Towards a Durable Peace - Policy in the Middle East

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
TOWARDS A DURABLE PEACE

III. An Affirmative Policy in the Middle East

Mr. President:

I take the time of the Senate, today, to consider another aspect of the problem of building greater stability into the international situation. This is the third time I have alluded to the subject in recent days.

In this series of addresses, I am dealing with some of the major pressure-points of potential conflict in the world. I am trying to search with the Senate, for ideas which may serve to relieve these pressures. In short, Mr. President, I am exploring the possibilities of an American initiative for the more durable peace which the world so deeply desires, so deeply needs.

In my previous statement, I reviewed the realities of the situation in Europe, as I see them, and suggested measures which may help to break through the dangerous impasse to peace in that region. Today, I turn to another area of potential conflict--to the Middle East.

At this moment, Mr. President, the Middle East is not at war and not at peace. We may assume, I suppose, if we are given to wishful thinking that this situation of neither war nor peace will hold more or less indefinitely.

We cannot rest safely, however, on that assumption. The most casual reflection will tell us that it is a highly dangerous assumption since the underlying tensions of the Middle East remain virtually unchanged.
It seems to me appropriate, therefore, to examine these tensions once again, to determine what, if anything, can be done to abate or control them; to replace, with something more durable, what has heretofore been a pattern of recurrent ruptures of stability.

At the outset, let me make clear that I do not subscribe to views which hold either Soviet penetration or Western imperialism or both primarily responsible for the difficulties in the Middle East. If we are looking for a target in the propaganda war, then the deviltry of Soviet penetration certainly provides one. If the Russians are looking for the same, then I suppose Western imperialism is not a difficult mark. And if Middle Easterners must have a scapegoat for their troubles, then, they can vent their wrath on Soviet penetration, on Western imperialism, or on both simultaneously.

But if the world wishes in earnest to find a more durable peace, then we shall have to look deeper, much deeper, into the sources of Middle Eastern tensions. Certainly, the policies pursued by the Soviet Union, the Western European nations and the United States at any given time, are relevant to this matter. More basic to the problem of peace, however, are the implications of the vast transition which is taking place within the Middle East. This transition and the tensions it brings have a vitality independent of the policies of nations outside the region.

Mr. President, a fundamental change involving the lives of tens of millions of people is never made with ease. Change in the Middle East is no exception. Change in the Middle East is exceptional only in its massiveness. What this change involves is an enormous effort by millions to leap over forgotten generations of political obscurity into the mainstream of international
life. It involves a desperate struggle to push aside the accumulated sands of social inertia and to emerge several hundred years later into the 20th Century. It involves an endeavor to rid the earth of one of its heaviest concentrations of stagnating poverty, superstition, fear and disease, of the ugliest forms of human subjugation--and to do it virtually overnight.

The basic pressure for this desirable, this constructive change is produced by nationalism. Whatever difficulties nationalism may bring, let there be no mistake, Mr. President, about its necessity. Nationalism is essential in the Middle East to produce the change essential for durable peace. To deny its validity is to deny our own history.

The difficulty in the Middle East arises not from nationalism as such. The difficulty arises from the unpredictable course which Middle Eastern nationalism may take at a highly critical moment of history, at a moment when the peace of the world balances on a razor's edge. By its very nature, this force is not easily channeled. When a whole people break out of an existing pattern of life into something new, it is not easy to calculate or control the direction of the great human surge which is released by the fission.

There was a time, perhaps, when mankind could sustain the excesses, the errors, the random scattering of the power of an explosive nationalism. That is no longer the case. In the present state of international affairs, nationalism on a rampage endangers not only those who release it; it endangers peace and, hence, the peoples of the entire world.

The needs of mankind require that nationalist leaders, today, not only lead national awakenings but that they lead them soberly and responsibly.
The needs of mankind require that these leaders lead with due regard for the dangerous complexities of current international life.

In the Middle East, the world skirts the edge of disaster, not because of nationalism, but because nationalism has not fully established a new pattern of constructive and peaceful progress to replace the older and no longer acceptable pattern which it has destroyed. The force of nationalism, at present, plunges headlong into western interests established many decades ago--special interests, perhaps--but interests, nevertheless, which cannot be liquidated overnight if they are to be liquidated in peace. Further, this force divides into shifting political and regional alignments, which clash one with another and, in so doing, threaten the stability of the region. It collides with or scoops into its fury ancient foci of power which have a vested interest in the preservation of the accumulated social rot of centuries. It recharges tribal feuds that go back to biblical times. It plays with the dangerous fire of great-power balance in the naive belief that it is too clever to get burned. Too often, it pushes precious human energies into the wasting-pit of militarism, terrorism and mobism. Too often, Mr. President, it sidesteps the one path which will lead, more quickly than any other, to full national and human equality--the path of unremitting effort to establish orderly, progressive societies with responsible governments.

These, Mr. President, are some of the less desirable spawns of nationalism in the Middle East. They are products of the nationalist fission in that area, its destructive products, and they are, in my opinion, the principal source of the region's instability. We overlook this source when we see the problems of peace in the Middle East as arising solely from
Soviet machinations, as the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957 did and still does, despite clarification and modification by the Senate. The Russians overlook it, if, in fact, they see these problems as arising primarily from Western imperialism. If we continue to overlook it, we shall have policies which deal primarily with shadow rather than substance—costly policies and in the end, probably futile policies.

An affirmative policy for peace, sooner or later, must look squarely at the inner difficulties of the Middle East. Before this nation can have that kind of policy, however, we must have a better understanding of American interests in the region.

It is not difficult, Mr. President, to catalogue the most significant of these interests. They are legitimate interests and we need not hide or obscure them. Certainly, we need not apologize for them.

United States companies have heavy investments in Middle Eastern petroleum development; that is an American interest. We have bases or other defense arrangements against aggression in the Middle East, that, too, is an American interest. We have trade, cultural, educational and other ties with the Arab States and Israel; these are American interests. We have a commerce through the air and sea lanes and the petroleum pipelines of the region; these, too, are American interests. We have a stake in a stable Western Europe which, in turn, is now heavily dependent for economic stability on Middle Eastern petroleum, trade and trade routes; that is a highly important, if indirect, American interest.

Beyond all these specific concerns, however, we have one national interest that is overriding. That is an interest in the peace of the entire
Middle East. I speak, now, not of a peace at any price, of a peace of inertia, appeasement or repression. I speak of a durable and vital peace which will provide an opportunity for essential change to take place in the Middle East, the change which will enable the peoples of that region, if they have the will, to live in a satisfying national independence in the 20th Century.

On that kind of peace depends the long-run survival of all the particular interests of Americans. On that kind of peace in the Middle East may well depend the peace of all Americans and the world.

I do not know, Mr. President, whether any policies pursued by this nation will be able to assist in producing such a peace in the Middle East. It seems to me highly unlikely that they will do so, however, if these policies are made subservient in concept or in administration to any special American interest, whether it be petroleum concessions, defense arrangements, ties with the Arab States or Israel, or any other.

Certainly, it is desirable, Mr. President, for Americans to participate in the development of Middle Eastern petroleum, if this development profits them and serves the people of that region. It is not desirable, however, for all Americans to go hat and pail in hand to any country to beg for oil. That, in effect, is what we may be doing if American policies are made subordinate to this particular American interest.

Certainly it is desirable to have bases and other defense arrangements in the Middle East if they grow out of a common concern with security against aggression. It is not desirable to have these arrangements, however, if we must grovel before any nation in order to obtain or to keep them. That,
in effect, is what we may be doing if these defense arrangements are elevated into the principal objective of policy.

Certainly, it is desirable for Americans to have cultural, trade, educational or other friendly ties with the Arab States and Israel. It is not desirable, however, if these attachments mean that all Americans must acquiesce in an aggressive hatred of Arab toward Israeli or Israeli toward Arab or Arab toward Arab. That, in effect, is what we may be asked to do if our national policy is subordinated to these specific attachments.

Finally, may I say, Mr. President, that it is certainly desirable for us to recognize the need of Western European allies and other friendly nations for access to the petroleum, the trade and trade routes of the Middle East. It is not desirable, however, to recognize this need without also recognizing that the unequal privileges of yesterday’s colonialism must yield to the requirements of a constructive nationalism today.

Mr. President, that is the first step in an affirmative policy for the Middle East: to get clearly in our own minds that the national interest in a vital peace in the Middle East takes precedence over any particular American interest. Those who conceive and administer United States policy must understand that. Other nations must understand it. It is particularly important that those who play dangerously with a destructive nationalism and those who seek to repress a constructive nationalism know it.

I am afraid, however, that we shall not impress anyone by words, whether they be the soft generalities on peace or the violent terms of the propaganda war. What cannot be done by words, perhaps, can be done by acts, acts which make clear that the primary American interest in the Middle East is an interest in a vital peace and that we are determined to pursue it.
No single act in this connection is more important than to develop alternatives to Middle Eastern petroleum and to the pipe-lines and waterways through which it now moves. In 1956, Mr. President, a year before the Suez crisis, I urged in a speech in the Senate (April 18, 1956) that this country begin to plan in concert with oil-consuming countries against the possibility of a temporary cut-off in the flow of Middle Eastern oil. What was needed then, was an immediate increase in the supply of sea-going tankers of large tonnage; preparations which would have permitted a prompt expansion in the petroleum output of the Western Hemisphere; and a speed-up in the development of nuclear energy for power. So far as I know, however, nothing was done along these lines until the following year when the Suez crisis was already upon us.

I do not say, Mr. President, that the immediate availability of alternatives to Middle Eastern oil would have prevented the Suez crisis. It seems to me very possible, however, that it might have mitigated it. And it seems to me very possible now that the availability of alternatives to petroleum from that source may discourage similar crises. Certainly, it will help to meet such crises if they should come.

What is true if alternatives to petroleum is also true of alternatives to defense arrangements in the Middle East. I assume that any arrangements we now have serve the mutual benefit of ourselves and the Middle Eastern countries which participate in them. I hope that they will go on serving a common interest. By the same token, however, I hope that the Defense Department will begin now to plan to safeguard this country without these arrangements, if the price of retaining them is a servile submission to one-sided terms, to conditions which degrade this nation.
Finally, it ought to be made clear, if it is not already clear, that this country has a deep interest in the survival and progress of Israel. This country's policies should unashamedly sustain that interest so long as the Israelis pursue their progress in peace. We can and must be prepared to override the particular interest, however, in the greater national interest, if Israel abandons the ways of peace.

What applies to Israel applies equally to the Arab States. I should say that the Administration has already gone out of its way to make clear that this country has a deep interest in the survival and progress of these states, but, if by some chance, further assurances are necessary then they should be given. This country's policies should sustain the interest so long as the Arabs pursue their progress in peace. We can and we must be prepared to override the particular interest, however, in the greater national interest, if the Arab States, singly or collectively abandon the ways of peace.

Whether we demonstrate our concern in the peaceful progress of the Arab States and Israel by public statements, by the channels of diplomacy or by some other way, is a secondary question. The important point is that the interest be made clear to both sides and that the word, peaceful, be underlined for both sides.

What I have been trying to suggest, Mr. President, is that we need to inject into national policies in the Middle East, a clarity of purpose, of primary national purpose, which they do not now have. I am also suggesting that we develop alternatives to present particular American interests which will permit sufficient flexibility in the pursuit of this purpose.
I believe, Mr. President, that since World War II, we have been
groping towards an affirmative policy of this kind, under both a Democratic
and a Republican administration. There has been an obvious official apprecia-
tion of the importance of a durable peace in that area. There has been an
appreciation of the importance of nationalism in achieving that peace. There
has been a desire to support its stirrings, modified by the fear of alienat-
ing the nations of Western Europe, which formerly held most of the area as
colonies, protectorates and mandates. It has been modified, too, by the
fear of jeopardizing the particular interests of Americans in that region.

Despite good intentions, policy in the Middle East is now encased
in a gigantic, expensive holding action. It is not directed primarily to-
wards building a vital durable peace in that region. It is directed primarily
towards preventing the inner tensions of that region from snapping.

The result has been a broadside effort to please all which obviously
pleases none. The result has been a vast decline in the prestige of this
country. The result has been a growing contempt and antagonism towards Ameri-
cans, despite hundreds of millions of dollars expended in various kinds of
aid. The result, Mr. President, was a conduct of foreign policy bordering
closely on appeasement of arrogance and submission to blackmail, until the
Secretary of State put a stop to this nonsense by withdrawing the Aswan Dam
proposal. Putting aside the question of the manner in which this was done,
I can only endorse what was apparently his determination not to permit this
country to be made a pawn in someone's balancing game.

Mr. President, I am afraid, that if we go on as we have, we shall
not, in the end, prevent the tensions from giving way in the Middle East.
In the end, we shall not prevent communism or some other form of totalitarianism from sweeping through the region. In the end, the particular interests of Americans may well be lost along with the general interest of all Americans in a durable peace.

Good intentions, as I have said, have not been lacking in Middle Eastern policies during the past decade. What we have lacked, is a full appreciation of the priority of the interest of the whole nation in that kind of peace. What we have lacked, I believe, is an acute sense of discrimination as between constructive and destructive nationalism as the primary instrument for producing that kind of peace.

If there has been one great error of policy in the past decade, it has been this failure to draw a line of distinction between these two expressions of nationalism. There have been those who have advocated indiscriminate support of Arab nationalism in the Middle East. There have been some who have advocated indiscriminate support of Israeli nationalism in the Middle East. There have not been, or at least we have not heard, the voices of those who distinguish between constructive and destructive nationalism, regardless of whether it is Arab or Israeli.

That error must be rectified if we are to move towards an affirmative policy in the Middle East. There is little value in going back into the history of the past decade in a search for scapegoats for failure in the Middle East. What is vitally important to the American people is not what was done or not done in the past. What is vitally important is what is done from now on.
It seems to me, Mr. President, that what we require first is a new concept of policy, a concept which puts first things first, a concept which recognizes that the interest of all the people of the United States in a vital and durable peace in the Middle East takes precedence over any particular American interest. We require, too, officials to administer this policy who are able to put aside personal interests, predilections and bias in their pursuit of that interest. We require, further, officials who are able to draw a distinction between constructive and destructive expressions of nationalism and to appreciate the relevance of this distinction in building a vital and durable peace in the Middle East.

I know that the distinction is a subtle one in a region as complex as the Middle East. Nevertheless, I believe it can be drawn; indeed, it must be drawn. Unless it is drawn, we will find ourselves applying such influence and resources as we have in that region impartially as between those who would destroy and those who would construct, and the one effort will cancel out the other, as, in fact, has been happening.

Such influence and resources as we can apply—if we are to apply any at all—must be channeled largely in line with those who are working to build stability and responsibility in the Middle East. If we are not to waste our strength in well-meaning but futile gestures, this nation must stand, not indiscriminately with Middle Eastern nationalism; rather, we must stand with its constructive expression, whether it emanates from Israel, particular Arab States or all the Arab States.

We may well ask ourselves, is it really so difficult to determine what is constructive or destructive in the nationalism of the Middle East? It seems to me that there are simple guidelines which may be applied if we wish to use them.
Certainly, a constructive nationalism will insist that the unequal privileges of a past colonialism go. It will exercise, however, in the larger interests of mankind, the patience and restraint which will permit these privileges to be liquidated in an orderly manner. When nationalism exercises that kind of patience and restraint it deserves the support of this nation and the world. Similarly, when Western nations manifest a willingness to liquidate their special privileges in an orderly fashion they deserve our support against the buffetings and blows of a nationalism on a rampage.

A constructive nationalism will seek to encourage a peaceful commerce with the rest of the world on a mutually beneficial basis. It will not seek to parlay an accident of geography, whether it be petroleum beneath the ground or the seashores, airlanes or pipelines through and over its territories into an economic stranglehold on the peoples of the world, it will not use a natural blessing of this kind as a lever to upset the peace of the world.

A constructive nationalism will apply the resources and the energies of its people primarily to the enormous tasks of stamping out hunger, ignorance, disease and injustice within its borders. It will not command these resources and energies for the personal pleasures of a ruler; it will not direct them into militarism, terrorism, conspiracy, mobism and subversion. It will not divert these energies into an unremitting campaign of all-consuming hatred—whatever its real or imagined grievances—against other peoples in the region and outside the region.

A constructive nationalism, in short, will work for the orderly progress of its own people. It will work for peace in the region and for peace in the world.
I know, Mr. President, there are few black and white results if these tests are applied to the course of nationalism in the Middle East during the past decade. All of the countries involved, in one degree or another, have manifested destructive and constructive tendencies. They shall undoubtedly continue to do so in the future, in one degree or another. For the foreign policy of the United States, however, the critical questions are, how destructive? How constructive? The questions are questions of degree and the answers can only rest on the judgment of the Administration which is charged with responsibility for carrying out foreign policy.

I would be less than frank if I did not express my view that this judgment has been faulty in the past. For too long, this Administration has shown a lack of discrimination as regards nationalism in the Middle East. For too long, it has tended to coddle its destructive expression. For too long, it has treated with something approaching reluctance, if not disdain, the constructive manifestations of this force in Lebanon and Israel. We have reaped consequences of this faulty judgment in the past, in the Suez seizure, in the spread of conspiracy, subversion and terrorism throughout the region. We are reaping others now in the ordeal in Lebanon, one of the most progressive and peaceful of the Middle Eastern States. We may reap them elsewhere unless this servile tendency to flirt with a rampant nationalism is finally curbed.

I know, Mr. President, that the question of distinguishing between constructive and destructive nationalism is complicated by the persistence of the Arab-Israeli dispute. Perhaps the time has come to make clear, however, that as far as United States policy is concerned, we shall no longer permit ourselves to be stopped, by fear of a breakdown in this situation, from pursuing a constructive course in the Middle East. Perhaps the time has come to make clear that as far as the United States is concerned there
is going to be no going back in this situation. Those leaders in the region who look to an eventual solution of the Arab-Israeli dispute by force, with American acquiescence, do a disservice to their own people and to all the peoples of the world. They permit a disgraceful hatred to gnaw at their vitals and, in the end, they will not solve the problem. On the contrary, unless they come to grips with it soon, not only will they destroy the promise of a constructive nationalism for their own peoples, they will destroy it for all the peoples of the Middle East.

It is time to make clear once and for all that United States policy cannot and will not support the fantasy of some Arab leaders of eventually pushing Israel into the sea. Equally the policy of this nation cannot and will not support a fantasy of Israeli expansion at the expense of the Arab States. To permit the illusion to remain any longer that we may be drawn in time into the web of the one dream or the other serves no useful purpose. Perhaps it may put off the reckoning from today until tomorrow. In so doing, it may even help to create an illusion of peace, but it will not contribute to a durable vital peace in the Middle East.

What the United States can support, indeed, what we must support are international efforts to put at rest any genuine fears of aggression, Arab of Israeli or Israeli of Arab or, indeed, Arab of Arab. To that end, Mr. President, it seems to me high time for this country to take an initiative for peace. It seems to me high time to propose in the United Nations the extension of the United Nations Emergency Force to the borders of any country in the Middle East which is concerned with aggression from a neighbor and which asks for that safeguard. It is time, in short, to determine who is really afraid of war and who is really afraid of peace in the Middle East.
It is time, too, Mr. President, for this country to take the initiative in the United Nations and to call again upon Israel and the Arab States to end their state of belligerency. It is time to call upon them to meet face to face, to meet as honest men, as decent human beings and try to make at least the beginnings of a beginning on reducing the deep-seated bitterness between themselves, in their interest and in the interest of the world. If they do so meet, if they do make a beginning, then, whatever we or any other nation can reasonably do to bring stability between them should be done. It is time, in short, to see who seeks peace and who is afraid of peace in the Middle East.

Mr. President, in making these suggestions, I do not prejudge any nation, any leader, any position in the Middle East. I suggest only that, regardless of what has happened in the past, it is time for Middle Eastern nationalism to come of age, to recognize its responsibilities not only to itself but to all mankind.

By the same token, it is time for the policies of this country to come of age. It is time for these policies to cease playing the role of indulgent father to errant son. It is time to direct these policies strictly in support of those nations which work sincerely for peace, which make an unremitting effort to put the energies of nationalism into the building of peaceful, progressive and responsible States.

When these policies are so directed perhaps then, and only then, shall we be in a position to come to grips with Soviet penetration, as it may exacerbate the danger to peace in the Middle East. Perhaps then, we shall cease to waste hundreds of millions of dollars belonging to all Americans in seeking to safeguard the interests of particular Americans, in seeking to catch up with and to extirpate the elusive spector of communism as it flits from country to country, from the Maghreb to the Hindu Kush.
For, then, Mr. President, we shall be prepared to confront Soviet words of peace with acts of peace. We shall be prepared, as we ought to be prepared, to offer in the United Nations a proposal to establish an enforceable international control over the arms traffic in the Middle East.

And we shall be prepared to join with any nation with a stake in peace to assist the constructive forces of nationalism in the Middle East dealing with the ancient tyranny of starvation, disease, ignorance, and inhumanity. The world shall be able to see, then, and, only then, Mr. President, who talks peace and who means peace.