CHAPTER VIII

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CONCLUSIONS

Prior to the Second World War, US activities in West Asia were limited chiefly to those carried on by educators, missionaries and philanthropic groups. The Americans became conscious of the strategic importance of West Asian ports and airfields which safeguarded the Allied supply lines during World War II. After the War, the US sought to check Soviet influence in the region with the co-operation of Western allies and local Arabs. The international politics of oil made it imperative for the US to assume an active role in the area which in turn led to American involvement in the Palestine problem. President Truman, who was committed to the Zionist cause due to humanitarian and domestic political compulsions, played an effective role in the adoption of the Partition Resolution by the UN General Assembly on 29 November 1947. The US extended recognition to the new born State of Israel within minutes after the mandate ended on 14 May 1948.

In the initial stages, the Soviet Union feared that the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab State would help Britain consolidate its stronghold in West Asia. But when the Palestine problem was referred to the United

Nations, the Soviet Union withdrew its opposition to the partition proposal as it found it the easiest means of ending the British rule. It gave de jure recognition to the new born state of Israel on 18 May 1948. During the Palestine War, the Soviet Union supplied arms to Israel through Czechoslovakia. The Soviet help enabled Israel to emerge as a State and survive during the war.

Thus the super powers played a major role in the creation of the State of Israel. Communist arms purchased with US money enabled Israel to emerge as a State and repulse the Arab invasion during the First Palestine War. The Arabs blamed both the US and the Soviet Union for their respective roles in the creation and survival of the Jewish State of Israel.

After the emergence of Israel, two ideas dominated the American Foreign Policy-makers, namely, the containment of Soviet Union and the containment of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the Tripartite Declaration of 1950, the US aligned with Britain and France to maintain the security of the Middle East. The Soviet Union was deliberately denied any role in West Asia.

With the intensification of the cold war in West Asia, the Arab-Israeli conflict became part of the global rivalry between the two Super Powers. American efforts to forge anti-Soviet military alliances in the area led to the Soviet entry into West Asia. Due to close proximity of the

Arab East, the Soviet Union regarded the West-sponsored defence alliances as a Western plan to encircle it. The Czech-Egyptian arms deal paved the way for Soviet entry into the region and ushered in an era of super powers arms race in the region.

During the Suez crisis, the super powers co-operated with each other in the United Nations to bring about a cease-fire, as both powers for strategic and economic reasons wanted to strengthen their position in the area. The crisis also brought about the clash of ideologies and the cold war tradition of hostility between the super powers into the open. Due to conflict of interests and ideology, the US rejected the Soviet suggestion of taking joint military action against the aggressors. After the Suez crisis, while the Soviet Union emerged as the protector of Arab nationalism, the US emerged as the chief guardian of Western interests in West Asia. Ignoring the fact of the Soviet presence, the US came out with the Eisenhower Doctrine which reaffirmed the Tripartite Declaration and assured the Arabs of armed help to fight international communism. The US attempts to deny Soviet Union any role in any future peace arrangements in the region, aggravated the cold war in the Arab-East and led to an unprecedented arms race in the area.

Military preparations went on on an unprecedented scale in West Asia as neither of the super powers was willing to impose a workable peace in the area. The super powers

continued helping their clients in economic and military fields. Israel and Arab countries lost faith in the United Nations due to the partial attitude of the Super Powers towards Arab-Israeli problems. The activities of militant Palestine organisations led to Israeli retaliations which further aggravated the crisis. The withdrawal of UNEF and the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba in May 1967 threatened the very existence of the State of Israel. It worsened the already tense situation in the area and forced the Super Powers to devise means to avert the Arab-Israeli armed clash and avoid any direct involvement in it. While the American policy during the crisis period, which lead to the outbreak of armed hostilities reflected hesitancy and indecisiveness, the Soviet policy on the other hand showed a marked disinterest in exercising any restraining influence on its Arab clients who had the initial tactical advantage.

Once the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967 started, the foremost aim of the super powers was to restrict the crisis to a regional level and avoid direct involvement. The continuation of war for a longer duration could have forced the super powers into involvement on behalf of their respective 'proteges' which in turn could threaten world peace. A quick Israeli victory saved the US from an unpleasant situation of involvement in the war on Israel's behalf. During the war the aim of US diplomacy was to allow time to Israel to consolidate the position to her advantage. The Soviet policy was aimed at

saving the Arabs from a crushing defeat. The Soviet Union refused to be involved in the war in spite of the provocative Egyptian charge of US-British collusion. In the UN, the US foiled all Soviet attempts to get Israel branded as an "aggressor". The US forced Israel to agree to the Security Council ceasefire resolution on 10 June, only when the Soviet Union threatened to intervene in order to save Syria. The US did not honour its earlier commitments to safeguard the political and territorial integrity of all the States in the region, as Israel was the beneficiary of the war.

In the post-war period, while the US was not affected strategically or financially from the closure of the Suez Canal, it created difficulties for the mobility of Soviet fleets in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. While it was in the Soviet interest to demand return to the pre-war positions and convert the Arab military defeat into a diplomatic recovery, the US opted for allowing Israel to retain the Arab territories in order to secure a leverage in negotiating a final peace-settlement. To help the Arabs to recover their lost territory and military power, the Soviet Union opted for a policy of re-arming its Arab allies. But as the status quo helped Israel to maintain military superiority, the US called for an end to the arms race in the region. In order to avoid involvement in any future Arab-Israeli war, the US decided to keep the balance of power in Israel's favour.

In the UN, the super powers failed to secure the adoption of a resolution based on their declared positions.

The Soviet Union failed to win Arab acceptance for a compromise solution at the General Assembly. Finally, the US and the Soviet Union agreed to the British draft resolution (adopted on 22 November 1967 as resolution 242) in the Security Council as the basis for any future solution of the West Asian problem.

The Super Powers key interest in the region remained the avoidance of direct confrontation and the maintenance of detente without giving up influence in the region. The super powers throughout the crisis co-operated with each other to avoid direct confrontation in the local war. They cautioned the local powers "not to be the first to open fire" and settle the conflict by peaceful means. The joint efforts of super powers to contain the conflict reflected a keen desire on their parts to restrain them from initiating the war.

Once the war started, the super powers through mutual contacts assured each other to keep it at a local level. The use of "hot line" during the crisis represented the will of the Super Powers not to involve themselves in the regional war which did not affect their vital interests. The super powers reached an agreement on a compromise resolution in July 1967 but did not pursue it due to strong opposition from the Arabs. The super powers could not afford to enforce a joint agreement on the affected parties without the fear of losing their allies. They shared the common interest of restricting the war to a regional level, but worked separately to influence the

developments in the area to the advantage of their respective 'protegee'.

The West Asian crisis of 1967 brought about the following recurring patterns of behaviour amongst the involved parties in the conflict:

Firstly, there was a lack of control of super powers over the local powers; secondly, there was dependence of local powers on super powers for arms; thirdly, the super powers have the potential to end the war when it threatens their involvement; fourthly, the super powers' failure to look at the problem purely from an objective angle; fifthly, lack of will in finding a permanent solution; sixthly, lack of power to impose a solution on local powers; and lastly, any attempt to arrive at a final peace-agreement without the Soviet participation would further complicate the West Asian problem.

The crisis reflected the super powers' failure to control the outbreak of war as the actual decisions to launch the war and selections of their military and political targets were made by the regional powers independent of their super power patrons, and this brought into focus the lack of control of the super powers on decision-making by local powers on issues affecting the local powers and the ability of even the smallest country to defy the super powers in matters of vital national importance.

The super powers cannot be sure that the military resource transfer relationship will allow them to apply sufficiently effective sanctions to bring their clients back

into line. Any attempts to that end could breed distrust and resentment in bilateral relations and recipient states could retaliate and turn elsewhere for arms. The very threat to look elsewhere for arms has been frequently used as an effective means of deterring super powers from seeking to manipulate military supplies in this way. The 1967 crisis amply proved that US support may be essential for Israeli survival, but the US cannot prevent Israel from acting her own way. Similarly, it brought about the Soviet failure to prevent the Arabs from taking action on their own.

The crisis exposed the acute need of the regional powers for military resupplies during and after the crisis. It showed up the dependence of local powers on the super powers to fight any war. At the same time it indicated that the small powers take super powers support - both arms as well as diplomatic - for granted as they feel the dire need of super powers to protect their allies.

The super powers must refrain from encouraging the arms race, by ceasing to compete with one another in supplying arms to the region, in a struggle for influence, as large scale arms supplies have actually led to the outbreak of war. The supply of modern arms should be used by the super powers as levers to persuade the involved parties to give concessions to resolve the crisis in a peaceful manner.

The crisis also highlighted the super powers' potential by active intervention to pressurise their clients to

terminate war when it reaches a critical stage or threatens their direct involvement, as the super powers were not willing to involve themselves in any war not of their making. So long as the continuation of war did not seriously threaten them into direct involvement, the super powers refused to put pressure on their 'proteges' but the very threat of involvement forced them to pressurize their clients to terminate the armed action.

Crisis management by the super powers during the 1967 crisis was aimed at efforts to safeguard and promote the interests of their respective clients and secure a better presence for themselves. The super powers made parallel and separate efforts to restrain their clients and these were reinforced by mutual appeals and warnings amongst themselves to use their influence.

Whenever the super powers referred to "preserve balance of power between Arabs and Israel" what they meant was to keep balance heavily in favour of their respective clients. The super powers attitude has been partial and they have failed to look at the problem purely from an objective position. To provide a reliable basis for a permanent solution, they must press the local powers to abide by the principles and decisions of the UN. The super powers must co-operate with each other and make both the parties seek peaceful solutions to their differences.

The super power efforts during the whole crisis were directed at avoiding a major war in the immediate situation and not at settling the underlined roots of the crisis. Their contribution consisted mainly in avoiding their own involvements in the hostilities. In the pre-June situation, the super powers did not work to remove the immediate causes which created the situation. When the war started their aim was to keep it confined to a local level so as to avoid direct involvement. After the war, their aim was to increase their influence and not to remove the causes which were at the very roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The crisis highlighted the fact that the super powers have limited power to force a political settlement upon their respective clients. Any attempt on their part to force a political settlement (imposed solution) would not be acceptable to either the Arabs or the Israelis and will meet the fate of the 18-19 July 1967 super powers agreed formula to end the crisis. The super powers should commit formally to guarantee the security of Israel and the Arab states so that the involved parties are encouraged to make substantial concessions without any fear of endangering their security.

The crisis established the Soviet presence in the region. A lasting peace in the region is not likely to be achieved without a fundamental understanding between the two super powers - an undertaking that would -

(i) put an end to the arms race;

(ii) remove the area from the grip of the cold war; and

(iii) finally impress upon the local powers to make mutual concessions to break the deadlock.

An attempt to ignore the Soviet Union in the final peace agreement would lead to the danger of Soviet exploitation of such an American move to complicate the West Asian problem and prompt a new regional arms race. The Soviet Union definitely can be a potential trouble-maker if any attempt to deny it a role is made by the United States. Though the Soviet Union lacks the capacity for imposing its will on the local powers in West Asia, it possesses the means for obstructing any solution that completely excludes it. This is why a purely American solution cannot work.

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