

# EXCURSUS 1

**Donald F. McHenry on  
HEAR NO EVIL DIPLOMACY**

The fortunes and misfortunes of the Middle East are entwined with the history of the United Nations.

The U.N. played a vital role in the establishment of Israel. Soldiers in the familiar blue beret of the United Nations daily risk and too often sacrifice their lives in the cause of peace. Yet today Israel is among the organization's harshest critics, and both Israel and the Arabs regularly frustrate the efforts of U.N. peace-keepers. Similarly, while the U.N. has provided a platform for the people of the Mideast to air and seek redress of their grievances, some of the actions of those who stand to benefit most from an effective U.N. have served to weaken the organization.

As I look back over many years of observing the U.N., only Southern Africa rivals the Middle East for the amount of time, passion, and paper devoted to a single subject. Indeed, on frequent occasions in the "I tickle you, you tickle me" atmosphere that is politics, the Mideast and Southern Africa are — unwisely and incorrectly — connected, and usually to the disadvantage of all.

As the U.N.'s past is so closely connected with the dispute between Arabs and Israel, so too is the future health and effectiveness of the organization. Only with a settlement of the underlying issues in the Mideast dispute — and of those at issue in Southern Africa — will the United Nations be able to write a final chapter to the matter of self-determination that has dominated and transformed the postwar world. Only then will the people of those areas and the United Nations turn their attention and resources to other pressing disputes and to complex questions of economic and social development.

I know there is a belief among many in this country — even among some who ought to know better — that the

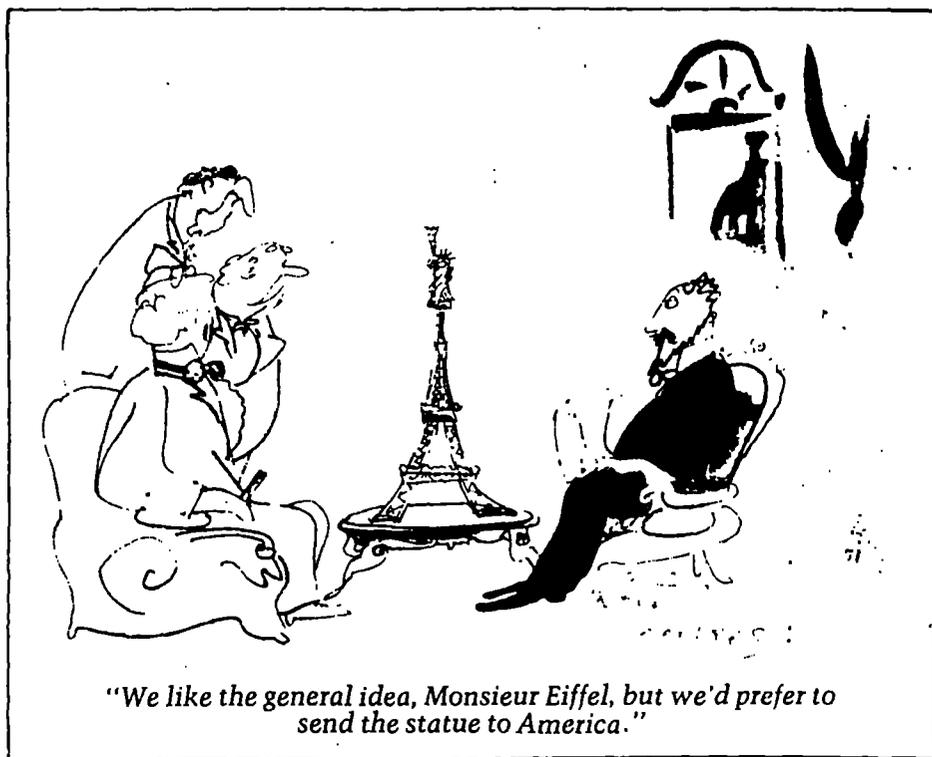
United Nations is part of the problem. In fact, the U.N. is only a reflection of the views of its membership and a forum where parties to a dispute seek redress of grievances. Some will attempt to use the organization to mobilize political support for their positions. Others find it more politically expedient to avoid taking a complaint to the United Nation, where they risk public disapproval of their sweeping accusations of bias and where criticism gains in credibility and effectiveness.

In the U.S., and particularly in the city that is host to United Nations headquarters, some of the organization's strongest and most influential supporters have, to put it mildly, become disenchanted, largely because of disagreement with the U.N. on the Middle East. So great is their disenchantment that they overlook the many accomplishments of the organization.

While some U.S. citizens have reached the conclusion that the United Nations is hopelessly one-sided, many in the U.N. have reached a similar conclusion about the United States — its politicians in particular. So emotionally involved with Israel does the U.S. seem, in fact, that few will accept our claims to objectivity in matters Middle Eastern.

The European initiative of last year was greeted by many Americans as self-centered meddling and likely to affect adversely our own efforts to reach a settlement through the process begun at Camp David. But as much as anything else the European initiative resulted from a judgment that there were tough issues to face if the Camp David achievement was to be matched by a satisfactory resolution of the question of Palestinian nationalism. The merits of their particular proposal aside, European leaders believed, and quite correctly, that the United States was incapable of pressing the crucial issues, especially during an election year.

In my judgment, little has happened to warrant any greater confidence in our objectivity. The Israeli bombing of the Iraqi nuclear facility and of civilians in Beirut was met with little more than a slap on the wrist. The U.S. lost an opportunity to press the issue of restraint and to reinforce our own laws against the use of American weapons for offensive purposes. These laws once again have been proven hollow and



stand as an unfortunate precedent for others.

The recent debate on supplying AWACS to Saudi Arabia is another example of our inability to consider Middle East questions on their merits. There was a strong case to be made against supplying AWACS to Saudi Arabia, but not one that was based on the opposition of Israel, which every day presses for more weapons. Surely the time has come for the United States to put *all* parties on notice that they must seek peace through realistic negotiations, not through constant rounds of purchasing ever more sophisticated arms.

Serious suggestions about reexamining American policy are met by a torrent of criticism and abuse. Those who are Arabists are, by definition, suspect. Government officials who express the need for careful consideration of the views of all parties to the dispute are subjects of vicious whispering campaigns, some officially inspired. An effort by Flora Lewis of the *New York Times* to question the policies of the prime minister of Israel was met by "mostly irate, and in some cases shrilly insulting and even menacing" letters. Many of the letter writers, according to Ms. Lewis, took the position that "any criticism of Israeli policy or leadership automatically makes one pro-P.L.O., anti-Israel or even anti-Semite."

My own experience is not too dissimilar to Ms. Lewis's. But it has an equally menacing counterpart in the reactions of those who are indeed anti-Semitic and look upon honest efforts to weigh the merits of all parties as support for their own repugnant views. Frankly, the embrace of supporters sometimes can be as uncomfortable and as deadly as the wrath of critics.

At the risk of both wrath and deadly embrace I suggest that the time has come for Americans to open their ears and minds to the full range of views on the issues of the Middle East. Perhaps ours is the correct position, even when we find ourselves consistently at odds with our European allies or with an overwhelming majority of United Nations members. In that case, we should proceed with our position. But surely we should recognize that the very distance between our views and others' makes it incumbent upon us to reexamine our position and be alert to the views of others and to new ideas.

In this regard it cannot be said that we have a full picture unless we are at least willing to talk with all parties. Specifically, we must talk with the Palestine Liberation Organization. We must do so directly lest, in addition to continuing to antagonize, we fall victim to that old parlor game whereby views are distorted as they pass through various intermediaries. Among other things, direct contact will give us an opportunity to say directly that we are committed to the existence and security of Israel and also to demonstrate that our commitment to Israel is not inconsistent with a just settlement of the question of Palestinian nationalism.

Of this I am certain: Neither the Palestinian people nor their views will go away because the United States refuses to listen to them. And the problems of the Middle East cannot be resolved without them.

Our conduct now has important implications for the future. When there were people in Portugal and Iran seeking a just solution to the situations in those countries, the United States cut itself off, refusing to listen to or even have contacts with them. When change did come in both countries, the United States was without the necessary contacts in either one. In both cases the refusal of the U.S. to listen was cited as evidence of our support for those who opposed peaceful change.

There should be no misunderstanding of what such conversations mean. Conversation does not mean love, affection, or sympathy. Conversation does not mean agreement with policies or actions. Conversation does not mean recognition or status.

The time is also ripe for greater debate in this country on United States policy in the Middle East. At present there is very little. At four-year intervals and during other important election campaigns we have no debate at all. It is ironic that at this point Israel frequently debates American policy more vigorously than does the United States.

Finally, our debate must be free of the straitjacket of simplistic anticommunism. With a few exceptions there is a great deal of sympathy in the Middle East for the only real objective of Secretary of State Haig's strategic consensus: the right of the people of the Mideast to live free and at peace. But there is little prospect of the United States gaining much support among Arabs as long as the Palestinian question remains unresolved. On the contrary, many in the area believe that the failure to resolve the Palestinian question is what promotes Soviet aims, that our one-sided approach places in jeopardy the very objective we and they share.

My observations deal with procedural matters rather than substantive ones — though admittedly there are substantive implications. But such procedural changes are essential if we are to build on the outstanding achievements of Camp David and assist a troubled area in finding peace.

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## EXCURSUS 2

### Thomas Land on A BENEVOLENT INTERVENTION

The United Nations University has deployed its considerable international resources to help the Chinese Academy of Sciences confront an ecological disaster of yet unassessed proportions arising from the conversion to agricultural land of vast stretches of marshlands in the northeast. Their first joint move is the establishment of a series of agro-ecosystems research and monitoring stations in the area. The project may well lead to greater consultation between the universities and the agricultural and development planners of many countries.

The joint program has been worked out after a visit to Heilongjiang Province — an area producing a sixth of China's total commercial wheat yield — by scientists of many disciplines brought together by the U.N. University from ten countries. Nearly two million hectares of forest and swamp have been reclaimed in the Sanjiang Plain since the 1950s, leading to wind erosion, a sharp drop in rainfall, and declining soil fertility.

The visiting specialists were told that the local water table had declined by more than two-and-a-half meters at some places. Nature had shown a frightening ability to react to changes imposed by man. After a sandstorm whipped by winds approaching ninety kilometers per hour, the ditches along farm roads were filled with precious black topsoil from fields nearby. Elsewhere, thousands of hectares of wheat seedlings were swept away and buried.

Dr. Joseph Needham, director of the East Asian History of Science Library at Cambridge, observes in a new U.N. University paper that behind China's aggressive reach for new arable lands lies an ancient tradition of confronting nature's adversities. The earth's land surface transfers water back to the atmosphere through evaporation and transpiration — and the land reclamation scheme, originally intended to enable China to cut its wheat imports, may well have interfered