

The Mid-East War -- Missed Opportunities

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The new Middle East war was not inevitable, but nevertheless occurred because the doors to reconciliation, although opened at times, were never entered. It was obvious that unless the Arabs regained most of their lost territory peacefully they would go to war with Israel. From their standpoint, humiliation as a result of their defeat in the 1967 war could no longer continue. Someway, somehow, their territory and pride as men had to be regained.

This does not discount the fact that the Arabs probably deserved to lose their territory as a price for their attempts to destroy Israel. This obstinance in recognizing Israel as a legitimate state has been one of the biggest obstacles to reaching a peaceful settlement. In addition, the Israelis insisted on direct negotiations while the Arabs were attempting to get a favorable settlement through the U.N. Without a negotiated settlement, the result was obvious. First, a stalemate, then war.

U.S. Role

Was a negotiated settlement possible? It would be too much to make an absolute prediction. However, the one nation best positioned for bringing about such a development was the United States. Yet, in its usual fashion, the U.S. let the opportunities slip by. Being too interested in not making enemies, the U.S. was not taking the positive initiative in winning friends. Famous for its inconsistency in foreign affairs, it was already losing the faith and friendship of its allies without even trying. Had the U.S. acted more wisely, the Arabs could have possibly been won to its side, their territory recovered, and Israel would be secure from any Arab takeover.

The Israelis have not wanted to deal through a third party to negotiate a settlement. However, if necessary, they would accept only the U.S. as a go-between. The Arabs needed the U.S. and they knew it. Who else could talk the Israelis into giving up their occupied territory?

The opportunity came for the U.S. to achieve a peace settlement when the Egyptians told the Soviets to pack their bags. Soviet refusal to supply the Arabs with sufficient weapons to wage a successful campaign to regain their territory is what caused the Soviet Exodus.

The abortive Communist coup in Sudan also helped to chill relations between the Soviets and the Arab world. Being strong Muslims, the Arabs have never had any great love for Communism. Even had the Soviets given enough weapons to the Arabs, it is probable that the Arabs would have gradually broken off the engagement with the foes of Allah, once they had served their purpose.

Missed opportunity

With the Soviets gone, a near perfect opportunity existed for the U.S. to step in and bring a negotiated settlement. More than a peaceful solution to the Middle East crisis was at stake the entire Arab world could possibly have been won completely away from the Soviets.

This would have been a far greater achievement than all the nonsense talk of "detente" with the Soviets could have ever accomplished. In fact, the Middle East war is a perfect example of how meaningless "detente" has become.

Commitment a prerequisite

The steps taken to achieve such a peaceful settlement would have been, first, to establish a strong alliance with Israel by signing formal treaties, supplying her with the latest modern weapons in ample quantity, and strongly assuring the Arabs that the U.S. would take any measures necessary to protect the sovereignty and independence of Israel.

Secondly, the U.S. should have simultaneously pressured the Israelis to give up the major portion of the Arab's territory occupied by them since the six-day war. With Israel confident of her security, the possibility of her giving up the territory would be greatly increased.

The Arabs would undoubtedly be overjoyed to get their territory back. Knowing Israel to be too strong to destroy, particularly with strong U.S. backing, the Arabs would probably not attempt to drive her "into the sea."

Arab territory in Israeli hands can only increase the possibility of war, never lessen it. In the long run, particularly in terms of man and material, Israel has much more to lose, and depends on the U.S. to establish a strong, uncompromising position on Israel's existence as a legitimate nation. Eventually the Arabs will grudgingly have to accept the fact of Israeli existence supported by the U.S., as Jordan already has.

It is also in the interest of the U.S., Israel and Arab nations to limit Soviet influence in the Middle East. This can only be accomplished when the U.S. takes the initiative to win the Arabs through a reasonable territorial settlement. This might encourage the Palestinian commandoes to realize that more can be accomplished peacefully than through their futile violent attacks against Israel.

Communism is adversary

It is hard to know what possibilities for such a settlement may exist since the recent outbreak. What is certain is that the U.S., as usual, lost an excellent opportunity to bring about a peaceful and just settlement in the Middle East.

Detente as a goal in itself is useless without just and meaningful accomplishments. It has certainly been unsuccessful in urging big power cooperation to end the Arab-Israeli war.

The U.S. must realize that to ultimately secure peace and freedom in the world, its principal adversary will always be Communism. In the long run, greater peace and security will be assured in the Middle East as Communist or Soviet influence is neutralized. To win the Arabs to our side should be a major objective. If we do not, then in seven to ten years another Soviet-backed Arab attack on Israel is almost certain.

And as usual, everyone will be the loser.