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Washington's 'Arab mistake'

THE IGNORANCE displayed by today's world statesmen about elementary, often crucial, facts – particularly in foreign affairs – has lost the power to astonish. The Middle East, about which they all pontificate so readily, is a specially fertile field for their fatuities. Most important here inevitably are the pronouncements of American spokesmen, directly involved as they are in its problems.

Two illuminating examples of recent years spring to mind. Former Secretary of State Alexander Haig in putting up a defence of the Saudi Arabians' unwillingness to accept an American deterrent task force on their soil, explained that the Saudis had bitter recollections of their subjection to colonial rule. It so happens that they never were under any colonial rule. On the contrary: Saudi Arabia itself has repeatedly forced its own rule upon weaker Arab peoples

President Carter manifested an ignorance of much greater significance. His escort on a tour of Jerusalem in 1979 (Ariel Sharon) told him that the Kingdom of Jordan was Palestine, eastern Palestine, originally included in the British Mandate. Mr. Carter was flabbergasted. He turned to his companion, National Security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. "Is this true?" he asked. (Brzezinski, *nebbich*, could not but confirm the news.)

Mere human ignorance, however, cannot possibly explain a brief statement made last week by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz. Following the breakdown of the talks between King Hussein and Yasser Arafat, Shultz accused the Arab states of having "made a mistake" in recognizing the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."

This charge is equivalent to describing as a mistake a father's acknowledgement of the paternity of his begotten son. It was the Arab states which *created* the PLO – in its component parts and nurtured it as their agency for building up a constant terror front in the campaign to weaken and ultimately destroy Israel. The PLO's "Palestinian Covenant," setting out that aim of destruction, is no more than a codification of the purpose of the Arab states.

After all, in 1948 (16 years before the PLO was born), their self-confident leaders announced that their invasion of Western Palestine was designed to destroy the embryo Jewish State, root and branch. All they asked of the Arabs living in the area was to get out of the way until victory was won.

After their second attempt, in 1967, to annihilate Israel, in which they publicly proclaimed their purpose, the Arab leaders came to the conclusion that the image of a large nation, sprawled over 14 million sq. km. of territory trying to crush the minuscule Jewish State, was not pleasing to the Western eye. They consequently applied camouflage. Onto the centre of the stage was brought the small "Palestinian people," described as having been driven out of its homeland by Zionist aggression, fuelled by Western imperialism. The prestigious Egyptian journal *Al Mussawar* (December 1968) explained:

"The masses of the Palestinian people are only the advance-guard of the Arab nation . . . a plan for rousing world opinion in stages, as it would not be able to understand or accept a war by a hundred million Arabs against a small state."

THE INFRASTRUCTURE and the auxiliary services for building the PLO were provided from the beginning by the Arab states. Finance came from the wealthy oil states, with the Saudis contributing an ever-increasing part. Training facilities were provided by Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Jordan; arms poured in from all of them. All provided the PLO with diplomatic “cover” for moving men and arms across frontiers and ensuring shelter for perpetrators of terror operations. Arab embassies became bases for those operations.

Not least significant were the outpourings of approbation and applause throughout the Arab states at every new murder of Israeli civilians by the PLO. The massacre of schoolchildren at Ma'alot, the murder of Olympic sportsmen at Munich, were hailed as heroic military operations.

The PLO needed the Arab states' official “recognition” after its expulsion from Jordan in order to block Hussein's claim to “represent the Palestinian people.” That recognition, at the Rabat Conference (October 1974) was fortified by a renewed unanimous pledge – to support the PLO in all spheres and at all levels. This pledge was repeated frequently in later years by Arab leaders.

They thus solemnly reaffirmed their acceptance of their share of responsibility for the PLO's future outrages.

Meanwhile, the PLO had become a valued client also of the USSR, which provided officers' training courses in Eastern Europe; and became the PLO's major supplier of arms of all kinds.

Is there need now to recount how the PLO, so lavishly funded and equipped, grew in power and influence, how – in addition to its central role as the thrusting Arab sword against Israel – it now developed two other major roles? In collaboration with Syria, it served as the main force for the destruction of Lebanon and its Christian society; and (in evident collaboration with the Soviets) it became the hub of international terror, reaching out from Beirut to the whole world. Until its power was broken by Israel in 1982.

EVIL AS the purpose of the Arabs has been promoting the terrorist movement, and gruesome as has been its execution, it does reflect a purpose perceived as the “right” of the Arab race and as service to the greater glory of Islam. What moral warrant is there for the permissive, the benevolent attitude of the U.S. towards that undertaking? Throughout all the years of PLO rampage, not once did the U.S. utter a word of reproach or disapprobation of the Arab states' support for, and participation in PLO acts.

On the contrary, nobody doubted that the U.S. “recognized” the PLO as the “sole representative,” etc. The only obstacle to its actually negotiating with the PLO was its undertaking to Israel (in return for Israel's painful concessions in Sinai in 1975); and how irksome Washington found it to honour that restraint! Certainly since the Carter presidency, Washington virtually importuned the PLO to utter words that could justify negotiating with it. And did not sundry U.S. diplomats by devious maneuvers make direct contact with PLO leaders?

Of real impact on events was the protection the U.S. afforded the terrorist organization, shielding it against Israel's efforts to counteract, defeat and destroy it. Sometimes Washington ignored, always it minimized, the enormity of PLO outrages. A

regular ploy of administration spokesmen was their “inability to identify” the perpetrators (sometimes even after the PLO had issued a boastful bulletin on an exploit).

U.S. diplomacy, however, went far beyond whitewashing. It kept up sustained pressure on Israel to refrain from significant action against the PLO. This indeed sums up its behaviour on Lebanon throughout the years of PLO murder, rapine and international subversion.

It was under U.S. pressure that Israel agreed to end the Litani Operation in 1978 and agreed to the introduction of the UNIFIL force – which soon facilitated the return of the PLO.

When Israel was compelled once more to launch a campaign against the PLO in 1981, does one have to recall Washington’s knee-jerk reaction to the urgent appeal by Arafat (transmitted through Riyadh) to press Israel to halt her attacks – lest the PLO structure collapse within days?

The “cease-fire” then foolishly agreed to by Israel was predictably exploited by the PLO to prepare the tremendous built-up of Soviet arms uncovered by the IDF in the subsequent Operation Peace for Galilee.

The U.S. was unable to prevent that operation; but it did its utmost to weaken it and to frustrate its salutary consequences. None of the PLO barbarities towards the Lebanese people between 1975 and 1982, which came to light during the operation, evidently weakened in the least Washington’s resolve to cushion the defeat of the PLO.

The thrust of this policy has been maintained to this day – throughout the painful negotiations between Israel and Lebanon. With relentless consistency, Washington has tried to block every Israeli proposal to ensure the peace and security of Southern Lebanon and of northern Israel and to help put teeth into Lebanese independence in the Syrian and PLO encroachment. With equally determined consistency, Washington has pressed for measures (such as entrusting security in Southern Lebanon once more to the porous UNIFIL and the exclusion of the indomitable Major Haddad) which would obviously facilitate the return of the PLO.

WHAT GEORGE SHULTZ has glimpsed is not an “Arab mistake.” It is an abysmal American blunder. It is the historic continuing absurdity of U.S. policy in the Middle East: a world power tied to the coattails of Arab ambitions and fantasies – to the delight of its ill-wishers and the dismay of its friends.