

MR. COLLES

Prime Directive

A.S.C.  $\frac{3}{2}$ .

MIDDLE EAST

I was impressed by the Egyptian presentation yesterday evening. Mubarak and his colleagues had got it absolutely right in regard to the need for speed, not to allow the Lebanese negotiations to preclude a start on the Reagan initiative, etc.

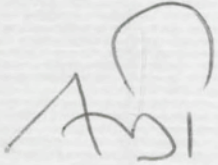
Where I thought that we were the victims of special pleading was over Iran/Iraq. Other Arabs are beginning to use the same argument, namely that, if the West does not come down on the Iraqi side, the Iraqis will disappear back into the Soviet orbit in the face of Syrian pressure on the pipeline and Khomeini's military pressure.

No-one knows better than I do how easy it is to be wrong about anything connected with Iran. But the Egyptian argument is misconceived. What the Iraqis need is not more military equipment which is about all the Russians could or might do for them - so far as I know they have plenty. They need money and military/civilian morale. The Soviet Union can provide neither. Money can come only from the rich Arab states who have already been paying up liberally and/or from a reopening of the pipeline and a general improvement in the oil situation. Morale is a matter for the Iraqis alone. Furthermore, the Russians share the preoccupation of most Western states with avoiding taking sides too obviously in the Iraq/Iran conflict. Intrinsicly Iran will always be more important to the Soviet Union than Iraq, for reasons of geographical proximity, size, natural resources etc. They have to live with Khomeini since they must know that the Tudeh party does not have the country-wide capacity in Iran to seize power, certainly not in present circumstances. They do not want Khomeini to win the war outright - a victorious Ayatollah would be even more dangerous than an embattled one. At the same time, they would not wish to do anything vis a vis Iraq which would mortally offend opinion throughout Iran. Hence, my guess is that they will remain on the fence, supplying some arms to both sides, but avoiding any decisive move which would identify them wholly with one side or the other.

This is not a bad policy for us to follow, as we have been doing. We must avoid being persuaded by the Arabs into coming out too firmly on the side of the Iraqis. Each side in the conflict is about

/equally

equally ghastly, and the consequences of an outright victory by either side equally frightful. Our interests on each side are fairly evenly balanced. Against this background the top of the fence is probably the most comfortable place on which to remain for the time being.



A.D. PARSONS  
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