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JOHN H. SIGLER

United States policy in the aftermath of Lebanon: the perils of unilateralism

In the preface to his classic study of the *Origins of the World War*, the historian Sidney B. Fay warned of the dangers in trying to judge events in the atmosphere of 'prejudice and war propaganda' which immediately surround the conduct of a war.¹ Certainly this is wise counsel in the continuing episodes of the Arab-Israeli conflict where so much of the story in international diplomacy, foreign policy decision-making, and covert intelligence operations remains hidden from view. In the Lebanon war, for example, we know very little about the degree of collusion that existed between Israeli and United States government officials before the outbreak of the war, or the circumstances surrounding the resignation of the United States secretary of state, Alexander Haig, three weeks into the war, or the responsibility for the assassination of the Lebanese president-elect, Bashir Gemayel, or the details of the secret pledges made to Israel by the new secretary of state, George Shultz, to secure its assent to the agreement with Lebanon on the settlement of the war. Any analysis must at best be tentative and open-ended, subject to the inevitable revisions required by new information and by the effects of unfolding events.

Like every administration since that of Harry Truman, the Reagan team has been forced to learn that Middle East actors are far from willing to adjust their demands and plans to the time-

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¹ Sidney B. Fay, *The Origins of the World War* (2nd ed rev; New York: Macmillan 1930), vii.

table and priorities in foreign policy of the government in Washington. Without strong direction, deep insight into regional realities, and a definite strategy, the United States can find its interests dangerously jeopardized by actors over whom it has little control, as even such a consummate strategist as Henry Kissinger was to learn to his regret.² The United States has repeatedly tried to assert its own strategic priorities over those of the multiplicity of regional actors who are preoccupied with their own grievances, some of which relate to a shared concern with the United States over limiting Soviet influence but many of which relate to distress with the United States for its pervasive influence which often exacerbates domestic as well as regional cleavages.

Those whose world view is formed by geopolitical criteria tend to neglect the problems posed by the presence of local governments and different cultures and concerns and concentrate instead on the power vacuum which must be filled by one superpower or the other. The debate between the globalists who stress East-West issues and the regionalists who concentrate on internal forces has developed into a major one within the United States foreign policy establishment and the academic community.³ The globalist view has dominated the foreign policy thinking of the Reagan administration even if its clash with regional realities has constantly forced substantial readjustments in approach.

The Reagan administration's initial Middle East policy concentrated on building a strategic consensus among 'friends' of the United States in the region on the basis of shared concern about the dangers of Soviet encroachments. The rapid build-up in sophisticated weapons supplied by the United States to Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia complemented the strengthening of the 'over-the-horizon' power projection capabilities of the United States navy and the new Rapid Deployment Force. The arms sales to

² Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little Brown 1982), 459-67.

³ See Ray Maghroori and Bennett Ramberg, eds, *Globalism vs. Realism: International Relations' Third Debate* (Boulder: Westview 1982), and Kenneth A. Oye, Robert J. Lieber, and Donald Rothchild, eds, *Eagle Defiant: U.S. Foreign Policy in the 1980s* (Boston: Little Brown 1983).

Saudi Arabia, which totalled US\$12 billion in FY1982 alone, added an important boost to the United States economy at a time of deep recession.⁴ A step-up in security aid to Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Lebanon, Jordan, and Oman was designed to protect them from Moscow's 'surrogates,' generally fellow members of the Arab League: Algeria, Libya, South Yemen, Syria, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The assassination of President Anwar Sadat of Egypt on 6 October 1981 sent shock waves through Washington and the American public as the little understood force of Islamic fundamentalism again struck down a pillar of United States geopolitical strategy in the Middle East. The administration demonstrated a new awareness of the dangers of too close identification with the United States. The State Department's regional specialists now persuaded President Reagan to speak favourably in public about the plan of Saudi Crown Prince Fahd for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, moving beyond the partial peace settlement of Camp David and the stalled Palestinian autonomy talks between Egypt and Israel.⁵ The shock of the assassination may have also influenced the mood of the United States Senate which narrowly failed to override the administration's proposed sale of eight sophisticated Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft to Saudi Arabia.

Out of sympathy for the plight of Egypt's new president, Hosni Mubarak, the administration also pulled back on an earlier plan by which Egypt would agree to the Israeli version of Palestinian autonomy on the West Bank and Gaza and would end its insistence on the removal of settlements and the establishment of a Palestinian self-governing authority which could develop into the nucleus of a Palestinian state. The United States also pulled back on its preference for American forces taking over the Israeli air bases in Sinai after Israeli withdrawal. The Reagan administra-

4 On Saudi defence plans, see 'U.S. pushes regional stability,' *Aviation Week and Space Technology* 118 (23 May 1983), 43-6.

5 Claudia Wright, 'Strategy and deception in Reagan's policy,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 11 (spring 1982), 16.

tion now sought support from its European allies for a shared role in the multinational force which would patrol the demilitarized zones in Sinai. The European price for participation was some movement in the American position of exclusive reliance on the Camp David formula toward the position of the European Communities in its Venice declaration which called for PLO participation in the peace process.

Israel was not at all persuaded that any concessions were needed to Arab sensitivities. A major blow-up occurred in United States-Israeli relations over this apparent deviation from the Israeli understanding of its Camp David commitments. The Israelis demanded United States support for its positions or, they suggested, the present situation could get a great deal worse. Israeli aircraft overflew a Saudi air base to demonstrate their power. Threats were made that new fighting might erupt in Lebanon, or that the Israelis might not withdraw from Sinai, or that the timing of settlement policy could be advanced.⁶ Neither the Egyptians nor the Saudis had any credible counterthreats, so the brief effort at United States accommodation with the sensitivities of its Arab friends quickly collapsed. The United States withdrew any support for the Fahd plan which President Reagan threatened to veto if it came to the United Nations Security Council. Unable to deliver on the hoped-for movement in the United States position on the Palestinian question, the Saudis were faced with public humiliation as their first major venture into regional peace plans failed to secure the support of many Arab foreign ministers at the abortive Arab summit in Fez in November 1981. For its acquiescence in the vague formula for European participation in the multinational force, Israel was rewarded with a 'strategic co-operation' agreement with the United States, which was suspended almost immediately after its announcement when the Israelis pushed their efforts to gain from this exercise in political pressure on the Reagan administration by legislative action which in effect annexed the Golan Heights, Syrian territory occupied

6 *Ibid.*, 19-20.

in the 1967 war. Rather than strategic consensus, the United States found itself squeezed between the competing pressures of its regional friends whose regional agendas appeared increasingly dissimilar to the strategists in Washington.

The White House staff was upset because the growing rivalry between Secretary of State Haig and Secretary of Defense Weinberger for control of these Middle East issues was damaging the image of the president as a strong foreign policy leader.⁷ Such sensitivity only increases the vulnerabilities in the American foreign policy system to manipulation by outside actors who know how to exploit bureaucratic rivalries, personality quarrels, and congressional-executive tensions to their own advantage.

Fear of upsetting the Sinai withdrawal scheduled for 25 April 1982 blocked any new United States initiatives on the Middle East. Where momentum and initiative are lost, other actors will move to assert their own preferences. The Israeli defence minister, Ariel Sharon, whose previous bold military campaigns had often been compared to those of Napoleon, now moved to centre stage to implement his long-standing plans for the promotion of Israeli security. In the doctrine of political realism, war is likely when an opportunity presents itself for the stronger party to impose its will on a resistant weaker party who has not accepted the reality of the preponderance of power of its opponent and limited its ambitions to what the stronger party will permit. Premier Menachem Begin of Israel had indicated that the situation in Lebanon was entirely unsatisfactory to him. He wanted a new government in Lebanon which would keep the PLO and Syria out and sign a peace treaty with Israel. No significant Arab opposition could be expected as the Arab world had never been more divided. The Iran-Iraq war was the major preoccupation of the Arab Gulf states, and Syria was even more isolated in the Arab world because it supported Iran. Egypt, the Arab world's only credible military force, had been rendered *hors de combat* by the peace treaty. Israel's former foreign minister, the eloquent Abba

⁷ Barry Rubin, 'The Reagan administration and the Middle East,' in Oye, Lieber, and Rothchild, eds, *Eagle Defiant*, 376-8.

Eban, now in opposition, described the Begin government's new scenario as follows:

The expulsion of the PLO from Beirut would be a turning point leading to a 'new era.' The PLO would be eliminated as a military and political force. Palestinians in the West Bank, freed from intimidation, would accept Mr Begin's parsimonious 'autonomy' proposals and give up any early hope of Arab independence. A stable government would be established in Lebanon and a President, elected under the eyes of Israeli troops, would sign a peace treaty with Mr Begin by 'the end of the year'. The United States, grateful for the strategic aid of Israel, which 'does more for American security than America does for Israeli security' would leave the contentious Palestine issue alone.⁸

United States acquiescence in such a bold plan must have seemed essential. The failure of Premier Ben Gurion and his French and British allies to inform the Eisenhower government of plans to topple Egypt's President Nasser in the Sinai War in 1956 evoked a strong United States reaction and forced Israeli withdrawal. Before the Six-Day War in 1967, in the escalation with Soviet pilots on the Suez Canal in 1970, in Jordan in 1970, the Israelis operated effectively with what they perceived as prior United States approval, or at least what has been called 'a wink and a nod.' Defence Minister Sharon was in Washington just three weeks before the outbreak of the war, and he could claim from this that he had fully briefed United States officials. The Arabs were at least convinced that there was collusion with Secretary of State Haig,⁹ an impression to which Mr Haig certainly contributed by insisting in the early days of the war that it represented a 'golden opportunity' for United States diplomacy. Meanwhile, an American public was treated to daily demonstrations on its television screens of the effects of this opportunity on the civilian population of Beirut; and the Saudis, bypassing the secretary of state, made clear to the White House their profound dis-

⁸ *Jerusalem Post*, 24 September 1982.

⁹ Robert G. Neumann, 'Finally - a U.S. Middle East policy,' *Washington Quarterly* 6 (spring 1983), 199.

satisfaction with United States policy. The Pentagon, Defense Secretary Weinberger, and other members of the National Security Council disagreed with Haig's pro-Israeli position. Mr Haig's resignation was promptly accepted by the White House.

The White House staff, which had played the key role in undermining Haig, assigned to the incoming secretary of state, George Shultz, the responsibility for developing a more acceptable Middle East policy. In the extensive consultations which Mr Shultz then initiated, the opportunity doctrine resurfaced in the counsels of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger who had heretofore been largely excluded from Reagan administration foreign policy. His knowledge of Middle East actors and personalities was substantial; and he reportedly convinced Shultz to take up the so-called Jordanian option which, to his regret, he had failed to convince the Israelis to act on in the wake of the 1973 war.¹⁰ Kissinger in effect sold Shultz the plan of Yigal Allon, the Israeli Labour party's former foreign minister, for a resolution of the Palestinian problem by returning populated areas of the West Bank to Jordan while retaining Israeli forces in the largely unpopulated border area with Jordan.¹¹ The Camp David process had also designated Jordan as a principal negotiating partner with Egypt for Palestinian autonomy on the West Bank and Gaza, but given the Arab League's rejection of Camp David, Jordan could not afford to break ranks and join Egypt. Now in the heat of war, with a much chastened PLO removed from Beirut, Jordan could be revived as a partner in the United States policy which President Reagan so succinctly described as 'creating more Egypts.'¹²

No serious consideration appears to have been given to a Palestinian or PLO option as this had few supporters in the Washington foreign policy establishment, and even fewer in Israel ex-

¹⁰ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 847-8.

¹¹ Yigal Allon, 'Israel: the case for defensible borders,' *Foreign Affairs* 55 (October 1976), 38-53.

¹² United States, Office of the President, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 1 July 1982, 862.

cept on the margins. This option also could be seen in the geopolitical perspective as leading to the formation of a disruptive Soviet 'surrogate' mini-state in the area. In late July France and Egypt put forward at the United Nations Security Council a proposal to link a mutual withdrawal from Lebanon with new negotiations under the auspices of the secretary-general for 'mutual and simultaneous recognition of the parties concerned,' self-determination for the Palestinian people, and participation by the PLO.¹³ The United States-sponsored ceasefire negotiations took precedence, however, and these ideas were overtaken by events.

The Reagan Middle East plan announced on 1 September 1982, the last day of the PLO withdrawal from Beirut, took up the opportunity theme but did not confine it to Lebanon. Reagan shifted the centre of United States concerns to the West Bank and Gaza and 'the opportunity for a broader peace,' as envisioned in the Camp David accords in which Israel had agreed to work toward the realization of 'the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements.' The Camp David formula was intentionally vague on the substance of these rights and requirements which were left to the negotiating process. That had resulted in an impasse, so President Reagan set out his solution: self-government by the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza 'in association with Jordan.' He explicitly rejected the PLO position of an independent Palestinian state, but he also rejected Premier Begin's clear determination to complete Israeli annexation of these territories. President Reagan called for a freeze on new settlements by the Israeli government. The direct lineage of the Allon plan was evident in Reagan's assertion that the determination of the final borders of the West Bank-Gaza area would be left to negotiations, with the United States taking the view that the border determination would be affected by 'the extent of true peace and normalization and the security arrangements' offered to Israel.

The Reagan proposals stunned the Begin government which

¹³ United Nations, *Weekly News Summary*, 23-29 July 1982.

promptly rejected them in their entirety and initiated new settlements in defiance of Reagan's call for a freeze. The Reagan administration had taken a clear risk in advocating the preferred solution of the opposition Labour party which quickly endorsed the plan. The Begin government accused Reagan of unacceptable interference in Israeli domestic politics. The sharp Israeli reaction helped to restore some measure of United States credibility in the eyes of its Arab friends and to head off the sanctions which were widely expected to come from the Arab summit in Fez on 8 September 1982 in response to charges of United States complicity in the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.¹⁴

Aware now of the dangers in a cautious and reactive policy, the Reagan administration clearly hoped to maintain the initiative in Middle East diplomacy with its proposal. A quick solution in Lebanon was expected to follow the PLO withdrawal. The success was short-lived. The assassination of President-elect Bashir Gemayel on 14 September and the immediate Israeli occupation of west Beirut followed by the massacres at Sabra and Shatila returned Lebanon immediately to centre stage and required restoration of the multinational force for an indefinite period. In these few hours, United States credibility, the essential ingredient in any implementation of a United States-mediated Reagan plan, was dealt a devastating blow. This is undoubtedly what Defence Minister Sharon intended. In the agreement which the United States special envoy, Philip Habib, had carefully negotiated to govern the withdrawal of PLO forces from Beirut, the United States government provided guarantees of safety for PLO forces and the Palestinian non-combatants left behind in Beirut 'on the basis of assurances received from the government of Israel and the leadership of certain Lebanese groups with which it has been in touch.'¹⁵ These contacts included the same Phalange officers who worked with General Sharon in the operation for 'cleansing'

¹⁴ Neumann, 'U.S. Middle East policy,' 199.

¹⁵ Text of the agreement can be found in *American-Arab Affairs* (fall 1982), 139-48.

the refugee camps in Sabra and Shatila.¹⁶ On this point there is an embarrassing silence from the United States government. Despite strong United States objections, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) entered west Beirut and set the stage for the massacres. Yasir Arafat's angry charge that 'American credibility disappeared in the alley ways of Sabra and Shatila and among the blood of the innocent'¹⁷ is likely to echo for years to come as the Arabs assign responsibility for the massacre, scenes of which have been captured in a Palestinian film which will have a strong emotional impact on Arab audiences.

Only strong leadership by the president or the secretary of state might have restored the American initiative. No strategy was apparent. If the damaged credibility of the United States as a reliable intermediary and guarantor was to be restored in Arab eyes by taking up the Jordanian option for the West Bank and Gaza, then there would have to be quick progress on an Israeli evacuation from Lebanon. The Israelis had little incentive to co-operate with this strategy as they were vehemently opposed to the Reagan solution for the Palestinian problem. United States marines were harassed by Israeli forces in Beirut. General Sharon accused the United States government of trying to seize the fruits of victory from Israel to serve its own interests in Lebanon. He threatened to re-establish relations with the Soviet Union. It took until the end of the year to get the negotiations between Lebanon and Israel started, and Israel could prevent any progress until it saw clearly that the Reagan West Bank plan was not going to produce any results.

The pressure was all on King Hussein of Jordan. The Reagan administration may have expected him to act independently, or at least with Saudi support. Arab diplomacy places a high value on

¹⁶ Colin Campbell, 'Key Phalangist aides implicated in operation that led to killings,' *New York Times*, 30 September 1982, identifies Elias Hobeika, Phalange chief of security, as the key leader in the attack and reports he was the liaison officer with Israeli intelligence and the United States embassy in Beirut.

¹⁷ Cited by William Stivers, 'Could Beirut become America's Belfast?' *Christian Science Monitor*, 25 May 1983.

consensus, even if the evidence of the difficulty in achieving it may be what most impresses the outside observer. The Arab League, with the support of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, had adopted its own plan at Fez where they called for an independent Palestinian state with guarantees for Israeli security from the United Nations Security Council. Arab League teams were to visit each of the permanent members to explore their reactions to the Arab League plan. King Hussein, who was to chair one of these teams, could not appear to give priority to the Reagan plan or act independently without the acquiescence of the PLO, which in turn had to bring together its badly scattered elements to consider its future options. The Arab League teams included a PLO representative, and if there ever was a chance to break the logjam on talking with the PLO, this was it, but it was not taken. Was it out of fear of further Israeli reaction, or does the United States not really want a PLO role of any kind other than acquiescence in an American plan which excludes them but which they should not oppose because the only alternative is Israeli annexation of the West Bank and Gaza?

The Reagan plan did not envisage any role for the Soviet Union which, as in Kissinger's grand design, was to be excluded.¹⁸ The idea that only the United States can bring about a settlement is also a legacy from the Kissinger period. The argument is that only the United States can talk to both sides. The Soviet Union, which broke relations with Israel in the wake of the 1967 war, has no influence over the dominant regional power, Israel. President Sadat flattered the always receptive American *amour propre* by insisting that the United States held most or all of the cards. He thus hoped to influence the United States to exercise some pressure on the Israelis to modify their policies in ways which re-

18 In his press conference of 17 May 1983, President Reagan said: 'I don't think the negotiations should include inviting the Soviet Union into the Middle East. I don't see what reason they have to be there ...' (*New York Times*, 18 May 1983). For a critical interpretation of Kissinger's Middle East policy, see Alexander L. George, 'The Arab-Israeli war of October 1973: origins and impact,' in George, ed, *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention* (Boulder: Westview 1983), 139-54.

flected United States interests in the region. The strategy was never very successful given the reluctance, inability, or unwillingness of successive administrations to go very far with it, in the face of possible uproar from congressional and interest group opposition. The United States strategy has been one of substantial reward for often marginal concessions. The only pressure that has been exerted is the occasional suspension of rewards. The power of the obstreperous actor, now so widespread in our public life, should not be underestimated. As the Reagan administration learned, power was not symmetrical for the Israelis could threaten greater damage to United States interests than the reverse.

This interpretation undoubtedly exaggerates the nature of Israeli power. The United States needs a strong Israel, not only for the fulfilment of its deeply held moral commitment over many decades, but to play a major deterrent role against the Soviet Union. The provision of United States weapons to one of the world's most effective military forces clearly serves East-West conflict objectives.¹⁹ If Arab states feel endangered by Israeli military power, their principal protection lies in close friendship with the United States which can exercise a moderating role. This game has too many similarities to a gangland 'protection racket' and explains why so many of America's Arab friends are reluctant to enter United States-mediated negotiations on this foundation where coercion is paramount and a concern for a fair and equitable settlement far from apparent.

The insistence on a United States unilateral role is a highly risky one in such complex conflict situations. Where there is some success, the United States can claim the credit as it did with Camp David, although the success was certainly a mixed one in that it

19 Geoffrey Kemp, Middle East adviser on President Reagan's National Security Council staff, pointed out that Israeli nuclear forces could reach targets in the Soviet Union. See his 'A nuclear Middle East' in John K. King, ed, *International Political Effects of the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office 1979), 77. See Jacques Derogy and Hesi Carmel, *The Untold History of Israel* (New York: Grove 1979), 290-2, for a discussion of Israel's role in providing intelligence on the Soviet Union to the Central Intelligence Agency.

alienated even further those whose grievances were not addressed by the United States and who had previously relied on Egypt for protection. Where there is a stalemate, the responsibility also lies with the United States, and where there is a clear failure, as may yet be the legacy of Lebanon, the United States is in the high-risk situation of being blamed by all sides.

The Reagan plan certainly set up the Soviet Union to play a spoiler role. King Hussein reports that Communist party secretary, Yuri Andropov, told him in Moscow in December 1982 that the Soviet Union would use all its forces to oppose the Reagan plan.²⁰ The supply of sophisticated long-range surface-to-air missiles (SAM-5s) with Soviet crews to Syria early in 1983 was clearly designed to block any United States plan to force Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon on United States terms by the threat of further Israeli military action against the Syrians. Deepening United States involvement in the region's internal conflicts throughout this period has enhanced the opportunities for the Soviet Union to increase its influence with the aggrieved party.

Andropov warned King Hussein that his shoulders were not broad enough to handle the weight which the Reagan plan put on him. Shultz and Reagan continued to hope that King Hussein could act. As a reward for just a statement of his willingness to enter negotiations, President Reagan offered him a squadron of F-16s, which the king may well have recalled did little to solve the legitimacy problems Sadat faced from having drawn too closely to the United States. President Mubarak publicly supported the Reagan plan but privately told King Hussein that he doubted if the Reagan administration could deliver. Meanwhile he moved to mend his fences with the Soviet Union and to pave the way for the early re-establishment of diplomatic relations. The Saudis were caught in the middle. Mr Arafat tried to push them to get a better deal on Palestinian self-determination than Reagan was offering Hussein, while Reagan urged the Saudis to persuade the

²⁰ Karen Elliott House, 'Interview with King Hussein - 1,' *Wall Street Journal*, 14 April 1983.

PLO to accept the existing plan. King Fahd reportedly told Arafat to play it safe and not give Hussein a mandate.²¹ After extended negotiations in which the PLO held out for more, Hussein finally broke off negotiations on 10 April 1983, blaming the United States for having failed to secure an early Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon or a freeze on Israeli settlements, either or both of which were vital to convince the Arabs that the United States was a serious intermediary.²²

The Israelis expressed considerable satisfaction with this turn of events. No doubt the disappointment expressed by Secretary Shultz and President Reagan was sincere. They lacked an alternative plan, and it was politically convenient to put the blame on the PLO and radical elements. The Reagan plan was the administration's most important foreign policy initiative and had received a very good press and public reaction in the United States, a rarity for a president who had to date little to offer to the electorate by way of success in foreign policy. In the view of the White House staff, Secretary of State Shultz had the responsibility for providing a success in the Middle East to bolster the president's image, and pressure increased on Shultz to get something out of the long-stalemated Lebanese-Israeli negotiations.

The Begin government had made its point about its ability to block a United States plan which did not conform to its interests. The earlier confrontation style was no longer needed. As a result of the Kahan Commission's report on the massacre, Sharon had been demoted to minister without portfolio and no longer exercised the dominant influence in the cabinet. His successor, Moshe Arens, had learned from his experience as ambassador to Washington that there was a political price for Israel if it chose public opposition to United States policies. He set about improving relations, first of all by ending Sharon's embargo on sharing with the United States the intelligence on Soviet equipment gained in

²¹ William R. Brown, 'The puzzles in Saudi policy,' *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 May 1983.

²² House, 'Interview with King Hussein - II,' *Wall Street Journal*, 15 April 1983.

Lebanon. Non-co-operation with the United States marines in Beirut ended. Together with the new chief of staff, General Moshe Levy, the tight military controls on the West Bank population were eased. The Israelis also had an incentive for seeking some settlement in Lebanon as the continuing casualties from guerrilla activity were the catalyst of mounting domestic opposition.

Secretary Shultz appeared reluctant to undertake the Middle East mission, probably because he was well aware of the risks. A continuing stalemate in the Israeli-Lebanese negotiations would indicate how little influence United States mediators had; forcing a settlement would however reveal to all how close the United States and Israeli positions really were. The pattern was already set by the White House staff formula for handling Hussein's refusal to enter the Reagan plan negotiations: blame the Soviet Union and its surrogates for the inability of the United States to achieve peace. Assigning any blame to Israel would be unwise politically and would contribute to further tensions in relations with the principal strategic asset of the United States in the area. A cold-war explanation would find a ready audience in the United States; few people understood much about the regional complexities or the long history of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The secretary of state played out his assigned role. His low-key style favourably impressed Premier Begin, and his intensive shuttle diplomacy between Beirut and Jerusalem produced agreement on a peace plan which appeared to meet minimal Israeli demands for recognition, demilitarization of southern Lebanon, and United States participation in ensuring compliance. Israel was made to appear to yield to United States influence, and this unlocked a flood of rewards, including the end of the suspension on the sale of 75 F-16s, the release of technology for joint production of the new Israeli Lavi fighter aircraft, an increase in the grant proportion of the United States aid package, and an invitation for Premier Begin to visit the White House. In exchange for its signature on a possibly unimplementable agreement, Israel also received a

number of secret pledges, including an agreement for a 'green light' in Lebanon if its security was again threatened.²³ The trick in the whole deal was to make the implementation of the agreement conditional on a timetable for Syrian and PLO withdrawal from Lebanon, but the United States then dismissed this as an Arab problem which was not in its diplomatic mandate. The message was clear: the United States only helps its friends, and only the United States could influence the Israelis who were immune to any military solution. As the Soviet Union was limited only to military help, the Arabs who did not co-operate with the United States were faced with an impasse at best, or as in the case of Lebanon and the West Bank, a rapidly worsening situation if they did not accept American terms.

Surveying the results of American influence on the outcome of the Israeli-Lebanese peace agreement, Syria's president, Hafez al-Assad, was not impressed with the benefits of that influence. The Syrians had made clear before the Shultz visit that they would oppose any agreement in which the Lebanese made too many concessions to Israel. They insisted that Habib had promised them an unconditional Israeli withdrawal. In the Syrian view, the concessions made on joint supervisory teams and a tripartite supervision commission turned Lebanon into an Israeli-American protectorate.

The agreement does provide a severe test of legitimacy for the fragile Lebanese government whose power extends only to a small section of central Lebanon. The agreement triggered the formation of an opposition Muslim-Christian-Druze-Communist national front whose leaders command three of Lebanon's private armies. The Gemayel government remains based on a political party and a private army which bear responsibility for the massacres at Sabra and Shatila and which is accused of continuing harassment of the Palestinian civilian population. It seeks to impose order through a weak Lebanese army, funded by the United States and

²³ Bernard Gwertzman, 'US and Israelis sign agreement on responding to Lebanon raids,' *New York Times*, 18 May 1983.

with United States military advisers. This combination has proved a dubious foundation for political legitimacy throughout the Third World. Many in the dominant Muslim population regard Syrian influence in Lebanon as entirely legitimate, as the present boundaries of the state of Lebanon were created out of the Ottoman province of Syria by the British and the French in 1920. Many in the area will recall that the security zone in southern Lebanon identified in the Lebanese-Israeli agreement is identical with the northern boundaries for the Jewish homeland set out by the Zionist delegation to the Versailles peace conference in 1919.²⁴

Syria has considerable potential for exercising influence in the complex mosaic of Lebanese politics. It was after all Syria which was invited in to Lebanon in 1976 to end a civil war which threatened to destroy the existing government. Syria crushed the Muslim leftist and PLO forces and saved the Christians. The United States badly fumbled its debut in Lebanese politics in its intervention in 1958, and its Christian ally was promptly dumped from power. Israel's direct help to the Phalange in 1975 to crush the Palestinians fuelled the intensity of the civil war which only Syrian forces could end.²⁵

Secretary of State Shultz, who had moved relatively adroitly through this obstacle course, then committed his own diplomatic gaffes. His advice to the Arabs to get rid of the PLO was followed by endorsements of the PLO by all of America's friends, President Mubarak, and Kings Fahd, Hussein, and Hassan. Now he could appear optimistic after the Syrian rejection of his agreement between Lebanon and Israel only by stating publicly that Saudi Arabia would help bring Syria around to the United States plan. No doubt Shultz could count on Saudi support, but he had com-

²⁴ Text is in J.C. Hurewitz, ed, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record* (2nd ed rev; New Haven: Yale University Press 1975), II, 137-42.

²⁵ For General Sharon's charge that the IDF participated in the early phases of the Lebanon civil war, including the Phalange massacre in the Palestinian refugee camp of Tell al-Zatar, see his remarks to the Knesset, 22 September 1982, reported in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12 (winter 1982-3), 214.

mitted the serious mistake of making the proud Saudis appear to be acting at the bidding of the United States on such a sensitive question of inter-Arab politics. The Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud, publicly rebuked Shultz for interference. The Syrians had little incentive to agree to withdraw as their warnings had not been heeded and their concerns ignored. Presumably Saudi subsidies were to provide the missing carrot, and the threat of unleashing the Israelis on the Syrians to force withdrawal was the stick. The sabre-rattling of the next few days was obviously meant to underline the credibility of the Israeli threat, although the United States media dutifully followed the orchestrated leaks designed to show the imminent danger of a Syrian attack. The Soviet Union warned Israel that Syria would not be alone, and the situation quickly calmed down. Rather than take on the Syrians, the Israeli government had to beat down an opposition motion that the Israelis withdraw unilaterally from Lebanon. Now the United States government had to urge that the Israelis remain as their position is essential to any United States leverage on the Syrians.²⁶ It was apparent at the end of the exercise that the United States was a long way from favouring an unconditional Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon or trying to back up their demand that Israel freeze settlements on the West Bank. But these were the efforts which America's Arab friends clearly expected from an intermediary who claimed a unilateral responsibility for bringing about a settlement. These Arab friends may well conclude that they had better look elsewhere if they want any real movement.

No new American initiatives on the Middle East are likely during the quadrennial presidential campaign circus. The administration needed the appearance of success, and failing to get much in the Middle East, it has moved on to Central America where a major shake-up in the State Department gave new responsibilities to Mr Shultz to demonstrate success there. President Gemayel urged Secretary Shultz to return to the Middle East to

²⁶ Trudy Rubin, 'In topsy-turvy Lebanon, us now wants Israel to stay,' *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 June 1983.

break the diplomatic impasse which threatened to result in the de facto partition of Lebanon. President Assad left the door open to further discussions with Shultz but rejected peremptorily any contact with Philip Habib who was called an enemy of the Arabs. For the White House, however, it was more important that United States-Israeli relations be smoothed over so that Democratic presidential candidates could not exploit the administration's earlier differences with Menachem Begin.

The United States government may interpret the relative silence from Arab capitals to the invasion of Lebanon, the massacres, and the Lebanese-Israeli peace agreement as indifference, fatigue, acquiescence, or even support. Some see the lack of Arab reaction to the events in Lebanon as an indication of the retreating importance of the Palestinian question on Arab state agendas. Both the United States and Israel have sought to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict by a series of state-to-state agreements between Israel and its neighbours. In this view, the pragmatic problems of state-building, internal security, and economic development will dominate the agenda, replacing the emotional attachments of the past to pan-Arab identities and the fate of the Palestinians. The westernization of the Middle East, with massive doses of United States technology and largesse, can lay to rest the ghosts of the past. Those who adopt this state-centric view also see the Palestinian problem as one of a fractious PLO terrorist organization whose excesses in the past have earned the fate which befell it in Lebanon.

Regional specialists warn that there is a profound malaise in the Arab world today.²⁷ The shame of the repeated demonstrations of Arab impotence to protect the Palestinians has been revived and added to the deep dissatisfaction which many, particularly in the technically educated younger generation, feel about

²⁷ See John Waterbury, 'Arabs on edge,' *New York Times*, 9 November 1982; interview with William Quandt, 'The US needs positive results within the next six months,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12 (winter 1982-3), 31-7; and Robin Wright, 'Resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism posing threats and challenges to the Arab states,' *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 May 1983.

the performance of incumbent régimes on many issues. Whether this discontent will be translated in the near future into revolution on the Iranian scale is impossible to predict, but there are many ominous signs of impending trouble. If it comes, it seems unlikely that the Israeli air force or crack commando units, or the Sixth Fleet, or the Rapid Deployment Force, or the ubiquitous United States-supplied riot police in the capitals of Washington's friends will be of much use in containing it. Sowing the seeds of hatred may well be the most important longer-term consequence of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon just as it has been in so many other wars.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that every one emerged from the invasion of Lebanon far worse off in an already bad situation. For Israel, the PLO may have been driven from its bases in southern Lebanon and Beirut, but the price in Israeli lives was as high as all the civilian and military casualties sustained in fighting with the PLO from 1967 to the war in 1982.²⁸ Galilee remained quiet, but the Israeli army was tied down in what increasingly appears to be a war of attrition in a permanently partitioned Lebanon. The rationale for the war was rejected by the opposition, intellectuals, and many army reservists. The government, to be sure, survived the protests and the Kahan Commission investigation, but the self-image of Israel, at home and in the Jewish communities of the diaspora, may never be the same. While strategic analysts and military experts will eagerly pore over the lessons learned in the demonstration of the superiority of United States and Israeli weapons and tactics over Soviet equipment and tactics, many of the public, in Israel and abroad, will ponder the moral implications of the use of such sophisticated modern weapons systems against urban targets.

The regionalists in the State Department tried to warn Alexander Haig of the dangers in lending any support to Ariel Sharon's

²⁸ According to an analysis by B. Michael in *Ha'aretz*, 16 July 1982, total Israel civilian casualties over the fifteen-year period were 282 and IDF casualties 285, for a total of 577. Total IDF casualties in the first year of the Lebanon operation were 486.

ideas about the opportunity in Lebanon.²⁹ One immediate consequence of the war was to end the political careers of Generals Sharon and Haig well short of their considerable ambitions. The credibility of the United States as an effective intermediary received what may be a fatal blow, and the Soviet Union waits in the wings to pick up whatever benefits it can from the inevitable fallout from this demonstration of United States political and diplomatic weakness and insensitivity to regional realities. About all we can hope for as a lesson from these terrible events is that policy-makers in the future may treat with healthy scepticism those among them, even in the most powerful states, who argue they will be able to control events and determine outcomes from the initiation of 'wars of opportunity.' Political leaders who talk so glibly these days of their military options may contemplate the judgment visited publicly on Menachem Begin by a bereaved Jewish father who lost a son in Lebanon:

All your incompetence, all your mistakes and complexes, all your political and social stupidity, you wanted to unload by achieving the dubious glory of victors ... The history of our ancient, wise and persecuted nation will judge you with whips and scorpions, and your deeds will become a warning sign and an eternal abomination. And if you have a small residue of conscience and of a human heart left inside you, then my colossal sorrow, the sorrow of a Jewish father whose world collapsed and whose life became meaningless, will pursue you in your sleep and also when you rise and walk, and it will become Cain's mark on your brow, forever.³⁰

²⁹ Zeev Schiff, 'Green Light, Lebanon,' *Foreign Policy* no 50 (spring 1983), 81-2.

³⁰ Yaakov Guterman, 'From the father of Raz, to those whose hand was raised in favor of the Lebanon War,' *Ha'aretz*, 5 July 1982 (English translation in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 11 (summer/fall 1982), 216-17).