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Can There Be Peace in the Middle East, City Club Forum, 1983.

Can There Be Peace In The Middle East?

City Club Forum

Daniel Jeremy Silver

December 23, 1983

The other day I came across a child in our Nursery School busily crayoning. I asked her what she was drawing. She said: "God." I said: "No one knows what God looks like." She looked me straight in the eye and said: "After I'm through they will."

Anyone who presumes to think that after I'm through they will know whether there can be peace in the Middle East or how peace can be achieved in the Middle East will be disappointed. No one knows, neither the protagonists in the area nor the diplomats in the various ministries of the world. The Middle East is a cauldron. The Middle East is going through the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, the Technological Revolution, and the Information Revolution all at once; and it has a long way to go before it achieves stability. Many of the countries in the Middle East are in the same relative place in their evolution that Christian Europe was in at the beginning of the Hundred Years War. They are trying to sort themselves out and they are caught up in any number of bitter internecine quarrels. Time, and time alone, will bring a degree of stability to the Middle East. The best one can do, I think, is to take a narrow look at one of the problems of the Middle East and to extrapolate from that issue some approaches which may be generally useful. That's what I'd like to try and do with you this morning.

I will concentrate on the Lebanon. Let me begin by asking the questions we've all been asking to see whether the answers we've been getting satisfy us. If they do not, what ought to be our American policy in that part of the world? The question we've all been asking is this: 'What are the Marines doing in the Lebanon?' and the answer we've been getting is that 'they are there as part of a multi-national peace-keeping force'.

Question. 'How can a few thousand soldiers, hunkered down in defensive bunkers, bring peace to a country where everybody seems to be at the throat of his neighbors?'

Answer: 'They are there as part of our symbolic commitment to the Lebanese government.'

These are the questions we've been asking and these are the answers we've been getting, and most of us are not satisfied by these answers. We know that peace-keeping must be an active enterprise. You can't secure a city if all its police officers spend their duty hours in the police station. If our troops are to be an effective symbol of our commitment to the Lebanese government, there must be something positive and accomplishful about their presence. In reality, they have been assigned a defensive, passive posture. The result is that our troops have become targets of opportunity for anyone who feels that he has some real or feigned reason to be angry with the West or the United States. We ought not be surprised that many are saying: "Bring the boys home."

Perhaps we ought to remove the multi-national force, but before we do let's ask again the basic question - why are they there - and see if there are better answers than those the government has provided.

Let's begin by reminding ourselves that the Marines are not there because of a unilateral decision of the United States. The multi-national force was requested by the Lebanese government, and four Western powers. Great Britain, France, Italy and the United States responded to that request. Why? Because it was in their interest to do so. The West does not want the Lebanon to fall under the aegis of Syria. An independent Lebanon fits in with our geo-political reading of what should take place in the world. We don't want a radical state allied with Iran and the Soviet Union to control a significant section of the sea coast of the Eastern Mediterranean.

We also have a parents' concern for the Lebanon. The Lebanon is our child. The Lebanon was created in the middle of the 19th century by the French for reasons which, as all political reasons, were partially economic and partially humanitarian.

The economic reason was that the French, and Europe generally, wanted an outpost in the Middle East from which they could do business with a part of the world which they recognized was beginning to emerge into economic prosperity. But there was another reason. Traditionally, this area of the Lebanon had been the area to which Christian groups, minorities in the Arab world, and some sectarian Muslim groups like the Druze, had come during the medieval period, seeking security from the religious imperialism of orthodox Islam. The French created the Lebanon in part to be a safe area where these minorities could live and survive without being threatened by a rising tide of Islamic nationalism.

Much of the concern which we have about our policy in the Lebanon is based on the common wisdom that there has never been a nation called the Lebanon. It is argued that the Lebanon is an artificial creation fundamentally unstable and that, therefore, any attempt by the West to create a nation called Lebanon is doomed to failure. Lebanon is a fragile state, but it is well to remember that for the better part of this century, until the early 1970's, the Lebanon, however fragile its political arrangements may have been, was a relatively secure place as the Middle East goes. Its security was sufficient to transform the Lebanon into the most prosperous country in the Middle East. These were the decades when Beirut became the most prosperous capital in the Middle East. The commercial and banking interests of the West and of the Arab world met there. Much of the business of the Arab world was done in Beirut, and as Beirut's prosperity grew some of it reached out into the countryside. If it had not been for foreign intrusion, if it had not been to those who imposed themselves on the Lebanon from the outside, I am convinced that the prosperity of the Lebanon would have continued, and the fragile political relationship of the Lebanon would have been able to hold together.

In 1970 those relationships were shattered when the major military and political leadership of the PLO settled the Lebanon. You recall that the Palestine Liberation Organization was created in Egypt in the middle 1950's. Its desire to drive Israel into the sea corresponded nicely with Nasser's ambitions; but Nasser

quickly discovered that the PLO had a complex political agenda. Since it was armed it could not easily be controlled. Within a year or two Nasser had driven the PLO out of Egypt. The Syrians restrained the many-sided and varied political and military ambitions of the PLO by conscripting the local PLO into the Syrian Army. For several decades there has been an Al-Saika division of Palestinians in the Syrian Army. Rebuffed by the major confrontation states, the Palestinians moved their political and military base to the weaker of the states which border on Israel. For a number of years Jordan tolerated the presence of the PLO, and it was from Jordan that many of the terrorist attacks of the 60's were mounted against Israel. But by 1970 King Hussein had recognized that the PLO was a threat to his throne and the security of his country, and engaged the PLO in a major battle in order to free his country of their unwanted presence.

The PLO then moved its headquarters and military commands to the weakest of the countries which face on Israel, to the Lebanon, and it is with the introduction of the PLO in force into the Lebanon in 1970 that the tragedy of the Lebanon began.

The PLO moved into a country where relationships between the minorities had always been tenuous and where the political structure was an arbitrary structure designed to maintain a balance of power between the minority groups. The PLO came in like a bull in a china shop. Maronite Christians were muscled aside from their centers in Sidon and Damur. Shiite Muslims were pulled out from traditional centers in southern Lebanon and the Druze from some of their strongholds in the Shuf Mountains. The PLO began to carve out for itself what was intended to be an independent state in Southern Lebanon. The PLO not only muscled aside these groups for some of their traditional turf, but provided arms, equipment and terrorist training to the radical among them; and soon, because everything was now in confusion, fragile relationships which had survived for almost a century frayed and came unstuck. Everyone armed himself. Militia began to fight against militia. In 1975 Lebanon fell into a tragic, costly, bloody civil war which turned everyone else into an enemy.

The PLO brought not only war and bloodshed to the Lebanon but also the Syrian Army. By 1976 the government in Beirut found itself incapable of maintaining even a semblance of order, and Syria was handed a wonderful opportunity to extend its influence in the Lebanon, something it has traditionally and historically sought.

Over the centuries Damascus has been the dominant capital in that part of the world. During the long centuries of Turkish rule, Damascus was the provincial capital; Beirut a small provincial city. Earlier during the heyday of Syrian power under Saladin, Damascus had governed most of the Middle East. Syria has always looked upon that area which we now call Lebanon as part of its natural hegemony, and it has been Syria's clear and consistent policy to increase its influence, either directly or indirectly, in the Lebanon. In 1976 the Syrians sent in their army, ostensibly to keep order. Syria kept portions of the army in the capital and, in effect, incorporated much of the eastern third of the Lebanon, the Bekka Valley, into the homeland. Syria allowed the rest of the Lebanon to remain trapped in recurring rounds of internecine warfare because confusion suited her purpose. Syria simply settled in.

As the PLO developed its state in the south, it began to develop that indispensable arm of every independent state, a standing army. Money and equipment - tanks, cannon and missiles - were provided by Libya, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Algeria, and the Soviet Union. By the late 70's a well-equipped standing army was in place in southern Lebanon. All that it lacked was an air force.

Naturally, the Israelis were concerned, and conveyed to the United States their concern. The United States cautioned patience. Washington reminded Israel that as long as it had control of the skies, modern warfare is won in the sky and not on the land, they had nothing to fear. The United States went farther and negotiated a tacit arrangement between Syria and Israel in which the Syrians agreed not to move surface-to-air missiles into the Lebanon, and Israel agreed not to take preemptive actions against this PLO army. Within six months of making this agreement, the Syrians violated it. They moved Russian-built surface-to-air

missiles, the SAM II's, into the Bekka Valley. Israel complained to the United States which had negotiated the agreement and, in effect, guaranteed it. Phil Habib was sent to Damascus. He came back empty-handed. Damascus had no intentions of pulling back from this extension of its power and influence. Syria is a determined police state which knows its mind as far as the Lebanon is concerned. Syria was testing the United States. The United States, instead of taking some kind of economic or political action which would have signaled its displeasure, tried to act as if nothing had happened and simply cautioned Israel to be prudent. In so doing, we laid the seeds for the inevitable preemptive action which was the Israeli invasion of the Lebanon in the summer of 1982.

The United States reaction was not only a passive one towards Syria, but a positively pliant one. The Administration began to argue that the reason that the United States had failed was that we had no talking points with the Syrians. We needed better relationships with Damascus. We didn't have such relationships because Syria is a police state. Thirty thousand secret police help Assad control dissent. Syria keeps a division of crack troops in Damascus in order to maintain the control of the Alawite minority who rule the country with an iron hand. Nevertheless, forces in the United States, the impetus coming first from those in the Defense Department whose major activity is military sales to the Arab world, began to argue that we should find ways to support Damascus. So our reaction to Syria's deliberate flaunting of the United States' good name, incredible as it now seems, was a proposal by our Administration to the Congress that several hundred millions of dollars be granted to Syria under our foreign aid program.

Assad saw the United States blink and moved to take full advantage of the situation. Syria began to send even greater quantities of arms to the PLO and to those minorities in the Lebanon who were the more radical and allied with the Shiite Alawites and the Shiite Iranians.

The predictable happened. Israel was patient for awhile as the PLO army grew in size and her northern settlements continued to be bombed. She recognized that the time would soon come when she might not be able to control a PLO army backed by Syria's Air Force and surface-to-air missiles. The SAM missiles threatened Israel's control of the air over northern Israel and southern Lebanon, and the 1982 invasion took place.

Once the Israelis had defeated the PLO army, driven the Syrian Air Force out of the sky, and destroyed the SAM II missile centers, the United States and our Western allies were presented with a rare new opportunity - a chance to engage in negotiations with all those foreign groups which had brought such tragedy to the Lebanon: the PLO, the Syrians, and the Israelis. Here was an opportunity for negotiations which would see to it that all of these forces withdrew from the Lebanon. Through these negotiations we would support the elected government of Lebanon and help to extend its authority. At the same time, we could pressure that government to engage in those necessary reforms which would readjust the political equation in the Lebanon so as to take into consideration the new realities of power among the minority groups.

It was at that time that the request for the Western soldiers came, and the West willingly responded. But Washington during those months was caught up in its policy of Syrian appeasement. Largely under the influence of Casper Weinberger, the Administration convinced itself that the Syrians were acting as they were acting not out of national ambition but as a way of signaling to us their displeasure with the United States' relationship with Israel. Casper Weinberger and his allies argued that the United States had a golden opportunity to signal to the Arab world that we were distancing ourselves from an ally who had done something of which we disapproved. Here was a chance to show the Arabs by our actions that we were sympathetic to their concerns. In the months ahead we would show the Israelis our displeasure. In following this policy of appeasement, we lost the

opportunity of creating negotiations which would involve the Syrians as well as the Israelis. We set the Syrians aside. Only Israelis and Lebanese were involved in negotiations, and we even told the Lebanese government, 'you don't have to negotiate peace with Israel. All you need to do is simply make an arrangement in which the Israelis agree to withdraw.' After some months, in May of 1983, we forced the Israelis to sign such a bilateral agreement - forced, not in the sense that the Israelis had any long-term territorial ambitions in the Lebanon, but forced in the sense that the Israelis recognized how stupid and short-sighted American policy was. Not to involve the Syrians was a guarantee that this agreement, whatever it was, would never, in fact, go into effect because it was predicated on the coordinated withdrawal of all foreign forces, and Syria had no reason to withdraw.

What was Casper Weinberger's argument? He argued that once the Israelis agreed to withdraw and the United States had made clear its displeasure with Israel, Syria would willingly withdraw. Why would Syria withdraw? Because Syria would recognize that she could gain support and influence with the United States by such an act; and because the Saudis would bring pressure upon Syria to move out. Over the last many years the Saudis have provided the basic financial support which allows the nearly bankrupt economy of Syria to survive. Between the summer of 1982 and the spring of 1983 the Saudis had provided nearly two billion dollars to the Syrians, the dollars which the Syrians used to rebuild their army with new and more sophisticated Soviet equipment. Weinberger felt that all the Saudis had to do was to go to Damascus and tell Mr. Assad that he had gained from the United States all that could be gained, that the United States had distanced itself from Israel, and now was the time for the Syrians to further the larger interests of the Arab world and secure the involvement of the United States with positive forces in the Arab world by withdrawal.

Weinberger's argument bore no relationship to political realities. The Saudis had no real interest in accomplishing withdrawal. They are not interested in the

security of sectarian Muslim groups or in protecting Christian Arabs in the Muslim world. Christian Arabs are not allowed to live in Saudi Arabia. Nor did they have, in fact, talking points in our sense of the word with the Syrians. True, they give billions to the Syrians, but this was protection money, not leverage money. It was the kind of money that a shopkeeper gives to representatives of the Mafia in order that he can continue to stay in business. The Saudis are deathly afraid that the Syrians will support the subversion of their power in the oil fields by arming the poor Arabs, mostly northern Arabs, who work in the oil fields and who do not share in the riches or power which black gold provides Saudi Arabia's feudal lords. The Saudis have been buying the Syrians off.

Once the Israeli-Lebanese agreement was signed, Syria said simply: 'We want no part of it. The only issue as far as we're concerned is the unilateral withdrawal of the Israelis.' Emboldened by the appeasements which they found in Washington's policies, Syria redoubled her efforts to enlarge her sphere of influence in the Lebanon. She gave tanks and cannon to dissident groups within the PLO to drive Arafat's supporters first out of the Bekka Valley and then out of their northern base around Tripoli, a task which has recently been accomplished. What is their argument with Arafat? They are not angry with Arafat, as some in the West suggest, because he presumedly is willing to negotiate on Israel's existence; not at all. Neither Arafat nor the dissidents accept negotiations. They are angry with Arafat because he will not submit control of the PLO to Syria's authority.

The Syrians also went ahead and provided heavy cannon and tanks to the Druze who used this firepower to force the Phalange out of the Shuf Mountains and to gain control over the heights which overlook Beirut. Syria gave arms to the Shiite Amal. These are the guns which have been firing at the multi-national force and which have prevented the Lebanese government from extending its authority into West Beirut. Syria also provided support, explosives and training to Iranian volunteers in the Baalbek region, the group who launched those terrifying truck-bomb attacks on our Embassy, the French headquarters, and the Marine GHQ.

The Syrians, in other words, have responded to appeasement as most dictatorships respond to appeasement, by taking advantage of every opportunity which they sense along the way. In the process, over the last year Syria has seriously weakened the West's position in the Lebanon, been responsible for the loss of many American and French lives, and have created greater havoc than existed before.

They continuously and directly opposed our purposes. Yet, we continued to try to use the carrot.

Our interests lie in supporting the Lebanese government. It is clear that the Lebanese government must be pushed to political reform, and that there must be some reconciliation between the warring minorities. To this end the United States has been pressuring for a conference of reconciliation, but we found that the Syrians demanded as a price of their support that the minorities not go to Geneva unless they went to Geneva with them. We didn't even test their resolve, but simply agreed. So everyone went to Geneva a month ago and what happened? Instead of dealing with the domestic issues of the Lebanon, instead of dealing with political reform, Geneva dealt with only one issue - the demand by the Syrians that all the parties in the Lebanon denounce the Israel-Lebanese Treaty, which is to say that all the parties in the Lebanon, including the duly elected central government, denounce the basis of Western interests in the Lebanon and tacitly agree to accept Syrian leadership in all such matters.

The Geneva Conference broke up without any substantial accomplishment, but by now the degree of Syrian sponsored violence in which the West was directly involved had mounted to the point when these governments were under domestic pressure to rethink their commitments. Washington's response was to move away from the Casper Weinberger policies of appeasement to a more active policy which allows our forces to retaliate when directly attacked.

Unfortunately, retaliation has shown how obsolete many of the weapons are which are available in our arsenal. We are responding with the guns of a battleship which was mothballed ten years ago or more because the admirals knew that in

the era of missile warfare battleships are sitting ducks. We sent carrier planes against Baalbek, slow, subsonic planes because they are the bombers we fly off of these carriers, and two of them were shot down and another was seriously damaged.

Can we just walk away and leave Lebanon to the Lebanese? If we could leave Lebanon to the Lebanese it might be wise to walk away; but if we leave Lebanon to the Lebanese we're not leaving Lebanon to the Lebanese, we're leaving Lebanon to the not-so-tender mercies of the Syrians. Syria is a police state. The Syrian government has shown that it is willing to turn its guns against its own people. I remind you of Hama, the fifth largest city in Syria, whose center was destroyed by the Syrian Army because it sheltered those who opposed the Assad government.

Commitment will require patience and perseverance. We will have to pressure Gemayel and others in the central government to change the balance of power. But you know, Syria is not a super power. Syria is a nearly bankrupt government, fearful of internal dissension. That's why it is a police state. Assad may be incapacitated. If so, we are likely to see a power struggle among the minority Awalites who rule that country and between them and those who oppose their rule. Syria is disliked in the Arab world. Syria cut the pipeline through which Iraq exports oil to the Mediterranean. Syria is disliked because of its radical pro-Soviet activities and because of its anti-traditional Islamic laws and proclivities. There is no reason to believe that if we persevere Syria will remain as she is now, in seeming control. Those groups who receive Syrian support, given Western resolve and support, might well slowly disengage themselves from their Syrian sponsors. The Druze are a strongly independent community which has no wish to be dominated by Syria or anyone else. Given half a chance I am convinced that most of the various minorities would begin to show a greater willingness to cooperate with Beirut towards creating the independent Lebanon. They need to survive.

There are no guarantees. There is no way that anybody can stand at this rostrum, or any rostrum, and tell you that if we keep our troops in the Lebanon we

will, in fact, be able to make out as we propose to make out, that is, support and sustain an independent Lebanese state. The Middle East is not a predictable area of the world, but I would suggest that the risk is worth the taking. To give up now, before we have really tried patience and political consistency, is to write off several millions of people and condemn them to totalitarian rule. Withdrawal would not only expose the Lebanese minorities to the not-so-tender mercies of a police state, but weaken our ability to deal with those countries in the Arab world which have depended upon our support. They would have every reason to question whether America is a dependable allie.

Let me close by extrapolating from what has happened in Lebanon to the whole question of Israeli-American relationships. As part of this new activist policy of trying to contain Syrian influence, at the end of November of this year the United States signed with Israel an Agreement on Strategic Cooperation. This agreement is simply America's recognition that the Israelis are the only major army in place on which the United States can depend and that the I.D.F. can be supportive of American activities in that part of the world. Last week we saw the first evidence of this cooperation when Israeli convoys and tanks went into the Shuf Mountains on prearrangement and brought out from Deir El Kamar 2,000 Phalange soldiers and some 5,000 Maronite civilians who had been beseiged there for several months. This relief diffused one of the many problems with which the Lebanon abounds.

But I must say to you ~~that the Israelis~~ that the Israelis did not greet this new Agreement with great joy. They are deeply concerned, as are other pro-Western countries in the Middle East, with the inconsistency, and sometimes the downright foolishness, of American policy. A similar memorandum of strategic cooperation was signed three years ago. It was in being for all of three months before it was unilaterally denounced by the American government because Jerusalem had announced that it was bringing the Golan under routine administrative control. Mr. Begin had just completed Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai. In the process he had had to dismantle a major Israeli town, Yamit, and the Golan act

was his attempt to reduce domestic unrest. It was a purely technical matter. Yet, the United States government rose up in righteous wrath and used this act as a pretext to denounce this memorandum of strategic understanding.

Allies often do things which we do not approve of - England in the Falklands; and we do things of which our allies do not approve of - the United States in Grenada; but if there is to be a really meaningful commitment among allies which will be understood by all the parties in the Middle East, that commitment must somehow run through thick and thin. The Israelis are concerned that this new agreement will last only as long as America feels weakened in the Lebanon. They are also concerned that America's indecision has made negotiations between Israel and its neighbors increasingly difficult. Whenever the Arab world feels that the American-Israeli relationship is steady and sturdy, we begin to hear talk about the willingness of so-called moderate Arab governments to negotiate with Israel. The minute Washington begins to distance itself from Jerusalem, as we did last year during the era of the Weinberger policy of appeasement, these voices are silenced. We've heard little this last year from Arab capitals about the possibility of negotiations. The Arab states have been content simply to denounce the Reagan plan and sit back and wait. Why should they negotiate when they feel that Israel will be increasingly distanced from its major big power support?

What I'm saying is simply this, that if, as I believe, the major element in the equation which concerns peace in the Middle East is the factor of time - the countries of the Middle East must somehow last out the next decade or two while systemic changes take place in their society - then it is crucially important that the United States sort out its priorities and remain consistent in support of those priorities. If, as seems clear, one of those priorities is an independent Lebanon, then let us make sure that Syria understands this, and let us take those measures which will, as far as possible, support the possibility of maintaining an independent Lebanon. Further, if America's policy remains what it has been for

influence does America have on the Saudis and how much influence do the Saudis have on the Syrians?

the last 35 years or more, that we support the existence of Israel and see her as a strong, democratic ally, then let the United States make clear by its actions that we do in fact consider Israel an indispensable ally and that we will not back away from her even if she takes actions in her own interest which the United States, for one reason or another, does not approve. Only when the rest of the world understands the steadiness of this relationship can there be any significant opportunity for peace.

When the new agreement on strategic cooperation was signed, Sec. Schulz happened to be in Europe. He left Europe for meetings in Tunisia and Morocco where he met a good bit of anger from the so-called moderate Arab states about our new agreement with Israel. The secretary responded to these leaders by saying, 'there's nothing new in this agreement which has not been, in fact, the fact since 1948.' What he ~~had not reason to~~ ^{did not} say but is in fact the fact, is that the actions of the United States over the last year ~~as two have~~ ^{had} raised the question in the minds of these Arab leaders whether this strong relationship remained in place. Their anger was in fact frustration that the United States was now reasserting what had always been basic American policy - a policy which does not fully suit their interests.

I wish at this season of the year that I could stand here and tell you that peace is around the corner in the Middle East, that there's an easy way to achieve it. Peace is not around the corner in the Middle East and there is no easy way even to dampen down the area's violence. What I can say is this, that peace has a better chance in the Middle East if Washington is clear as to its mind and if Washington has a mind.

It is for constancy and judgement that I pray at this season.

Questions

Q: Rabbi, you've mentioned, and it seems rather clear, that Syria will be told what to do in Lebanon by the Saudi Arabians. My question is, how much influence does America have on the Saudis and how much influence do the Saudis have on the Syrians?

A: If I suggested to you that Syria will be told what to do in the Lebanon by the Saudis, I misstated. I don't think I suggested that. I suggested that Mr. Weinberger believes that the Saudis are able to tell the Syrians what to do and that they are able to do so because of the large amounts of money that the Saudis give to the Syrians. I believe quite the reverse to be the case. The Saudis are afraid of the Syrians. The Saudis are a small feudal oligarchy sitting on top of rich gold fields, black gold, and the Saudis are afraid of subversion because the oil fields are manned by Palestinians, by Syrians, by Iraqis who are not allowed to share fully in the wealth they are bringing out of the earth. The Saudis fear the Syrians as the agents through which the Soviet, the Libyans, the Iranians and others could ship down weapons, subversive materials and subversive propagandists in order to stir up the oil fields. Essentially, the Saudis are buying off the Syrians, and it is my firm belief that Syria's ambitions in the Lebanon begin in Syria, are determined by Syria, fit Syria's concepts of her leadership role in the Arab world, and will be limited only insofar as Syria feels that other countries will not allow her to increase her influence.

Q: Rabbi Silver, I've been puzzled and somewhat astonished recently that there has been no outcry or moral condemnation in the U.N. or the Third World countries, similarly in world opinion, for what I regard as slaughter and killings by so-called rebel PLO versus the other Palestinian PLO, and by the Syrian involvement in that. You don't hear any real condemnation of that. Similarly, in the Iraq-Iran war there is no significant discussion of that; it's relatively quiet and seemingly ~~where~~ the world is unconcerned ~~about~~. What is the moral difference that takes place in the world with regard to that kind of violence and slaughter and massacre as against other types that are condemned?

A: We have what you would call a selective morality based on what is of interest to the news media and what they are allowed to report. One of the problems of the Iraqi-Iranian war is that the correspondents can't get to the front and report on the slaughter which has now reached the tens of thousands. Another is

that the media has largely a Western moral bias. It is assumed that Israel as a western state should abide one set of moral standards, and somehow if Arabs kill Arabs it's something less, 'lesser breeds without the law.' The attitude doesn't speak well of our appreciation of the people who live in the Third World or the Arab world, but it's a fact of life. This moral bias harms our understanding in a more basic sense than simply moral outrage which is a relatively cheap commodity. When the terrible civil war broke out in the Lebanon in '75-76 it was hardly covered in the world press and, therefore, it hardly became an issue. We continued to deal with Syria and the PLO in Lebanon as if nothing had changed. Instead of trying to nip a problem in the bud we let it fester, and like all wounds that are allowed to fester, the situation became increasingly dangerous.

One of the problems that we're dealing with here is that only those issues which seem to be controversial at home are those which are raised up in the media. I was announced as today's speaker at the City Club to talk on peace in the Middle East. Suddenly before anybody knows what I'm going to say, there has to be an opposition speaker who's going to counter whatever it is that I have to say. Now, that's fine. The platform is devoted and dedicated to free speech, but my point is that somehow the issue of Arabs in Israel has become one of those issues which excited debate in the United States while the Arab vs. Arab issues do not and so do not get that same kind of coverage though, as in the case of Iraq-Iran, North Yemen-South Yemen, poor Arab-rich Arab, the brotherhood of Islam vs. the radicalist Islamic groups in Syria, they're much more important in the long run, much more basic.

Q: Rabbi Silver, in your very clear description of the history of this mess in the Middle East, I see one thing as missing. All these people over there are members of major religions. What has happened to the religious philosophy, as I interpret it as being something for the human race, in all this mixup. We have

It's called the Rainbow Group. It's a group of priests, Dutch Reform ministers, professors at the Hebrew University, from all of these groups.

the Christians, we have the Muslims, we have the Shiites, the Alowites, all this. What has happened to the religious beliefs of these peoples?

A: The assumption that religions promote peace is false. I don't mean mean to play bah humbug with the Christmas spirit, but I remind you of the Crusades. I remind you of the Hundred Years War in Europe which was essentially a war between the Lutheran north and the Catholic south. I remind you of the terrible wars of the Middle Ages when the graceful civilization of the Albigensians was destroyed by the Catholic forces of northern Europe. I don't think anyone should wonder that religions are involved. Religions are inevitably woven into the texture of a society and, therefore, reflect all the interests and contradictions of the society. We would like religions to deal with peace and good will and all of that, but that's only one side of the coin. They also deal with turf. They also deal with survival. They also deal with ambition, and at least in the case both of Christianity and Islam these religions have traditionally been imperialist, that is, they have looked to the conversion of the world by force if not by missionaries.

Question: As it is common knowledge to most, every time the past ten years when any person on the so-called West Bank, so-called occupied territories, would attempt to start a dialogue with an Israeli government representative in the negotiation of status, the Palestinians, that person was inevitably not part of the PLO framework, that person was either maimed or assassinated by the PLO. There are many such incidents. Now that the PLO seems to be in greater disarray than it ever has been, would you care to hazard an opinion as to whether those moderate voices among the Palestinians will have a greater say in negotiations and an ability to bring about some negotiations with the Israeli government?

A: I'm not sure that the PLO is in great disarray. What has happened is that the armed PLO is now consolidated under Syria's influence. What is in disarray is Mr. Arafat's role and position.

Let me answer the question by telling you of a group that meets in Jerusalem. It's called the Rainbow Group. It's a group of Catholic priests, Dutch Reform ministers, professors at the Hebrew University, academics from all of these groups,

who meet every six or eight weeks to discuss issues of common concern. This group has been meeting for many years. A number of times when I've been in Jerusalem I've had the privilege of meeting with them. There are a number of intelligent and scholarly Muslim intellectuals in the Jerusalem area. Over their history the Rainbow Group has made several efforts to bring some of these people into these conversations. No political decisions are being made, but at least there should be contact. They have never been able to do so. One of the problems that we have in all of these relationships is that it takes two to dance, and the leaders of the Muslim world have not even been willing to dialogue. And if we can't do it at that level it's going to be a long time before we do it at the political level.

~~Q:~~ You couldn't have given a better argument for the new International Information Order about how selective the Western news services are about what news they will cover and, ironically, it's that very issue that the United States is pulling out of UNESCO.

A: The new International Information Order would not encourage the fuller dissemination of information of all kinds. It's designed to control information for the benefit of groups for which it is not now being controlled. It's an attempt to license reporters. It is an attempt to require reporters to publish what that particular country believes to be positive and affirmative about its activities. It's an attempt to see to it that we get a view of the Third World which the Third World wants us to have rather than a view of what the Third World really is like. The problem is not, as far as I'm concerned, that we need this UNESCO fiasco which would absolutely shackle the free press, but we need a free press which is determined to do the present job that it is equipped to do but to do it better.

~~Q:~~ Rabbi Silver, would you comment on why the Soviet Union has not been more assertive and aggressive as we have remained there in Lebanon.

~~A:~~ The Soviet Union has been assertive in the sense that it has resupplied the Syrians with the most advanced equipment which has ever left the Soviet

Union. The Syrians now have the Soviet's newest and best surface-to-air missiles which can control that whole air corridor. They also have, and this is most dangerous to the United States, something called the SS 20 which is a surface-to-surface missile with a range of about 200 miles which is absolutely accurate within that range and could destroy the big guns in New Jersey with one or two hits. What it has not done, beyond sending 8,000 troops into Syria many of whom are in combat structures; what it has not done is to be more visible because it recognizes what the United States does not yet recognize - the degree to which other countries in that part of the world whose interests it would like to cultivate, particularly Iraq and Iran, do not want to see Syria gain hegemony in that part of the world. Because of these conflicts of interest, the USSR must tread a little bit softly in the Middle East.

Q: Would you comment on the Israeli claim to Palestine as compared to the Arab claim. Were the Israelis interlopers on the Arabs in Palestine?

A: I saw a sign back there which said there was one minute to go. Let me simply say that I don't see any value at this point of debating historical claims. I think the Israelis have a traditional claim which we all recognize. The point is that they have a viable state. The point is that there is territory which is in dispute. The point is that that territory which is in dispute cannot be resolved unless there is recognition on all sides that the parties to the agreement can be trusted, and the plea that I made earlier remains, that until the United States has a consistent policy which is consistent in fact, the Arabs have no reason to enter into serious negotiations on the West Bank or on Gaza.

From the desk of—

RABBI DANIEL JEREMY SILVER

IT IS when we all play SAFE
That we create a world of
utmost insecurity



Q Why are we moving a Telus

A They are putting a multi-national peace keeping force

Q How is several thousand soldiers he would seem better
keep the peace in a country where there is an
ongoing threat?

A Our forces are a symbol of our commitment to
Telus peace.

There are two main reasons why we are doing this
and have been getting from Washington. The answer don't make
sense to many of us. To peace keeping force must follow a clear

rule. A peace force with keep the peace in all the areas of
in the peace situation. Compared to a peace rule we

perhaps have several types of operations for as soon

that want to meet the situation on the West. We're

suffered some counter attacks as announced and

of unplanned - no more way as soon Barry

The 5 up here

Where the multi-national force needs to be moved - but

before we make that decision, let's at least be clear

about it papers - the believe. That's all we

should be aware of, and, that the entire force keep

hasn't been intentionally planned - but that we are

good reason for the force to be there - and that

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social media have to take some preceptor action -

Signed and said he to leave alone

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for at an stage

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