**Interview With Daniel Pipes, Expert on the Middle East**

**“The War Can Only Hurt American Interests”**

The balance of power is shifting in the Persian Gulf, says this authority on politics in the Moslem world, and the U.S. is on the losing end. Who wins? Iraq—emerging as the region’s new kingpin—and its backer, Russia.

Q. Dr. Pipes, will the Iranian-Iraqi war benefit or endanger American interests in the Middle East?

A. The war can only hurt American interests. Any increase in Iraqi power is detrimental to us, in that Iraq is a state with territorial ambitions which will destabilize the area. It has ideas of getting increased oil reserves by taking Khuzestan province. It is determined to bring down the Camp David accords. And it has, I think, long-term hopes of establishing hegemony over the Persian Gulf. So that’s one danger: The increase in Iraqi power.

Q. What are the other dangers?

A. Second is that the shipment of oil out of the gulf from other countries will be endangered—although this seems to be diminishing. It hasn’t happened so far.

There’s a danger that the Soviet Union, which is the sponsor of Iraq, will gain prestige internationally in backing the winning side and gain power locally: That is, the Soviet Union would have control over the power that is pre-eminent in the gulf.

Q. Have the Russians made notable gains so far?

A. The Russians now have more leverage over Iraq than they used to. The Iraqis are quickly running out of spare parts and out of ammunition, and the Soviet Union is now in the position either to provide them with replacements or not. Should it choose to do so, the Iraqis will be ever more in the Soviet debt than they were before.

Remember, Iraq has been attempting to leave the Soviet orbit. It voted against the Soviet Union in the U.N. on the Afghan question. It has been trying to buy more and more of its arms and industrial goods from the West. Obviously, no Western country is going to be sending in arms at this point. So if the Soviet Union does supply more weapons, it increases its influence in Iraq.

Q. Longer range, the Soviet Union also improves its position in the area, doesn’t it?

A. One can view this as a pincer movement toward the gulf. Last year, we saw the Soviets’ invasion of Afghanistan. Now a Soviet quasi client—Iraq—is expanding territorially and acquiring ever greater military control of the northern part of the gulf; that can only help the Soviet Union.

It threatens our interests. After all, we are the status quo power in the gulf; we can only lose. We—the United States and the Western World—are getting virtually all of the oil from the gulf. Any change there hurts our interests.

Q. What is the Soviets’ long-term goal in that region—to control the gulf?

A. It must be. If the Soviet Union controls the gulf, it has virtual control over the foreign policies of Japan and Western Europe. Should the Soviets want to take control of Western Europe, they probably will not attack it directly. It’s much easier for them to get control of the oil. It is—in a way—painless.

The U.S. doesn’t need the oil that much; we can survive without it. But Japan and Western Europe are quite dependent on it. They have shown in the past that they’re ready to change their policies in order to suit the Arabs who control the oil. So there’s every reason to think that they would change their policies for the Russians if the Russians control that oil. Dismemberment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization would be one of the first things the Soviets would call for, and this would lead to international isolation of the United States. The stakes are very, very high.

Q. Do you see any way that this war might help to bring the American hostages home any sooner?

A. Anything about the hostages is unpredictable, but I think it will hurt the chances of the hostages being released.

Q. Why?

A. There’s a power struggle in Iran between two factions: What we might call the nationalists and the activist Moslems—between Bani-Sadr, who is a Western-educated Iranian nationalist, and Mohammad Beheshti, leader of the Islamic Republican Party.

The hostages are an ace in the hole for the IRP; it’s very important in their struggle for control of Iran. If anything, the challenges of the war have made it less likely that the hostages will be freed quickly.

Q. How will the conflict in the area affect the balance of power among the Arabs? Is Iraq about to become the new policeman of the Persian Gulf?

A. The balance of power among the Arabs is up for grabs. Since Egypt signed the Camp David accords and the peace treaty with Israel, it has lost political leverage in the Middle East. It’s an open question whether Egypt will continue to be ostracized from Arab politics, but in the meantime, so long as it is, Baghdad has probably the best qualifications to take over: It has the strongest Arab army. It has one of the strongest economies. The country no longer has severe internal problems. It has a fairly substantial population. As far as becoming policeman of the gulf, that seems quite credible. After the collapse of Iranian military power, there really is nobody else. I don’t believe that the Saudi Arabians have credible military strength. They are spending incredible amounts of money to build up their Army and Air Force. But I’m very skeptical that the Air Force would prove effective, and the Army’s not much better. So that leaves the Iraqis, who have the manpower, the money, the ambition.

Q. What effect will the war have on the chances for an Arab-Israeli peace?

A. It’s bad for Israel, in that the greater power of Iraq is going to harm the Camp David ac-
cords—the Egyptian-Israeli peace—and will make further steps along that path more difficult for other countries, particularly Syria and Jordan.

Q. How will the other Arab countries, especially the conservative regimes in the gulf—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain—accept Iraq's new role? Are they worried about Soviet influence in Baghdad?

A. I'm sure they are. As fellow Arabs, they have a preference for the Iraqis over the Iranians. As status quo powers, they favor Iraq over revolutionary Iran.

Q. Can the new Iraq become strong enough to build a network of friends that will put it in the same league as Iran? Are the other countries of the area going to take notice of this new Iraq?

A. It seems unlikely. The new Iraq is unpledged, with a history of making commitments. But it is clear that the Iraqis are determined to make their mark on the world stage.

Q. Is the new Iraq strong enough to pose a threat to Iran?

A. No, Iran is still the dominant power in the region. The new Iraq is a minor player, with limited resources and capabilities.

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