

# Getting Tough With Israel

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by J. William Fulbright

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I believe that the current situation in the Middle East is shaped by two central facts. One is the volatility of the Arab-Israel conflict, and the high probability of another, greater war if the central issue of the occupied territories is not soon resolved. The second—which for domestic political reasons we are exceedingly reluctant to acknowledge—is the close relationship between the Arab-Israel conflict and the price and availability of oil.

The danger of a fifth Arab-Israel war is acute, and if such a war comes, it will almost certainly be more violent and more protracted than the previous wars. In the period of truce since the October 1973 war both sides have rearmed heavily. The consensus of military experts is that the strategic balance is shifting to the Arab side, not only because of Soviet supplies but also because of the greatly improved training and technical competence of the Egyptian and Syrian armed forces. Egypt and perhaps Syria are now armed with Russian surface-to-surface “Scud” missiles, which would enable them to attack Israeli cities as well as Israel’s vulnerable oil storage facilities. Israel, for her part, is generally assumed to have acquired nuclear weapons, and if Joseph Alsop—whose Israeli connections are excellent—is to be believed,

Israel is prepared to use those weapons if her cities are attacked. In Alsop’s view, Israeli warnings already issued amount to a veiled but unmistakable threat of nuclear war.

The alternative to war—and the only alternative—is a general settlement. It is no derogation of Secretary Kissinger’s achievements to note that the disengagement agreements of the past year and the limited Israeli pull-backs in Sinai and the Golan Heights were no more than preliminary accomplishments. The difficult issues remain—in particular Jerusalem and the West Bank—and unless they are resolved, there will almost certainly be war, a war that would devastate Israel, quite possibly provoke a Soviet-American confrontation, and most certainly bring on a new, ruinous oil boycott. This prospective crisis is not remote or hypothetical; it is closer to being a clear and present danger.

It cannot be permitted, and it is up to the United States, not alone but in collaboration with the Soviet Union and the United Nations, to prevent it. Israel, it appears, is stalling, and with nothing concrete in mind except to get all the arms and money she can from the United States, so as to try to hold off the inevitable. The Israeli leaders might have made good use of time gained since last year’s truce to prepare for the necessary accommodations. They might have been telling their people, as Israel’s first and wisest leader, David Ben-Gurion, tried to tell

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*J. William Fulbright is former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. This article is adapted from a speech he delivered at Westminster College.*

them in 1971, that peace is Israel's "great necessity," and "to get it we must return to the borders before 1967." "As for security," he added, "militarily defensible borders, while desirable, cannot by themselves guarantee our future. Real peace with our Arab neighbors—mutual trust and friendship—that is the only true security."

The shift of the balance of power gives added force to Ben-Gurion's prescient words. This shift is more than a matter of improved weapons and fighting skills on the Arab side. The rise of the Arabs is based upon two powerful and growing forces: money and nationalism—the enormous wealth which is accruing to the oil-producing states of the Persian Gulf, and the surging national feeling of the Arab peoples, especially the embittered, tenacious nationalism of the Palestinians. The brief, spectacular ascendancy of the Israelis in the Middle East has been based primarily on human assets which, beyond a certain point, cannot be expanded—discipline, energy, bravery, and competence. Impressive as these human assets are, they do not and cannot outweigh the fact that Israel is a small country with modest natural resources and heavy liabilities. It has

no oil except that of the occupied Sinai fields. Its economy is burdened by military costs and inflation, and is so dependent on the United States as to make Israel—however little we or the Israelis may care to admit it—a client state of the United States.

What is taking place in the Middle East is a long-term historical unweighting of the scales of power, comparable, say, to the inexorable displacement of France by Germany as the paramount power of Europe in the nineteenth century. In the Middle East, however, it is all happening much faster. Myopia among the Israelis, with their siege mentality, is perhaps understandable. It is much less so among Israel's supporters in the United States, who, by underwriting intransigence, are encouraging Israel on a course which must lead toward her destruction—and possibly ours as well.

Israel, I am convinced, can and should survive as a peaceful, prosperous society—but within the borders called for by the UN Security Council in November, 1967. That resolution also calls for a settlement "guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every state in the area. . . . This provision, can be implemented by great power guarantees contracted through the United Nations Security Council and, in addition, by an explicit, binding American treaty guarantee of Israel.

That much we owe them, but no more. We do not owe them our support of their continued occupation of Arab lands, including old Jerusalem and the Palestinian West Bank. The Palestinian people have as much right to a homeland as do the Jewish people. We Americans—who have always professed adherence to the principle of self-determination—should be the first to appreciate that. But when the United Nations General Assembly voted last October, by 105 to 4 with 20 abstentions, to allow the Palestine Liberation Organization to participate in the Assembly debate on



Diana H. Walker

Palestine, the United States was in the minority of four, together with Israel, Bolivia and the Dominican Republic.

So completely have the majority of our officeholders fallen under Israeli domination that not only do they deny the legitimacy of Palestinian national feeling, but also we saw such otherwise fair-minded individuals as the two candidates for senator from New York engaging in heated debate as to which one more passionately opposed a Palestinian state. We have nearly allowed our detente with the Soviet Union to go on the rocks in order to obtain an agreement on large-scale Jewish emigration—a matter of limited relevance to the basic issue of human rights in the Soviet Union and of no relevance at all to the vital interests of the United States. Senator Jackson has further obfuscated the matter with invocations of Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." Note that the article refers not only to the right to leave but also to the right to return. Is the right of the Palestinians to return to homes from which they were expelled any less fundamental than the right of Soviet Jews to make new homes in a new land?

Within the broader question of the West Bank there is a special importance about Jerusalem. It is here especially that the Arab-Israel conflict converges with the question of the price and availability of oil. Let me explain why:

The oil countries, united in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), appear to be on a kind of power "trip," and their lack of restraint is widely, and properly, condemned. Those most insistent on repeated price increases, however, have not been the Arab states, but two of the principal non-Arab producers, Iran and Venezuela. The largest oil exporter, Saudi Arabia, has

shown a keen awareness of the dangerous disruptions threatened by the four-fold increase in the price of oil, and Saudi officials have made known—both publicly and privately, in unmistakable terms—their strong desire to lower prices and to work out long-term supply arrangements for the industrial nations, especially the United States. The Saudis are motivated by strong feelings of friendship and also of reliance upon the United States. Fearing—not only communism

Three years ago, Senator Fulbright proposed a U.S. security guarantee for Israel. Over a year ago Secretary Kissinger was willing to entertain the possibility of a formal treaty for this purpose.

In the overall scheme of a settlement, the intended role of any U.S. guarantee of Israel's borders is clear: to enable Israel to give up Arab territory without giving up military security. Instead of the forcible occupation of Arab lands which Israel has been using since 1967 in an effort to protect her own territory and compel a settlement, the idea would be to substitute a "collective self-defense" arrangement with the United States.

But an American guarantee must be of the right kind.

First, since the *sine qua non* is inducing Israel to withdraw, it must give Israel reliable assurance of physical security. This means that it must commit the United States to act alone if necessary, without either the approval or participation of other countries, if any, that might join in the guarantee. It means also that the guarantee must be in the form of a treaty obligation, for any legally weaker undertaking on our part would not be sufficiently attractive to the Israelis.

—From an article by Lawrence Hargrove which appeared in The Washington Post.

but also Soviet and Chinese influence in the Arabian peninsula, Saudi Arabia looks to the United States as its mainstay in the Middle East.

But the Saudis are caught in a dilemma. It is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for them to accommodate the United States while the United States provides the money and arms which enable Israel to occupy Arab lands. Further—and this is the heart of the matter—King Faisal feels a special responsibility, indeed a stewardship, for the holy places of Islam. Saudi Arabia is the most orthodox of Muslim societies. The holy city of Mecca is within its territory, and the Kingdom uses the Koran as its constitution. Second only to Mecca in sanctity to Muslims is Jerusalem, where the Dome of the Rock is located, scarcely a hundred yards from Judaism's holiest site, the Wailing Wall, and is only half a mile away from the Christian shrine, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

As a city sacred to three religions, Jerusalem warrants a special status. Under the original United Nations partition plan of 1947—to which the United States subscribed, and which it has never repudiated—Jerusalem was to be a "corpus separatum under a special international regime." After Israel annexed the old city of Jerusalem in 1967, the United Nations General Assembly condemned the action, by a vote of 99 to 0, and condemned it again on two subsequent occasions.

In a world without effective international law, sovereign nations are often required to choose between justice and self-interest. A fair solution for Jerusalem, however, and of the Arab-Israel conflict as a whole, requires no such choice—no matter what the uncritical supporters of Israel may say. The choice for the United States, they insist, is between Israeli democracy and Arab oil, between high morality—as they would have it—and the crassest greed. In fact, the withdrawal of Israel to her approximate borders of 1967 and the

internationalization of Jerusalem would be wholly consistent with the principle of the self-determination of peoples, an international principle to which we have always professed to subscribe.

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#### Not A "Sellout"

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An Arab-Israeli settlement will not put an end to the energy crisis. Nor could it be counted upon to bring about an immediate substantial reduction of oil prices. It would, however, eliminate the major irritant in relations between the United States and the Arab states—especially Saudi Arabia—and in so doing create a much improved environment for negotiations on oil supply and prices. A settlement making just provision for the old city of Jerusalem and for the other occupied territories would greatly increase the political influence of Saudi Arabia, and therefore its weight as a force for moderation within OPEC. Saudi Arabia would be liberated, in effect, to do what King Faisal and his ministers want very much to do: cooperate to keep the West, and especially the United States, on which Saudi Arabia relies, prosperous and strong.

Such an approach would not constitute a "sellout" of Israel. Quite the contrary, it calls upon Israel to do nothing more than she ought to do anyway, even if the Middle East contained not a drop of oil. Indeed it would be to Israel's advantage—probably her salvation—because there can be no lasting security for that small, beleaguered community without a settlement, and there can be no settlement without withdrawal. For the United States the occasion—if we rise to it—is one of those rare and happy ones in which justice and self-interest coincide.

Unfortunately, neither the Israelis nor their uncritical supporters in our Congress and in our media have appreciated what is at stake, and the enormous distortion of American interests in our present course. Endlessly press-

ing the United States for money and arms—and invariably getting all and more than she asks—Israel makes bad use of a good friend. Unlike the Saudis, the Israelis seem not to recognize that if the United States is gravely weakened, they themselves can hardly hope to survive.

For these reasons it has become incumbent upon the United States—working with the Soviet Union through the United Nations—to take the decisive lead in bringing the quarter century of crisis in the Middle East to a prompt and equitable solution. The general outlines of such a solution are clear and even obvious: an explicit acknowledgement by the Arabs, including the Palestinians, that Israel has a right to exist; Israeli withdrawal to the approximate borders of 1967, with United Nations forces patrolling demilitarized zones on both sides; self-determination for the Palestinian people of the West Bank, either as an independent state or in some form of confederation with Jordan, according to their own wishes; a special status for the old city of Jerusalem, providing equal and uninhibited access for members of all faiths; and a general great power guarantee of the settlement and its terms, under the auspices of the United Nations, reinforced by a direct American treaty guarantee of Israel's independence and territory. On the basis of unofficial soundings, there is reason to believe that the Soviet Union would be prepared to join in such a settlement, including the guarantee of Israel.

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### Holding Back the Apocalypse

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A solution in the Middle East is the key to a resolution of the mounting world economic and political crisis. Although it cannot be predicted with certainty, there is good reason to believe that Israel's withdrawal from old Jerusalem and the West Bank will lead to a significant lowering of oil prices, giving the West and others the time they so desperately need to

adjust to the new world energy situation. There is even better reason to believe that the failure to achieve a solution will bring a new war, a new oil boycott, and possible consequences therefrom ranging from another Great Depression to Armageddon itself.

To state the matter with simple candor: the United States has done as much for Israel as one nation can do for another—we, and we alone, have made it possible for Israel to exist as a state. Surely it is not too much to ask in return that Israel give up East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as the necessary means of breaking a chain of events which threatens us all with ruin.

As we survey these great difficulties, we cannot fail to perceive that the only available solutions are cooperative solutions. If the world crisis is to be surmounted, unprecedented accommodations will be required, starting with the absolutely essential accommodation of Israel and the Arabs. Beyond that—and because of it—it will become possible to build the equally essential cooperation between oil producers and oil consumers, between rich nations and poor nations, industrial and developing nations. We must rededicate ourselves to the objectives proclaimed by Churchill and Roosevelt in their Atlantic Charter of 1941, including their desire “to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned,” and the right of “access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world. . . .”

Lord Byron wrote that “the best of prophets of the future is the past.” History casts no doubt at all on the *ability* of human beings to deal rationally with their problems, but the greatest doubt on their will to do so. The signals of the past are thus clouded and ambiguous, suggesting hope but not confidence in the triumph of reason. With nothing to lose in any event, it seems well worth a try. ■

