

REMARKS BY CONGRESSMAN LES AuCOIN
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THE MIDDLE EAST -- WHAT NEXT?

In assessing the future of the Middle East this evening, I'd like to discuss the status of American relations with Israel, the recent controversy over the Golan Heights, and then speculate on the likely events after Israel returns the Sinai to Egypt this April.

When President Reagan took office, he announced that his top foreign policy priority would be the Soviet Union. Within a few months, however, the Middle East moved to the top of the agenda. The Administration then tried to develop policies that could meet the Soviet threat in the region, while playing down the significance of regional tensions, including the Arab-Israeli conflict. I believe that was a devastating mistake which triggered a sequence of events which now leaves the U.S. with less influence with all parties in the region.

The Administration believed that its anti-Soviet objectives would be served by the sale of advanced military equipment to Saudi Arabia, including offensive enhancements for the F-15A jet fighter and the sale of 5 AWACS command planes. Accordingly, they concluded an \$8.5 billion deal transferring this technology to Saudi Arabia.

It is always difficult to disagree with a president on a major foreign policy initiative. It is particularly difficult to oppose a popular president at the beginning of his term. Despite tremendous pressure from the Administration and corporate lobbying, I had no alternative but to oppose the White House.

Indeed, I was one of the cosponsors of the Congressional resolution of disapproval. I spoke out against the sale on the House floor and here at home.

I did not then and do not now believe that the AWACS sale was in the best interest of the United States of America. AWACS are so sensitive, so advanced, that we do not even allow our NATO allies to have the exclusive control that Saudi Arabia demanded and got.

I objected to selling these, the most sophisticated weapons in our arsenal, because of the following facts:

- Saudi Arabia is potentially unstable;
- Saudi Arabia rejects the Camp David peace process;
- Saudi Arabia has declared an Islamic holy war against Israel -- a war to the finish, a war of extinction;
- Saudi Arabia could not guarantee the security of the AWACS;
- Saudi Arabia will not allow American bases on its territory;
- Saudi Arabia finances and supports the terrorist PLO;
- Saudi Arabia raised its oil price from \$12/barrel at the time of the last big sale in 1978 to \$32/barrel in 1981.

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But there were also three other reasons Congressional opponents objected to this sale:

First, it violated a pledge to Congress that this type of equipment would never be sold to Saudi Arabia.

Second, we believed that the United States did not receive enough in return -- we did not gain access to bases in Saudi Arabia; we did not receive assurances on the peace process or on oil pricing. It was a one-sided empty bargain.

But third, and most important, the sale undermines the security of America's most dependable ally in the Middle East -- Israel. In addition to jeopardizing the existence of Israel, the increasing of the arms race in the region presents Israel with a budget crisis that it cannot afford.

I was gratified that the entire Oregon delegation agreed with these assessments and that every Member from our state voted against the sale.

I was pleased that the House passed the resolution of disapproval by a vote of 301-111. I believe that the vote would have been similar in the Senate if the Senators had voted purely on the merits of the sale.

However, the final vote in the Senate did not reflect the merits of the issue. In that vote, the issue became a referendum on the power and prestige of the presidency rather than the wisdom of this president's policy.

It is, in fact, ironic that the same man who urged the Congress to reject the Panama Canal Treaty and the "Salt II" Treaty on the ground that it is the duty of Congress to correct flawed policies of a president, should claim here that Congressional rejection of his White House policies would weaken the power of the presidency itself.

Finally, I was disturbed by the undertones that marked the arguments of some of the proponents of the sale because of what it might portend. When this sale called for a choice between "Reagan or Begin" and when it was asked whether "the Jews should run American foreign policy" it calls into doubt the patriotism of Americans -- and is totally unacceptable in a free society. Even the President's comment that he did not want "foreign nations" to interfere in the foreign policy process of the United States was a direct slap at American Jews and Israel. Parenthetically, I must note that this comment was made at the same time that the Administration was going all out to assist Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia to lobby for the sale.

I cannot express in strong enough terms my rejection of anything that remotely smacks of anti-semitism and charges of "dual loyalty." These charges are not new. But they are repugnant and should not have been ressurected on this issue or any other.

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Even though the AWACS sale has been approved, it is important in assessing what comes next in the Mideast to examine the effects of the sale -- particularly the actions of Saudi Arabia. The Administration tried to gain support for its AWACS position by arguing that Saudi behavior would moderate if the sale was approved. But unfortunately, since the sale the Saudis have:

- o Raised their price of oil to \$34/barrel and lowered production by 1 million barrels per day;
- o Pressured the country of Oman to reject American facilities;
- o Urged Oman not to participate in operation Bright Star and even offered a \$1.2 billion dollar bribe to this effect;
- o Contributed an additional \$28 million to the PLO;
- o And pushed the Fahd "Peace Plan," which calls for a Palestinian state with "East Jerusalem" as its capital.

This is a "friend?"

This is an "ally?"

This is "moderation?"

Whether we here tonight agree or disagree with the Saudi peace plan, we ought to be appalled that it was rejected because radicals like Syria and Libya thought it was "too moderate" toward Israel. It's interesting to me further to note that Prince Fahd recently met with President Assad of Syria. One hour after their meeting, the Prince cancelled his scheduled, long-awaited trip to the United States -- no doubt under pressure from Assad.

Thus, in my review of the facts, I have not seen the promised moderation from the Saudis.

Shortly after the AWACS vote, the Administration considered selling an advanced telecommunications satellite system to a consortium of Arab states called Arabstat. The members of this group include Libya, Yemen, Syria and the PLO. Not only would this sale have military advantages for the very countries listed by the State Department as supporting terrorism, it would be a tacit recognition of the PLO. At this time the Administration is still considering whether to proceed.

Let me turn next to the current status of U.S.-Israel relations. Secretary of State Alexander Haig told the House Foreign Affairs Committee on November 12, 1981, that "if our friends are more secure, they will be more willing to take risks for peace." I certainly agree with this statement, but I do not believe that current American foreign policy has been adhering to these guidelines. Recent U.S. actions, statements and policies have had the effect of increasing Israel's nervousness about the strength and depth of American support.

Israel is beginning to see the United States as a fickle and unreliable ally, quick to abrogate agreements, contractual and otherwise. It sees the United States as frightened of offending the Arabs and irrationally concerned about Moscow. As Jordan recently proved, any nation that even threatens to go to the Soviet Union for succor gains entre in Washington, even if the threatened link to Moscow poses a great danger to that country. The raid on the Iraqi nuclear facility last spring results, in part, from Israel's convictions that neither the U.S. nor anyone else really cared about the Iraqi nuclear threat and failed to do anything to help despite Israeli pleas.

To a degree, I believe that Israel's recent actions in the Golan Heights are a direct repercussion of the AWACS sale and other American actions.

There has been a great deal of rhetoric concerning the Golan Heights -- let me briefly explain the situation.

The essence of what Israel did was to extend civil jurisdiction in place of the military law which had prevailed in the area since the 1967 war. In the words of the Wall Street Journal, Israel merely "imposed the right to a trial by jury on 18,000 Arabs and Jews in the Golan."

This action did not foreclose the option of negotiations on the final settlement of the territory. These negotiations are unlikely, however, because Syria has consistently refused to negotiate with Israel.

There were numerous Syrian actions which led up to the Israeli move. Let's count them:

1. Syria invaded Israel three times through the Golan Heights.
2. In the 19 years preceding the 1967 War, Syria used the Heights to stage devastating artillery mortar fire on civilian settlers below in the Galilee.
3. Syria's actions in southern Lebanon, including the placement of more SAM batteries, endanger Israel's security.
4. The Syrians totally rejected Philip Habib's efforts to remove the Syrian missiles.

5. Syrian actions resulted in the collapse of the so-called Arab peace summit and the rejection of the Fahd peace plan. This plan was uncompromising and unacceptable to Israel, but even the remote possibility of Saudi willingness to recognize Israel was unacceptable to Syria.

6. Syria has signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union and is clearly a Soviet surrogate.

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I was upset that the United States voted in the U.N. Security Council to condemn Israel for its Golan actions and took unilateral steps to punish Israel. This is an unfortunate signal to send. It gives the impression that Israel, rather than the Soviet surrogate Syria, is the enemy of the United States. This is not the case, as the fundamental friendship between Israel and the United States continues. Thus, I do not believe that the Administration's actions were well thought out.

Conversely, I was also upset at the excessive rhetoric used by Prime Minister Begin in response to American actions. This was reckless, insulting, and dangerous rhetoric. I hope that calmer heads will prevail and that America's relations with Israel will rebound from their current status. When there is a storm, the dust eventually settles. The current problems do nothing to change the essential need for strong U.S.-Israeli ties. This is in the best interest of both of our nations.

On April 25th Israel is scheduled to return the last part of the Sinai to Egypt. This will complete the return of 92% of the territory taken in the 1967 war as a result of Arab aggression against Israel.

As April 25th approaches, Arab pressure on Egypt will mount. Thus far, President Mubarak has given every indication of continuing the good relations established with Israel by President Sadat. Egypt has realized the benefits it gains from peace with Israel.

On the other hand, other Arab states are making efforts to weaken the relationship. It is important for the United States to disassociate itself from these Arab efforts. There have been troubling indications and statements by prominent Americans urging a shift away from the Camp David process. I cite the statements by former Presidents Carter and Ford, the Seven Springs Report by Harold Saunders and Philip Klutznick, the Administration's flirtation with the Fahd Peace Plan, and a background paper prepared for the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations by Malcolm Kerr recommending new U.S. approaches to the PLO. These types of statements and actions only serve to intensify the concerns already expressed in Israel.

As we look forward to future American policies in the Middle East, many pitfalls and problems remain. Israel's security must be preserved, particularly after the return of the Sinai in April, 1982. The instability in Southern Lebanon, particularly the increasing number of Syrian and PLO troops and armaments is a potential crisis. Soviet activity in the region, the actions of Quaddaffi, and Western reliance on Middle Eastern oil are just a few more issues that must be dealt with in a constructive and careful manner. Your interest and your participation in the American political process are causes for optimism. It is largely because of people like you, people who are informed, active and involved, that we can be confident that America's future actions will contribute to the cause of peace.