

Sandstorm

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICTS & AMERICA

Edited by DANIEL PIPES

A MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL BOOK

This book was written under the auspices of the Middle East Council, a division of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia. The Council works to define and promote American interests by shaping the debate in which U.S. foreign policy is made.

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To Albert J. Wood

**"To live well and rewarded is to tie one's full conviction,
concentration, and courage to a humane and honest cause."**

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D.P.
Philadelphia, 1992

Introduction

As one of the world's most volatile areas, the Middle East receives disproportionate media coverage. But newspaper and television accounts almost invariably present the events of the day without providing the context needed to understand the implications and meaning of those events. We selected the eighteen articles in this volume with an eye to providing just such background for Middle East topics of current interest.

The chapters originally appeared in *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs*, a quarterly devoted to issues of U.S. foreign policy. They were published between 1986 and 1991 and appear here unaltered, except for minor stylistic changes. While covering a wide range of topics, two themes stand out: security issues (wars, terrorism, and hostage taking) and attitudes (public opinion in Lebanon and the United States, and the Israeli security dilemma). These are the features which endure for years, and even decades, and therefore provide a key to understanding the daily flux of events and policies.

Consider Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf war, events that seemed to twist the Middle East kaleidoscope, shaking everything up. States once powerful became weak; enemies became allies; some financial debts disappeared while others grew quickly; a proud country suffered attacks without retaliation. The rout of Iraqi forces in February 1991 then produced still other changes. The Arab-Israeli conflict looked closer to resolution as the Arab states, concentrating on

hostilities in the Gulf, let anti-Zionism stray to the sidelines. Saudis summoned the courage to speak their mind, coming out with blistering attacks on those who had failed or betrayed them in their hour of need. (Yasir 'Arafat, for example, they called "that clown.")¹ Conquest and occupation transformed Kuwaitis: playboys turned into resistance fighters, hesitant diplomats became resolute allies.

The assertion of American might had finally eliminated the stigma of close ties with the United States; for the first time, Arab states proudly wore their American association. Even so famous an anti-American as Hafiz al-Asad of Syria joined the U.S.-led coalition; more astonishing yet, Syrian and American troops stood together in Saudi Arabia. Old verities and structures appeared moribund; the Middle East had been altered in deep and irreversible ways; and the war's decisive end confirmed expectations that a new order in the region had dawned.

But things quickly went back to business-as-usual, so much so that within two months it felt almost as though the war had never taken place. Saddam Husayn remained in power, as barbaric, truculent, and deceitful as ever. He went right back to spinning promises about autonomy and democracy, all the while massacring Iraqis, just as before. The Saudis reverted to their old, coy ways, reluctant to allow U.S. military equipment to be pre-positioned on their soil. Back in power, Kuwait's leaders returned as much as possible to the pre-invasion way of life; calls for power sharing meet with reluctance and disdain and the notion that Kuwaitis would do more of their own work quickly fell by the side.

¹ *The New York Times*, February 27, 1991.

It quickly became apparent that Asad had joined the U.S.-led coalition for his own reasons (in particular, his longstanding rivalry with Saddam), not owing to a change of heart. Asad still engaged in all manner of unsavory activities — conquering Lebanon, dominating the Palestinians, confronting Israel, sponsoring terrorism, trafficking in drugs — in some cases doing more of these than ever.

And while Washington was able to compel the Arab and Israeli disputants to meet in Madrid, it could not force them to make peace.

Why were the hopes of winter dashed by the realities of spring? Not because of mistakes made in Washington; foreigners are not that important in determining Middle Eastern politics. Rather, the reason has to do with the region's incorrigible tendency to domination and strife. Ethnic- and religious-based hatreds last for generations; political passions regularly overrule economic requirements; and the imperatives of dictatorial rule negate democratic or humane leanings. Opportunism reigns: Saddam Husayn was friendly to the U.S. government when he needed help in 1986; the Saudis were friendly in 1990 for the same reason.

It often seems that little really changes in the Middle East. Anwar as-Sadat's trip to Jerusalem, the Iranian Revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the *intifada*, and the Kuwait crisis all came and went. Details are jiggled, but things go on fundamentally as before. Of course, things do change over time, but slowly, oh so slowly.

This conclusion suggests that U.S. policy in the Middle East must have modest and reasoned aspirations. Neither American power nor the strength of its example can push away deeply grounded perceptions and habits. Washington has

neither the desire nor the need to rebuild Iraqi society from top to bottom as it did in Japan and Germany; regrettably, the Arab-Israeli conflict has decades yet to run. Further, except with regard to Turkey and Israel, the only democracies in the Middle East, Washington should be wary of overextension in the region. Getting too close allows the misdeeds and failures of others to become our own problems.

The articles that follow, each with its own nuances, confirm and amplify these points. They help the reader distinguish what does change, and what does not. We have arranged them under four rubrics: Arab politics, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Persian Gulf, and U.S. policy.

I. *Arab Politics.* Emmanuel Sivan explains in "The Islamic Republic of Egypt" that the drawing power of radical Muslim scholars in Egypt derives from their occupying the "moral high ground" of Islamic sacred law, the Shari'a. The radicals' "founding myth" that the Shari'a must guide Egyptian society continues to draw followers who believe that "Islam's primary task is to shape human behavior through use of law." While the radicals lack practical proposals for government, Sivan extrapolates that a future Islamic state would not bode well for democracy, civil liberties, economic stability, women, or non-Muslims. That Islamists in Egypt led demonstrations against the October 1991 peace conference shows us these issues are still important, still consequential.

The activism of Palestinian youths in the *intifada* influenced their brethren in Algeria, according to Khalid Durán, leading to the protests and riots of October 1988. Durán dubs this "The Second Battle of Algiers" and notes the profound irony of an Algerian leadership remembered for its inspiring

war against colonial rule now cast in the mold of the Israeli government. He also points to implications of the Algerian example for the Palestinians: the "uprising against their own government and the party of their own people's liberation movement, rather than against forces of occupation . . . served as a poignant if unintended warning to the youths of the West Bank that life after national liberation may be worse than before it." Since Durán's essay was written, upheavals have vividly illustrated just how powerful militant Islam remains in Algeria.

In an attempt to explain the motivations of Lebanese Shi'i terrorists, Hilal Khashan surveys Lebanese Shi'i students' attitudes. In "Do Lebanese Shi'is Hate the West?" he inquires about religion, relations with the West, and terrorism directed against Westerners. The results prompt Khashan to challenge the common view that Lebanese Shi'is are "profoundly anti-Western," and that those sentiments arise from Shi'i religiosity. Instead, he finds a surprising degree of political moderation. Khashan hints that terrorist actions, such as the suicide bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks on October 23, 1983, are the result of rogue Shi'is working individually, of unacknowledged Hizbullah initiatives, or of a combination of these two.

In "The Revival of Pan-Arabism," Khashan polls Lebanese Muslims of college age, Sunnis and Shi'is alike, and reports on their reactions to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. He found that Sunnis tended to be less organized politically but more inclined toward pan-Arabist, pro-Saddam Husayn, and radical anti-Western views than Shi'is. Khashan notes that, since Sunnis do not enjoy the opportunities for political expression that Shi'is do, pan-Arabism has become a "demographically stabilizing necessity" for Sunnis in countries with significant Shi'i populations. He predicts that Sunni pan-Arabism will

make a resurgence in the region during the coming decade, and that the "precariousness" of Sunni political power in lands north of the Arabian peninsula will cause this movement to spread still further. With Lebanon's political future still shifting, this analysis remains an excellent guide for the future.

II. *The Arab-Israeli Conflict.* Michael Mandelbaum applies political science theory with special verve in "Israel's Security Dilemma." On the one hand, the West Bank and the Golan Heights serve to buffer Israel from its Arab neighbors to the east, and in so doing they contribute to Israel's defense. On the other hand, the continued occupation of those territories increases regional tensions. Herein lies Israel's dilemma. Should it trade land for peace, thereby weakening its defenses? Or should it continue to occupy the territories and risk provoking the Arab states and inviting international isolation? Mandelbaum concludes that Israel will opt to stay in the Occupied Territories, preferring strength over an intangible decrease in tensions. We at the Middle East Council were not the only ones intrigued by Mandelbaum's argument: the PLO translated his article into Arabic and reprinted it in a bootleg edition of its own.

Mitchell Bard argues in "How Fares the Camp David Trio?" that diplomatic treaties have done little to attenuate decades of Egyptian hostility toward Israel. Egypt's "cold peace" — a phrase coined by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, now U.N. secretary general — with Israel has its obvious mutual benefits in comparison with the previous state of war, but Cairo's lack of resolve leaves the relationship in limbo. Bard concludes that pragmatism was the chief motivating factor behind Egypt's involvement in the Camp David initiative, and that in the near term, the "emotional, religious, and historical sources of conflict between Israelis and Arabs will not disappear."

Aaron David Miller approaches the same topic more optimistically. In "Changing Arab Attitudes toward Israel," he argues for the existence of a new pragmatism developed among some key Arab states besides Egypt in the late 1980s. The "cost/benefit calculus" that has always played a part in shaping Arab attitudes has recently served to moderate Arab policies. Israel's staying power, backed up by success on the battlefield, and the increasingly limited Arab military option have fostered Arab pragmatism. Events over the last fifteen years contributed to this trend. Just as the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty reduced Arab capabilities vis-à-vis Israel, the Iran-Iraq war shifted attention to the Persian Gulf. Miller, however, acknowledges that a reversion to the old animosity remains possible so long as these Arab states continue to maintain a war stance toward Israel.

In "Islam in the Palestinian Uprising," Robert Satloff warns of the dangers to the Arab-Israeli peace process posed by fundamentalist Islam in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Published after the United States had begun a dialogue with Yasir 'Arafat and the PLO, this article describes the role that fundamentalist groups like Islamic Jihad and Hamas have had in creating and maintaining the *intifada*. According to Satloff, in choosing to deal with the Palestinian nationalist leadership of the PLO, Washington did not sufficiently recognize the influence of fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories. The peace process, he writes, will depend "as much on intra-Palestinian developments [between Palestinian nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists] as on Palestinian attitudes toward Israel." He suggests that Washington risks disaster in attempting to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict without taking the interests and views of Hamas and other fundamentalists into account.

Using polling data, Eytan Gilboa considers the effect that the Palestinian uprising has had on public opinion in the United States, particularly on such issues as support for Israel, acceptance of the PLO, and an independent Palestinian state. In "The Intifada: Has It Turned American Public Opinion?" he concludes that though the *intifada* did gain enormous media attention, the resulting "barrage of critical commentary" neither diminished traditional American support for Israel nor increased the standing of the PLO or the acceptability of a Palestinian state on the West Bank. Though contrary to conventional wisdom at the time of publication, in early 1989, this conclusion has subsequently been vindicated.

In "Declaring Independence: Israel and the PLO," Daniel Pipes compares two texts — the Palestinian proclamation of independence of November 15, 1988, and its Israeli precursor of May 14, 1948. He points to the similarities in "subject matter, organization, and even in specific phrasing" between the two texts and suggests that the PLO document was intentionally modeled after the Israeli one. He concludes that the dissimilar careers of the two documents confirm "the old truth that history produces documents more than documents produce history."

III. *The Persian Gulf*. Iraq and Iran fought the longest conventional war of the twentieth century, a brutal, high-casualty conflict that left both countries economically devastated, demoralized, and bloodied. Though the two sides conspicuously "failed to apply most of the classic principles of war — from the assignment of realistic war aims to the adoption of appropriate tactics," Efraim Karsh suggests in "Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War" that the conflict offers "significant military and strategic lessons" for other states. Morale, for example, does not always have a positive effect on a country's war effort.

Also, though "wars are not easily limited," the process of escalation is not always random. Karsh ends on a pessimistic note, citing "the exceptionally mild international reaction to the erosion of several crucial thresholds and 'red lines' during the war (primarily the use of gas)," and predicts an increased "potential level of violence in [future] Middle Eastern wars." His 1989 analysis was born out just a year later.

Martin Kramer probes enduring Sunni-Shi'i tensions in "Tragedy in Mecca" and notes that fundamentalist Islam reintroduced the concept of "holy war by Muslims against Muslims" into Middle Eastern public life. The leading example of this was the violent clash between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security forces in Mecca on July 31, 1987. The exact details of the confrontation remain unclear, but Kramer explains its underlying causes. For a thousand years, Sunni and Shi'i Muslims have battled over the nature of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, a central facet of the Muslim religion. According to Kramer, the Khomeini-led Iranian revolution re-aggravated and exacerbated the centuries-old conflict between Sunnis (particularly Wahhabis) and Shi'is. He further suggests that this problem, though hardly noted by non-Muslims, will continue to inflame political passions in the Middle East.

Patrick Clawson and Charles Kupchan both visited Iran in November 1989 and came away with complementary impressions. In "Iran after Khomeini" they describe the severe toll that eight years of conflict have taken, causing the radical Iranian regime to steer away from aggressively exporting the Islamic revolution and to refocus on economic reconstruction.

They both look forward to normalizing relations with a moderating adversary, but approach the matter differently. Clawson proposes a package deal: after the release of the

Western hostages in Lebanon, restrictions on trade with Iran are lifted. At the same time, Washington should maintain "a credible set of threats" in case Iran does not stop supporting terrorists. For him, "the best way to deal with [Iran] is through hard-headed, quid-pro-quo bargaining, not through naïve, nice gestures." Kupchan counsels Washington to seek a rapprochement with Tehran and to open a constructive dialogue. As each side engages in confidence-building measures, the two countries can then develop a "positive relationship."

Eliyahu Kanovsky believes that the oil crisis of 1990, stimulated by the invasion of Kuwait, resembled the one of 1979, following the Iranian revolution. In "Why the Oil Crisis Won't Last" (published in September 1990), he predicts that oil prices will fall as world markets adapt to the threatened shortage of oil. As in the 1970s, they will lower the demand for oil by increasing energy efficiency, drawing on alternative fuels, and a variety of other methods. He was correct: not only did oil prices drop, but they did so as soon as hostilities against Iraq began. When the next oil shock occurs, Kanovsky's logic should serve as a guide for decision makers, both in business and government.

IV. *U.S. Policy.* Is Israel a plus or minus in U.S. calculations in the Middle East? Steven Spiegel makes the authoritative case for the plus view in "U.S. Relations with Israel: The Military Benefits." He shows how Israel provides the United States with military innovation and expertise, offering "room for study and for possible enhanced cooperation in those areas in which they specialize." Not only does the relationship further U.S. interests in the region by providing a democratic and militarily strong ally, it also furthers U.S.

interests in the broader global theater by providing the United States with military innovation and expertise, and with knowledge gained from battlefield experience against Soviet-made weaponry. In addition, Israel's martial successes benefit American arms makers and adversely affect Soviet defense plans and arms sales.

In "The U.S. Raid on Libya — and NATO," Frederick Zilian highlights the strained U.S. relationship with its NATO allies at the time of the April 1986 air raid on Libya. Though the U.S. acted unilaterally and with the support of only one NATO ally (the United Kingdom), U.S. government criticism of fellow alliance members was muted, especially in comparison with its criticism of Allied reactions to the declaration of martial law in Poland in December 1981. Still, the Libyan action brought up "one of those continuously divisive issues since the early days of the Alliance," namely, the NATO charter's applicability to non-European territories and states. Zilian correctly suggests in this 1986 article that NATO will "evolve, not wither." He also predicts that the raid on Libya will serve as a precursor to future unilateral actions in the Third World on the part of the United States — with or without the support of Washington's European allies. With the collapse of the Soviet threat and the re-evaluation of NATO's role, out-of-area questions have taken on a new importance; and in this context, the 1986 Libya raid remains a benchmark event.

Daniel Pipes's "Breaking the Iran-Contra Story" provides the two key documents which revealed the Reagan administration's strategy of dealing with Iranian "moderates." One is the brief, rarely seen text that broke the story in *Ash-Shira*, a Lebanese weekly, the other a speech of Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, then speaker of Iran's Parliament. The

account in *Ash-Shira* forced Rafsanjani to respond to protect himself from charges of cooperating with the United States. In his speech, Rafsanjani provides the first details of the American activities, including the cake in the shape of a key. At that point, the scandal broke wide open.

Arab Politics

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