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# THE MIDDLE EAST IN US-SOVIET RELATIONS

Graham E. Fuller

**T**HE Middle East, more than any other part of the world, has become a modern symbol of irreconcilable nationalist passions, intractable religious exclusivism, and high political volatility. The roots of the conflict and instability lie deeply buried in the history, geography, economics, culture, and religious character of the region. Yet, these endemic roots of conflict have been exacerbated by the tensions of the long Cold War that imposed the ideological matrix of Soviet-US competition upon an already fragmented region. The Cold War now seems to be nearing a historic conclusion, but one of the keys to anticipating the future of the US-Soviet relationship in the Middle East lies in grasping the origins of the East-West relationship: a confrontation created almost exclusively by seven decades of Soviet insistence upon its ideological role as executor of the forces of history. The ideologues not only philosophically condemned the West to ultimate defeat and collapse, but also developed the tools to help history along.

It is not surprising that the current East-West reconciliation comes almost exclusively as a result of changes in the Soviet Union itself. As we now see with such dramatic clarity, Moscow has been compelled to revise its reading of history, leading it to all but abandon its ideological vision. Because of the Soviet walls encircling Eastern Europe, only Moscow—through President Mikhail Gorbachev's stunning transformation of the very character of Soviet politics and ideology—could terminate the Cold War. The West's obligation now is to remain

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open and responsive to these changes and adjust its thinking to the new realities as they emerge.

Significantly relieved of the crosscurrents of global politics, Middle East regional conflict may, at this juncture, now revert to its native regional roots. At the same time, however, Washington has been deprived of the trusty analytical tool that served policymakers so well for decades: *cherchez les Russes*. For many decades, an awareness of where the Russians were and what they were doing provided almost instant policy guidelines as to what parts of the world the United States should focus on. Moscow precisely mirrored those policies—indeed, Lenin invented the zero-sum game—in seeking allies whose primary utility lay in their capabilities to blunt US plans and ambitions in the region.

The primary intellectual challenge to be confronted today is to assess afresh the character of US and Soviet interests globally. Now that the zero-sum game seems to have faded with the collapse of ideology, US and Soviet interests inevitably take on a different character. In some cases those interests will be parallel, in other cases the interests will be independent, separate, and of minor interest to the other party, while in a number of cases interests will conflict. Indeed, this description would apply in defining US interests vis-à-vis any other major power in the world.

### *DETERMINING INTERESTS*

US interests in the Middle East are probably easier to determine than those of the Soviet Union if only because US interests have remained relatively constant over the past decades. In light of dramatic changes in the Soviet Union, however, one standard US policy goal—the need automatically to deny Soviet influence in the region—needs to be revised. The question is, however, how much. Assuming that Soviet policies and behavior in the region may now appear to Washington to be fundamentally “benign”—an assumption to be examined later—is it a question of dropping only this particular long-standing US goal in the region? Yes and no. In one sense the United States may no longer need to focus on neutralizing Soviet policies in the area, but in another sense—globally—the United States will need to redefine not only the *nature* of its own interests, but also the *extent* of its interests internationally. Countries once regarded with great concern by Washington because of a Soviet presence, activity, or investment there—Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and Nicaragua, for example—may now feature less prominently on the American policy horizon. In short, as Soviet intentions change, the range of US interests are likely to shrink correspondingly in scope.

This formulation may, in itself, be controversial. Many in the United States, and especially in the defense and security fields, consider US interests and the American security role as permanently “global” under any circumstances; even if the Soviet’s international agenda has markedly receded, the United States will still need the capability to go anywhere and meet any potential challenge to friend

or ally. Profound political and philosophical issues are involved in debating this question—one that relates directly to another question: Historically, how “messianic” is US foreign policy—even long before Lenin got off the train at Finland Station? What bounds are there to US involvement in international security affairs or the unilateral use of force? Indeed, since the rise of communism in the Soviet Union and its growing global challenge to the United States and the West during the 20th century, it is now hard to redesign a foreign policy vision in which the struggle against Moscow’s international ambitions are absent. Such a complex topic lies outside the scope of this article, but it needs to be noted as a central theoretical problem in discussing the roots of US foreign policy interests anywhere, including the Middle East. What nearly everyone would agree upon is this: resource constrictions and competing priorities have long imposed real and finite limitations upon US involvement abroad and are destined to do so even more in the decade ahead.

### *The United States in the Middle East*

In the absence of opposing Soviet intentions, where do US interests in the Middle East lie? Historically they have focused on four major issues, in no special order:

- protection of Middle East energy resources and their unrestricted commercial flow to consumers;
- preservation of the security and welfare of Israel;
- assistance to friendly regimes in the region in order to enhance overall regional stability;
- maintenance of US political influence and commercial access in the region.

Although these policy goals are relatively unexceptional in themselves, the consistent differences between US policy and that of most of the rest of the world emerge primarily from disagreement over the degree of priority and manner of the US commitment to the security of Israel. Indeed, all American administrations have recognized that exclusive and uncritical acceptance of all aspects of Israel’s own security policies at some point begins to create incompatibilities with other US regional goals, including good relations with Arab states and the exclusion of Soviet influence from the region. In short, while there need be no zero-sum game between Israeli security needs and those of other states and interests in the region, there are always trade-offs that call for careful balance. This has long been a central dilemma of US policy formulation in the Middle East.

The four interests stated above, furthermore, represent US *declaratory* policy. In fact, Washington has also long pursued another unspoken preference: that when it comes to the Arab-Israeli problem, the United States preferably should enjoy a monopoly and domination of the peace process. Administrations

have fairly consistently maintained an attitude of “Thanks, but no thanks,” whenever alternative peace plans or procedures have emerged from broad European or Arab ranks. The US rationale has been that those states may not be sufficiently committed to Israel’s basic security interests, while Soviet involvement in the process had been viewed as acting in a spoiling capacity. The United States has jealously guarded its custodianship of the peace process and, indeed, can be proud of having crafted the Camp David agreements while doing so.

Exclusive US domination of the peace process, however, may prove to be increasingly difficult in light of two factors: the apparent impasse between Israeli and Palestinian visions of the disposition of the occupied territories and the new international environment that seeks political resolution of all such regional conflicts. The continued nonresolution of this problem seems increasingly incongruent in the new international atmosphere; pressures will rise from all quarters to make progress here as well. The presumed centrality of the US role in most international issues is likely to be increasingly open to challenge, especially with the emergence of other power centers such as a united Europe and a nascent East Asia. Indeed, this issue has direct and profound implications for the future of US-Soviet dealings in the Middle East itself.

### *The Soviet Union in the Middle East*

Defining the nature of Soviet interests is a more complex exercise because Soviet public expression of interests can be taken only as a partial guide. If US global policies are now in transition it is because Soviet global interests are currently in a state of flux. With the geopolitical significance and very future of Afghanistan, East Germany, Poland, the Baltics, and even Azerbaijan highly uncertain at the moment, Soviet interests in the Middle East begin to look peripheral. Given the collapse of Marxist globalism and the current intellectual fluidity and political free-for-all in all facets of Soviet thinking and society, it is fair to say that Moscow’s real global interests may not even be sorted out and stabilized before the end of the century.

Nonetheless, Soviet policy interests in the Gorbachev era can be defined as follows:

- *Avoiding international conflict.* This would allow the government to focus on pressing domestic needs and develop desperately needed economic ties to the West.

- *Settling regional disputes through peaceful means.* This policy goal is not based on mere idealism, but on the conviction that Moscow can no longer support military solutions to most regional conflicts, as it once did. Military solutions become even less attractive as those governments it supports lie foundering everywhere from Phnom Penh to Havana, Kabul to Luanda. Perhaps more important, as Moscow abandons so much of the imperial trappings of Soviet

power and influence, this process of divestment at least requires a fig leaf, a new operating principle to justify it in terms of grander principle rather than mere weakness. Thus Gorbachev's domestic position can ill afford simple crass public abandonment of old clients, allowing them to go down in military defeat at the hands of US-supported rebels; it would be far better to make virtue of necessity and embrace the political solution, letting such regimes take their chances under the rubric of peaceful negotiations. Moscow's new-found embrace of national reconciliation and peaceful settlement is not entirely cynical; in one sense the Soviet Union may be grasping the newly emerging character of superpower limitations faster than Washington.

■ *Countering US efforts to dominate.* There is a strong psychological need—as Moscow withdraws more into itself—to discourage the US tendency to dominate major international geopolitical issues, especially when it comes to the projection of US power into regions close to Soviet borders. Moscow will very likely oppose—mainly verbally—most unilateral US power projections around the world, hence the Soviets' new-found interest in the instrumentality of the United Nations as a peacekeeping body. Although it is unlikely that Moscow will contest militarily any unilateral US moves, directly or indirectly, the Soviet Union as a major military power and geopolitical presence has a continuing interest in seeing a broader distribution of power and interventionary capabilities among a variety of nations that would reduce the relative salience of US power and the scope of its international military involvement as a whole. As noted above, the United States is almost surely headed toward a reassessment of its own power and how it is used.

■ *Focusing more on Soviet interests closer at hand.* The countries on the enormous Soviet periphery, Europe, China, Japan, Korea, India, the northern tier states of Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkey, and much of the Middle East will undoubtedly remain especially important in this regard.<sup>1</sup>

#### *EXPECTATIONS FOR A PEACEFUL ARAB-ISRAELI SETTLEMENT: ACTORS, MOTIVATIONS, AND GOALS*

Keeping in mind this outline of Soviet and US global interests, how does each side relate to a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict? Five years ago it was reasonable to argue that the Soviet Union did not want a settlement of the

1. As Moscow gradually permits greater economic and foreign policy latitude to its own ethnic republics, the 50 million Muslims of the Caucasus and Central Asia are already beginning to loom on the political horizon of the Muslim world. Muslim Central Asia will unquestionably change the political balance of the Middle East, with Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan the primary beneficiaries in influence because of the unique character of their ties with an emergent Central Asia. How this will affect the Arab world is so far unclear. The Republic of Azerbaijan is already in the process of developing its own foreign policy. The new international role of autonomous—or independent—Soviet Muslims will probably affect Soviet policies toward the Middle East in ways still not remotely discernible. See Graham E. Fuller, "The Emergence of Central Asia," *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1990.

Arab-Israeli dispute: the prolongation of the conflict weakened the United States in the Arab world, strengthened the “radical” states and their revolutionary visions, provided fertile soil for Moscow’s arms sales diplomacy, and kept the region in a turmoil that only served to weaken the allies of the United States. Based on Moscow’s reconsideration of national interests, however, the Soviet Union and the United States are now likely to agree on several principles relating to an Arab-Israeli settlement:

- the unacceptability of a military solution;
- the need for Israel to surrender land for peace;
- Israel’s right to secure borders;
- the need to satisfy Palestinian aspirations and rights to self-determination;
- the need to secure the goals of Palestinians and Israelis within the framework of an overall Arab-Israeli settlement.

Moscow and Washington are also likely to agree on policies to limit nuclear and chemical-biological weapons and, perhaps, missile-delivery systems. The Soviet Union has greater intrinsic interest in these issues than the United States because of the proximity of the Middle East to its territory. Both sides are increasingly likely to agree on counterterrorist policies and to cooperate to some extent in this field as well.<sup>2</sup>

The United States and Soviet Union probably will not quickly agree on several issues, in particular the role of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the question of a Palestinian state on the West Bank. The United States is gradually moving toward acceptance of the PLO as the primary spokesman for the Palestinians and possibly toward acceptance of the ultimate establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza. Whereas these ideas were once unthinkable, they are now regularly discussed in public in Israel and the United States. It is important to remember that the role of the PLO as the Palestinian’s representative and any future Palestinian state not only reflects the general Soviet vision of an eventual settlement, but also the views of most states of the world as well, including those in Western Europe.

From the point of view of Washington, however, as welcome as any major Soviet shift in policy toward the Middle East might be, there is an irony: any increase in Soviet “reasonableness” allows it a greater role at the negotiating table, which will increase overall pressure to move toward eventual direct PLO-Israeli negotiations and an eventual Palestinian state—both of which are politically awkward for the United States in 1990. The US dilemma is that the more accommodating the Soviet Union and the PLO become, the greater the dilemma and pressure upon Washington will be when it deals with an Israeli Likud

2. Indeed, American and Soviet nongovernmental delegations met twice, in Moscow in 1988 and in the United States in 1990, to discuss just such long-range cooperation. Retired KGB and CIA officers were included in the delegations.

Party that knows very well what it does not want; it is for this reason PLO moderation can never be good news for the Likud. US-Soviet friction may temporarily increase as Soviet policies bring it close enough to the negotiating table to crowd the United States with alternative (but still reasonable) negotiating positions that slightly exceed US-preferred positions—much as the Europeans have historically done, to Washington's ire.

The Soviet Union is thus getting closer to being able to facilitate a genuine comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement. It has pressured factions in the PLO not to block Chairman Yasir Arafat's approach to a peace settlement and has made clear to Syria that it will not support a military solution to the conflict.<sup>3</sup> Gradually normalizing Soviet ties with all states in the Middle East is helping to fill in and cover the historic fault line between the so-called moderate and more radical states in the region.<sup>4</sup>

Given the nature of the Arab-Israeli problem, the end of the Cold War was a necessary but insufficient condition for resolving the Middle East conflict. Local states and forces still sharply complicate its resolution, but, for the first time, perhaps sufficient external conditions now exist that could bring about a settlement.

### *The First Steps*

Aspirations among Middle Eastern protagonists and other local players afford enough raw material to keep diplomats engaged for many years to come. How ultimately incompatible are the goals of the regional players? In the case of the Likud government in Israel and the PLO, the impasse at this point is near total. The *intifada*, now in its third year, has destroyed the status quo whereby Israel could afford to occupy the West Bank and Gaza indefinitely until a Palestinian interlocutor of Israel's choice would come forward to accept something less than self-determination. The political dynamic of the uprising galvanized Palestinians in the occupied territories into taking responsibility for their own fate instead of waiting for an external savior. It was the *intifada* that caused Jordan's King Hussein formally to renounce responsibility for representing the Palestinians on the West Bank, despite Israeli and US urgings that he continue to do so. It was also the *intifada* that forced the PLO leadership into a new realism that recognizes as folly the hope of defeating Israel through armed struggle and of recovering all of Palestine.

Although recent steps taken by the PLO have represented welcome progress to the Israeli Left, to the Israeli Right they are most unwelcome. The analysis by

3. For details on this Soviet shift, see Melvin A. Goodman and Carolyn McGiffert Ekedahl, "Gorbachev's 'New Directions' in the Middle East," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4 (Autumn 1988), p. 576.

4. "The resuscitation of Tehran-Washington ties seems to be a completely logical step and would benefit both sides. The improvement of Iran-US ties would assist in improving the international atmosphere." Moscow in Persian to Iran, February 3, 1989, as translated in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Soviet Union, February 10, 1989, p. 30.



the Israeli right wing is correct: any move toward negotiating with the PLO will lead inexorably to recognition of the legitimacy of the organization and its aspirations and ultimately to the creation of a Palestinian state. Even more, the PLO's recognition of Israel's right to exist within secure borders, the subsequent US-PLO discussions, and other developments in the region have *already* made a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza an inevitability. No other long-range option exists other than Israel's forcible expulsion of 1.7 million Palestinians from the occupied territories. Any interim arrangements wrung out of the parties by diplomats will be just that—interim and still begging for a final settlement.

Based on this logic, Likud will not enter into any “process.” From Washington's perspective, it is not a question of finessing the problem or of putting the best face on a diplomatic process to spare Likud sensitivities. The Likud knows what it wants—the territories—and knows what it does not want—giving up the territories. There is nothing that the PLO can do to change this. No third party is capable of intervening or breaking the impasse between the PLO and Likud. Only a sharp change in the costs of the occupation—either domestically or internationally—will bring about a change in the Israeli body politic, forcing drastic policy reconsiderations by the Likud or bringing other forces to power in Israel.

Such a sea-change in political opinion is likely to come only with a worsening of the current situation: sharply escalated international pressure and greatly increased ugliness in the occupied territories and the risk of major damage to Israel's international relationships including those with the United States and Egypt. Another prime factor is the inexorable demographic reality. All this could lead the Israeli Right to realize the ultimate costs of denying Palestinians self-determination. Israel may eventually recognize the advantage in taking the lead in helping form a Palestinian state, in conjunction with the PLO, rather than being eventually dragged kicking and screaming into the arrangement, a situation that would be seen as a major Israeli defeat and that would poison Israeli-Palestinian relations for a long time to come.

Most of the international community will probably attempt to push Israel in the direction of this logic, but for several reasons the United States is likely to be the most hesitant to confront Israel in this regard even though Washington has already taken the critical step of indicating that land for peace is the only viable solution. US-Soviet differences on this point reflect only a difference of degree, while the Soviet Union already shares similar views with the Western Europeans and most other countries. The harsher reality is that the problem cannot be solved simply by Israeli acquiescence to the principle of land for peace. Some of the most contentious disagreements will arise once Israel accepts land for peace because the issue then becomes *what* land for *what* peace.

### *The PLO*

The PLO will not compromise its basic goal of establishing a Palestinian state

in the occupied territories; its *raison d'être* depends on the establishment of a state. West Bank Palestinians have few reasons to abandon that goal, even if the intifada were to be temporarily subdued. Most of the international community as well accepts the legitimacy of that goal. The PLO's most urgent task is to insure that there be no backsliding on its commitment to forswear the use of terrorism, to maintain and expand the substance of its own diplomatic ties with major nations, especially with the United States, and to hold those factions in check that are opposed to Chairman Arafat's actions. Indeed, a key part of Likud's strategy was to play for time in the hope that frustration with the intifada and the lack of political progress would lead to renewed challenges to Arafat and ultimately to the delegitimization of the PLO in the eyes of Palestinians and the United States.

The reasons for moderate versus radical tactics are complex ones from the PLO's perspective. It is easy for an American to speak of the virtues of moderation, but the harsh reality is that the PLO's hijackings and attacks of two decades ago put them on the political map and onto the diplomatic agenda of most of the world. Indeed, the intifada has garnered more gains for the Palestinian cause than has any other factor in a decade. If the level of hostility rises and more Palestinians and Israelis continue to die in the intifada, will the Palestinian cause be advanced or set back? If extremism and anger result from a lack of political progress, if the younger generation in the occupied territories is offered no alternative other than violence as a way of life, who will have gained—Israel or the PLO? If the United States breaks ties with the PLO, will the West Bank be closer to peace and Israel's security situation improved? Who can convince Palestinians on the West Bank that they are better off without the PLO, and how? In considering these questions, one may be disquieted by earnest Western recommendations to the PLO about the benefits of moderation, when objective analysis—not philosophical preference—renders such judgments uncertain.

On the one hand, only continued moderation by the PLO will insure the gradual and necessary shift in Israeli public opinion toward willingness to live with a Palestinian state, but PLO moderation may not last forever in the face of no progress. On the other hand, violence, increasing costs to Israel, and long-term fear of Palestinian demographics will also cause Israelis to see virtue in separating the West Bank and Gaza from Israel. Yet, this same violence could also strengthen those hard-liners who urge expulsion by force of 1.7 million Palestinians from their homes—a solution euphemistically called “transfer.”

The United States, however, in its continuing dialogue with the PLO, is in a position to reinforce the PLO's moderation and to demonstrate that moderation can pay dividends; the highly constrained US negotiating style with the PLO has yet to show the PLO that there are in fact dividends. On the other side, it is particularly the Soviet Union, as a long-time supporter of the PLO, that is in a position to keep the extremist factions in the PLO from sabotaging Arafat's approach; Washington shares that goal. If the virtues of PLO moderation,

however, continue to bring no dividends, will the Soviet Union and the United States part company on the issue of where to turn next?

### *Jordan*

Jordan is perhaps the most vulnerable element in the current Israeli-Palestinian dynamic. By many estimates, more than half of Jordan's population is reported to be Palestinian, which has led to the famous dictum by former Israeli defense minister Ariel Sharon that "Jordan is Palestine," thus suggesting that Jordan will be the future Palestinian state for the Palestinians of the occupied territories. Indeed, Sharon would go further, seeking to implement this concept through "transfer" of the West Bank population into Jordan and to hasten the collapse of the Hashemites and the accession to power of the Palestinians.

King Hussein's concern about the implications of this scenario led to the attempt to strengthen the stability and legitimacy of the Jordanian state through the parliamentary elections of November 1989. Potential disorder in Jordan resulting from the political opening of the state and the strong political showing by Islamist candidates could lead to major instability, which would have an important effect on the intifada. Indeed, the intifada can also have a destabilizing effect upon the Palestinian population in Jordan, especially if passions rise and the killing of West Bank Palestinians should significantly increase. At this point, King Hussein does not especially welcome a Palestinian state on the West Bank, but he knows that the longer the intifada continues and the uglier the situation there becomes, the more radical a Palestinian state could be.

A more democratic government in Amman will inevitably lead to the strengthening of pro-Palestinian policies in Jordan and this will affect Israel's calculations. Indeed, many Israelis would argue that they cannot afford to have a Palestinian state on the West Bank as long as the ultimate political character of Jordan itself has not yet been determined. Many Israelis would prefer to negotiate a compromise on the West Bank with a Palestinian government in Jordan than with a West Bank leadership. Here both the United States and the Soviet Union will be solicitous for the welfare of Jordan and will be in close agreement on policy toward Amman. Soviet relations with Jordan were cordial even before Gorbachev.

### *Syria*

Syria continues to be one of the more intractable elements in the Arab-Israeli equation. The Syrian state—at least under Alawi minority rule—has long had regional ambitions of its own. This author's judgment is that Syria does not want the creation of a truly independent Palestinian state because it would be a rival to Syrian influence in the region; indeed, the Syrian leadership believes that, fundamentally, Palestine should properly be part of a greater sphere of Syrian

influence, if not actually part of the Syrian state. Moreover, Syria opposes and will move to block any Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement that excludes a Syrian role. Damascus has thus far profited from its intransigent approach to a peaceful settlement: it has received generous amounts of Soviet arms over the past decades, massive payments from conservative Arab regimes, and has claimed leadership of the radical Arab camp and the right to use all instruments—including some breakaway factions of the PLO—in order to prosecute its armed struggle against Israel. In short, Syria benefits more from its rejectionist policies than it would were it to acquiesce to peace with Israel; a possible settlement would automatically condemn Syria to a modest position within the peace camp rather than as a leader of the armed struggle camp.

It is only in the context of the new international order that forces have been assembled that have the potential of breaking Syria's intransigence; it is here that the Soviet role has been paramount in persuading Syria that times have changed and that Damascus can no longer count on Moscow to assist in efforts to pursue military parity with Israel. Syrian recovery of the Golan Heights—annexed by Israel—occupies only a small place on the spectrum of Syrian geopolitical ambition. The necessary conditions for forcing President Hafiz al-Asad to the negotiating table would have to include most of the following: a Palestinian-Israeli agreement in the offing—with nearly all states in the Arab world in support of it, Jordan ready to make formal peace with Israel, and an imminent international conference designed to reach a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace with the Soviet Union fully backing the process.

### *Egypt and Other Arab States*

In terms of the peace process, Egypt represents a positive force as long as the conflict does not explode, bringing new waves of extremism in its wake. Egypt wants the next phase of the peace process to begin so as to legitimize and vindicate its signing of the Camp David accords. Cairo will play a highly constructive role in any process and will also provide a “reality check” for Washington by indicating the limits beyond which concessions to Israel in a broader peace settlement in the region cannot go. Soviet ties with Egypt have improved across the board; both states seem to share nearly identical views on a regional settlement, and the United States will place a high value on good working relations with such an important state as Egypt.

Egypt's desperate economic problems, however, cause concern that internal instability could change the atmosphere of two decades of Egyptian moderation. There may be some reasonable grounds for optimism in that Egypt is deeply involved in the peace process, President Husni Mubarak has reestablished Egypt's leadership in the region, and a measure of democratic procedures in Egypt have served to weaken radical Islamists. Only a shattering deterioration of Israeli-Egyptian ties would seem likely to undo the work of Camp David. Indeed,

it is up to the signatories to vindicate the work of Camp David. There need not be any friction between the Soviet Union and the United States over Egypt's role.

Nearly all other Arab states seem likely to acquiesce to a general Palestinian-Israeli settlement that satisfies the PLO and Jordan; some, such as Saudi Arabia, may press for satisfaction of Syrian needs as well. Iraq is the key question mark. Although Iraq has stated that it will abide by any settlement that is accepted by the immediate parties to the conflict, Baghdad's longer-term regional policies may not yet have sorted themselves out. As long as Saddam Hussein's Baath regime in Baghdad remains so markedly insulated from public opinion, intolerant of human rights, and hostile to public participation in policy formulation, Iraq's foreign policy process will remain hostage to a tiny authoritarian coterie of leaders with unpredictable aspirations. Although there are no concrete grounds for belief that Iraq would actively oppose a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement, some doubt remains as to whether Iraq may again be tempted to seek leadership of the rejectionist camp should Syria abandon that role.

#### *A SOVIET-AMERICAN CONDOMINIUM IN THE MIDDLE EAST?*

Although neither the United States nor the Soviet Union seeks to establish a condominium in the Middle East, the combined power of both states could exert enough force on actors in the Arab-Israeli conflict to create a nearly irresistible momentum toward regional settlement—one in which cautious leaders such as Arafat, King Hussein, and Saudi Arabia's King Fahd might feel they were sufficiently buffered from radical Arab reactions. There has probably never been as propitious a time internationally for such movement as now.

A final settlement will inevitably produce hard choices for Israel in that an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza will be for Arabs the only acceptable formulation of a settlement, though one that will require Palestinians to relinquish any dreams of recovering all of Palestine and require the Arab world to accept established, uncontested, and peaceful borders with Israel. Indeed, only if the United States and the Soviet Union can agree upon this eventual outcome is joint pressure for acceptance of broad principles by all parties a possibility, although differences in approach are certain to abide.

Arms sales to the Middle East may be one area of minor US-Soviet friction. Both will try to retain a share of the arms market in the Middle East, a market in which they are hardly the only two rivals. Because the main recipients of Soviet arms in the past have been the so-called radicals, the Soviets will be reluctant to cut off this market entirely; the United States will generally be unhappy with Soviet arms sales to these clients on both economic and political grounds. The Soviet Union will see major US arms sales to Israel in the same light and watch Western states scramble for arms sales to the Gulf.

*Wild Cards*

The Arab world has been changing at a dramatic rate over the past several decades. Politics have grown more subtle, interests more shaded, the old urgings for unity more muted with the emergence of individual state interests demonstrating increased differentiation. What new phenomena could emerge that would upset the best current calculations of how Middle East society and politics will develop?

For a variety of complex reasons, democracy has not traditionally fared well in the Middle East. Among other factors, the delicate Lebanese experiment has failed under the crushing pressures of the Arab-Israeli struggle, in which it was not allowed to remain a passive bystander. Yet Egypt has managed to maintain a semblance of democratic practice that may be one of the key sources of its stability in the decade after Anwar al-Sadat. Of particular importance is its considerable success in coopting the forces of the Islamist movement into the workings of a more open society. Jordan has also taken its first tentative steps in the same direction with as yet unforeseeable consequences.

The impetus for democracy may now grow through the demonstration effect of the changes in Eastern Europe, where the stirrings of democracy are now witnessed on the world's television screens. Democracy, if it can be broadly extended into the Middle East, may to some extent limit a state's previous capability to generate unfettered hostile ideological propaganda against its neighbors. Just how willing will various Arab populations be to engage in war against their neighbors, including Israel, if there is greater awareness of the relative costs of war and peace imposed upon their own personal lives? And how will the vision of Islamists fare when forced to go to the polls on a regular basis and generate programs of political and social action over an extended period of time? It is possible that the Islamist movement may flourish less when denied the martyrdom of political repression. Any analysis of the potential for peace over the long run will need to understand better the potential dynamic of democracy in the Middle East. It is now not unreasonable to imagine both the Soviet Union and the United States favoring the growth of democratic institutions there if it serves overall political stability.

The success of the United States and the Soviet Union in devising a settlement in the Arab-Israeli conflict would be an outstanding test of their ability to bring the same influence to bear on attempts to solve other regional problems. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the simple removal of superpower rivalry and its replacement by a desire for peace in the world would cause international conflict to melt away in the Third World. Persuasion by external forces to resolve these issues would be neither successful nor lasting unless there were some effort to get at root sources of grievances. Yet identification and treatment of root causes in itself can be highly contentious.

The outlook for US-Soviet cooperation on the Middle East is thus vastly better than ever before with both sides now in pursuit of a genuine Arab-Israeli settlement. Frictions between the two states over the modalities of ultimate arrangements, details of arms sales, and questions of unilateral US intervention in a security role may well remain; Soviet intervention—unusual even in the Brezhnev era in the Middle East—is even less likely now. There would seem to be no other inherent clashes of interest between the two states except as may arise in countries nearer the Soviet periphery, such as in economic or commercial competition. Moscow may well become interested in working alternatively with the United States or with the Europeans in seeking relative advantage.

The Middle East is unlikely to present serious grounds for US-Soviet conflict except perhaps over energy resources, in which Western Europe will be a greater competitor than the Soviet Union. The major characteristics of Soviet-American rivalry in the Middle East would seem, in sum, sharply on the wane. Both sides now have powerful incentives to seek regional solutions that help limit international friction at all levels, but the region will continue to be resourceful in presenting new challenges to outsiders. Both the Soviet Union and the United States will seek to diminish or defuse these challenges, but there may well remain ample grounds for rivalry over the solutions that are proposed in which each side finds the other's approach irritating, but no longer laden with global strategic significance. That is progress.

