

OBSERVATIONS

Butting In, Butting Out

THIS newspaper is neither pro-Israel nor anti-Israel. We believe that America's national interest is the only basis upon which American foreign policy should be made. If what is good for the United States is also good for Israel, that is well and good. If what is good for the United States is bad for Israel, that reality is acceptable. There is no reason to believe that American and Israeli interests are always the same or even similar.

Public officials and commentators are well aware of the energetic Israel lobby in this country. Any statement or suggestion that seems even remotely contrary to Israeli interests is set upon with passion. This newspaper recently received scores of hostile letters after publishing a news report about Zionist activities in the United States. Many letters charged us with anti-Semitism.

While we appreciate the emotional ties some of our countrymen have with Israel, we don't think such ties are a sound basis for making public policy. As for the anti-Semitism charge: Name calling is a practice preferred by those without a sound and rational argument.

As we see it, there are two important differences between the situation in Southeast Asia and the situation in the Middle East. First of all, Israel has asked to buy arms from the United States—it has not asked for free help and it has not asked for American military personnel. Secondly, the Israeli government is considered "liberal" whereas the governments of Arab countries and indeed those of South Vietnam and Cambodia are considered "conservative."

As for the first difference, we feel reasonably confident that as time goes on and if events go against Israel, that country would eventually ask for any kind of American help that would save it from defeat. If that proposition is baseless, it would be useful if Israel's friends in this country were to explain why.

With regard to the second difference, is the real issue among American liberals one of war or peace—as they have so steadfastly claimed—or is it rather a political matter? Should the United States have one foreign policy for liberal countries and another for conservative ones?

The ways of the political left in America are getting curiously and curiously. Many members of the dove contingent of the United States have signed a letter to Secretary of State Rogers urging that more fighter planes be sent to Israel forthwith. This move is enthusiastically championed even though it represents another step toward a direct U.S.-Soviet confrontation in the Middle East.

After all the liberal oratory about the urgency of winding down the war in Indochina, we find it peculiar that the same peace-lovers are so ardent in their desire to see the United States escalate the war in the Middle East.

We find it equally peculiar that many liberals automatically assume America's interests would be better served by helping Israel rather than in maintaining and improving America's relations with the Arab countries.

It is true, of course, that Russia is leading the escalation spiral by supplying equipment and some military personnel to Egypt. But Russia also has been supplying aid to the Vietnamese Communists, and when the United States responded to that challenge the doves ignored the Moscow-

Peking escalation and simply railed against the American reaction to it.

Some questions suggest themselves.

If, as the liberals contend, the United States' vital security would not be hurt by disinvolvement in Indochina, wouldn't the same conclusion apply to the Middle East?

Does the United States have more to fear from the Arab states than from the Indochina Communists? What have the Arab countries done to America to deserve the hostility of so many U.S. senators?

Would it be wise, considering the passion for peace within the United States, to stumble out of one war only to stumble into another? How far are the liberals prepared to see America go in defending Israel?

It seems obvious to us that America's national interest would not be served by deliberately alienating the entire Arab world. Beyond that it would be reckless indeed to get involved in another society-rending foreign war. And it would be utter madness to proceed to a final confrontation with Russia in Russia's back yard because of a local feud between countries that pose no threat to American security.

Regarding the frequently heard assertion that the United States has a "moral" obligation to protect Israel, we would simply suggest that if the liberals are right in denying an American moral obligation toward the non-Communist countries of Indochina, the same position is entirely applicable in relation to Israel. Did the United States approve the establishment of the state of Israel? Yes, just as in another fashion it in fact approved the establishment of the state of South Vietnam. We fail to see why that fact—assuming, which is debatable, that it should have approved those establishments—in either case commits the United States to help protect those countries indefinitely.

Perhaps we're wrong, but we somehow recall many American liberals saying that it is no longer realistic for the United States to consider itself the world's policeman. The statement, although difficult for many people to accept, does reflect the actualities of international politics in the 1970s.

Nor is there an absolute "rightness" in Israel's cause to which the United States must give ultimate priority. There are, after all, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who were made homeless when a group of non-Arab countries took it upon themselves to create a non-Arab state in the heart of the Arab world.

Make no mistake about it. We do not wish to see the end of the state of Israel; we do not take glee in its plight. It would be a poor student of human history who didn't appreciate its people's claim to an eminent place in the story of civilization; it would be hard to discount the bravery and industry of its people.

But we believe Israel has misguidedly followed a policy that can only be called expansionist since the Six Day War. Its policies are militant and dangerous, threatening a Soviet-U.S. holocaust. There is ample room, we believe, for Arab-Israeli conciliation and political settlement. It is in this direction that the United States should move—not in further escalating the situation.

However much the hard realities distress many of our countrymen, it would be worse than absurd for America to butt into the Middle East at the very time it is trying so hard to butt out of Southeast Asia.