

## AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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As I look upon this audience and see so many friends, I am absolutely certain, as I was saying to my colleague Phil Habib, that I am among experts. In fact, I feel a little bit like the man who survived the Johnstown flood, and I am referring to a Johnstown flood that took place not recently but nearly twenty-five years ago. Everywhere this man went, the only thing he could talk about was how he survived the Johnstown flood. And low and behold he died, and when he went up through the pearly gates Saint Peter welcomed him and said, "Welcome, this is your first day, and it is going to be an easy day for you; the only thing on your schedule is a tea at 4 P.M. — and of course you will be expected to make some appropriate remarks." And the individual responded very quickly, "Fine, I want to talk about how I survived the Johnstown flood." Well, this gave Saint Peter some pause and he said, "Are you sure you want to talk about this?" And he said, "Yes, I am sure I want to talk about this." Saint Peter paused again and said, "Well, all right, but bear one thing in mind. Noah will be in the audience." Now it is in this spirit that I am going to address this group.

It is somewhat ironical as we look back a little over a year ago. Sadat had taken the initiative in going to Jerusalem. We had hoped for reasonably rapid progress at that juncture, and, in time, it culminated in Camp David. And the hope and expectation was that, in view of the two accords reached at Camp David, a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel could not be very far away. And here as we gather today, we find there are still remaining differences, and we find further the likelihood of a pause over the coming days. But before I focus very briefly on how we got where we are and where I think we will go, let me say that my own judgment is that the process that was begun in Jerusalem a little over a year ago is an irreversible process. There will be, in my judgment,

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at a reasonably early date, a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel.

Now, some will say that is a pretty foolhardy prediction given the history of this past year. But there are many reasons why I share this relatively optimistic judgment. The Sadat initiative of a year ago represented a significant psychological breakthrough. It was a psychological breakthrough which in my judgment had been long in the making. One has to go back to the War of 1973. The inconclusive military result of that war meant that Sadat would no longer be going to the conference table with his head bowed. And for the Israelis, the inconclusive military result, in sharp contrast with the overwhelming military victory in the June war of 1967, proved to be a stimulus and boon for negotiations. It is then, in my judgment, that we began to see the first glimmers of a psychological change in the area. Both sides reflected the image of being sick and tired of war as a means of resolving their differences. So that when we all experienced the media event that we did, when Sadat went to Jerusalem and we saw this outpouring of people both in Israel and in Egypt, it was a genuine expression of the deep feelings of the people who, in my judgment, had been well in advance of government leaders in the area for some time.

The change that started in the immediate aftermath of the October 1973 War, I think, helped create the underlying conditions that made it possible for Henry Kissinger to succeed in his shuttle diplomacy and to achieve the two disengagement agreements between Egypt and Israel and the disengagement agreement between Syria and Israel. And so the new administration was able to embark upon a fresh course. They were able to embark upon this fresh course without the immediate concern that the area was about to experience another renewal of hostilities between the two sides. We then had a period when the attempt was to convene a Geneva conference. And in retrospect, a good many people these days like to be critical of that particular effort. I personally would not be critical of the effort during that year. The very fact that we had achieved three piecemeal agreements by the so-called "step by step" approach meant that all the principal participants were ready to approach the problem from the point of view of an overall, comprehensive settlement. The assumption was not that all aspects of the Arab-Israeli dispute could be resolved, but rather that the objective should be an overall settlement. Politically, there was no realistic alternative for the United States or for the principal par-

ticipants on both sides to do anything except enunciate, with a good degree of seriousness, a comprehensive settlement as the overall objective. And so we came to Camp David, and I believe that it is fair to say that Camp David in the first instance was an American initiative in the sense that Sadat was dissatisfied that the previous year had not brought about the negotiations he sought; matters were at an impasse. I can recall that particular period, when there was a tendency to criticize the administration on the ground that the summit meeting was not fully prepared in advance. And there is no doubt that even though there had been years of negotiations, the Camp David meetings took place within a framework of substantial agreement on many issues and fundamental disagreements on others. And so I think the administration deserves great credit, and I believe that this underscores the continuing centrality of the American role even though there is no question that the parties are primary. It is the parties that have to make the peace — they must live with the peace. It is the parties that have to implement that particular peace.

Now, why do I feel that the process is irreversible? I happen to believe that the decisions that were taken at Camp David, and which in time will be reflected in this peace agreement, are decisions that basically reflect the broad majority of the people of Israel and the broad majority of the Egyptians. Understandably, the Israelis are concerned with the possible turn of events if something happens to Sadat. And particularly as we begin to see the situation in Iran, and we become concerned with the future of the Shah and the future of Iran, certainly it is a legitimate question to ask what would happen in Egypt in the event that something were to happen to Sadat. While none of us see a good alternative to Sadat, I believe that if the peace agreement can be achieved it will be basically a peace agreement that will be maintained because it reflects the broad views of the Egyptian people as they perceive their own national interest.

Now, let us assume for a moment that we achieve this peace agreement. What about Jordan? What about Syria? What are its broad implications in the area? And what about the other Arab states? What can we expect over the next year or two? First, it is clear that Jordan remains on the fence. It is true that Jordan has been critical of Camp David as well as the potential peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. Yet Jordan perceives this largely as a separate peace and does not consider the present *status quo*

intolerable. Over the years, Jordan and Israel have been cooperating on a *de facto* basis to maintain quiet and stability in the West Bank. So from the point of view of the King, unless he has a clearer notion as to what is at the end of the tunnel, he is prepared to live with the present *status quo*, both in the West Bank and the Gaza. But he has also been very careful to keep his options open, and I think that what we need as a stimulus is a practical demonstration that the Egyptian-Israeli agreement can work to the mutual benefit of both sides.

And I think that we need to find a way for the process of self-government to begin to take root both in the West Bank and in the Gaza. I suppose one of the reasons one is hearing second thoughts in some sectors of Israeli public opinion with respect to the autonomy proposal advanced by Prime Minister Begin, is the realization that nobody can tell for sure what the result will be after a five-year test on the ground itself. I happen to believe that if the indigenous population and the indigenous leadership in the West Bank can be convinced to assume leadership within the broad framework of the principles expressed at Camp David — which went somewhat beyond the original proposal of Begin for self-autonomy — if that practical test on the ground can actually take place, and if it can succeed, I think that one is very apt to find a rather substantially different Israeli attitude five years from now on the key questions of sovereignty, security arrangements, and final borders. So the administration, rightly in my judgment, is giving priority not only to the achievement of the Egyptian-Israeli agreement, but is seeking to find a way at least to ensure that the process as it relates to the West Bank and the Gaza will begin at an appropriate early stage.

The far-reaching nature of the proposal made by Begin as it relates to the Sinai is not, in my opinion, sufficiently understood. I can recall, as early as 1969, when we negotiated with the Soviet Union with the goal of arranging a partial Egyptian-Israeli agreement, which was not dissimilar to the framework of Camp David today. It was based on one basic fundamental notion: that the Israelis might withdraw to the 1967 border, which they are committed to do in two phases under Camp David, but it was preconditioned on a satisfactory agreement between Egypt and Israel in order to meet the principal security concerns of Israel in the Sinai. And that, after all, is the essential element that is contained in a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel.

Now, I said that Jordan remains on the sideline, neither in nor

totally out. And I think that the eventual Jordanian decision will depend on how successful the implementation of an Egyptian-Israeli agreement is over a given period of time. I don't think we will be in a position to press immediate negotiations between Jordan and Israel. But I hope there will develop in time at least the start of the kind of discussions that offer hope for the process of self-autonomy to begin.

The key in many respects continues to be Saudi Arabia. And here we know that Saudi Arabia has, over the past two years, played a very significant, yet quiet role. They were particularly important and relevant, and successful I might add, in helping to achieve the cease-fire in the aftermath of the serious fighting in Lebanon. And in Lebanon I think we see a very significant microcosm of the Arab world itself. Syria went into Lebanon for a good many reasons, but I will just single out one in particular. Syria was concerned that if she did not stabilize the situation, Syria might be drawn into a one front war with the Israelis. And if one wonders why Assad has been so critical of the separate moves of Sadat, it is because of the Syrian full realization that the exercise of the military option on the part of the Arabs against the Israelis is not a viable proposition without the direct participation of the Egyptians. And therefore, both the disengagement agreements which Egypt entered into, as well as the potential peace agreement today, leaves Syria in a relatively isolated position — isolated in the sense that Syria has always felt that in order to achieve the kind of equilibrium in negotiations with Israel she has to be in a position where Israel recognizes that Syria is in a position to exercise the military option. Syria is in no such position today. In fact, the options that Syria faces in Lebanon today are very bleak indeed. And the description we are hearing from time to time that Lebanon is, or could become, potentially a serious Viet Nam, in my judgment, is not too far off the mark. Because Syria had to intervene, once against the leftists and the Moslems, and then in different circumstances against the Christian community, it is on the horns of a dilemma. Syria would like to get out of Lebanon and yet she is unable to do so for fear that the situation could get out of control in such a way that Syria feels she might be drawn into complications with Israel — which would serve the interests of no one. Saudi Arabia, nevertheless, for all of the doubts that she has had, realizes it is in Saudi Arabia's interest to ensure that the moderate Arabs remain on the moderate course in negotiations. And while the

Saudis hold very deep views, and quite frankly deep doubts, as to the advisability of Sadat going ahead on the peace treaty, nevertheless the Saudis, in my judgment, have no alternative but to continue to support both Egypt and Jordan financially. You also know that the Saudis are providing support to the Syrians as well.

My concern today is not that we will fail to achieve an Egyptian-Israeli agreement, but that the situation in Iran can develop in such a way that our vital interests can be affected seriously and adversely. The Shah today probably faces the most precarious of the positions that he has ever faced. One of the basic misconceptions about the situation in Iran, in my judgment, is that the opposition that we are seeing in Iran is basically an opposition against the modernization movements of the Shah. I think this is an erroneous characterization of the situation. The opposition to the Shah today is against authoritarianism. It is an opposition that seeks greater political freedom; it is an opposition that is critical of the corruption that we have seen over the recent years; and it is an opposition that seeks, in the first instance, to bring the Shah and the monarchy down.

The strategy of the Ayatollah Khomeini, in my judgment, is to adhere rigidly to the position that there is no acceptable solution that would embrace the continuation of the Shah, either in the form of a constitutional monarchy or in the form of a regency. Now as long as that is the basic position, there can be no negotiations between the monarchy and the Ayatollah. The big question mark — and I don't presume to know the answer because one really must know the personalities involved and the intricacies of the political forces in the country — is whether there is hope. It seems to me that the hope lies in the direction of trying to develop the conditions of negotiations to bring about a broadly based coalition. Sanjabi, the head of the National Front, has been most reluctant to get out in front for one simple reason: Khomeini, who has very strong support within the country, and who has over the years been speaking in the mosques, has adopted and stuck to the position that no solution is possible, no compromise is possible, unless the Shah abdicates. Now whether there are elements — and after all Iran is about ninety-eight percent Moslem — whether there are elements in Iran to the right, if I can put it this way loosely, of Khomeini who, at a given junction, would be willing to try to establish a broadly based coalition, I believe is an immediate question which our policymakers are grappling with at the present time.

The alternative, it seems to me, is the continuation of the army being in power, and that too is problematic. We know from past experiences that an army can shoot at its own people only a given number of times before it becomes so highly controversial and so politicized that conditions begin to develop within the army, within the armed forces, for power struggles and conditions of destabilization. There is no easy answer to the situation in Iran. I do not have to say to this knowledgeable group what the destabilization of Iran could mean to us, to the Western world: what it means in terms of resources; what it means in terms of the geopolitical situation both in the area of the Persian Gulf and in the Arabian Peninsula.

I hope also that we begin to draw our NATO allies into this situation. Certainly our NATO allies, as well as Japan, who could be hurt even more than we by an embargo or a reduction or a cutoff of oil from the area, certainly they have an important role to play and have as much of a stake in this situation as we have. So I can not be optimistic regarding Iran. I think that we will have to see what the situation is over the coming weeks. But I am convinced of one thing: the stakes are so high for the United States that it isn't possible for the United States to stay out of this situation politically. I believe that it is going to be necessary for the United States to become centrally involved in stimulating the kind of negotiations which at least test the proposition, without knowing what the answer is, whether a broadly based coalition can be achieved.

Let me conclude with just one final word in coming back to the Middle East. Destabilization in the area of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula will have its impact on the Middle East and particularly with respect to the so-called "front line" states. I can recall, for example, shortly before we achieved the Sinai II agreement, Henry Kissinger and I flew to Zurich; we got the agreement of the Shah that any oil that went to Israel would be considered a commercial enterprise and that no political conditions would be applied. Here today we have Khomeini saying that if an Islamic state is established, and if he is the political force, one of the first actions he will take, will be an embargo against the United States as well as a cutoff of oil from Israel. So what is happening in the Gulf is very upsetting to Kuwait, the Emirates, and the tremors are already being felt in Saudi Arabia itself.

I conclude with this thought. None of us who have ever been involved in this area have ever felt there were any easy answers or that predictions were very sure. I for one, for example, was sur-

prised at the Sadat initiative of a year ago November. I am convinced the Egyptian people support the initiative of the last year, and that there cannot be any turning back. I believe it is going to require President Carter to become involved directly once more. I do not think that a pause for a short time will hurt. It is a pity that as a result of the delay between Camp David and the target of December 17, 1978, a good deal of the positive spirit between Egypt and Israel has been lost. And in the Middle East, probably more than any other area in the world, the question of mutual trust is fundamental. Nevertheless, these are decisions on peace that were made on the basis of perceived, objective national interests — politically, economically, and strategically. Therefore, I remain hopeful that in time we will see a peace agreement based on the Camp David accords. Not that this is going to bring about the millenium. We are going to have continued divisions in the Arab world; we are going to have continued opposition on the part of the so-called steadfast and rejectionist fronts. Nevertheless, the direction of such an agreement is a good thing for the area, because in time it could create pressures for addressing other aspects of the problem. We are, of course, talking about a period of five to ten years, not a period of five to ten months.

Thank you very much.

*Q. President Sisco, is it realistic to expect peace in the Middle East without the direct participation of the Soviet Union in these negotiations?*

*A.* First, there cannot be a peace in the Middle East without at least the ultimate acquiescence of the Soviet Union. But, insofar as the Soviets playing a direct role in peace negotiations, there is no need. If the Soviet Union has an opportunity to supplant Sadat, it will do so. Sadat is entirely realistic in this regard. Sadat is deeply concerned by what he sees as a very substantial role the Soviet Union has in Libya. There have already been indications of Sadat beginning to turn to the problem of Libya in circumstances where the Israeli border is protected on the basis of a peace agreement. As far as the Soviets are concerned, I believe that the consultation process from time to time must continue. But I believe Soviet diplomacy in the Mideast is a diplomacy with one arm behind its back. It has no relationships with Israel. And I would contend that not only is American influence greater in the obvious places of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, but also in Damascus as well, for



one simple reason: regardless of the ongoing military assistance relationship between Syria and the Soviet Union, Syria perceives the United States as central in bringing about the kinds of concessions from Israel which Syria requires. But Syria has serious doubts that the United States will be able to achieve the kind of concessions which Syria hopes for and wants. By the same token, neither does Syria want to be isolated. Syria knows that the Soviet Union can help them make war, but it is only the United States that can help Syria make peace. In the last analysis, Syria today, regardless of its strong opposition to the agreement between Egypt and Israel, is being very careful to keep its options open.

*Q. What role has the United States played in reconvening the Geneva Conference, and do you see any obstacle to Geneva if PLO participation is forbidden?*

*A.* There are two parts to your questions. Let me try to address both. Insofar as the role of the Soviet Union at the Geneva Conference, this was a bilateral agreement that was achieved between ourselves and the Soviet Union, and later endorsed by the United Nations. In fact, we were very very careful, for a lot of complicated reasons, to come to that co-chairmanship on our own, rather than as a product of the United Nations. The administration made much more than a college try in seeking to achieve the renewal of the Geneva Conference — in fact, the administration spent one entire year, its first year in office. It is true that when it came up against the hardrock of differences of views between the Israelis and the Arabs, the issue of the Palestinian participation was a major issue. Insofar as the PLO, which seems to be the second part of the thrust of your observation, what the President has said is this: that as long as the PLO fails to accept Security Council Resolution 242 and to recognize Israel's right to exist, there is no basis for either negotiations or PLO participation. I happen to believe that the PLO had an opportunity at Cairo, some eight or nine months ago, to alter its covenant and to test the Carter proposition. I do not claim to know what the administration would have done in those circumstances, but the fact of the matter is that the PLO was so divided that it was not able to accept the basis for negotiations that was embraced in the Geneva Conference. I know of no legal commitment, whether it be as co-chairman of the Geneva Conference or other legal commitments, that precludes the United States, when one avenue of diplomacy has failed, to explore others. The fact of

the matter is that it is in our national interest to be active and in the forefront. The last thing the United States can afford to do in this area is to adopt a policy of disengaging itself from the parties. So I do not find what we are doing now by way of an alternative to the Geneva Conference to be an abridgment of any legal obligation. I might add that politics being the art of the possible, it would have been to the detriment of everyone's interests, the Israelis, the Arabs in the areas, as well as the United States, if we had not explored other avenues. It was a little over a year ago that Sadat himself was sick and tired of the attempts to achieve a Geneva Conference; this stimulated him to go to Jerusalem. And there was finally achieved high level, direct negotiations between the parties concerned. Geneva was only a poor substitute for direct negotiations.

*Q. Would you comment on the problems of the Camp David Summit? Can a peace treaty be agreed upon by the December 17 deadline?*

*A.* Both sides have made it clear that in the legal sense there is no linkage between the Camp David framework on Egypt and Israel with the Gaza and the West Bank; even the generalized language that has already been made public now as part of the treaty, preamble, and nine articles was a very generalized statement made largely for cosmetic purposes. Sadat is trying to protect his haunches, *vis-à-vis* the other Arabs, particularly the rejectionists, who are accusing him of going the route of a separate agreement. The American position on the question of settlements is well known. The United States thinks these matters should be a subject of negotiations within the framework of the discussions on the West Bank and on the Gaza. There is obviously a difference of interpretation on the part of Begin and President Carter as to what the undertaking on settlements has been in relationship to Camp David. The President has contended, as you know, that the commitment was that no settlements would be added as long as the negotiations were going on. Begin has taken the view that the three months are up on December 17, and that he is free of any commitment after that date. As a matter of law, the linkage, in my judgment, is not there unless the peace treaty should alter that. But as a matter of political reality, these two aspects will tend to interact on one another and inevitably affect the actual implementation. I wish it were otherwise, but I think that is the reality.

*Q. Given the present situation in Iran, what role did the United States play in formulating a policy for the Shah that has caused Iran great unrest?*

*A.* I can appreciate what you suggest, but we tend to seek scapegoats when something like this develops. Let's go back for a moment. In 1968-69 the British left the area, and I can recall very readily; the new administration came to power and the question that was posed was what should American policy be in this area? There were two options which were put before the National Security Council. One, that the United States should fill the vacuum directly once the British had left. The second option was that we should promote a policy of regional cooperation within the area of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, with Iran and Saudi Arabia being the two principal pillars. And the latter is the policy that has been pursued. And I think it has been pursued with some effectiveness and success, and benefits have accrued to the Iranian people as well as to the United States.

Now, the Shah certainly made very serious mistakes, as we did. The Shah, for example, never developed the kind of political institutions that could take over in his aftermath. He felt, and I can recall hearing this directly on a number of occasions, that he needed a few more years to develop the kind of structure that would put Iran in a position where it could develop into a modern state. France was his model. I suppose you can fault the United States — we should have been sufficiently prescient to know that the lack of participation on the part of many political elements in Iran might inevitably lead to the situation we see today. We deferred to the Shah. Moreover, it is a great overestimation of our capacity, whether you are talking about Iran or other nations, for us to make the judgment that we have that kind of decisive influence in this internal situation. We pursued an arms policy *vis-à-vis* Iran. The arms policy made sense for a good many years except at the point where we decided to take the lid off in 1972 to the point where the Shah was giving primary emphasis to modern arms at the expense of economic and social developments in the country. I cite these as possible mistakes and errors in the situation. I regret to say that our capacity today to affect the internal situation is not what it ought to be. I do not want in any manner to diminish your question, because in many ways it is valid. But by the same token, I think we have to get away from foreign policy by box score — hits, runs, wins, and errors. I think it presumes too much in terms

of our own capacity to seek to make the United States the scapegoat.

*Q. Since it appears Jerusalem is claimed by both the Arabs and the Israelis, what role will Jerusalem play in any Mideast settlement or treaty?*

*A. Jerusalem has always been the last item on the agenda of anybody who knows anything about the Middle East, and it has been simply because of the fact that while any one of us can devise all sorts of theoretical schemes, the issues are of such fundamental character that no ready solution can be perceived. Unity is not a fundamental difference, nor is access to the holy places. The question of giving the Arabs some economic state in Jerusalem is solvable. The fundamental question is where will sovereignty reside. On this issue there is not a glimmer of possible compromise today. Israel views Jerusalem as its own — the capital of Israel. The Arabs hold to the view that at least that portion that was occupied by the Arabs should be returned. Again, I think it illustrates why the goal of a comprehensive settlement is a desirable goal to set, but it also illustrates by the same token that the only way you are going to achieve that particular goal is to attack the problem segmentally.*

*Q. Since Israel is unwilling to give up the Golan Heights, can the situation between Israel and Syria be solved peacably?*

*A. I do not necessarily make the assumption that the question of the Golan Heights is not resolvable between Syria and Israel. You use the phrase "give up the Golan Heights." Well I doubt that Israel, as you say, is going to give up the Golan Heights. But what is the principle concern of Israel as it relates to the Golan Heights? It is to assure its own security. And there are ways, if we ever get to that particular point, by which the sovereignty needs of Syria in substantial part may very well be met, consistent with the security needs of Israel.*

*Q. What role do you see the Soviet Union playing in the unrest in Iran? Will any intermeddling by the Soviet Union jeopardize the present SALT negotiations?*

A. The Soviet hand presumably is not showing. From the Soviet point of view, I am sure that we must operate on the assumption that it is giving support to those elements whose objective is to bring the Shah down. Obviously, the Soviet interest in this area is every bit as substantial as our own. I make the assumption, and I believe it is a prudent assumption, that the Soviets view Iran as a possible target of opportunity. And their view of *détente* does not exclude pursuing their national interest and pursuing Iran as a target of opportunity. The SALT agreement is going to stand or fall on its merits, in my judgment. I believe that while the Soviets are not going to chance a traditional across the border involvement, it is prudent to assume that below the surface they are contributing to the instability in Iran. And here, I might say, I am going to express a very old-fashioned view to some of you. We have done a very effective job of destroying the covert capacity of our own Central Intelligence Agency. I regret this very much; it is unfortunate we do not have a covert capacity. I am sure the other side has it. I am sure the other side is using it.

*Q. What do you see as the Soviet Union's main objective in regards to the unrest in Iran, and does this objective center on the exiled religious leader, the Ayatollah?*

A. Well, that assumes that the objective is to achieve an Islamic state under the Ayatollah. What I am trying to suggest to you is that while the Soviet Union is involved, it will also be cautious. The Soviets have not been able to make any inroads in this area largely as a result of the close friendship between the United States and Iran. Iran has been a buffer, if you will, against any possible Soviet expansion in the area. That narrow Straits of Hormuz is probably one of the most important areas of water anywhere in the world. Seventy percent of our oil comes from there. If we get to a situation where Soviet power can be applied in that area more directly, it will be a situation where our own security and the security of Western Europe will be in a much more uncertain and adverse position.