MIDDLE EAST NOW KEY TO A GLOBAL STRATEGY
By C. L. SULZBERGER
New York Times (1857-Current file); Feb 10, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2003)
pg. 143

MIDDLE EAST NOW KEY TO A GLOBAL STRATEGY

U. S. Air Bases Being Built in Morocco Are Intended to Protect Resources Of the Area From Aggression

BIG JOB FOR DIPLOMACY, TOO

By C. L. SULZBERGER

NOUASSEUR AIR BASE, Morocco, Feb. 9—The Middle East may soon in itself become as important in global strategic terms as the great inland sea it borders, the Mediterranean, has been since ancient days and still remains.

The term "Middle East" is variously used. Loosely it may be defined as that vast and predominantly Islamic area comprising North Africa and Western Asia which extends from Morocco on the Atlantic to the Afghan-Iranian frontier.

This region has frequently served as an invasion highway. Carthage sought to push its Middle Eastern empire into Europe. Successive waves of Moslem conquest poured westward over this dusty route and then thrust into Spain and France.

From north to south and from west to east the great Continental powers like the British and French spread empires into Africa and Asia and employed the Mediterranean—lined by their Middle Eastern bastions—to link these possessions together.

During the last world conflict it was from the Mediterranean and its southern coast that the Western Allies were able first to lance the "soft underbelly" of Axis Europe. Now, amid the tenseness of a "cold war," the democratic powers are seeking to reinforce their Middle Eastern position politically, economically and, above all, militarily.

Strategic Assets

The immense region affected has three outstanding strategic assets. Economically, its mineral reserves are of critical importance. The petroleum deposits already known to exist—above all, in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrein and Iran—are the largest underground oil bank in the world.

From the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, with their lead, zinc, iron and manganese, to the gold and copper of the Saudi-Arabian Hejaz and the coal and iron of Turkey lie seams of mineral wealth essential to the metallic requirements of this century.

Politically, the cooperation of the various peoples inhabiting the sprawling region is needed if either its economic or its military potential is to remain available to the democratic cause. The Occident has recognized the vital necessity of advancing new political formulae, such as the proposed alliance centered on Suez and extending from Egypt to the Turkish Caucasus.

Militarily, the geographical location of the Middle East is one of the most important in the world. The industrial power of the United States follows the water-borne highway of the Atlantic through the Mediterranean and Red Seas eastward and up through the Dardanelles to the Black Sea and Soviet Russia's factory and population centers. Middle Eastern bases from Casablanca to Oran, Bizerta, Alexandria and Haifa can service Western fleets.

But now the area has a new role—developed during World War II and vastly accelerated since—of untold importance. This is its function as a great new air route by which the strategic bombing arm of America can be brought into immediate and direct contact with any aggressor in Europe or in Western Asia.

Strategic Significance

Bases such as this immense new landing field south of Casablanca—one of five now being built in French Morocco—have strategic implications not yet widely realized. Today the United States can keep its most telling weapons—atomic bombs and the huge airplanes that carry them—safe in the heart of the North American land mass.

Yet, upon a moment's notice, they could be moved to Moroccan and other fields in a matter of hours and brought to bear upon a power instigating war. Linking by railways and fuel pipelines to seaports, these bases are being equipped with the necessary supply depots.

As a result an aerial armada could take off from Carswell Field in Texas and be here on the outer periphery of the Middle East in less than a day.

By gradually—if expensively—developing the facilities of the Middle East as the world's best airdrome, with vast stretches of flat lands and generally excellent weather, the United States can make the power of its own most valued weapons immediately effective on a global basis.

Morocco is just the beginning of this new strategical concept. The cumbersome air-borne equipment employed nowadays requires careful ground preparations. Runways either laid down or being constructed here are more than two miles long and able to bear tremendous weights. Few other fields between here and Iran are able to handle the largest planes.

Yet in Algeria, in Libya, in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia, in Iraq and in Turkey fine if old-fashioned bases exist. These could be developed to exacting new standards. Thus, even if the heaviest bombers were not stationed there, protective fighters, repair depots and take-off points for the XB-29 flying gas trucks could extend the range of strategic weapons.

Vast Ranges Opened

If one recalls that a B-36, carrying a payload of 10,000 pounds, can fly 5,000 miles and return non-stop one realizes the full implications involved. One has only to take a divider, fix it to the proper scale and swing it in an arc northward and eastward on the map from Morocco, to see how much of the earth's surface could be rendered vulnerable to an invading force.

This development of global strategy is still in its infancy. It can be expanded as much and as far as American planners deem necessary and economically wise. The farther onward it moves across the Middle East toward the petroleum deposits which are among the treasures it hopes to protect, the more efficient it is likely to become.

America already utilizes similar massive foreign bases—in Greenland and in England, for example. But, in a sense, these are more isolated. In the Middle East exists a vast potential aircraft carrier bordering a sea under complete Allied control and containing the fuel that makes the dominant weapon mobile.

Need for Highest Diplomacy

In order to be able to develop this protective arm, the United States needs the agreement of the Governments ruling in the Middle East to cooperate for the sake of mutual defense. This requires diplomacy of the highest order. The Middle East, frequently oppressed, under foreign domination for many decades, is filled with surly complexes and resentments.

There is little use investing the vast amounts of money required to develop most efficiently America's global protection in lands which may suddenly erupt and spew the Yankee out. The United States must rest its defenses not only on the agreement of Governments but on the tolerance and goodwill of peoples. Thus, without the effective success of American diplomacy—the development of successful policies acceptable both to our European allies and our Middle Eastern friends—the strategic thinking of those who plan our safety would be crippled. This ranks among America's greatest policy problems.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.