

Mideast Isn't Seen in Left-Right Terms

By DANIEL PIPES

The usual debate is not taking place after the recent tragedy in Lebanon. The bombing of the U.S. Embassy annex does not cause conservatives and liberals to take up standard positions. The former hesitate before ascribing blame on the Soviet Union, the latter do not dwell on American mistakes.

This reticence was even more apparent in the discussion during 1983 over the presence of U.S. Marines in Lebanon. At that time, conservatives did not call for standing by the government of Amin Gemayel as a U.S. ally, they did not emphasize the riches Lebanon gained through its laissez-faire economy, nor did they blame Lebanon's problems on Soviet mischief. As for liberals, they did not blame Lebanon's problems on unequal distribution of wealth, call for land reform, sympathize with the rebel forces, contest the validity of parliamentary elections, hold the authorities responsible for human-rights outrages, or—despite its control over less than 1% of the country's territory—contest the legitimacy of the central government. In short, neither side put forth its predictable ideological arguments.

Outside the Great Debate

Rather, conservatives and liberals debated among themselves about practical matters. Some Republicans hesitated to support a military undertaking in a complex situation where the U.S. had no clear vital interests. In contrast, a number of Democrats believed that an American commitment on the ground in the Middle East would help with other issues in the region. Aid to Lebanon appeared in American eyes humanitarian more than ideological; U.S. soldiers were seen to help end anarchy and for once enjoyed the role of peacekeepers, not partisans.

This particular case illustrates a large point: The Middle East stands outside the great debate of American foreign policy since World War II—the disagreement over the danger posed by the U.S.S.R. Conflicting assessments of the Soviet threat in turn determine how an American views issues in Central America, Western Europe, South Africa, East Asia and elsewhere. Only in the Middle East is the U.S.S.R. not the critical debate. Political discussion there is dominated by an entirely different and wholly unrelated dichotomy—the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Conservatism does not predispose an American to favor one side, nor does liberalism. Indeed, all four possible combinations are well represented in mainstream American politics: conservative pro-Arab, conservative pro-Israel, liberal pro-Arab, and liberal pro-Israel. Conservatives friendly to Israel note the country's useful-

ness against the Soviet Union; pro-Israel liberals note its democracy and high moral standards. Pro-Arab conservatives stress the importance of oil and business ties; liberals friendly to the Arabs emphasize the suffering of the Palestinians.

Columnists, for example, span the four categories. Among those who are pro-Arab, Rowland Evans is conservative and Anthony Lewis is a liberal; among the pro-Israel columnists are the conservative George Will and the liberal Morton Kondracke. Journals of opinion divide in similar ways: the National Review is conservative and pro-Israel, while The New Re-

are seen as critical to successful business dealings, and this in turn is seen as a function of attitudes toward the Arab-Israel conflict.

As for religion, it is the very key to understanding American feeling about Middle East politics. Monotheism originated in the Middle East, a fact that permanently endows the region with special significance. The interest of American Jews in the Middle East is self-evident; most Jews consider their standing as a people to be bound up with the State of Israel. Christian concern with events there is less direct but also powerful. As the

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public is liberal and pro-Israel. Among newspapers, the conservative Chicago Tribune and the liberal Christian Science Monitor are pro-Arab; the conservative Wall Street Journal and the liberal New York Times are pro-Israel. Among think tanks, the conservative American Enterprise Institute and the liberal Carnegie Endowment are pro-Arab, whereas the conservative Heritage Foundation is pro-Israel.

Prominent figures who have taken pronounced stands on the Arab-Israeli issue come from all points of the political landscape. For example, the pro-Arab side includes conservatives Spiro Agnew, John Connolly and Caspar Weinberger; liberals J. William Fulbright, Andrew Young and George Ball; radicals Noam Chomsky and Jesse Jackson.

Conservative businessmen and liberal Democratic senators running for president agree that it is natural and logically consistent that to be conservative is to be pro-Arab and to be liberal is to be pro-Israel. Radical editors of the Nation and the neo-conservative editors of Commentary agree on precisely the opposite alignment. At the same time, conservatives and liberals tend to cooperate on Middle East issues; the pro-Arab and pro-Israel lobbies are probably the most thoroughly bipartisan efforts on Capitol Hill.

Why are politics in the Middle East an issue apart, unrelated to the dominant debate in American foreign policy? Of the many reasons, the most important concern is the financial and religious interests of Americans in the Middle East. Trade in oil, the largest and most profitable industry in the world, offers extraordinary opportunities for financial gain—and Arab states dominate its export. Good relations between oil-exporting states and the U.S.

birthplace of Christianity and the home of the early church, the Holy Land is a special place for every believer. The Middle East may be remote, exotic and incomprehensible, but it is not alien and it is never without interest.

That the Middle East does not fit into the usual ideological categories has major implications for the formation and execution of U.S. policy. While every administration enters office with an articulated point of view on the Soviet Union, the Middle East, for all the attention paid it, is seen as far less important; with few exceptions, American voters do not select a candidate with the Arab-Israel conflict in mind. A newly elected president will have received a mandate for an approach to relations with the U.S.S.R. but does not have one for the Middle East. What policies he chooses to pursue there are very much in question after he wins the election.

Personnel decisions have greater impact on policy because political appointees have no generally shared viewpoint regarding the Middle East. The president-elect selects his foreign-policy aides primarily with an eye to East-West issues and without much regard to their views on the Arabs and Israel; how they feel about the Middle East is therefore a matter of chance. The absence of a consensus on the Middle East implies greater contention in formulating policy. Every administration typically includes top officials espousing irreconcilable opinions about Middle East issues. Decisions depend on who prevails in the bureaucratic struggles, and erratic policy follows.

Power flows to the bureaucrats and the lobbies. Bureaucrats gain because new administrations, lacking an ideological viewpoint on the Middle East, have little incentive to bring in fresh faces at the working

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level of government. There is therefore less housecleaning at the beginning of a new administration, and it is easier for those already in place to stay on in positions of authority. Political appointees are especially few in number in the bureaus that handle Middle East affairs. These factors account for the homogeneity of the so-called Arabists at the State Department, as well as their legendary hold over Department policy.

Lobbies also gain. Put positively, there is special scope for citizen participation and influence in the debate about American policy in the Middle East. Put negatively, the national interest has exceptionally little role. The absence of ideology increases the role of parochial considerations, notably religious emotions and business pressures.

The non-ideological approach to Middle East affairs affects the actual course of U.S. policy in several ways. Swings in policy toward the Soviet Union do not affect the Middle East. Liberal policies during the Carter administration and conservative ones during the Reagan years have had profound influence on the U.S. posture everywhere in the world but the Middle East.

An Element of Diversity

The American public not being polarized along conservative and liberal lines, the U.S. government has greater flexibility to use U.S. soldiers in the Middle East. While \$20 million in U.S. aid to El Salvador in 1982-83 was the object of extensive criticism in the press and in Congress, \$210 million to Lebanon was virtually uncontested. Sending 55 trainers to El Salvador provoked extreme controversy, while a force 20 times as large in Lebanon raised much less debate. The public is uniquely willing to accept direct U.S. military involvement on the ground in the Middle East.

This offers a unique chance to escape the conservative/liberal dichotomy that otherwise dominates American foreign policy. The Middle East adds an element of diversity to American political life and contributes to the vitality of the foreign-policy debate. Whereas other regions are seen in terms of dangers, the Middle East offers American politicians a chance to achieve something positive. For this reason, American presidents see the Arab-Israeli conflict as a special opportunity to make their mark in foreign policy.

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Daniel Pipes argues plausibly (editorial page, Sept. 27) that views on Middle East politics are not shaped by conventional ideological biases. His presentation is flawed in one respect. He employs a fallacious mode of classification that is too widely accepted: that all who hold views on the subject are either "pro-Israel" or "pro-Arab."

This is a kind of application of the biblical formula (later lifted by Lenin) that those who are not with us are against us. It is a disservice to clear thinking and to our national interest.

To say that Arab nationalism is not less worthy than the Jewish nationalism born of Zionism is not to derogate the latter nor to be "pro-Arab." To suggest that Palestinian Arabs have human rights that are entitled to respect and to international concern (no less than Jewish Israelis) is not to be "pro-Arab." It is open to serious question that to accept and condone the expansionist views of many Israelis is, in a profound sense, "pro-Israel."

American foreign policy will not be free to play a constructive role in the Middle East until these points are apprehended by many more Americans than now recognize them.

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Daniel Pipes correctly observes that the debate on U.S. Mideast policy occurs largely outside the context of liberal-conservative "disagreement over the danger posed by the U.S.S.R." He favors this, believing that it makes possible a realistic, non-ideological approach to the formulation of our Mideast policy. But even if American conservatives (let alone liberals) do not view the Middle East in terms of the East-West conflict, there is ample reason to believe the Soviets do. So-

viet Mideast policy—like Soviet policy toward any country or region—is dictated by the requirements of maintaining and expanding a military empire. Extending Soviet influence over the Middle East is critical to Moscow's long-range objective of demoralizing and dividing the Atlantic Alliance.

Now that Syria is the dominant force in Lebanese politics, Egypt is the only Arab state on the southern rim of the Mediterranean that is not actively hostile to the U.S. and the West. Egypt, already under pressure from Soviet-backed Libya and Soviet-allied Ethiopia and South Yemen, sees Israel as a buffer between herself and Soviet-allied Syria. Should Israel suffer a major defeat, therefore, the entire southern rim would almost certainly fall under the control of clients and proxies of the U.S.S.R. Soviet domination of the southern Mediterranean would so threaten the maritime commerce and population centers of Turkey, Greece and Italy, that these nations would probably find it expedient to withdraw from the NATO command structure.

The Allies were able to launch an invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe only after securing North Africa and the Middle East. Should another war break out in Europe, the Western powers will again need bases and allies on the southern rim if they are to have any chance of defending or reconquering their homelands. In the foreseeable future, Israel is the only first-rate military power in the Middle East that is also dependably pro-Western. To appreciate Israel's strategic importance to the defense of the West, one need not be either a liberal or a conservative. One must, however, give some thought to the fact that the Middle East is adjacent both to the Soviet Union and to the southern flank of NATO.

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