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During the Berlin crisis, the Korean War, the Cuban confrontation and the Vietnam conflict there have been certain implicit but well understood rules to prevent world holocaust. There are no rules for the war game in the Middle East. Some of the players, like Jewish survivors of Auschwitz or Palestine Arab refugees, suffer emotional trauma and none of them, except Israel and Egypt, are doing what they say they're doing.

The Israelis consistently proclaimed they would not agree to be squeezed to death and have now broken out of threatened confinement with an initial string of victories. The Egyptians consistently proclaimed their desire to extinguish Israel and no one can say they haven't tried. But the roles of other nations aren't what these nations pretend they are.

Nasser's Following

Until June 5 Nasser's flamboyant leadership managed to gain approval of all Communist capitals and active alliance of all Arabs. Yet, among Israel's neighbors, Lebanon has done nothing; Syria has bragged more bravely than it has acted; and Jordan has used its fine little army in sectors of minimal strategic import. Maybe Nasser's allies are privately reluctant. The Lebanese dislike him, the Syrians detest him and King Hussein of Jordan has every reason to distrust him.

In the increasingly unlikely event that Israel fails to achieve its goal of swift aerial superiority and tactical envelopment of Egypt's armor, the Jordanians might still try to sever Israel by thrusting to the sea. One should avoid dangerous clichés about Arab soldiering ability. In 1940, when I visited Weygand's French Levant Army and asked why all Annamese were in service units, I was told: "The Indochinese can't fight!"

While belligerents battle and so-called belligerents watch, the powers and the semipowers talk in ways best calculated to deceive. A U.S. spokesman announced this countrywas neutral, which Dean Rusk subsequently toned down. Washington is about as neutral on Palestine as Peking on Vietnam.

Until now Russia has been speaking loudly while carrying a small stick. It wants the Arabs to win but doesn't want to widen the war by giving them active help. Britain favors Israel and follows the American lead, but France has launched a new policy which helps the Arabs because it has cut off arms shipments to Israel. On Tuesday, May 23, France's Government thought it was pro-Israeli. The next day, at a Cabinet meeting, it discovered from the general that this wasn't true.

French Prestige

There are several reasons for the change. De Gaulle wishes to avoid commitments that might involve France in any non-European war. He hopes to regain French prestige and influence in the Arab world. He was not happy when Israeli agents helped O.A.S. conspirators who once tried to keep Algeria French and oust de Gaulle himself. And he wants to keep his diplomatic position free to encourage ultimate negotiation.

If such a negotiation comes, the cause of the United States and the case of Israel could start at a disadvantage. Soviet diplomacy seeks to isolate us in Asia and Europe and to squeeze us out of the Middle East. Prevalent opinion in U.N.'s glass menagerie shows the idea doesn't lack support. Israel has earned much admiration, but the Arabs have oil. Modern industrial society is fueled by petroleum, not praise.

If and when the statesmen take over from the generals, we might remember the cautionary words of Sir William Hayter, former British envoy in Moscow: "The Russians always negotiate for victory. It never seems to occur to them that the proper object of a negotiation is not to defeat your opposite number but to arrive at an agreement with him which will be mutually beneficial."

Sandstorms of War

Palestine remains obscured by the sandstorms of war and U.N. is obscured by the smokescreens of diplomacy, while both areas of decision wait to see what rules, if any, are agreed on. Meanwhile Israel plays its own desperate game according to the cardinal rule of David Ben-Gurion, who once told me:

"Our people cannot understand destiny. They believe in the freedom of human choice. Human beings can make their own fate. All history proves this, and most recently and specially the history of Israel. There is no abstract fate or destiny involved. We don't believe in fate."

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