New Power Structure
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Israel's Sweeping Victory Is Likely To Intensify Conflicts in Mideast

By HANSON W. BALDWIN

The equation of power in the Middle East has been materially changed by the sweeping Israeli victories.

But the outlook is that the basic national, ethnic, religious and economic conflicts have been sharpened, not reduced. The area's oil resources, its vital waterway, the Suez Canal, and its strategic and geographic importance as a land bridge to three continents seem certain to keep the Middle East a focal point of contention.

News Analysis

Israeli now holds strategic positions that make her frontiers and her interests far more defensible than in the past—the Old City of Jerusalem, the west bank of the Jordan River, positions dominating the Strait of Tiran, the Gaza Strip and key communications junctions in Sinai. She is not likely to surrender these quickly.

To her great superiority in the professional and psychological intangibles of war—leadership, tactics, technology, morale—Israel has now added a striking increase in material superiority. The Egyptian and Jordanian air forces have been almost wiped out, the Syrian crippled and the Iraqi hurt. Large numbers of captured tanks, trucks, guns and small arms will greatly increase the strength of the Israeli ground forces, while the losses will diminish the strength of the Arab states, and of Egypt in particular.

For some time to come, unless there is great-power intervention, Israel will have military superiosity in the area. She has become not only the strongest single power in the Middle East—except perhaps for Turkey—but one that clearly outbalances the Arab states collectively.

Bitterness Likely to Grow

This shift in the balance of power, and the psychological and political impact of the Israeli victories, are bound to influence the inter-Arab conflicts in the area.

Both the war in Yemen between republican and royalist forces and their supporters and the terrorism in Aden are likely to be intensified.

The defeat is certain to foster a bond of Arab and Moslem bitterness. But it seems unlikely that this bond will be strong enough in practical power terms to surmount Arab differences and forge a real Arab-Moslem military-political common front.

In terms of power, the Arab renaissance that President Gamal Abdel Nasser has so determinedly sought to lead seems a long way off.

Among the great powers, the Soviet Union appears to be the most affected by the swift defeat of the Arabs. The traditional and long-term ambitions of Russia in the area—ambitions that predate communism—include possession of, or access to, a warm water port on an open ocean. The usefulness of Soviet ports on the Black Sea is limited by Turkish control over the straits leading to the Mediterranean.

The desire for such a port, though muted, has never been relinquished. To it, in the Communist era, has been coupled the objective of exercising some control, if only by proxy, over the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, key waterways for the world's shipping.

Soviet influence, usually exercised indirectly by arms or economic aid, or construction projects in Egypt, Yemen and Aden, has given Moscow footholds adjacent to these waterways.

Soviet Navy Expanded

This exercise of influence along the narrow bottlenecks of world shipping in a region whose oil is highly important to the West has been accompanied by a great enlargement of the Soviet merchant marine and Navy. For the first time in the Communist era, a Soviet Mediterranean fleet or task force is now maintained.

This expansion to the high seas appears to be an important part of the Communist program for development and expansion of Soviet power, and the Middle Eastern events will certainly not halt this. Indeed, they may expand it. The Soviet Mediterranean task force is not dependent upon bases in Arab states and probably will be maintained whether or not such bases are available.

On the other hand, Moscow may reconsider its methods and policies if not its objectives. The Communists apparently overestimated Arab military capabilities, particularly the Egyptians'. They must now decide whether it is in their interest to continue indefinitely the vast program of arms and economic aid they have provided in the past. If they decide that it is, they may drive a hard bargain with the Arabs and insist upon a much larger measure of Soviet control over the aid. This could lead to greater Communist penetration of the area.

'Desertion' Seen

But the freely expressed feeling of Arab diplomats that the Soviet Union "deserted" its protegés in the Middle East when the pressure was on will handicap any attempt by the Russians to mend fences. It is conceivable that the Chinese Communists may try to make political and psychological gains in this situation, but the actual material aid Peking can give the Arabs is limited.

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