer considered the Arabs to be a threat that required placating or potentially useful allies in need of seduction, there was no reward to be gained from satisfying Arab grievances beyond mere moral gratification. On the other hand, were Israel to surrender the Occupied Territories to Arab control, Tel Aviv would be deprived of the strategic benefits afforded by Sinai, the Golan and West Bank. These benefits were considerable. As the former BBC Middle East Correspondent, Jeremy Bowen, notes in his book on the Six Day War, retreat from the these strategic territories threatened to reduce Israel's defensibility dramatically:

> Withdrawal from the West Bank would not only multiply several times the border Israel has to defend, but would again leave Israel with the 'wasp's waist' that, prior to the June war, was always regarded by Israeli military leaders as Israel's most serious strategic weakness. Israel is only 15 miles wide at this point, and on June 5, 1967 rounds fired from Jordanian guns hit the suburbs of Tel Aviv. If Arab military forces were allowed back into the West Bank, Israel would be presented with the threat of a sudden and massive Arab military drive to pinch off the 'waist', dividing Israel in two.[6]

Elsewhere, a retreat from the Golan Heights would once again render Israeli settlements in the upper Jordan valley vulnerable to Syrian artillery, while a withdrawal from Sinai would mean that Israel's "front lines would be 150 miles closer to home and considerably longer". The surrender of Sinai would also deprive Israel of the peninsula's "advance air bases and early warning radar", both of which had

[3] William B. Quandt (1971), 'The Middle East Conflict in US Strategy, 1970-71', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.1, No. 1, 50.

[4] Michael Hudson (1973), 'The US and the Middle East in the Second Nixon Administration', *American Committee for Justice in the Middle East* (Boulder, Colorado), 2, cited in Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 102.

[5] William B. Quandt (1971), 'The Middle East Conflict in US Strategy, 1970-71', 49, 51.

[6] Jeremy Bowen (2003), *Six Days: How the 1967 war shaped the Middle East* (Simon & Schuster UK Ltd: London), 11.

made the IDF better prepared than ever to defend against surprise attacks, and deny Israeli the strategic advantages of controlling "the best tank trap ever made", the Suez Canal.[7] As Nixon's sentinel approach relied upon Israel's strength to maintain stability in the Middle East, the idea of reducing Israeli security in this way was unthinkable.

Pointedly, even if the US had been in favour of a restoration of the Occupied Territories, convincing Israel to accept a settlement would have been another matter altogether. To achieve a meaningful settlement would have undoubtedly required the US to impose prolonged and severe pressures on its new partner, most likely the suspension of economic and military aid. This embargo might well have forced Israel to cooperate with settlement negotiations, but would have also had a detrimental effect on Tel Aviv's defensive capacity, leaving Israel vulnerable to an opportunistic Arab attack. In light of this possibility and Washington's commitment to Israel's survival, such a reduction of Israel's security was deemed counterproductive:

> Assuming that the US would in the end intervene itself if Israel's survival were at stake, with all the risk of Big Power confrontation which this would imply, it would be contrary to US national interests for us to contribute to a significant weakening of Israel's defensive capabilities.[8]

In short, the aspiration to achieve territorial justice in the Middle East was considered of secondary importance to the maintenance of Israeli strength and security. As a result of this practical reality, the Nixon White House suspended efforts to advance the peace process and settled for managed instability.

"Officially Inspired Optimism"[9]

Exactly which domestic officials were privy to the administration's opposition to a settlement in unclear. Secretary Rogers' vocal optimism regarding the peace process may well suggest that the State Department (or at least its chief) was not aware of the official policy. It would certainly seem in keeping with the marginal nature of Nixon's other dealings with Rogers to suggest that the neglected Secretary of State was not informed, at least not in full. Moreover, given the secretary's marginality, it seems more plausible that his frequent statements regarding 'a genuine negotiating process' were the naïve sentiments of an ill-informed and unusually sidelined statesman, rather than the conscious deceptions of a co-conspirator. On the other hand, Rogers' deputy, Joseph J. Sisco, does seem to have been aware of the anti-settlement policy. In May 1973, the Assistant Secretary of State "publicly called for Israel to 'prime the pump' of negotiations with new ideas".[10] However, behind closed doors,

[7] In addition to geographical advantages afforded by Sinai, the Israelis were also exploiting Egyptian-built oil platforms in the peninsula at a rate of 100,000 barrels a day. DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section II, subsection 3.

[8] DOS (1969), 'Report: International Situation in the Middle East, January 1', section II, subsection 6.

[9] Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 105.

[10] Barry Rubin (1973), 'US Policy and the October War', *MERIP Reports*, No. 23 (December), 7.

Sisco informed Israel's "Washington ambassador, Simcha Dinitz, that this statement was only to keep the Arabs 'off the US's back'".[11]

Whether deliberately misleading or simply misinformed, optimistic public statements regarding the peace process were undeniably useful to the administration. Although the White House had privately decided against pursuing a settlement, there were various reasons why it was necessary for the US to maintain an illusion of interest in the project. Such an illusion placated America's colleagues in the United Nations who, having passed Resolution 242 in November 1967, wanted to see Israel return the Occupied Territories to Arab control as soon as possible. Such an illusion also guaranteed that the Arab bloc continued to see the US as a source of hope, rather than a target for hatred. As William B. Quandt observes, "it is only when the Arab governments, and in particular Egypt, are convinced that the United States has nothing to offer them, that they will begin to attack US interests in the region".[12] (Of course, the Nixon administration believed the threat posed by Arab regimes to be of minimal significance, but there was no need to subject American interests to trials unnecessarily). Diplomatic gestures and optimistic comments were therefore essential to creating a façade of support for the peace process which distracted the international community from the administration's controversial true intentions.

Ignoring Arab Overtures

Nixon's resolution to stall progress on the Arab-Israeli problem continued right through until October 1973, despite a string of peaceful overtures by Arab leaders during the early months of that year. The first of these overtures was launched in January, when King Hussein visited the White House to share his plans for a settlement between Jordan and Israel. Hussein had a long history of developing peace plans and, aware of the mounting frustration of his Arab cousins, was eager to secure an agreement with the Israelis before renewed hostilities began. After meeting the administration, he told the press confidently:

> I am hopeful that within the near future the US will show a greater interest than it has [previously]… to make a contribution toward achieving a lasting peace in this area. I am really quite optimistic about the trend. I feel we may be on the threshold of important developments.[13]

However, during the Israeli Prime Minister's visit the following month, America made no effort to modify Israel's behaviour or attitude towards a negotiated settlement. Indeed, "on March 12, [Golda] Meir arrived home and said 'there is no basis' for changing Israel's policy on a Middle East settlement".[14] In spite of remarkable Arab concessions, including Sadat's receptivity to a proposal

[11] Barry Rubin (1973), 'US Policy and the October War', 7.

[12] William B. Quandt (1971), 'The Middle East Conflict in US Strategy, 1970-71', 41.

[13] King Hussein, *US News and World Report* (1973), January 15, cited in John Galvani (1973), 'Look Who's Coming to Dinner: Meir and Hussein Seek Peace in the US', *MERIP Reports*, No. 14 (February), 9.

[14] Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 104.

involving "Israeli-Egyptian sharing of petroleum resources [in Sinai] and [an] Israeli presence at Sharm el Sheik", both Tel Aviv and the White House remained staunchly convinced that any attempt to negotiate with the Arabs was as undesirable as it was impossible at this time.[15] Consequently, Meir spent her time in Washington discussing armament deals rather than peace projects.[16]

Even while Hussein's overture was still playing, the Egyptians launched a second round. On February 17, 1973, after Hussein's Washington trip but before Meir's, Sadat announced that he was sending his national security affairs advisor, Hafez Ismail, to America, "to press on President Nixon the need for diplomatic action in the Middle East".[17] Thus began what Barry Rubin describes as successive "'cycles' of negotiations".[18] These cycles were characterised by an initial Arab overture, a second movement in which American officials endorse and compliment the overture, and then a grand finale in which the US government reveals its fundamental disinterest in any form of settlement.[19] One typical example of these cycles involved Sadat offering to accept international control of the strategic city of Sharm el-Sheik, while the Saudi oil minister warned the Washington Post that Riyadh "would not expand oil production unless the US altered its pro-Israel stand".[20] The following day, on April 19, the ever-optimistic Secretary Rogers responded to this intricate 'carrot and stick' overture by stating that "the US would try to persuade the Arabs and Israel to begin 'a genuine negotiating process'".[21] However, as Rubin seems both delighted and disgusted to reveal, within a few mere months of this 'concerted effort' to bring peace the Middle East, it emerged that America has signed a four-year deal to supply forty-eight F-4 Phantoms and thirty-six Skyhawks to Israel.[22] Rather than encouraging Tel Aviv to rein in its military and consider settlement terms, Israel was being rewarded with weapons systems far beyond the sophistication of the Arab militaries; supplies which would facilitate continued aggression towards neighbouring states.

Now, despite the Nixon administration's deliberate decision to stall the peace process, the relationship between Arab overtures and US-Israeli arms deals should not be overestimated. In fact, given the administration's incoherent conception of Middle East strategy, it is reasonable to suggest that Washington's decision to supply Tel Aviv with new armaments bore no more than a coincidental correlation to Washington's policy on the peace process. This is not to say that contemporary witnesses did not arrive at the same conclusions that Rubin has – that US-Israeli arms deals were a

[15] John Galvani (1973), 'Look Who's Coming to Dinner', 8-9.

[16] Since Israel's military aid package would expire at the end of the year, the Meir needed to ensure that a new arrangement would take its place without "any disruption in the arms flow". John Galvani (1973), 'Look Who's Coming to Dinner', 10.

[17] Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 103-4.

[18] Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 104.

[19] Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 104.

[20] Ahmad Yamani, *Washington Post*, April 18, 1973, cited in Barry Rubin (1973), 'US Policy and the October War', 7.

[21] Barry Rubin (1973), 'US Policy and the October War', 7.

[22] Christian Science Monitor, June 18, 1973, cited in Barry Rubin (1973), 'US Policy and the October War', 7.

consciously slight against Arab overtures – but, probably the Americans were ignorant to the perceived significance of their actions.

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For three years following the crisis in Jordan, the Nixon administration pursued a policy that actively sought to deter progress towards a Middle East peace settlement. As Rubin summarises, such a development, while morally attractive, would demand "putting more pressure on Israel than US policy-makers were willing to venture".[23] To avoid public censure, the administration masked its controversial policy with a carefully crafted illusion of ongoing support for the settlement project. Arab leaders, deceived by this illusion, launched several ambitious efforts to advance the peace process. However, since "all Arab concessions, especially Egyptian ones, were seen as signs of weakness which only confirmed the views already held by US leaders", the White House saw no reason to review its opposition to a settlement.[24] Consequently:

> Instead of chivvying the Israelis towards compromise and settlement, Washington… gave Israel every piece of military hardware on the Israeli shopping list and left it free to consolidate its positions in the occupied territories at will.[25]

The blunt truth of this policy was revealed in an unusually frank statement by Kissinger at a luncheon with key Arab representatives in September, 1973: "'What is necessary,' Kissinger said, 'is to find ways to turn what is presently unacceptable to you into a situation with which you can live.' This – maintenance of the *status quo* – was the real US position".[26]

THE RETURN TO WAR

Blinded by Assumptions

Not surprisingly, the Arabs themselves were less than willing to endure the humiliating *status quo* indefinitely. As early as October 1972, infuriated by the failure to make peaceful progress towards a territorial settlement, Sadat began publicly announcing his intention to revive the war with Israel.[27] Having inherited a country economically ruined and militarily humiliated, Egypt's third president needed to take radical steps in order to prevent Cairo from losing its position in the Arab world. A military victory would not only serve to restore Egypt's status as the leading Arab nation, it would also afford Sadat the political capital to implement unpopular but essential modifications to the Egyptian economy. In preparation for the attack, Sadat replaced Egypt's raft of political generals with

[23] Barry Rubin (1973), 'US Policy and the October War', 3.

[24] Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 101.

[25] John Galvani (1973), 'Look Who's Coming to Dinner', 10.

[26] *Washington Post*, September 26, 1973, cited in Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 107.

[27] Abraham Rabinovich (2004), *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East* (Schocken), 25.

competent officers and ordered a thorough revision of Egyptian military tactics. Meanwhile, Soviet armaments continued to arrive in great numbers. Especially significant were the shipments of AT-3 Saggar anti-tank guided missiles, which would soon be used to devastating effect against Israeli armour in the Sinai.[28] Having acquired the necessary armaments to launch his attack, Sadat surprised the international community by expelling nearly all 20,000 of his Soviet military advisors. The White House interpreted this development as another sign that its strategic arrangement with Israel was successful in bringing pro-American stability to the Middle East. In reality, the expulsion of Sadat's Soviet advisors was a pre-emptive effort to limit Moscow's ability to curb Cairo's plans for war.

As the months passed, Sadat continued to warn of his impending attack against Israel unless progress could be made in the settlement project. However, since neither the US nor Israel considered Egypt a genuine threat, these warnings fell on deaf ears. The failure to identify the very real threat in Sadat's warlike words was the consequence of what subsequent investigations termed 'the conception'. This conception was comprised of two assumptions:

> (a) Egypt would not go to war until it was able to stage deep strikes into Israel, particularly against its major military airfields, in order to neutralize Israel's air force;
>
> (b) Syria would not launch a full-scale war against Israel unless Egypt was in the struggle too.[29]

Since the Egyptians were apparently yet to take delivery of fighter-bombers capable of neutralising Israeli air power, it was assumed that an Egyptian attack was not imminent. In fact, Sadat worked hard to maintain this misconception, leaking false intelligence to Israel concerning missing parts for weapons systems and ill-trained personnel. In May and August, Sadat staged large-scale military exercises near the Israeli border. Just to be sure, the IDF was mobilised but the long-threatened Egyptian invasion never materialised. These false starts cost Israel ten million dollars.[30] Consequently, when Egyptian troops began massing near the canal in early October, Israeli intelligence assumed further exercises. Since Israel did not believe that Egypt was poised to attack, the curious buildup of Syrian forces near the Golan was also ignored. Even the eleventh hour warnings of King Hussein, delivered in secret to Golda Meir, could not convince Israel that an attack was imminent. As Mossad chief Zvi Zamir later mused, "We simply didn't feel them capable [of war]".[31]

The October War

Despite all expectation, in the early afternoon of Saturday 6 October, 1973 – the Jewish Day of Atonement – Egyptian and Syrian forces swept into the Israeli occupied Sinai and Golan Heights. In the south, Egyptian troops used water canons to breach the carefully constructed Israeli defences,

[28] Anon (n.d.), 'Yom Kippur War: Combat Operations', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur_War (accessed 31/07/06).

[29] Avi Shlaim (2000), *The Iron Wall* (Penguin: London), 319.

[30] Anon (n.d.), 'Yom Kippur: Lead Up to the Surprise Attack', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur_War (accessed 24/08/06).

[31] Abraham Rabinovich (2004), *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East*, 50, 57.

advancing two army corps nearly fifteen kilometres inland. The few Israeli units not on leave for Yom Kippur were swiftly overwhelmed. To the north, Syrian forces outnumbered Israelis nine to one:

> In the Golan Heights, the Syrians attacked the Israeli defenses of two brigades and eleven artillery batteries with five divisions and 188 batteries. At the onset of the battle, 188 Israeli tanks faced off against approximately 2,000 Syrian tanks.[32]

In both arenas, Soviet anti-tank and anti-aircraft systems were deployed widely to neutralise the sophisticated Israeli air force and veteran armoured divisions. Caught off guard and facing such overwhelming numbers, Israel's situation seemed suddenly desperate.

By and large, the Americans had been equally blind to the impending attack. When the startling news of the invasion reached the White House, Nixon immediately ordered "the forty-eight ships and thirty thousand men of the Sixth fleet" to the Eastern Mediterranean as a show of solidarity.[33] With Arab forces overrunning Israeli positions, America pushed for an early ceasefire along the 1967 frontiers, "a move that would have cancelled out the Egyptian advances on the east bank of the Suez Canal".[34] Not surprisingly, neither the Egyptians nor their Soviet backers were enthusiastic about America's proposal. Indeed, the oil-producing Arab nations were so incensed by Washington's proposal that they announced an escalating embargo on oil to Israel's Western allies until such a time as the IDF withdrew from the Occupied Territories. Faced with the possibility of an Israeli defeat, the US implemented a massive operation to re-supply the battered IDF.[35] At Nixon's request, Congress authorised $2.2 billion in emergency financial aid and increased Israel's already substantial military aid by a further eight hundred percent.[36] Meanwhile, America's watchful presence in the Eastern Mediterranean was bolstered by the arrival of "two attack carriers and two amphibious assault carriers, the latter each carrying about two thousand Marines trained in desert warfare".[37] Encouraged by America's backing and armed with these new supplies, "Israel began to turn the tables on its enemies".[38]

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[32] Anon (n.d.), 'Yom Kippur War: Combat Operations', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur_War (accessed 31/07/06).

[33] Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 109.

[34] Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 109.

[35] Interestingly, the president had ordered the re-supplying of Israel as early as the 6 October, and again on the 9, but on both occasions those orders were overruled by Kissinger, who presumably sought to engineer a situation that would be more conducive to establishing a regional peace. This curious incident raises challenging questions as to which man – Nixon or Kissinger – was actually in charge of America's foreign policy in 1973. Patrick J Haney (1994), 'The Nixon Administration and Middle East Crises: Theory and Evidence of Presidential Management of Foreign Policy Decision Making', *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 47 (December), 948.

[36] Martha Wenger (1990), 'US Aid to Israel: From Handshake to Embrace', *Middle East Report*, No. 164/165 (May-August), 14.

[37] It is doubtful that Nixon intended to have American troops intervene directly in the conflict. Instead, the presence of these forces was probably intended to pressure the Arabs into an early peace and discourage the Soviet Union from staging an intervention. Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 109.

[38] Avi Shlaim (2000), *The Iron Wall* (Penguin: London), 320.

Four days after the war began, Syrian forces had been pushed back across the pre-war boundary; five days later, Operation Stouthearted Men broke through the enemy lines in Sinai and neutralised Egypt's anti-aircraft and anti-tank defences. As Israel advanced inexorably into Arab territory, threatening Damascus and Cairo, the Soviet Prime Minister, Alexei Kosygin, revived calls for a ceasefire, hoping to preserve some advantage for Egypt. On 22 October, UN Resolution 338 granted Kosygin his ceasefire, but Israel intended to finish what it had started. That night, under cover of darkness, the IDF continued its offensive west of the Suez Canal. When morning broke, Israel had encircled Sadat's Third Army, trapping them in the Sinai. Israeli forces were just sixty miles from Cairo. Tel Aviv justified the operation by alleging that Egypt had violated the ceasefire, destroying several Israeli tanks. Washington was quietly satisfied with this excuse, but Moscow was outraged. If the United States was not prepared to force Israel into compliance with the ceasefire, Brezhnev warned Kissinger, the Soviet Union would have no choice but to take matters into its own hands.[39] Although the Kremlin was unlikely to actually commit troops to the Middle East, Washington took this threat very seriously. For the first time since the Cuban Missile Crisis, American forces went to DEFCON 3, placing "some two million soldiers around the globe, including the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the Strategic Air Command and some National Guard and Reserve units" on alert.[40] Whether Washington's dramatic response was guided by deliberate brinksmanship or genuine fear is uncertain. Either way, it alarmed the Soviets sufficiently for Moscow to de-escalate the crisis; neither Egypt nor Syria was worth the cost of a direct confrontation with America. On 26 October, twenty days after the beginning of hostilities, organised fighting ended on all fronts, paving the way for negotiations to begin.

[39] Abraham Rabinovich (2004), *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East*, 479.

[40] Remarkably, it seems that President Nixon was asleep when the move to DEFCON 3 was ordered by Kissinger and the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG), again raising the question of who really decided America's foreign policy. However, as Stephen Ambrose notes, "Nixon probably would have agreed with the nuclear alert, had he been awake", leading Haney to conclude that this episode simply illustrates the organisational sophistication of the Nixon-Kissinger White House: "One might expect [such a highly centralised system] to collapse under the circumstances of presidential inattention. To the contrary, the Nixon advisory system worked even in the president's absence". Stephen E. Ambrose (1991), *Nixon: Ruin and Recovery* (Simon and Shuster: New York), 234-35; Patrick J Haney (1994), 'The Nixon Administration and Middle East Crises: Theory and Evidence of Presidential Management of Foreign Policy Decision Making', *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 47 (December), 949; Barry Rubin (1974), 'US Policy, January-October 1973', 112.

CONCLUSION

A STRATEGIC MISCALCULATION

In order to achieve the objective of lasting stability within the Middle East, the United States needed to identify a comprehensive and coherent strategy for the geo-pivotal region. Following a decade of strategic uncertainty and vulnerability, the Nixon administration resolved to meet America's strategic needs through formal partnership with the state of Israel, as well as similar agreements with the governments of Turkey and Iran. However, with its emphasis on using force of arms to encircle and suppress Arab grievances, rather than fostering positive engagement with regional tensions, this arrangement represented an incomplete – and therefore inadequate – response to the problem of Middle East stability. Indeed, Nixon's controversially partisan approach not only failed to tackle the myriad issues which plagued the fragile region, it actually promised to exacerbate them.

A LEGACY OF INCOHERENCE

Lack of coherence was by no means a novel feature of American Middle East strategy. Incoherence was common to several previous incarnations of American strategy in the region: Truman's creation of the Northern Tier shield may have resolved the immediate problem of Britain's inability to support Greece and Turkey against Soviet pressure, but it failed to pre-empt Britain's inevitable abdication in the heart of the Middle East, therefore allowing the Western system in the core states to deteriorate dangerously. The decade of piecemeal bilateralism which followed the twin shocks of the Suez War and the Iraqi Revolution was equally incoherent, as the US, lacking clear strategic options and distracted by other foreign policy priorities, allowed the Western system to deteriorate still further (to the marked advantage of enemy influences). In fact, between 1945 and 1970, the Eisenhower administration, with its emphasis upon pro-active engagement with the Arab bloc and firm opposition to Israeli expansionism, was the only administration which sought to extend a

coherent, region-wide strategy for the Middle East. Ultimately, the challenge of incorporating both the Egyptians and their Iraqi rivals into an American system impeded Eisenhower's grand ambitions, but amidst the strategic incoherence of other Cold War administrations, Eisenhower's uniquely coherent conception of Middle East strategy demands recognition.

In light of the legacy of American strategic incoherence, Nixon's reaction to the events of September 1970 was by no means unprecedented. However, this fact did not make Nixon's failure to delineate a suitable regional strategy any less problematic. Indeed, the controversially polarised approach that emerged following the Jordan crisis was actually more problematic than previous expressions of strategic incoherence had been. Previous expressions of incoherence had failed to look beyond the immediate needs of the region, thereby allowing pockets of instability to persist unopposed. However, despite this failing, previous expressions had been essentially even-handed in their approach to both the Arabs and the Israelis. Nixon's unbridled support for Tel Aviv from 1970 marked a clear break from this tradition of even-handedness. As a consequence of this development, US strategy in the Middle East went from being merely incoherent, to being actively antagonistic.

Pointedly, Nixon himself was unconcerned by the incoherence of his controversial, Israeli-centric approach. As the strategic geography of the sentinel network readily demonstrates, Nixon – a convert to the philosophy of *realpolitik* – was far more interested in power than popularity when it came to securing the American system abroad. The administration's choice of allies in this venture was undeniably controversial: Spain and Portugal were each subject to fascist dictatorships, both Greece and Iran were governed by military juntas, and the legacy of human rights abuses committed by the Turkish continues to undermine Istanbul's bid for European integration today. However, undesirable, undemocratic and unpopular as these regimes were, they each possessed the strength and willingness to fulfil the administration's hegemonic ambitions, and were therefore considered valuable allies by the administration. In the same way, while it was obvious that Washington's overt support for Tel Aviv would provoke an intensification of anti-American sentiment within the Arab states, White House officials believed that the benefits of the US-Israeli strategic partnership ultimately outweighed these fleeting disadvantages. In any case, thought Washington, the disgruntled Arabs would necessarily be driven to acquiescence eventually by the need to maintain friendly relations with the West and fear of the 'invincible' IDF.

A FATAL MISINTERPRETATION

Unfortunately, Nixon's confidence in Israel's ability to subdue the inevitable Arab unrest was seriously misplaced and therefore the administration's decision to advance a US-Israeli partnership at the expense of US-Arab relations represented a major strategic miscalculation for the US. The root of this miscalculation lay in the administration's unique interpretation of the events of September 1970. According to the White House, the Jordan crisis had been pacified by a mixture of American

diplomatic resolve and Israeli military power. In reality however, the US-Israeli contribution was far less significant. Throughout the crisis, the White House had been paralysed by indecision. Even at the height of the insurrection, with foreign armoured divisions threatening to convey the rebels all the way to Amman, Washington procrastinated and failed to offer anything more concrete than rhetoric to support to imperilled Jordanian regime. Tel Aviv was more pro-active than Washington and the Israeli Air Force did indeed stage flyovers of enemy positions. However, the impact of these aerial displays on the Syro-Palestinian campaign is debatable. As the crisis wore on, with no sign of direct American assistance in sight, it fell to Hussein's own air and ground forces to dispatch the revolutionaries, a feat which they accomplished with the unwitting assistance of factional rivalries within the Syrian military command.[1]

The US-Israeli contribution was therefore largely inconsequential to the cessation of hostilities; ultimately, it was the Jordanian military, not American rhetoric or Israeli posturing, which had repulsed the Syrians and pacified the Palestinians. In light of this revelation, two major flaws in Nixon's Israeli-centric approach become apparent. The first of these was the extent to which the administration misjudged the importance of maintaining good working relations with the Arab bloc, the second was the overestimation of Israel's capacity to stabilise Arab unrest.

Underestimating the Arabs

For as long as the United States had been involved in the Middle East, accepted wisdom had taught that it was the Arab regimes who dictated regional stability. Consequently, despite the growing disinterest in a US-Arab arrangement, American policy-makers had remained cautious of advancing strategies that would offend Arab sensibilities. However, the defeat of the Syro-Palestinian uprising threw this strategic conception into doubt. As the White House saw it, the fearsome *fedayeen* had been cowed by mere threats of interventionary force, the Syrians had retreated at the arrival of the American navy and Israeli jets, and other influential Arab players – particularly the Iraqis – had remained conspicuously neutral. In light of these events, the White House concluded that the Arab threat had been entirely misjudged by previous administrations and therefore efforts to appease Arab sentiments in American policy-making were unnecessary.

Belief in the impotence and disunity of Arab power was the foundation of Nixon's unambiguous partnership with Israel and wilful antagonisation of US-Arab relations. It was

[1] The Syrian ground forces that entered Jordan were commanded by *de facto* Baath Party leader, Salah Jadid; the commander of the air force was his rival, Hafez al-Assad. Assad, a military pragmatist, disapproved of Jadid's ultra-leftwing government and irresponsible foreign policies. During the Jordan crisis, Assad deliberately withheld air cover for Jadid's ground forces, leaving them vulnerable to Jordanian airstrikes. Jadid returned to Damascus disgraced by his defeat. Within three months, the bloodless Corrective Revolution had ousted Jadid and installed Assad in his stead.
Anon (n.d.), 'Hafez al-Assad', *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hafez_al-Assad (accessed 24.05.06).

responsible for discrediting the Arabist voice in Washington, thereby allowing the pro-Israel lobby greater influence over policy-making, encouraging the US to rely exclusively upon non-Arab sentinel states for stability, and leading the administration to the controversial decision to stall the Arab-Israeli peace process. However, since this belief sprung from a fundamentally flawed interpretation of the crisis, it was entirely misplaced. Arab forces had created the instability of September 1970 and Arab forces had also been responsible for the end of that instability. Clearly, the concept that the US could afford to ignore Arab grievances indefinitely was a serious mistake.

Overestimating the Israelis

Contrary to Washington's official interpretation, Israel had not pacified an inter-Arab conflict by the mere threat of intervention. Consequently, there was no evidence that Tel Aviv could successfully deploy the IDF in a stabilising capacity and the emergence of an American strategic alliance with Israel following the crisis was therefore founded upon a misconception. Indeed, the great irony of America's decision to seek regional stability through partnership with Israel was that, by and large, the primary source of conflict in the Middle East was Tel Aviv's own belligerent foreign policy.

As if pathologically committed to antagonising its neighbours, the IDF was constantly provoking skirmishes with Arab forces along Israel's periphery. Washington generally chose to remain neutral in such matters, stating bluntly that, while the US "would prefer to see no military action at all… [the White House had] no intention of telling Israel how to defend itself".[2] However, this diplomatic neutrality was deeply undermined by the fact that, in rewarding Israel with a strategic partnership, Nixon had effectively endorsed Israel's antagonistic activities. This is not to say that Washington never sought to restrain Israeli military aggression: during the summer of 1970 (before the formal partnership), the US supplied Israel with "approximately $7 million worth" of military aid, ostensibly to consolidate Israeli defences and therefore discourage a violation of the ceasefire with Egypt. However, as critical State Department officials observed, rather than fostering peace between Tel Aviv and Cairo, this arrangement actually "increase[d] Israeli capabilities to perform the kinds of actions which, in fact, [Washington sought] to deter".[3] In the same way, rather than facilitating the establishment of a stable American system in the Middle East, the advent of the US-Israeli alliance simply buoyed the IDF towards further acts of belligerence.

Granted, Israel's aggressive approach was not entirely without merit. As Harold Saunders commented in 1972:

[2] Harold Saunders (1972), 'Memorandum for Dr Kissinger: Israeli-Syrian Military Clashes, November 21', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number CK3100546228.

[3] Anon: State Department (1970), 'Deterring Possible Major Unilateral Violation of the Middle East Ceasefire by Israel, September 6', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills), Document Number CK3100548307, subsection B, paragraph 1, 3.

> It is hard to argue that the Israeli strategy is ineffective since it has already resulted in the securing of Israel's border with Jordan and, at least for the moment, in substantial Lebanese control and *fedayeen* caution in southern Lebanon.[4]

In the long-run however, Nixon's tacit support for Israel's heavy-handed policies undermined regional stability and served to tarnish the international image of the United States. It is no coincidence therefore that Arab terrorist activity intensified following the formalisation of the US-Israeli arrangement; aggravated by the Israelis and frustrated by America's support for Israel at the expense of Arab interests, the Arab population had little choice but to resort to violence to make its grievances heard.

REVELATIONS OF THE OCTOBER WAR

In October 1973, the strategic miscalculations which had characterised Nixon's controversially polarised approach to the Middle East were exposed by the sudden resurgence of open warfare between Israel, Egypt and Syria. The successful Syro-Egyptian attack not only turned the administration's misplaced belief in Arab impotence on its head, it also undermined Washington's faith in Israel's regional dominance. Indeed, the war revealed that Israel, whose military prowess had been a deciding factor in its promotion to regional guardianship, "could not fight a prolonged engagement in which its army did not determine the timing and pace of fighting without depending on a re-supply from the United States".[5]

At the end of the war, Washington's ill-founded regional paradigm was further undermined, when – contrary to expert predictions – Arab oil-producers cut off America's oil supply. Thanks to the Nixon administration's controversial disregard for Arab grievances and damaging association with IDF aggression, during November 1973 the US faced an oil deficit of "at least 225,000 barrels per day". Given the impact of this deficit on America's military activity (especially in Southeast Asia), the strategic miscalculation inherent in allowing US-Arab relations to deteriorate so dramatically was manifestly evident. As John R. Nolan, Acting Assistant for Petroleum Affairs at the Department of Defence informed Arthur Mendolia, Assistant Secretary for Installations and Logistics:

> There can be no avoidance of the unpleasant fact that the ability of the United States to conduct its military operations with complete flexibility, unhindered by petroleum logistics considerations, is now for the first time temporarily inhibited.[6]

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[4] Harold Saunders (1972), 'Memorandum for Dr Kissinger: Israeli-Syrian Military Clashes, November 21'.

[5] In fact, a number of America's strategic allies protested Nixon's polarised approach to the Middle East by denying the use of their bases as launch-pads to re-supply the IDF during the war. The only European base which cooperated with America's emergency airlift to Israel was Lajes Air Base in the Azores, situated over five and a half thousand kilometres from Tel Aviv. Esther Howard (1983), 'Israel: The Sorcerer's Apprentice', *MERIP Reports*, No, 112 (February), 17; Joe Stork (1980), 'The Carter Doctrine and US Bases in the Middle East', *MERIP Reports*, No. 90 (September), 6.

[6] John R. Nolan, Acting Assistant for Petroleum Affairs, DOD (1973), 'Memorandum for Mr Mendolia: Military Petroleum Situation, November 5', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Mills, Michigan), Document Number: CK3100413397.

Having become painfully aware of the full cost of pursuing an exclusively pro-Israeli approach, the White House once again set about reviewing its regional strategy. In an effort to re-establish working relations with the Arab bloc, Washington's post-1973 approach restored a greater degree of even-handedness to America's dealings in the Middle East. At the fore of this effort to rekindle US-Arab relations was the highly-publicised campaign of 'Shuttle Diplomacy', designed to pressure Israel into accepting progress on a settlement regarding the Occupied Territories.

Meanwhile, having learnt not to take the flow of Gulf oil for granted, the United States diversified its foreign energy suppliers to include Venezuela, Nigeria and Mexico and established the Strategic Oil Reserve in preparation for future oil shocks. Around the same time, Washington initiated a long-term strategy which saw the US "steadily accumulating military muscle in the Gulf" in order to secure direct control of the geo-pivotal oil-fields. This strategy was outlined in a 1975 article entitled 'Seizing Arab Oil', in which the author discussed "how we could solve all our economic and political problems by taking over the Arab oil fields [and] bringing in Texans and Oklahomans to operate them". Arguably, the current war in Iraq represents the culmination of this thirty-year process.[7]

ONGOING INCOHERENCE

Despite the superficial revival of US-Arab relations, America's strategic approach following the October War was no more coherent than the approach it was drafted to replace. For a start, Kissinger's Shuttle Diplomacy only ever dealt with Israeli-Egyptian territorial grievances; masked by highly publicised progress over the Sinai Peninsula, Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Jordanian, Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese issues were all left glaringly unresolved. Moreover, the US continued to rely primarily upon non-Arab powers to ensure American hegemony in the Middle East, rather than cultivating a coherent, Arab-inclusive approach to the region. Consequently, Iran rather than Iraq remained the key to America's security strategy in the oil-rich Persian Gulf, a fact evidenced by America's strategic shock and scramble for foreign military bases following Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979. Likewise, there was no sign of deceleration in Washington's partnership with Israel. In fact, "Israel's aid skyrocketed from $30 million in 1970 to $2.2 billion in 1974".[8] Even the momentous Sinai II peace deal was engineered to Israel's advantage. As Avi Shlaim has observed, the agreement was effectively "a vast real estate deal in which the United States bought a slice of the Sinai Desert from Israel in exchange for a huge financial and political consideration" – a consideration, it should be

[7] Robert Dreyfuss (2003), 'The Thirty-Year Itch', *Mother Jones*, March-April, http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2003/03/ma_273_01.html (accessed 15.11.05).

[8] Kathleen Christison (1999), *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on US Middle East Policy* (University of California Press: Berkeley), 124.

noted, that included a "secret commitment to 'maintain Israel's defense' with the most sophisticated weaponry" available.[9]

Recent administrations – particularly Bush I and II – have sought to revitalise American efforts in the Middle East and reposition the Arab bloc within a new US strategy for the region. To a certain extent, this repositioning marks a return to the strategic wisdom of the Eisenhower administration. However, Eisenhower not only understood the vital importance of engaging the Arabs in US Middle East strategy, he also had a plan for achieving this ambition.[10] On the other hand, despite the current administration's rhetoric of building a 'coalition' between the United States and Arab powers, a clearly-defined blueprint for working with the Arab bloc remains unforthcoming. Consequently, efforts to reposition the Arabs in US strategy have suffered from the same crippling incoherence as previous approaches. Rather than seeking to foster stability through an "indigenous… defense arrangement", to which the US would "render limited military assistance" when necessary, recent administrations have pursued much heavier-handed policies, engaging directly in the region to impose pro-Western systems by force and subjugating Arab states by means of economic imperialism and the proliferation of American military muscle.[11] As a result, half a century after Eisenhower first undertook the quest for coherence in US Middle East strategy, the strategic ambitions of his administration remain glaringly incomplete. With developments in the fragile region more volatile than ever, it is high time a new champion emerged to finish the work that Eisenhower began and bring an end to decades of strategic incoherence.

[9] Avi Shlaim (1988), 'The Impact of U.S. Policy in the Middle East', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter), 19; Frank Forrestal (1977), 'The Sinai-American Connection', *MERIP Reports*, No, 63 (December), 19.

[10] NSC (1954), 'NSC 5428: United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East, July 23', *DDRS* (Gale Group: Farmington Hills), Document Number: CK3100102500.

[11] NSC (1954), 'NSC 5428: United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East, July 23'.

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