

II. The Background

When Syrian and Egyptian armies invaded Israeli-occupied territories on October 6, the reaction in Israel and the West was one of amazement and disbelief. The visible military preparations had been discounted, as were the extensive maneuvers including amphibious operations a few months earlier. The prevailing assumption was that it would be suicidal for the Arab States to provoke the Israeli juggernaut—"lunacy," as Golda Meir put it. "Action against Israel is clearly out of the question," a well-informed British correspondent wrote shortly before the war broke out,¹ expressing a virtually unanimous view. General Arik Sharon, Commander of the Southern Front and now the leading figure in the right-wing coalition *Likud*, informed an Israeli political meeting last July that Israel is more powerful than any European NATO force, and is capable of conquering the area from Khartoum to Baghdad to Algeria within a week, if necessary.² When Israeli Chief-of-Staff David Elazar announced in his first press conference that the tide had already turned and that Israeli forces would soon "break the bones" of their enemies, few doubted the accuracy of his prediction.

Events proved otherwise. Israel reconquered the Golan Heights and moved deeper into Syria, but the Syrian Army was not destroyed and conducted vigorous counterattacks until the cease-fire. Correspondents in Syria detected no sense of urgency and wrote of "astoundingly high" morale and "relatively few" casualties, more civilian casualties than military in one Damascus clinic.³ In Egypt, reports indicate that "the demoralization, not to say, decomposition, of Egyptian society which the endless no-war no-peace situation had produced has been replaced by a true cohesion," so that now "Sadat can ask of his people sacrifices which were inconceivable before the war broke out."⁴ Earlier this year, correspondent David Hirst comments, a war budget had to be withdrawn under popular pressure. No longer. The Suez battle remained a standoff until the last days before the cease-fire, when Israeli armor succeeded in breaking through the Egyptian lines and crossing the canal. It was only after the cease-fire that Israeli troops surrounded the Egyptian III Corps, threatening a military catastrophe that led Sadat to call on the great powers to enforce the cease-fire, provoking a carefully stage-managed superpower confrontation.

Israel plainly was unable to "trample Arab faces in the mud," as its Arabic-language broadcasts promised.⁵ Still less did it prove that it could conquer most of the Middle East and North Africa within a week. Rather, as one Israeli officer stated, "we have learned that given Soviet supplies to the Arabs, we cannot fight a two-front war simultaneously against the Egyptians and the Syrians"—"a very sad lesson," he added.⁶ Without a massive U.S. military supply effort, possibly exceeding Russian shipments according to Pentagon officials and continuing without let-up after the cease-fire,⁷ Israel might have been compelled to abandon parts of the occupied territories and Israeli urban

centers might have been exposed to bombardment—as Damascus and other Arab cities were—by the still intact Arab air forces. The U.S. was sufficiently concerned to dispatch combat marines aboard two helicopter carriers to the Sixth Fleet. Merely a "normal replacement," Defense Secretary Schlesinger explained as he attempted to convince the public that the worldwide alert of conventional and nuclear forces was justified by the ambiguous indications that the Russians were preparing to dispatch airborne troops.⁸ To be sure, the severity of the confrontation was not great, since the world understood that it was largely contrived for domestic political purposes in the U.S. and that the local issue was enforcement of the cease-fire before the destruction of the trapped Egyptian forces. But American concern over the fortunes of the Israeli military was real enough.

Sadat's "Operation Spark" seems to have been a successful gamble. New forces were set in motion in the Arab world and the U.S. may be impelled to reassess its policy of *de facto* support for permanent Israeli occupation of the territories gained in 1967. Earlier efforts by Egypt and other Arab states to achieve this end had failed, but it may be a result of the October fighting. Certainly the basic assumptions of U.S. policy have been shaken, if not undermined. The oil-producers and the great powers were compelled to involve themselves directly in the conflict. A potentially serious rift was exposed between the U.S. and its NATO allies. By disrupting regional stability and posing a threat to the fundamental interests of the superpowers, Egypt and Syria may have set the stage for an imposed settlement much along the lines of their earlier demands.

[ISRAELI "SUPERPOWER"]

Israeli policy since 1967, and U.S. support for it, has been based on the premise that Israel is a military superpower by the standards of the region and that its technological predominance will only increase. Though Sharon's bravado was excessive, his basic point was a commonplace. The Syrian Minister of Information observed that "America has based its Middle East policy on the assumption of overwhelming Israeli military superiority," and the leading paper of Kuwait warned that in the light of Arab military successes, "America should realize that Israel is no longer a suitable protector" for its interests. In emphasizing that "Israel (and the United States) will never seriously consider concessions unless the Arabs show Israel is incapable of keeping the lid on the Middle East,"⁹ Arab commentators were offering their own version of principles expressed as well by Israeli spokesmen. Thus General Yitzhak Rabin assured his countrymen that "Americans have given us weapons so that we should use them when necessary," adding that the West is coming to understand that "if some medieval-type rulers really mean to endanger the oil needs of hundreds of millions of people in the civilized world, then the West is permitted to take tough steps

to prevent this.”¹⁰ The implications of this—possibly prophetic—remark seem obvious.

Confident in its power, Israel pursued the policy of gradual incorporation of the occupied territories. Last August the Israeli press reported long-range plans for settlement in the “new areas” and for virtually doubling the “jurisdictional area” of Jerusalem, as well as the continued seizure of Arab lands by the security services. The Minister of Commerce and Industry, Chaim Bar-Lev, was quoted as saying that “we regard Israel and the occupied areas as a single economic unit.”¹¹ The dominant Labor Party adopted a program for the October elections that implied virtual annexation of the occupied territories. It thus outflanked the rightist opposition from the right, as the liberal Israeli commentator Amnon Rubinstein noted, by adopting in effect Dayan’s principle that Jews and Arabs can live together only under Israeli military occupation.¹² According to Rubinstein, Dayan’s statement to this effect had been received “with deafening applause” at the graduating ceremony of Tel Aviv University. As he states, it seems to be the guiding principle of the less expansionist of the two major electoral blocs. It is hardly likely that such programs can have been adopted without U.S. backing.

Until October, U.S. policy seemed a qualified success. The major military powers in the region, Israel and Iran, were firmly in the American camp, as were Jordan and Saudi Arabia. In important respects, the U.S. policy of reliance on Israel as a threat to radical nationalism represented a point of convergence of the interests of these powers, as was clear when the Palestinians were crushed in September 1970. Furthermore, Egypt had expelled Russian advisers and was appealing for American support. Even during the war, final negotiations continued with the Bechtel Corporation and Kidder Peabody Investment Bankers over an oil pipeline that is to be the biggest Egyptian undertaking since the Aswan Dam.¹³ In Egypt, the leftist opposition had been eliminated. Syria had closed down the Palestinian radio station. A *de facto* settlement favorable to U.S. interests seemed to be taking shape, a settlement which also coincided with domestic political needs of the Nixon Administration.

[RETHINKING U.S. OPTIONS]

It is important to bear in mind, however, that the U.S. has other policy options, which it will not hesitate to pursue if its basic interests are endangered. It might attempt to organize reactionary Arab regimes explicitly in an alliance that might well incorporate an Israel compelled to abandon its 1967 territorial gains. These were the implications of the Rogers Plan, discarded in favor of tacit support for permanent Israeli occupation. The latter policy is no law of nature, however, and the famous Jewish vote and Zionist lobby will be no serious barrier to reversing it if circumstances so require, just as they did not prevent Eisenhower from forcing Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai in 1956 or the Democratic administrations from giving twice as much aid to Egypt as did the USSR during the 5-Year Plan of 1960-65.¹⁴

The policy of supporting Israeli occupation carried serious risks, despite its appearance of success. It was unac-

ceptable to Syria and Egypt, and there was always a danger, now quite real, that the Saudi Arabian regime might be compelled by nationalist pressures to withdraw its tacit acquiescence and to modify its close association with the United States. The U.S. government is not prepared to see the world’s largest petroleum reserve slip from the control of American oil companies. Sadat’s military success called forth gestures of support from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf oil producers. They have already cut back production and restricted export to the U.S. Taking their pronouncements at face value, Aramco profits will be seriously reduced and the U.S. East Coast faced with a severe oil shortage this winter. The matter would be still more serious if the oil producers were to expand state control or shift allegiance to Japanese or Western European state and corporate power. There is no indication of any such moves, and if they were to take place, this would signal a major conflict within the capitalist world with unpredictable consequences.

There is little doubt that the regimes of the major oil-producing states would prefer to remain in the U.S. orbit (as, it appears, would Sadat). If the U.S. comes to the conclusion that the major premise of its policy is now “inoperative,” it can move towards an alternative policy option, and, with Russian support, impose a settlement along the lines of UN Resolution 242 of November 1967. There is every reason to expect cooperation. The major goal of the USSR remains an international arrangement (“détente”) under which it is free to control its imperial domains and suppress internal dissidence, while benefiting from badly needed trade and investment and adapting itself, in general, to the requirements of American global policy. If the U.S. moves in this direction, Israel will have no choice but to submit, abandoning the policy of creeping annexation.

To establish the validity of the premise that was the foundation of its policy and U.S. support for it, Israel had to win a quick and decisive victory. This it failed to do. The U.S. might therefore conclude that “Israel is no longer a suitable protector.” One can imagine an imposed solution with a return of civil control to Egypt and perhaps Syria in occupied territories and a superpower guarantee of demilitarization, and perhaps a federation of parts of the West Bank (a “Palestinian entity”) with Jordan, along the lines of Hussein’s proposals.¹⁵ For the Palestinians, the most tragic victims of the endless conflict, such a solution offers little. But it has long been clear that the rights and interests of the Palestinians are the concern of none of the contestants, apart from some inconsequential rhetoric. Every organized force in the region and the great powers as well will be more than pleased if the Palestinian plea for justice is stilled.

Such an outcome, essentially of the Latin American variety, seems not too unlikely. The basic logic of the approach would be support for reaction throughout the Arab world and continued suppression of the Palestinians and other disruptive forces. What would be the effect within Israel of such a shift in U.S. policy? Loss of the post-1967 élan would be the most likely immediate effect. Just before the Six Day War, the outlook within Israel was not overly optimistic. There was substantial emigration and an economic recession, since largely overcome by the expansion of war-

related industry and the availability of a cheap labor force of Arabs. Arrangements of this sort might persist even after an imposed "Rogers Plan," and it is possible that with a shift to the right in Israeli politics, which should be welcome to the Nixon Administration, Israel could be incorporated into a U.S.-dominated alliance in the region as part of a general "peace settlement."

[NECESSARY SHOCKS]

It remains true that Israel is the most advanced technological society and the major military force in the region. Within Israel, in the short run, the hawks will appear to have won a major political victory. But it is hard to believe that it will last. Implicit in the Israeli policy of gaining security through strength is the expectation of repeated military confrontations, in each of which Israel is likely to prevail. Plainly the policy is suicidal in the long run, since Israel can lose only once; and the need to rely on a single superpower and to accept increasing international isolation is no less risky from the standpoint of security. Recent events simply show that "the long run" may not be so long as anticipated. The war was very costly and much more of a close call than anyone expected. The isolation of Israel and the U.S. was remarkable. Even Ethiopia broke diplomatic relations with Israel. Turkey is reported to have permitted Russian overflights; Greece and Spain refused to permit the use of bases for resupply; and other NATO powers were so uncooperative as to call forth a rebuke from the U.S. government. The handwriting seems to be on the wall, and only the hopelessly irrational will ignore it.

There are, in fact, some indications that Israel had begun to lose its advantage in technical rationality, a very serious matter. General Sharon's comments, cited above, are only one of many indications, which have been noted with dismay by sympathetic observers.¹⁶ I believe that the growing irrationality and arrogance within some circles in Israel may be traced to the problem of living with the eternal contradiction of a "democratic Jewish state" with non-Jewish inhabitants, and since 1967, with a subject population in territories that were being gradually assimilated. Under such circumstances, it is natural that a doctrine of historic national mission will arise, accompanied by some form of master race ideology and the belief that the

natives are better off under external control, incapable of acting in any effective way on their own. The recent war may well provide a shock to any such system of belief, just as it seems to have already had the complementary effect of reviving Arab confidence.

The war leaves the three societies that were directly engaged battered and wounded. Even more than before, they are subject to the will of external powers and dominated by reactionary forces within. It is likely that in the short run, at least, articulate groups will be still more firmly committed to the belief that only through military strength can their minimal demands be met. The domestic consequences of this commitment are plain. Unless other tendencies develop or the superpowers impose a solution by force, the stage will be set for another brutal episode with still more awesome weapons and still greater destruction. Even now, the contending states may well be better armed than before the outbreak of the conflict. Western analysts seem to agree that Israel has the capability to produce nuclear weapons; the head of the French Institute of National Defense asserts that it "certainly" possesses nuclear weapons.¹⁷ Israel has long-range missiles that can carry nuclear warheads, and Sadat has claimed that Egypt possesses missiles of comparable range and probably similar character. In a moment of desperation, such weapons may well be used.

Quite apart from these dangers, the constellation of forces and the prevailing tendencies offer grim prospects for the people of the former Palestine. Yet their interests are perhaps not irreconcilable, and there is a slender hope that they may come to realize that the pursuit of their common interests, possibly in conflict with other regional or global powers, offers the best long-term hope for survival, as well as for a settlement that will satisfy the just demands of both peoples. This can only mean a program of socialist binationalism, which might take various forms. Realists on both sides will dismiss such possibilities, insisting that nations must organize themselves in a system of competing states for the purposes of mutual destruction and oppression. People who are willing to face reality may not be so sure. ■

Noam Chomsky's most recent publications are For Reasons of State (Pantheon), and, with Edward Herman, Counter-revolutionary Violence (Warner Modular Publications).

III. Crisis for NATO

America has lost Europe. The United States put its forces on a worldwide alert. Europe forbade it for U.S. forces on the Continent. The U.S. military base was instantly shrunken to its own territory and to the Azores and the decks of U.S. carrier task forces at sea.

This is the real meaning of events since October 22, 1973, the date of the Security Council resolution calling for

a cease-fire in the Mideast. The preponderance of force represented by the U.S. and the USSR may have meant that in fact the resolution was a bilateral decision imposed upon the Council by the two superpowers. But Europe chose to view it otherwise, as a dictum of world law laid down by an international body capable of determining world law. As far as lay within its capacity, Europe was determined that the superpowers must bow to that statement of law. Uni-

by Terence McCarthy