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Will There Be a War in the Middle East?, 1965.

#146
WILL THERE BE A WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

The Temple
April 25, 1965

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

You may recall that some eight months ago I spoke to you on this same theme, "Will There Be a War in the Middle East?" In January of 1964, thirteen Arab chiefs of state came to Cairo for a Pan-Arab Summit Conference. The result of that Conference was the threat that if Israel turned on the tap of its Jordan Valley Water Diversion Project, the Arab states would launch an all-out attack. The tap was turned on and there was no war. Many began to say that the era of Arab belligerency was over--that now was the time to begin again to do business, to sell arms and to give aid. I was concerned in October with the prevailing feeling that President Nasser and dictator Hafiz of Syria and King Hussein of Jordan had given up their favorite ultimate solution to what they delight to call, the Israel problem. It was being suggested in our State Department and in leading journals of international affairs that the bluster of the Summit Conference had been largely for domestic political consumption. The Arabs had not meant what they said. Here was the proof; there had not been an attack. This argument was being offered wherever men wished to explain our policy of sending military equipment to Jordan and Lebanon, two of the signators to the Summit Conference agreement; wherever people wanted to explain and exculpate our continuing aid to General Nasser, in the form of wheat and other foodstuffs; wherever man wanted to excuse and to explain our unwillingness to sell arms to Israel or to enter into any definite treaty with that lonely democracy.

In the late summer of 1964, a second Summit Conference was held in Cairo with the same principals. Again, there was no war. Again, voices were heard in the land saying: the Near East is moving, as the world itself has been moving, toward a detente. The Arabs had rejected war as an instrument of policy. As a matter of fact, so it was argued, this Summit Conference was not called for its announced purpose, to organize and plan the final battle that is designed to erase Israel from the face of the globe; rather this conference provided a cover behind which the various Arab chiefs of state could adjust and arrange their bloody internecine squabbles. True it is that the fabric of the Arab world is badly frayed. Saudi Arabia and Egypt are locked in a gruelling and bloody war in the Yemen. King Hussein has just foiled a Nasserite plot on his own life. Algeria and Tunisia are sniping at each other across their Saharan frontiers. Even the erstwhile partners in the United Arab Republics, Syria and Egypt, are engaged in a bitter ideological struggle.

Diplomats who are trained to look behind and around are sometimes so artful and subtle that they fail to see what is clear and undenied. The Arabs never disguised the purpose of either Summit Conference. They were designed for a single activity, to plan, to project, and to effect the final war of liberation, by which they mean a war which is to drive Israel into the sea.

Why was there no war? The absence of war was not a statement of political maturity or of a change of heart. Rather, it was a tribute to Arab military realism. Simply put, 1964 was an inconvenient moment to launch the attack.

Two years before, General Nasser had promoted a civil war in the Yemen similar to other revolutionary wars he has encouraged throughout the Middle

East. Nasser had sent in his troops early on in the war as a military exercise. He would use the Yemen much as the Fascists had used the Civil War in Spain, to test out his armor for the real battle, the ultimate clash. Unfortunately for Nasser, the Saudi-Arabian government rallied to the side of the Imam of Yemen and the war escalated until one-third of Nasser's effectives were tied down in this rugged, high and dry land. Syria was just recovering from one of her endemic military coups. The Jordanian throne was, as usual, jittery. General Nasser could not afford another Suez defeat. Even in his own nation his political image has begun to tarnish. There was the three-year debacle in the Yemen. There has been inflation, financial crises, and scarcity in Egypt. Egypt has had to purchase gold abroad. Egypt today must purchase three-quarters of its food requirements on the foreign market. Nasser has not been able to make good his revolutionary promises to his own citizens to improve their standard of living. Nasser could not afford another setback. He had to bide his time. This time he must plan carefully. This time he must make sure. So this Arab Conference in January, 1964, was followed not by war but by a series of staff conferences designed to lay the groundwork for the ultimate attack. Nasser made no bones about it. In the call to the Conference he said, "maybe this month, maybe this year, or it may be in the next year, but the war will be." And though many in Washington and London preferred to interpret such pronouncements as propaganda designed for internal Arab consumption, in point of fact each of the items on his agenda is being effected. The Egyptian General Ali-Ali Amer is the commander in chief of this Palestine Liberation force which coordinates the armies of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. Their officers have come together at a war college in Cairo where they are revising final plans for battle. General Amer and his aides have inspected

the entire Israeli-Arab frontier and have worked out plans to strengthen these defenses. Plans are underway to standardize equipment among these four armies. Russia, which continues to play the provocateur, has, as you know, in the last four years shipped more than a billion dollars worth of arms to Egypt. Six months ago, in order to speed up the standardization of the Arab armies' equipment, Russia signed a quarter of a billion dollars arms agreement with Syria. Little by little the plans move ahead.

Some months ago the United States government tried to bribe the two small nations of this quadrumvirate, Lebanon and Jordan, to withdraw from this compact. Our bribe was offered in terms of weapons. We would provide plans and tanks and artillery, if they would reject Russian arms and Egyptian officers. The Arab response was clear and quick. Within a matter of weeks, Egypt trumpeted that she had concluded a treaty with Lebanon permitting the establishment of an Egyptian army base on Lebanese soil--the first time this military presence has been permitted. King Hussein, who for a long time has been a puppet dependent of Washington, was forced to announce publicly what he had never announced before, that General Amer was indeed the commander-in-chief of the Liberation force. He was forced to rescind the exile and the imprisonment of the Nasserite politicians who had plotted against his life. He was forced even to revise the laws of succession to the throne, so that a younger brother of his, Prince Hassan, who is pro-Egypt, is now his heir.

The Arabs mean business and for this piece of business they have brought into being a new political entity, a paper state - a so-called Palestine Government in Exile. Its citizens are presumably the restless and impoverished ex-Palestinians, the so-called refugees. The purpose of this government is to confuse world public opinion so that there can be an

Egyptian puppet who will put out the claims of these refugees to repatriation, to land, and to compensation. General Nasser appointed as president of this paper state, an old-time, professional saboteur, a manager of earlier Palestine riots and a long-time admirer and friend of Adolph Hitler, Ahmed Sukhari. Sukhari has been empowered to organize commando and sabotage raids deep within Israel territory. During the winter and spring of this year, for the first time in nine years, these raids have been, in fact, carried on. Though most of these missions have been aborted at the Israel frontiers, it is clear that these are to be provocative and damaging and to continue. Not only is this new paper state, this puppet government, to play a military role, the Arabs hope that it will play a crucial political role in the final attack. The Arabs expect to say to the chancellories of the world; 'Yes, you have spoken to us often of the integrity of frontiers in the Middle East. But these men are not crossing frontiers, they are simply returning to their own land and taking back what is theirs.' Time will be gained. Israel must defend herself and at the appropriate moment the Egyptian army with the Soviet weapons; the Syrian army with Soviet weapons, and the Jordanian and Lebanese armies with American weapons, will go into action. The Arabs mean business. They mean to provoke, if they can, Israel to an attack.

In June 1964, the Arabs stated at their summer conference, that there would be war if Israel went ahead and drew waters from the Jordan to the parched lands of the Negev. I think the issue here must be kept clear. The Jordan is the key to the fertility of the lands to the East and to the west. These are parched dessicated lands badly in need of irrigation. The Jordan's potential usefulness has been known for many years. In 1954, President Eisenhower, seeking to find some overall solution to the problems

in the Near East to which all could agree, sent Ambassador Johnston to this area. Ambassador Johnston arranged a Water-Allocations Treaty, which was initialed by the hydraulic engineers and the agronomists of all the affected nations. This treaty set up quotas, how much water each of these nations could draw from this vast water shed. Later the Arab chiefs-of-state refused to ratify this treaty. They will not sign any treaty which must be co-signed by Israel. This would admit that Israel is in existence. But the United States chose to go ahead as if this treaty, in fact, were binding. American engineers and American money, built in Jordan a major irrigation work, the so-called East Ghor canal. American engineers and American money is at the moment engaged in the Jordan in building another such irrigation project, the West Ghor canal. Both of these projects have been engineered within the terms of the Water Allocation Treaty Agreement of 1954. Seeing Jordan with American support proceeding with such projects, Israel naturally went ahead with its own. The Jordan Valley Water Carrier is designed entirely within the terms of the treaty of 1958. Israel knows that, as she draws water and irrigates her land and as Jordan draws water and irrigates hers the standard of living of the entire near East will rise, stability may come to the area, and in stability there is a chance for peace.

The water projects which the Arabs announced at their Summit Conference have nothing to do with the flowering of the land. These projects are designed simply to dam up the waters so that they will never reach Israel. The headwaters of the Hashbani and the Nawam in Syria and in the Lebanon are to be turned from east to west so their waters will flow uselessly into the salt of the Mediterranean Sea. These projects are already afoot. The oil-rich kingdom of Kuwait has promised Jordan 33 millions to begin the big coffer dam at Muawiba on the Yarmuk only two miles from the Israel

frontier. A similar sum has been given by Kuwait to Syria and the Lebanon, to begin their coffer dams and storage basins. Dredges and caterpillar tractors and road-widening equipment and men are even now in the field. Washington chose to see the statements of January and June of 1964 as paper threats. They were meant as policy, and this policy is now being translated into reality.

Let there be no mistake about it. The Arabs have never abandoned their announced purpose of destroying Israel, of erasing the people of Israel from the land, and of destroying all that we have built these past years in that part of the world. The Arab draws upon his own religious tradition to explain his revenge. This is Yihad, the ancient, to the death, vengeance of the Bedouin. During the election campaign of 1965, when Nasser ran, unopposed for the Presidency of the Egyptian nation, he promised time and again to the cheering throngs: "We will not enter Palestine on a red carpet. We will enter on a river of blood." Just a week ago the dictator of Syria, Mr. Hafiz, told a group of visiting diplomats, "the war in Palestine is far nearer than you might think." Two weeks ago a strange meeting of Nasserite fellow travelers, ex-Nazis, British anti-Semites, and bought Western diplomats convened in Cairo. The high point of this conference was the appearance of our old friend Ahmed Suhari, in full battle dress, guns slung across his shoulder. He announced to thunderous applause, "I am ready for battle. We will march, and we will march soon." The Arab intention is clear and Israeli's response is equally clear. Israel must defend its rights and the rights of its citizens and its right to survival. Israel has all along announced its willingness to sit down and negotiate any outstanding dispute. Israel, has all along announced its willingness to allow any water irrigation project to proceed within the terms of the

1954 agreement, provided that the project is designed for the well-being of the entire area. What Israel objects to is not the dams but the damnable purpose to which the new projects have been launched. Israel must, as every nation must, look to its survival.

How is that survival to be assured? In the first place Israel must have an army which has sufficient fire power to counter the sophisticated Russian weapons which are now in the hands of the Egyptians and Syrians and of their allies. Russia has poured one billion dollars worth of the latest military equipment into the Egyptian hands in the past three years. The Austrian and the German scientists now so busy in Egypt, have built for Nasser an arsenal of rockets and missiles capable of hurling gas, and yes, even an atomic warhead against the State of Israel. Israel has long been concerned with her defense. She has a strong army. This was proven in 1948 and again in 1956. The people are prepared, if need be, to fight and die. Today war requires the weapons of war, and the weapons of war are increasingly complicated and intricate, and they must be bought from the great nations. The increasing arms imbalance was a matter of concern some four years ago when President Kennedy allowed Israel to buy Hawk ground-air missile in the United States. That was the first and only occasion on which our government has allowed Israel to purchase arms directly in this nation. Over the past two or three years the American government has allowed our allies to sell ex-NATO weapons to Israel. Recall that the German-Israel Arm Purchase Agreement which exploded some weeks ago and then was put back together again, was negotiated not in Bonn nor in Jerusalem, but in Washington. In other words, the American government has understood that the balance of arms in the Middle East is running against Israel. Our Intelligence agents cannot but know that Nasser today has more war planes

and more heavy tanks, than the combined inventory of the Allied and the Axis armies during the African campaign of the second World War. Israel needs arms. The emphatic reaction of Israel to the German cancellation of the arms purchase agreement was a testimony to the urgency of Israel's needs. Apparently Bonn now has agreed to complete the sale of tanks originally contemplated. But this is not enough. Just two weeks ago the Soviet Union signed another Arms Purchase Agreement with Egypt in which the USSR guaranteed to provide Egypt during the next 18 months another quarter of a billion dollars worth of modern armaments.

Israel's little army will require continuous strengthening and Israel has turned to the United States with the appeal that the United States sell the necessary weapons directly to her. But Washington has hesitated, dragged its feet and has so far been unwilling to do so. Israel faces then a steadily deteriorating arms imbalance. The second greatest power in the world, the Soviet Union, is actively supporting Israel's two greatest enemies. The greatest power in the world is not yet actively supporting Israel.

Israel must protect her defense and she must protect her water, for in the Middle East water is the stuff of life. If the land becomes parched, if the harvest rots, the desert takes over the sown and all that you have built and planned for and dreamed for, is erased. Many months ago Premier Eshkol said it this way "The waters of the Jordan are as dear to us as the blood that courses in our veins, and to protect this water we must take appropriate action." Now the Arabs in their current program are gambling on American reaction. They are gambling that America will tell Israel "you may not take deterrant action against these dams, that would be aggression. We cannot tolerate aggression." So far, let it be said, American reaction has been entirely what the Arabs predicted. Three months

ago when Ambassador Averill Harriman was uprooted from a Palm Springs vacation and rushed off to the Near East after the Bonn thing blew up, he told the Israeli government in no uncertain terms that the American government would not tolerate aggressive action by Israel to break up these damnable water projects and that the American government insisted that before any action were undertaken, we must be consulted. The American government held that no action might legitimately be taken until it could be proven that the Arabs were diverting from the Jordan more waters than they had been allocated in the agreement of 1954. In brief, America was saying to Israel: 'prove that no less water reaches your land and then perhaps, after consultation and negotiation, we will allow you to take some action to defend your rights. Israel perforced wonders at this holier-than-thou policy of our American government. It stands in shattering contrast to our aggressiveness in defense of our rights in South Viet Nam, and elsewhere. Israel, is, in fact, told to sit idly by and watch its own execution. Oh yes, there is a carrot at the end of the stick. The American government has told Israel, 'after all we are building together a water desalination project. By the time, two years from now, three years from now, that the Arab dams are built, our desalination project ought to be in operation and you will have a new source of water. But even if this desalination plant is in being, why should Israel be deprived of its legitimate rights in the Jordan Valley? Further, there is no guarantee that the desalination project will be effective; that it can be constructed within the time predicted; that, in fact, it will be constructed at all. The first feasibility studies on this project are being run and, already, it is clear that it will require not the 50 millions of dollars originally contemplated, but a quarter of a billion dollars. It is clear that it will not require three years but a minimum of six. And it is

clear that the water which it will produce will cost Israel approximately 15 to 16¢ per cubic meter which makes this water prohibitive for agricultural or for industrial use.

Israel looks upon the American proposal very much as we look upon the proposals of some of those who argue against various methods of birth control and say to us that by the time our globe is so full of people that no one can move about, we will have perfected interplanetary travel so that we can shoot off the extra population to the moon or Mars.

Israel has tried to understand the basis of American policy. Insofar as this policy is understandable, it seems to rest on an old proposition announced a decade ago by Secretary Dulles, and that proposition is, believe it or not, that Mr. Nasser is a bulwark against Communism in the Middle East. This is the thread that runs constantly through our American approach to affairs in this part of the world. We look upon Nasser as one of the key figures in our cold war battle, Israel is aghast and wonders how blind America can be. Nasser, far from being a deterrent to Communism, seems to be the man who is welcoming the Russians and the Communists presence in the Middle East. Cairo is the port of entry for Communist officers and Communist observers for Africa and the Middle East. During the last five years Egypt has taken the Communists line at every international convention. The Communists want us out of our giant air force base at Wheeler in Lybia and the Egyptians have brought pressure against the Lybian monarchy to force us out. Russia would like to have the British out of the oil protectorate of Aden and so Nasser has provided troops and men for guerrilla action against the British. Russia is opposed to the United Nations settlement in the Congo. The Egyptians have trans-shipped Russian arms to the Congo rebels

and have seen to it that they were delivered. And if you listen, as some do listen to Radio Cairo, you will find that it is far more vitriolic and vehement about American war mongering and American colonialism and American cruelty than even Radio Moscow. Israel fails to understand how America can look upon Nasser as anything but an arch foe. Communism enters an area when it is in turmoil. Nasser saboteurs have been found in Iran, undermining a pro-Western government, in Turkey, undermining a pro-Western government, in Tunisia, undermining a pro-Western government, in Ethiopia, undermining a pro-Western government, in Pakistan, undermining a pro-Western government; indeed, wherever money and weapons can buy assassination.

Why does Israel believe that the image of Nasser as a deterrant to Communism still preoccupies our State Department? Israel knows that when Nasser was criticized by Washington for his actions in the Yemen and in Ethiopia and in the Sudan and in Libya and in the Congo, and when he told the United States that if we didn't like the burning of our libraries and of our missions, we could go jump into the Mediterranean the Senate of the United States, expressing outrage of the American people voted almost unanimously to cancel any further aid to Egypt; and that the State Department interfered and forced a rescinding of this Senate resolution. Israel knows that just two weeks ago our Under Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Mr. Phillip Talbot, was in Cairo, and the day after his departure, by obvious pre-arrangement, Cairo submitted to Washington a new request for 500 millions of dollars worth of foodstuffs and Israel is quite convinced that the State Department will see to it that it is granted.

Four months ago, the second in command of Egypt's Central Intelligence Agency, fled to the West, to Iran. When he was questioned by the Iranian

and Western diplomats he gave them proof that the Egyptians had been re-shipping the wheat, which we have sent to other nations, where it is sold for cash. Nasser then uses this cash to buy arms for war in Yemen and for the ultimate war against Israel. It has been patently clear to all of us that as we ship hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of wheat and of other foodstuffs, Nasser is simply taking this item out of his domestic budget and transferring the free coin to his military budget. In effect, food aid, though it seems on the surface to be passive enough, increases Nasser's ability to wage war. Israel wonders that after all of this past history, we continue to support this megalomaniac. Yet we do. By our statements to Israel in regards to possible deterrent attack against the dams being built, we have gone further for we have thrown a shield of American protection over the caterpillar tractors and the dredges and the working men who are building the cement piles which ultimately spell Israel's destruction. Israel wonders also because Israel knows that over the past dozen or so years America has generously supported her undertakings. Israel is grateful for that generosity. Israel knows that every American government since the second World War has been sympathetic and friendly to her survival as every American government has known Israel as the only sturdy and dependable ally which we have in that part of the world. Israel is grateful. Israel cannot help but wonder that our policy is so hesitant, so unclear, so tortured. That we continue to send guns and tanks to countries pledged to the destruction of a friendly democracy and that we continue to support the megalomaniac whose energy and appetite is the cause of so much of the unrest and the upheaval in our world.

Will there be war in the Middle East? The Arabs are determined on it. Israel alone cannot prevent war. Israel can defend her rights but she cannot

enforce peace. Russia is playing a devil's game in the Middle East. She is the provocateur. She cannot be counted on to stabilize the area, and therefore, as so often in recent history, the fate of the Middle East rests upon the leadership of the Western world, upon our own nation, and ultimately upon our own President. Mr. Johnson has a long and honorable history of concern with and of understanding of Israel and her place in history, but unfortunately, Mr. Johnson also has a pension for maneuvering, for wheeling and dealing. So much of the confusion of the past year has been created because American ambassadors have carried individual messages to this or that leader, proposing this or that and the leaders of these nations have read these proposals to suit their convenience.

What is required in the Middle East? Simply this! A clear reiteration of American policy. Since 1954 Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson, all three, have spoken of the need to guarantee the boundaries in the Middle East. Now we need to go a bit further. We need to express our understanding of Israel's legitimate right to take such action as she deems necessary to protect her survival. If this means a bombing attack, Washington must at least know that Israel covets no territory. What needs to be stated now is simply this. That the United States will not tolerate any devious or direct action by the Arab world against Israel. That we will support Israel militarily and politically, if need be, in an emergency. This being clear, victory is not worth the price to the Arab states. You cannot bribe a criminal not to his crime. Weapons, water projects, desalination projects, all manner of aid, cannot buy peace in the Middle East. The only way to establish peace in this tortured place is by a clear, no nonsense commitment on the part of the Western nations, especially on the part of our own nation, to the survival of Israel. Will this come about? We can only pray that it will.

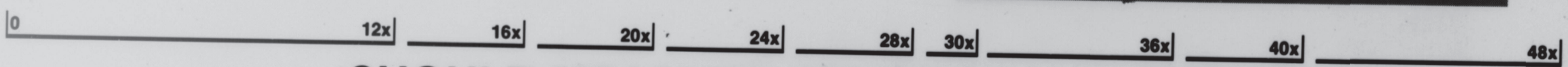
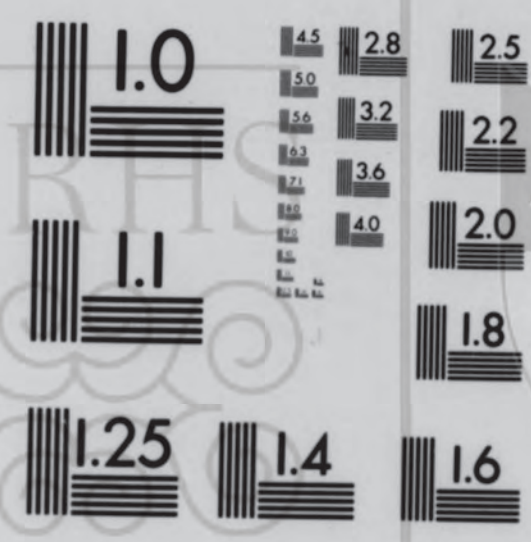
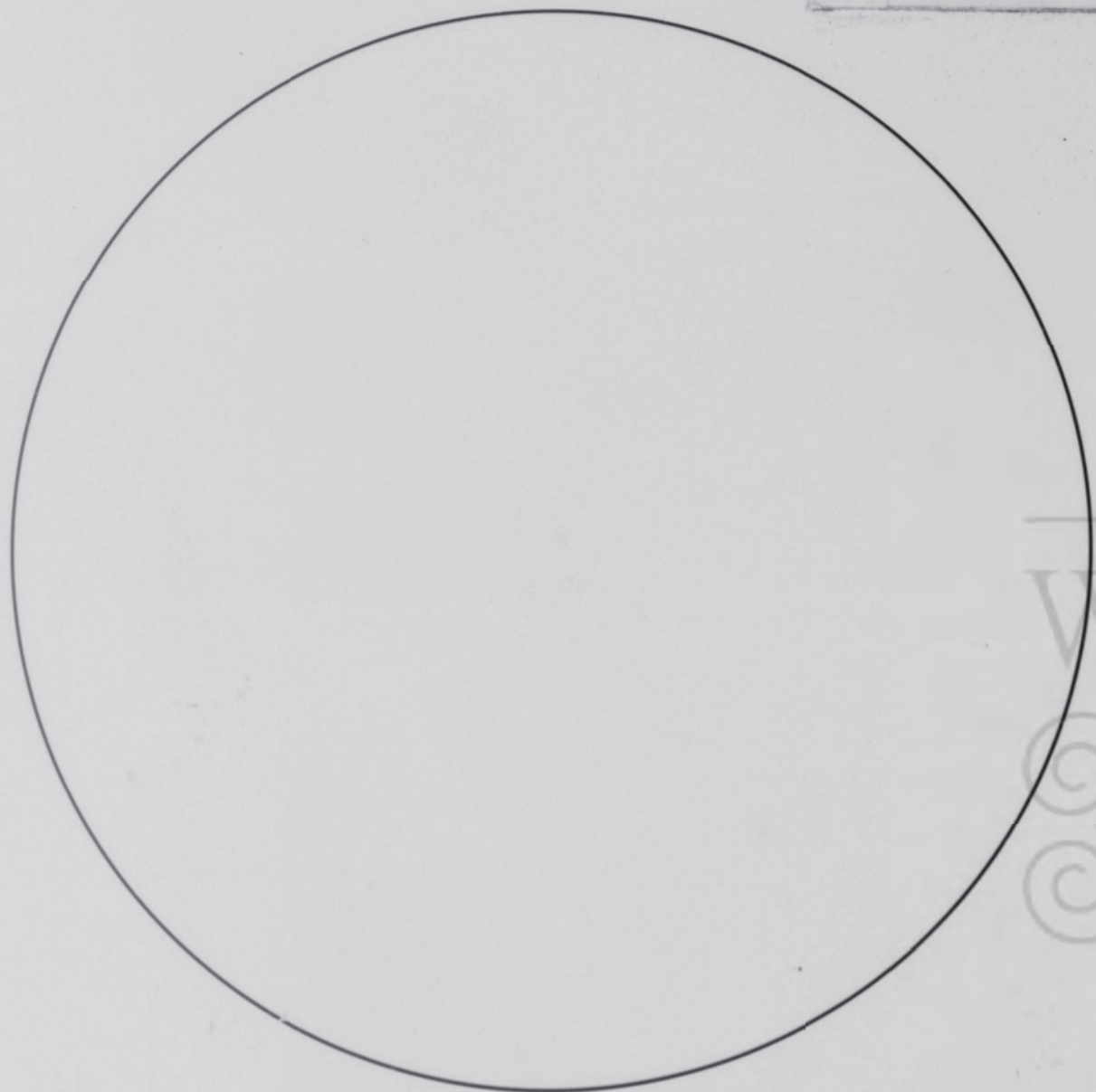
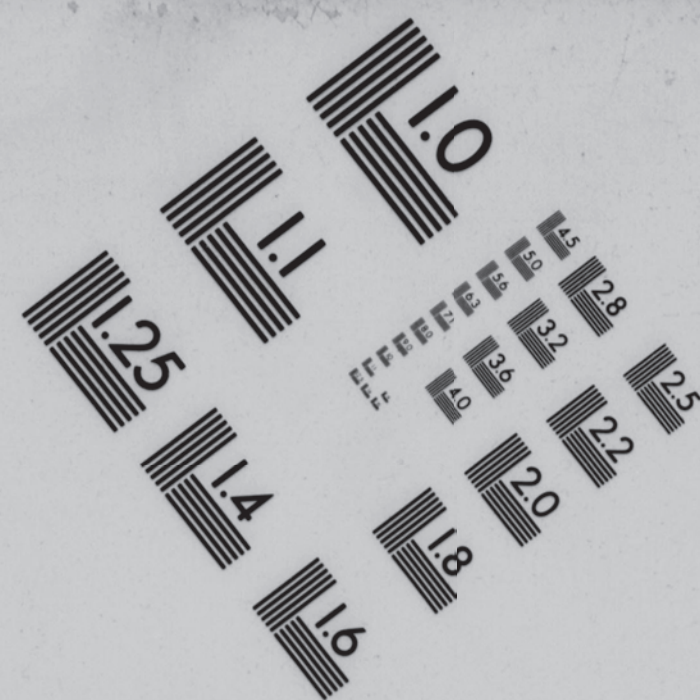
Washington, these past months, has maneuvered in all directions and often at cross-purposes, Washington has, in effect, in these last months moved to Israel's detriment. She has thrown a shield of protection around the water diversion project of the Arabs. She has said to Israel, "thou shalt not be an aggressor", but she has been unwilling to say to the provocateur, to those who have the knife at the jugular vein, "thou must desist". We have tried to buy off Jordan and Lebanon, we have not been successful. We continue, apparently, to believe that Nasser can be controlled, can be house-broken, if you will, and there is no reason to believe that this can, in fact be. To be sure we have allowed our allies to sell some arms to Israel. We continue to speak in most friendly terms to Israel, and we are, essentially, friends and allies, but we have not cut to the core of the matter. Which is simply this. The Near East must be stabilized and the stability will come only when the Arabs are convinced that they cannot achieve their end, that America will not tolerate it.

Will there be peace in the Middle East? Let us pray that there will be.

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