

Efforts by U.S. allies put Mideast peace policy in Washington's reach

by Thierry Lalevée

As 1984 began, Moscow looked confidently ahead to becoming the undisputed master of the Middle East, sharing its imperial rule only partially with carefully chosen and neutralized European powers such as France, Britain, and the Federal Republic of Germany. The Kremlin could look to the implementation of a modern version of the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement among Paris, London, and Moscow, at the expense of the countries of the region and of its principal rival power, the United States. Washington was seen as all but neutralized by its own presidential election campaign, and as incapable in any case of dealing with any difficult foreign policy crisis.

A year later, the situation has changed—no thanks to the U.S. State Department or the politicians in Washington who, indeed, did not pay the slightest attention to the Middle East during the election campaign. But the determined efforts of certain of America's allies in the region, and especially of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, have now landed the ball in the American court.

The challenge facing the second Reagan administration, to conclude peace in the Mideast, can only be achieved if the political initiatives taken by Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq are accepted. This means recognition of Yasser Arafat's leadership of the Palestinians, and a broader economic reform which puts an end to the International Monetary Fund's austerity conditionalities.

In early 1984, Washington was still paying the price of the Carter administration's decision in 1979 to put Ayatollah Khomeini into power in Iran, to play an illusory "Islamic card" against the Soviet Union. By October 1983, the Islamic card had been fully transformed into a Frankenstein monster—as this magazine had predicted it would—claiming the lives of over 200 U.S. Marines in Beirut. But Washington, out of fear as well as electoral preoccupations, did nothing to retaliate.

On the contrary, following the wishes of the Soviet Union, its mercenaries of the Islamic Jihad terrorist group, and the governments of Syria and Iran, Washington decided in February of 1984 to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, along with the troops of the other powers of the ill-fated "multinational peace-keeping force," such as the French, who had

also been badly hit, and the British, who were somehow always spared.

Wasn't the departure of the U.S. Marines from Beirut the first step toward a general withdrawal of American influence from the Middle East as a whole, from the Atlantic to the Gulf? Many of America's friends in the region thought in sorrow that this was the case; America's foes wished it and went on a terrorist rampage throughout the region and internationally to make their point—a way for Moscow to test Washington's true policies. Moscow looked forward to establishing diplomatic relations with more countries in the region, with Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia high on its list. Continuous Saudi-Soviet ties have been maintained in Kuwait, and the American businessman and KGB agent-of-influence Armand Hammer recently carried to Moscow a message from Israeli Foreign Minister Shamir on establishing Israeli-Soviet diplomatic ties.

Mubarak's political offensive

If it were not for the stabilizing role Egypt played over the past year and a half of American foreign policy paralysis in the Middle East, not only would the Camp David agreements have been wrecked, but Washington would have lost even its friends in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia.

Yet, no one can accuse Mubarak of being an "American puppet," as he led his country last August toward re-establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, severed in the wake of President Anwar Sadat's assassination in October 1981.

The reason for Egypt's efforts over the past 12 months to shift Washington's policy is simple enough. Outside of the economic and political links which bind Cairo to Washington, a political vacuum left by the United States would not only leave the field open and uncontested to the Soviet Union, but would take Egypt back 30 years when, following the treacherous policies of U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, it was ostracized from the international community and left to deal with Moscow on its own.

While abiding by the Camp David treaty and maintaining a limited but balanced relationship with Israel, Cairo was reintroduced into the Organization of Islamic Countries in

late 1983 at the initiative of Morocco's King Hassan, and new relations developed with other Arab states such as Algeria, the Gulf countries, and Iraq—which Egypt has unconditionally supported in its four-year-long war against Iran. Most Arab countries began to admit that Cairo is the center of Middle Eastern and Arab politics, and that refusing to have diplomatic relations with Egypt does nothing to change that.

The most spectacular acknowledgement of that basic fact of life was the reconciliation between Egypt and Jordan, dramatized in October by the first visit ever of an Egyptian President to the capital of the Hashemite kingdom, and the reciprocal visit of King Hussein to Cairo in December. The reconciliation was followed by the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Iraq on Nov. 26. Many American emissaries to Baghdad may have done footwork for this, but the political environment for the spectacular move was created by Egypt and a few other countries—all the more remarkable as Baghdad still has no ambassador in Cairo.

In February, immediately following the U.S. troop withdrawal from Lebanon, King Hussein and President Mubarak came to Washington for meetings with President Reagan, bluntly informing him that there will be no peace in the Middle East unless he deals with Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization. Reagan, under the malign influence of the State Department and the White House "Palace Guard," responded by telling Egypt to implement the austerity conditionalities that the International Monetary Fund was demanding!

The Arab leaders recognize that the principal obstacles to a new positive U.S. leadership role in the Middle East are Henry Kissinger and his State Department cronies. Kissinger is hated throughout the Mideast for his treachery against every country of the region. President Mubarak, during his meetings in Washington and in a letter to Reagan, called on the U.S. President to "break with the policies of Henry Kissinger." Mubarak's messages were intercepted on numerous occasions by the State Department; in one known instance, Secretary of State George Shultz intervened to prevent Reagan from receiving a letter from the Egyptian President opposing the U.S. withdrawal of troops from Lebanon.

Shortly after the Hussein-Mubarak trip, a major flare-up in the Iran-Iraq war served to further discredit the United States in the region. Lyndon LaRouche recommended in March that the United States immediately abandon its foolish "neutrality" and declare war on Khomeini's outlaw state, but this advice was overruled.

Happily, U.S. policy has not been completely under the State Department's thumb, however. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's two visits to the Middle East, in October and December, did much to strengthen the confidence that countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Tunisia place in the United States. As Weinberger was able to outline to them the basic ideas of the administration for a compre-

hensive peace settlement, those countries could agree to be patient a few more months, making clear that the weeks following the U.S. presidential inauguration will be crucial for testing Washington's real willingness to get to work in the region. This is especially true in light of the crucial developments within the Palestinian movement over the last year, and Arafat's Nov. 22 decision to break with the PLO's radical fringe groups, the puppets of the Syrians and the Libyans, and ultimately of the Soviets.

Qaddafi and the IMF

Though America's present standing, compared to last January, might look like a political miracle, it is in fact just enough for Washington to recapture the credibility it has lost since 1978-79, the worst years of the Carter administration.

As the January and February food riots in Morocco and Tunisia and the October food riots in Egypt underline, a political initiative from Washington is not enough; it must tackle the economic crisis of most of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

There is little doubt also that, outside of international political considerations, the riots were one of the prime considerations which led to the ill-advised Union between the Kingdom of Morocco, a close ally of the United States, and the "Jamariyyah" of Colonel Qaddafi of Libya in early August.

Qaddafi's kingpin role, which is being fostered by the Socialist International and the U.S.S.R., is a direct result of the U.S. failure to develop a comprehensive political-economic solution for the region. The United States is now watching the Soviets and the Socialists—François Mitterrand of France, Andreas Papandreu of Greece, Olof Palme of Sweden, and Willy Brandt of West Germany—capitalize on America's commitment to the austerity policies of the IMF.

These are also the issues that the United States has to face with Israel. For more than six months, that country's political life was paralyzed by an electoral process which produced an unstable Labor/Likud government led by Labor Prime Minister Shimon Peres. The economic crisis is the prime focus and problem of the new Israeli leadership, with an inflation rate close to 1,000% and industrial plants closing one after another. Israel now faces a choice: either a flight forward, which could bring the madman Ariel Sharon to power as prime minister and lead to the further military expansion of Israel, or a rational political solution and a peace settlement.

Israel holds most of the keys to peace in the region, and it is thus no surprise to see both the Socialist International and the Soviets wooing the new Israeli leadership, even at the expense of their other alliances. It is thus no wonder that Mitterrand suddenly invited Peres to Paris in mid-December and offered him what the American State Department had always refused, two nuclear power plants. The State Department is pushing for more austerity inside Israel, more unemployment, and higher interest rates—which makes Israel all the more open to the Socialist International's bid.