

MIDDLE EAST PROPOSITIONS

1. THE NEW U.S. ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Changing Conditions

The United States gained a dramatically enhanced position in the Middle East as a result of Israel's campaign in Lebanon. Soviet-armed and Soviet-backed Syrian and PLO forces were decisively defeated by U.S.-armed and U.S.-backed Israeli forces. Lebanon was neutralized as the anti-American "Cuba" of the area, insofar as it had been stockpiling Soviet arms and exporting international terrorism. For various reasons, both the Soviet Union and the combined Arab states proved to be generally impotent.

As a result, the United States emerged with demonstrably greater leverage. The U.S. Administration, while having tactical disagreements with Israel towards the close of the Lebanese campaign, generally acknowledged the positive aspects of that campaign, and supported Israel against attacks in the U.N. and elsewhere.

However, despite Israel's role, there were indications that the U.S. Administration might exercise its new leverage on Israel as well as on the Arab states. While it is appropriate for the U.S. Administration to attempt to influence the Israeli government, a too "even-handed" exercise of that leverage would erode the possibilities for peace which exist in the new situation. The chief deterrent to peace and stability in the Middle East remains the failure of Saudi Arabia and Jordan to recognize Israel -- and, unlike Israel, both of those countries played, at best, a passive role in the development of America's new status in the area.

Action Goals

- . The Jewish community relations agencies should stress to American policy-makers that:
 - . Israel's role as critical ally to the U.S. is demonstrably greater than ever before;
 - . With its new leverage, the U.S. should concentrate on the key to peace and stability in the Middle East: the continued rejectionism of Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

(Middle East Propositions)

2. THE PALESTINIAN ARAB QUESTION: Judea and Samaria

Changing Conditions

The Lebanese war quickly brought to center stage the issues of the Palestinian Arabs in general and Judea/Samaria/Gaza in particular. The Lebanese war was, after all, primarily an Israeli campaign against the PLO. The apparent diminution of PLO power seemed to open up a new urgency and new possibilities for pursuing a solution for Judea and Samaria. There was evidence of this new pressure point in the issuance of President Reagan's "Talking Points" on this subject before the echoes of the Lebanese war had died away.

The presidential speech which accompanied the Talking Points included strong affirmation of many positions which Israel had long held important for its security. However, the Talking Points did suggest that the U.S., in its new position in the Middle East, was interested in taking a more active role in seeking specific solutions for the problem.

While many welcomed a more active role by the U.S., there was concern that the U.S. was in danger of by-passing the Camp David process by prematurely espousing the kinds of . . . 1 . . . specific solutions which should properly be the end-product of the post-autonomy-period negotiations envisioned by the Camp David process.

If the United States were to become the exponent of action on Judea and Samaria which was too precipitate or which by-passed the Camp David process, then the U.S. would diminish its prime role: to bring to the negotiating table Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Palestinian leaders who accept the existence of Israel. Only that would serve the purposes of long-range peace.

Action Goals

. The Jewish community relations agencies should stress to the American policy-makers and public that:

. The main road to finding solutions for Judea/Samaria lies in the Camp David process, especially since that problem cannot be divorced from the need to find comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

. While the American government has the right and duty to urge Israel not to take any actions which the American government believes might imperil the Camp David process, the chief deterrent to implementing that process remains the failure of Arab states such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia to come to the negotiating table on that subject, recognizing the fact of Israel.

3. AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION

Changing Conditions

According to the polls, the prevalently favorable American public opinion on Israel remained stable during the southern Lebanon campaign, began to deteriorate somewhat during the bombardment of and entry into West Beirut, and fell to its lowest point in many years after the massacre of Palestinians by a Christian group in West Beirut. Media criticism of Israel seemed to follow the same pattern, as did perceived sentiments among Congressmen.

The 1982 Congressional elections seemed to provide some contrary evidence. Israel was not a prevailing issue in Congressional campaigns. There was no demonstrable negative backlash for candidates who were open and vocal supporters of Israel. And observers felt that the Congressional corps of Israel's supporters had increased as a result of the election.

The image of Israel had clearly suffered, emerging as more militaristic, and less humane. That more negative image resulted from the objective facts of the war, aggravated by often harsh and distorted treatment by the media. However, buttressed by the evident reality that the Lebanese campaign had served American national interest, the American people were apparently not ready to abandon Israel because of those negative images.

Nevertheless, the more negative images of Israel troubled the Jewish community. And there was no way to assess the cumulative effect of such negative images, especially as they might be compounded by future altercations and tensions between the United States and Israel over matters related to Judea and Samaria.

Action Goals

Jewish community relations agencies should mount an ongoing interpretive campaign, not just reacting to specific negative impacts in the media, but stressing the *fundamental* themes that are important for American public opinion:

. The reiteration and documentation of the reality that Israel is America's only militarily viable and politically stable ally in the Middle East.

. The reiteration and documentation of the reality that Israel is a thriving political democracy.

. The reiteration and documentation of the reality that Israel shares the basic political and cultural values of the United States.

. Constant reminders that tactical disagreements between the U.S. and Israel do not displace the fact that the two countries have basic common concerns in the Middle East.

4. AMERICAN JEWISH OPINION AND ISRAEL

Changing Conditions

The American Jewish community was dramatically shaken during the last half of 1982 by what the American media frequently featured as a new phenomenon of "dissent" among American Jews about Israeli policy.

Various surveys of American Jewish opinion consistently found this pattern: overwhelming support of the campaign in southern Lebanon; increasing doubts about the bombardment of and entry into West Beirut; and shock at the massacre in West Beirut. In addition, as the question of Judea and Samaria was precipitated to the top of the agenda, it became clear that American Jews were divided in their basic beliefs about how that problem should be resolved. Various American Jewish groups registered the strong feeling that the Israeli government should mount an independent judicial investigation of the massacre; and some groups indicated that the Israeli government's rejection of the President's "Talking Points" on Judea and Samaria, while often on the mark, was too comprehensive and summary a rejection.

The fact remained that there was a strong, undisturbed consensus among American Jews about the basic need for American economic, military and diplomatic support of Israel; and about a number of other basic issues -- relating to the PLO, for example, and the Camp David process. However, many Jewish communities reported an unprecedented internal ferment about the differences that do exist among American Jews about some Israeli policies; and an increasing level of frustration among some American Jews about their inability to effectively transmit their concerns and differences to the Israelis.

Action Goals

. American Jewish communities should make it clear to their policy-makers that, while there are differences among American Jews on some perceived points of Israeli foreign policy, there remains a strong consensus among American Jews on the basic points of American foreign policy vis-a-vis Israel and the Middle East.

. American Jewish communities should provide more educational opportunities for their constituents, whereby issues in contention, such as the options for Judea/Samaria, would be more thoroughly discussed, with an airing of all views.

. American Jewish communities should seek channels whereby not just the strong basic American Jewish consensus, but also the spectrum of differences among American Jews on some issues could be transmitted to the Israelis -- in a manner which will not confuse American policy makers or the American public.