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CLINTON AND THE MIDDLE EAST: DECISION-MAKING IN THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

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Minimal Washington Experience; Limited Ideology

This is a Democratic administration coming to Washington after twelve years of being out of the White House. It is a president and a presidency which thus far has brought to Washington only a small number of people with any Washington experience and, with exceptions, has chosen to use relatively few of the people in Washington with experience at the center of the process.

The Clinton administration entered office with no coherent view of the post-Cold War world and no overall conception of the foreign and national security policy essential for the post-Gulf War and post-Madrid Conference Middle East. Some potential elements were foreshadowed by the election campaign, but these were more general than specific and provided little significant insight into the pro-

spective Middle East policies of the Clinton administration. The dominant focus was on domestic issues, especially those relating to the economy, while foreign policy in general, and the Middle East in particular, was given little attention. However, Clinton pledged to guarantee loans for Israel to help settle Soviet Jews, to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, to oppose the creation of an independent Palestinian state, and to modify foreign aid programs to promote democracy (and Israel was identified as a democratic state). Clinton also made clear that he wanted to keep the peace process on track and to take whatever actions he could to ensure that there would be no break in continuity.

However, the framework of the Clinton campaign was domestic problems, focusing directly on two major issues: health care, and the combination

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of low productivity and high unemployment. Clinton believed, quite correctly, that George Bush did not understand that the main issue of concern to Americans was not foreign policy but domestic economics. This led to the two campaigns moving in opposite directions. Clinton tried to explain that the issue was economics. Bush never even bothered to try. Clinton's first speeches to the American people as president have been economic-oriented and he has told us nothing really about foreign policy, so it is in the framework of this economic focus that we must begin.

The new administration's approach also was conditioned by other factors. Unlike Bush, Clinton did not consider himself a foreign policy expert, nor did he show particular interest in those matters. His experience and background, and his perception of the need, was clearly oriented toward the domestic policy issues that had brought the country to its difficult position and helped to assure his election. And, unlike his candidates for domestic policy positions who generally were not part of the Washington establishment or of previous administrations, Clinton turned to Carter administration figures for the key positions of Secretary of State (Warren Christopher) and National Security Advisor (Anthony Lake). Neither had significant experience in dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict or with Iraq and the Persian Gulf sector, although the ouster of the Shah and the Iranian revolution were central concerns during the Carter tenure. Samuel Lewis, former Ambassador to Israel, was chosen by Christopher to head the Department of State's policy planning staff, and Martin Indyk, head of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and a former staff member of the pro-Israel American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), became a national security council staff member with Middle East responsibilities. Both came to office with a clear interest in issues affecting and background concerning Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Edward Djerejian, a career foreign service officer with expertise in the Arab world who had served as Ambassador to Syria, was retained as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.

The views of Clinton and of his working level group suggest a focus on the Arab-Israeli conflict and a desire to move the peace process to some resolution in 1993. Clinton has made clear his perception that the United States role "is to serve as an honest broker and, at times, as a catalyst." His working team seems to believe that an active role is needed for the success of the peace process, but also seems to concur in the view that Israel will make meaningful concessions only when

it is reassured of United States support. There is likely to be continuity in the existing process of negotiations and the United States will not devise a master plan, or seek to impose its own will or solution, believing that such an approach will not be successful, although Christopher has described the United States role as that of a "full partner." Consultation and coordination with Israel is likely to be a feature of the process, especially since Clinton has suggested that he will "treat the Arab-Israeli conflict as one in which the survival of Israel is at stake," and has made clear that the United States "must maintain our special commitment to our democratic partner, Israel, and its overall security."

A Campaign for Democracy?

Two foreign policy themes emerge from Clinton's campaign and the Democratic party platform. One is a focus on a rather amorphous something called "democracy." This will likely mean a focus on democracy as a theme without any real specifics as to what it means operationally.

Clinton's campaign stressed his desire to "encourage the consolidation and spread of democracy abroad." Should this emerge as a significant focus of foreign policy, as similar (human rights) themes did in the Carter tenure, it is important to note his characterization of Israel as a "democratic ally" whose survival has been at stake.

Perhaps every embassy will now contribute to a thick volume called "Democratic Practices in Countries of the World," along with the current volume on "Human Rights Practices," or perhaps they will merge the two together. Democracy may come to be used as a criterion for economic and military assistance. While all this remains unclear, there is no question that Clinton genuinely believes that countries that are called "democratic" are those with which the U.S. ought to be more aligned. That could be a useful conception if it does not fade from his world view and if Clinton can figure out some way to operationalize it and tie it to the other elements of foreign policy. The words are there, but there are no specifics and no guidance by the administration. Embassies have not been told what it is supposed to mean, however everyone realizes that there is a new thought out there called "democracy," though it is still quite imprecise.

Arms Control and the St. Louis Factor

A second theme arising from the Clinton administration relates to non-proliferation in the broad sense of the term, including nuclear, chemical and biological

weapons and missiles, as well as conventional weapons, though again there is no real precision as to what this will mean operationally. Clinton's view of the world is one in which the threat of nuclear weapons should not be widespread. The big powers are in the process of reducing their arsenals, and they want to prevent others from joining the circle of those who have such weapons. Chemical and biological capabilities must also be reduced, as well as the missile systems that have been developed worldwide which are capable of delivering these weapons of mass destruction. In this regard there will be a certain continuity with the Bush administration, at least rhetorically. Robert Gates, for example, in his final appearances as Director of the CIA, gave a series of presentations in November, December and early January that focused heavily on the problems of nuclear proliferation, singling out for special attention: Iran, Algeria, Iraq, Pakistan, and adding North Korea as the new troublemaker on the list. Conspicuously absent from the list was Israel, which never appears in any discussions of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction, although its nuclear capabilities have long been the subject of much speculation in the media.

The Bush administration defined arms control as one of the elements in its New World Order. The Arab-Israeli peace process has, as one of its elements, a multilateral seminar that focuses on arms control issues. But at the same time there is a new element in the American perception of arms control called "the St. Louis factor." It is fine in theory to talk about arms control, but the bottom line is spelled j-o-b-s, jobs. Close an aircraft manufacturing plant in St. Louis and 10,000 jobs go with it, or 12,000 jobs, or 40,000 jobs, depending upon how one counts. Clinton says there will be arms control, but on the other hand, we cannot forego the sales. Yet once we have made the sales, at least in the Middle East, there is the problem of maintaining Israel's qualitative edge, so Israel has to get more weapons as well. But that helps jobs too. A significant problem will be in the allocation of money to pay for all this.

The jobs factor is going to make it difficult for the U.S. to change its own arms sales policy for the sake of arms control because of the need for money and jobs. Yet when the United Arab Emirates announces a major decision to buy billions in arms from France, a different light is cast on the issue. The U.S. might not want arms control as long as it is going to be the seller, but it becomes more attractive if someone else is making the sale.

The United States would like arms control at the same time that it wants to sell arms and it will probably continue to make these sales, justifying them on defensive grounds. Therefore, we may expect continuing large arms sales to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, as well as transfers to Israel to maintain its qualitative edge.

Turning Inward After the Cold War

One other factor showed up during the course of the campaign involving a fairly standard American process. After America wins a war, Americans turn inward. We did it after World War I and again after World War II. We did it briefly after Korea and, of course, reacted passively to Vietnam. In effect, Americans are reacting similarly after "winning" the Cold War (although we are not quite sure how we won). In any event, each time Americans turn inward, sentiments grow to reduce foreign involvement, to cut back on economic and military assistance abroad, and to concentrate on promoting domestic activity.

Lawrence Eagleburger, acting as the Bush administration's last Secretary of State, sent a cable to every American ambassador reminding them that among his major functions was the task of chief commercial officer of the United States. This should not be dismissed as empty rhetoric. Rather, every embassy is now being reminded that the United States needs to do something similar to what the Japanese have been doing to focus on commercial activity. It was no accident that among the earliest meetings Clinton had was one with the Japanese.

The Clinton Approach to Decision-Making

The person who makes U.S. foreign policy is the president. The president's conceptions of what ought to be done and how are dominant. The president is now surrounded by Les Aspin, Warren Christopher, to a lesser extent Samuel Lewis, and Al Gore.

The decision-making process in the Clinton administration should be quite different than in the days of Bush and Baker. Christopher's connection to Clinton is very different from Baker's to Bush. They are not personal friends, foreign policy is not the main interest or concern of this president, and they are more than a generation apart.

Of all the appointments made so far by the new administration, those that are most reminiscent of the past are in foreign policy. Therefore, if we are looking for a whole new approach to foreign policy and security policy in Washington, we will not find it with Warren Christopher or Anthony Lake. They have provided

little in the way of a conceptual framework for foreign policy, despite earlier roles in the Carter administration.

America no longer has Bush or Baker but a president of the United States whose interest in foreign policy appears negligible. His knowledge of foreign policy is probably less than that, and his activity in foreign policy has been non-existent. Hillary Rodham Clinton, however, will definitely have an impact on decision-making, but her main focus will be health care issues. Nevertheless, many people who read problems into every word have already pointed to her connection with Third World institutes and other groups that have not been noted for their pro-Israel activities. But Hillary Rodham Clinton as well has no real record on the central themes of foreign policy and her interests are clearly domestic policy-oriented.

The critical people in Washington these days are the "FOBs," the friends of Bill. These are people who became connected to Clinton during his period as Governor of Arkansas and his days at Oxford. Their age is within a few years of Clinton himself and they have access to this president, many literally are only a phone call away. Others have been appointed to crucial jobs. Going through the list, Clinton's appointees are on both sides of Middle East issues, but the bottom line is that most of these people are FOBs for other reasons and have not focused on this region.

Strobe Talbot, for example, has been given a super ambassadorship in the State Department dealing with Soviet matters. He is the author of a famous *Time Magazine* essay: "What to Do about Israel," in which he focused on the negative aspects of Israeli policy and U.S.-Israel relations. But Talbot seems to be isolated from Middle East policy-making.

The critical question on personnel in foreign policy is going to be the working relationship between Clinton, Christopher, Lewis, and Edward Djerejian, who make up the State Department chain, and Clinton, Lake, and Indyk at the National Security Council. The likelihood is that the main person will be Christopher, not Lake, as we have seen so far. Clinton appears to regard the National Security Council as exactly what it was intended to be according to the National Security Act of 1947, to act as staff and coordinator for these kinds of issues.

A Pivotal Role for Sam Lewis?

Former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis, now Director of Policy Planning at the State Depart-

ment, was convinced that he would not be playing a role in the new administration. He was not interested and did not submit a resume. Christopher called Lewis the week before the inauguration and Lewis agreed to take the job. Since Lewis knows Israel and by extension knows the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East, he will be a major if not the major player. Certainly Djerejian's role will be limited, perhaps with Lewis focusing on Israeli-Arab affairs and Djerejian devoting his attention to everything else from Marakesh to Bangladesh.

Given his new key position in U.S. Middle East policy-making, it is important to learn about Sam Lewis's thinking. Although it is difficult to identify a particular source of his views, some of the elements are clear. Lewis believes strongly in the need to achieve an Arab-Israeli peace and that the United States should play a key role in which it must be represented by a senior individual empowered by the president and speaking for the president. On a daily basis, this should not be Christopher because the secretary of state has too many other things to worry about, especially in an administration where the president is not interested in such matters. Bush and Baker were both interested in foreign policy and so they empowered themselves. With Clinton and Christopher, the intensity of interest goes down one level.

Taking cognizance of domestic realities, Lewis holds the view that, with Israel, reassurance is more productive than pressure. In other words, an Israel that is safe and secure in its own mind is going to be more ready to make concessions than an Israel which feels that it has to worry about the arms balance in the region and other similar matters.

Lewis also believes that the irrational decision-makers have now left the Israeli government, having been replaced by a team of enthusiastic, positive compromisers with whom one can work. The U.S. role will be to get everybody to the table. Lewis's model to provide guarantees to Israel at the other end of the process is the multilateral force in Sinai and he envisions applying the procedure to the Golan Heights. He is not worrying now about the West Bank, which involves a different kind of negotiation. His preference is for a settlement on the Golan first and the West Bank second, since he views the Golan Heights problem as much simpler. This suggests an effort on an accord between Israel and Syria, albeit without abandoning the Palestinian (i.e., the West Bank) track.

Other Major Foreign Policy Players

Vice President Albert Gore is regarded as being very pro-Israel, but has played a limited role thus far. He will be more than a dutiful number two because he is the one who knows how Washington works, and is the one who can get the policies through Congress, but for the most part it is expected that those policies are going to involve domestic issues.

The new Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin, has a reputation for being positive on Israel. Looking at Aspin's recent record, it is clear that he does not want to focus on nuclear non-proliferation or arms control. He clearly understands that he must keep Saddam Hussein in check. He will try to avoid extensive involvement in Bosnia. Somalia is a humanitarian issue. He now must get the joint chiefs of staff to follow the policies of the secretary of defense. This, however, is not as simple as it sounds as there is discord among the chiefs on a number of issues, such as gays in the military and downsizing the military.

At this point Aspin does not seem like a critical player on the Middle East, although he will worry about the military balance. He is one of those who has used the term "qualitative edge" regularly. He is now reorganizing the Pentagon, a reorganization which occurs every third administration or so.

The National Security Council has not been a conspicuous player at this point; if it has played a major role in Middle East decisions thus far, that role cannot be fingerprinted. Anthony Lake has yet to form the conceptual framework for policy and little has been heard from Sandy Berger or Martin Indyk as well.

There are literally hundreds of jobs in the national security arena relating to foreign and defense policy of all ranks that are only slowly being filled. This is the slowest administration to fill its jobs in the past thirty years.

The Peace Process

As Clinton noted soon after his election victory, he wanted continued progress in the Middle East peace talks. The Clinton administration's policy was foreshadowed by the decision that Christopher's first foreign trip would be to the Middle East, primarily, but not solely, to see if he could reinvigorate and restart the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. Christopher prepared the way for his visit with a flurry of personal diplomacy to neutralize the obstacles to the peace process caused by the deportation of more than 400 Palestinians to Lebanon by Israel in December 1992. Christopher persuaded Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin

to agree to a complicated formula under which Israel would take back some of the deportees and then the Security Council would endorse the compromise and urge the Palestinians to return to the peace negotiations. The compromise provided insight into the new working relationship between the United States and Israel. It also demonstrated Christopher's skills at damage control and his ability to prevent foreign policy issues from diverting the president from his preferred focus on domestic matters.

Christopher's trip to the Middle East reflected no new or bold strategy on the peace process, nor any new substantive proposals to facilitate the negotiations, but rather an effort to meet and get to know the principal players and to seek to reinvigorate the process. He sought to establish personal relationships, to access the current state of play and the commitment of the parties to serious and continuous peace negotiations, and to make clear Washington's commitment to playing an active role in the revival of the talks and in their continuation.

Christopher's approach included the issuing of invitations together with the Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, for the ninth round of bilateral Arab-Israeli negotiations to be held in Washington in April 1993. There was no illusion that an imminent breakthrough on substantive matters would follow, but the process would be sustained.

Iraq and Iran

Among the immediate issues thrust upon Clinton was the need to contain, and to respond to aggressive actions by Saddam Hussein. This, in turn, raised the question of the coalitions's continuing role vis-a-vis Iraq. It also recalled the obvious — that no matter how much the president would prefer to concentrate elsewhere, crises in foreign policy require immediate responses. Although there is no particular reason for the United States to alter its policy and to be conciliatory to Saddam Hussein, there remains the ultimate question of the appropriate power relationships in the Gulf between and among the United States, Iraq, and Iran.

Iraq is an irritant but may, once again, become a significant threat. Iran poses a short term threat which may become more problematic over time should it continue to acquire advanced weapons systems and pursue its quest for nuclear-biological-chemical weapons systems.

Saddam Hussein will probe and test to determine the policy of the Clinton administration and there may

be a tendency to underestimate Clinton's position and vigor. Clinton has noted that he is different from Bush in that he is "not obsessed with" Saddam Hussein, but he endorsed the Bush efforts to ensure compliance with United Nations resolutions. Bush had personalized the relationship with Saddam Hussein; Clinton seems anxious to restore the relationship to the more normal one of state-to-state ties.

Iraq challenged the new president with the use of target-acquisition radar and by firing on United States and allied aircraft policing the no-fly zones. Saddam Hussein's initial challenges receded as the Clinton administration continued Bush administration policy of responding with military force to Iraqi violation of the United Nations resolutions. Clinton supported the Gulf War but argued that it should not have been necessary. The appeasement of Saddam Hussein was a dominant factor and Clinton vowed that his administration will not forge such strategic relationships with dangerous despotic regimes. Operationalizing the concept seemed elusive at the outset of his tenure. Clinton also criticized the immediate post-Gulf War policy of the Bush administration which allowed Saddam Hussein to attack the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south of Iraq. Clinton argued that the cease-fire and related United Nations resolutions should be enforced to prevent Saddam Hussein from taking advantage of the end of hostilities to promote unacceptable programs. The initial response of the Clinton administration was to reaffirm strong support for United Nations decisions and a continuity of policy to ensure Iraqi compliance with these resolutions.

The U.S. relationship with Iran appeared unlikely to undergo significant revision as long as Iran is perceived as a pariah state supporting the spread of the Islamic revolution and one that avoids altering its policies to become a positive player in the regional and international systems. Despite growing efforts in the United States to achieve an improvement in the United States-Iran relationship, expectations of an early breakthrough were dampened by policy statements and actions by both sides. Iran appeared to be awaiting a dramatic alteration in United States policy that was unlikely to occur, and the United States seems to be awaiting a matching of actions with the rhetoric of moderation from Iran, that was deemed by the administration to be illusory.

Terrorism and Islamic Fundamentalism

Terrorism is going to continue to be considered a relatively minor irritant from the point of view of U.S.

policy. The U.S. spends substantial sums of money on diplomatic security and that will continue, especially given the World Trade Center episode.

The U.S. has not yet figured out how to respond to Islamic fundamentalism, but a definitive view was Djerejian's speech last June where he made clear that the U.S. has nothing against Islam as long as it does not manifest itself in terrorism or in counter-democratic activity. Numerous Arab and Muslim world experts in the U.S. government and in academia argue that Islam is not a threat or that the threat comes from those who pervert Islam. The catch phrase here will be "the perversion of Islam" as the threat to the U.S. In either event, the related issues of terrorism and Islam's extremism have not been clearly focused on as a central policy theme.

Continuing Dependence on Middle East Oil

America's interests are going to continue to be affected in the future by oil. There has been much talk about an energy tax. Ross Perot wanted it to be fifty cents a gallon. The U.S. remains the world's largest oil consumer, using a quarter of the world's total daily production. Yet the United States has less than 10 percent of known oil reserves, with most of the world's reserves held by the countries of the Persian Gulf. Under the most optimistic energy scenarios of the Bush and Clinton administrations, by the year 2000 the U.S. will *only* be importing 43 percent of the oil it uses, largely from the Arab world.

If the Straits of Hormuz are closed at the entrance to the Persian Gulf, there is not sufficient oil produced elsewhere each day to meet the demands of all the world's oil consumers. There would be competition and rivalry over the oil, and problematic price rises. Unless there are energy alternatives, the United States interest in the Middle East is going to be to protect that flow of oil. America needs to dramatically reduce its dependence on oil, and especially Middle East oil. That is the major Middle East issue most likely to impact on U.S. decision-making and policy.

Israel and Washington

With Israel there is going to be a continuation of previous patterns, but Israel never was considered a strategic asset in the minds of most U.S. decision-makers. Only when the president says not to ignore it does Israel have strategic utility. The domestic political factor will continue to be very important, with groups like AIPAC and the Conference of Presidents continuing to matter very seriously in Washington.

The political side has never determined the policy. It has just made the existing elements of policy work operationally. Aid to Israel is not provided because AIPAC is successful. Aid is provided because AIPAC functions in an environment of shared values and strategic utility which are the bases of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Despite all the arguments to the contrary, it appears that support for Israel in Congress remains as strong as it was before. With all that happened in the elections, with the loss of Solarz, Smith, Cranston and Kasten, the Jewish proportion of Congress is the same in the House of Representatives, with a *minyan* in the Senate for the first time. While initial indicators are fairly positive, the problem is a loss of seniority and political skill.

Israel should be emphasizing that it fits into the president's conception of a democratic country that ought not only to exist but be supported. Some Arab spokesmen and lobbyists sought to convince the Clinton transition team to alter its position by producing a policy paper charging that Israel was not a democratic country, that the Israeli Arabs and the Arabs in the territories were being badly mistreated, and in their arguments liberally used comparisons between Israelis and Nazis. Therefore, it becomes very important to remind everyone just what Israel is and what it has done; to accentuate the positive. That is not as easy as it sounds because Israel's image has been eroded, partly because of its own actions, partly because of the media, and partly because of poor information work by Israeli embassies.

It is also very important to reinforce the view of the asymmetries of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Clinton has argued that Israel was never a country to attack its neighbors. It was always on the receiving end of conflict and we ought to remind people that there is a difference. The Israel we want discussed is a besieged Israel, not one that invades Lebanon.

In 1977-78 Anwar Sadat stood up and said "I want peace." He stopped after the third word and everyone understood he wanted peace. Menachem Begin said, "I want peace but..." and then came the conditions and limitations, for very good reason. However, when the public opinion polls were taken, Sadat was seen as a man of peace and Begin was not. That image has not yet been fully corrected. It is time for Israel to reassert the positive in what it is prepared to do and not be on the defensive.

Seeking a New Framework for U.S. Foreign Policy

The Cold War with the Soviet Union was the framework for 45 years of American foreign policy worldwide. Now the Soviet Union has disappeared and Russia, Ukraine, etc., have replaced it. Russia retains the official title of co-convenor of the Middle East peace talks. The U.S. consults with Russia regularly and relations continue to fit what may be called the Kissinger concept. During the 1974 disengagement agreements between Israel, Egypt and Syria, Kissinger shuttled between all the capitals. Somewhere along the line he would meet with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and they would issue a joint policy statement. The Soviets were kept informed but were not really involved.

The same pattern is happening today. Russia continues to get the honor it seeks, to go down in the history books as co-equal, but it is not really a player in substance. Where it is a player is in the weapons systems it is going to sell. The Russians continue to be given the honors because that keeps them out of trouble, but they are no more than equal today to many other players. Russia is a Third World superpower, with perhaps even less weight than France, Britain, Germany or Italy. It is more on the order of Spain or Portugal but with a nuclear capability.

In some respects, the first glimpses of Clinton's foreign policy may seem a retreat paradigm of Carter's, based on the human rights factor, the nuclear proliferation issue, and some of the same people. However, most of the new administration's professionals are very different. They are a new generation of professionals who know Israel a lot better than those of Carter's tenure and this can only be a plus for U.S.-Israeli understanding.

We should always remember that ultimate decisions will be made by Clinton, who has gone out of his way to distance himself from Carter's foreign policy ideas and even some of Carter's people. Christopher is the most senior one, but he is balanced out by Aspin, who will be the more energetic and influential on national security issues. Some of the conceptions of the Carter era are the same, some of the people are the same, but the conditions are very different.

There has been no parallel to Sadat's saying "no more war." No other Arab leader of consequence has stood up and said the same thing. For example, Hafez al-Assad has not said "I am ready to come to Jerusalem to talk peace." That will make it more difficult to

develop a parallel framework. And there is no indication thus far that anyone in the Clinton administration wants to get as directly involved as Carter and his team were. In the long run, I suspect we are going to find that the Clinton administration will be among the more positive, not among the more problematic, for Israel. It is not going to be like Carter or like Bush.

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