

21. There are many disadvantages in this course. In the first place it pre-supposes an interest by the USSR in solving the problems of the Middle East, whereas it is more likely that the Soviet cause is better served by continued divisions among the countries of this area, and the Western Powers. It is also possible that the Russians would ask, as a price of co-operation, the disbandment of the Baghdad Pact. My personal opinion has always been that both this pact and the previous Turko-Pakistani Pact served no useful military purpose and had many political disadvantages, and I would not think that its abandonment would be a serious loss, particularly as it is likely to lose its key member, Iraq, some day in any event. In any case, it is quite useless without active U.S. participation. The West, of course, should not try to bargain the Baghdad Pact against Soviet co-operation, and I think the Russians would not demand it as a pre-requisite. But I think the West should be prepared, if necessary, to sacrifice it in return for Soviet participation in arranging and guaranteeing a Palestine settlement.

22. I think, on balance, that the Russians would be prepared to work with the West in seeking a solution of the problem of Palestine if in this way they could achieve equal, and respectable, status with the Western Big Three in the Middle East. I do not doubt that they will continue to stir up trouble, and press their own specific aims, but that is something they are going to do anyway, and it might be easier to try to work with them, rather than against or without them. In fact Soviet co-operation is the only real hope we have now of reaching a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute.

23. Finally, I have one suggestion to make on the nature of that settlement. It is clear that the Arabs will demand territorial concessions particularly in the Negev in order to establish a land-bridge between Egypt and Jordan. It is also equally clear that the Israelis will not permit an Arab corridor through the Negev, and insist on the importance of the port of Elath for their future economic expansion.

24. My suggestion is that, as part of a general settlement, an international territory similar to Danzig or Trieste, be established at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba to include a small slice of Egyptian, Israeli and Jordanian territory, including the ports of Elath and Aqaba, and that it be administered by an international force under the command of a U.N. official directly responsible to the U.N. Free access to the port by all three states should be permitted as well as free civilian transit. While the Israelis might object to ceding sovereignty, face would be saved by comparable concessions by Egypt and Jordan, and Israel's economic position would be assured. It would in fact be a very small price for them to pay if peace were to be secured. It would, furthermore, be almost the only way by which an international armed force could be introduced into the area and this in itself would add to the security of Israel and its neighbours. The other points in a general settlement; minor frontier adjustments, frontier guarantees, and compensation for the Arab refugees, have been pretty fully explored and I need not go into them here; but I think the suggestion for a free territory in the Gulf of Aqaba might just possibly prove a starting-point for negotiations on the delicate but essential question of the Negev.

R.A.D. FORD