THE
HENRY M. JACKSON
MEMORIAL LECTURE

Professor
Bernard Lewis

Rethinking the Middle East

Presented by
The
Henry M. Jackson
Foundation

University of Washington
Seattle, Washington

March 11, 1992

The Henry M. Jackson Foundation was established in 1983 following the death of its namesake. A non-profit, charitable organization, the Foundation supports educational programs related to fields where Senator Jackson played a major leadership role. These include international affairs; public service; the environment, natural resources and energy; and human rights.
The Henry M. Jackson Foundation is grateful to the Seattle Post Intelligencer for its co-sponsorship of the Henry M. Jackson Memorial Lecture.

The Henry M. Jackson Memorial Lectures are presented periodically by the Henry M. Jackson Foundation to advance public discussion of important national and international concerns. The purpose of the Jackson Memorial Lectureship is to provide a significant forum in which major issues of public policy may be forthrightly addressed and critically examined. Views expressed in the lecture series are those of the speakers.
Bernard Lewis, is Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University and an internationally recognized scholar on the religion, society and politics of Islam.

Before joining the faculty of Princeton University in 1974, Lewis held posts as Professor of History of the Near and Middle East and as Director of the History Department of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. He retired from Princeton in 1986 to become Director of the Annenberg Research Institute in Philadelphia until 1990. Since that time, Dr. Lewis has continued to lecture internationally and to pursue his research, specifically on the relationship between Europe and the Muslim world since the advent of Islam in the seventh century.

The author and editor of over twenty-seven volumes, Lewis has had his works translated into numerous languages, including Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Hebrew, Turkish, Japanese, Spanish, French, and German. Professor Lewis earned both his B.A. and Ph. D. from the University of London.
WELCOME

William J. Van Ness, Jr.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the Henry M. Jackson Foundation, I am pleased to welcome you here this evening. My name is Bill Van Ness, and I have the privilege to serve as the President of the Jackson Foundation.

This evening’s lecture is the fourth Henry M. Jackson Memorial Lecture. This lecture series was established by the Foundation to provide a forum for the discussion of issues of national and international significance. These lectures have previously been held in Washington, D.C. and in Seattle. They have featured individuals who have distinguished themselves in their chosen fields. You will find a listing of the previous lectures in the program that you received on entry this evening.

Tonight we have the high honor and privilege to welcome to this great university and to this podium a scholar of great distinction and reputation.

At the conclusion of the lecture there will be an opportunity for questions from the floor.

To introduce this evening’s lecture, I’d like to now call on Helen Hardin Jackson, Chairperson of the Henry M. Jackson Foundation.
INTRODUCTION

Helen Hardin Jackson

Thank you, Bill, for that kind introduction and I want to add my warm welcome to all of you who are gathered here this evening.

No area of the world seems more perplexing than the Middle East. No conflict seems more intractable than that between the peoples who have chosen to live in that particular region of the world. To help us better understand the forces at work in the Middle East and the transformation it is experiencing today, we are privileged to have with us tonight one of the most distinguished experts on this region of the world.

Dr. Bernard Lewis is Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University where he held the Cleveland E. Dodge Professorship. An internationally recognized scholar on the religion, society and politics of Islam, he served for four years as director of the Annenberg Research Institute in Philadelphia following his retirement from Princeton. Professor Lewis was born and educated in England, where he earned his Ph.D. at the University of London and served on its faculty for twenty-five years. In 1974 he came to Princeton, and he became a U.S. citizen eight years later. Not only is he familiar with all of the major languages of the Middle East, but he is a prolific writer as well. He has published 27 books in the field, many of which have been translated into Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Malay and Indonesian.

Noted for the extraordinary range of his scholarship, Professor Lewis has demonstrated an exceptional command of the totality of Islamic and Middle Eastern history from the time of Mohammed to the present day. As one commentator observed, “Dr. Lewis’s sympathies for Turks, Persians, Arabs and Jews encourage him to tell the truth about them, the bad with the good. In this field those who prefer reality to myth are few.” Among the many honors he has received, Professor Lewis is an honorary member of the Turkish Historical Society and the Atatürk Academy. He is also a member of the Egyptian Academy in Cairo, and he was a guest of the Minister of Religions of Indonesia where he spoke at Muslim Universities on the study of Islam in the West.

So it is most fitting that Bernard Lewis has been selected to deliver the Henry M. Jackson Memorial Lecture. If there were one expert on the Middle East whose advice and counsel my husband consistently sought, it was Bernard Lewis. Scoop often called upon scholars for historical perspectives on the nations with which he was dealing, but Professor Lewis was one of the few in the academic world with whom
Scoop consulted regularly over the years. He had confidence in the Professor’s judgment, valued the profound insights he provided on issues pertaining to the Middle East, and respected his extraordinary reserve of knowledge related to the history and culture of this region. Scoop knew he could depend on Professor Lewis for sophisticated analysis and far-reaching understanding of the developments in the Arab world.

I am confident that you, like Scoop, will find Bernard Lewis to be an engaging, provocative, and astute observer of the Middle East. It’s a privilege and great personal honor to present to you this evening, on behalf of the Henry M. Jackson Foundation, Dr. Bernard Lewis.

Helen H. Jackson is Chairman of the Jackson Foundation and wife of the late Senator Henry M. Jackson.
ADDRESS

Bernard Lewis

Madam Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. Before I get down to the business of the evening, there are one or two things I would like to say. First, to express my delight and gratitude for this opportunity to revisit Seattle for the third time. The first and the second were in 1954 and 1956, and both your city and I have changed considerably in that interval. I do, however, still recall vividly my joy on coming here which you will understand more readily when I tell you that I had spent several months in Los Angeles and what I most vividly remember on coming to Seattle was a cold nip in the air, a drizzle of rain in the sky, and no palm trees. And I really felt at home. I do again.

The second observation I would like to make, is to say how deeply honored I am to have been selected to deliver the lecture in memory of Scoop Jackson. He was a man whom I first got to know in the early 60’s. I was a frequent visitor to Washington at his request, and I came greatly to admire and respect him for his human and political qualities. Indeed, I still regard it as one of the most rewarding and illuminating experiences of my life to have known him and to have enjoyed his friendship. I have never been more acutely aware of his loss than during these past few months.

Let me come now to my theme of the evening, rethinking the Middle East.

In the period immediately following the cease-fire in the Gulf War, many voices were raised, saying, “everything has changed, the Middle East will never be the same again. This is a new world, a new Middle East, and all the problems and answers are different.” And then, when the new world order failed to materialize in days, or weeks, or even months many voices — some of them the same voices — were heard again, saying, “nothing has changed: everything is back where it was before, the same actors playing the same parts and acting out the same scripts.”

Momentous events may happen quickly, as they surely did in Kuwait and Iraq last year, but some time is needed to perceive — still more, to understand — the changes that events have revealed, or accelerated, or caused. By now it is becoming increasingly clear that there are indeed many changes in the Middle East, and that while these vary considerably in their scope, scale and range, few things and few participants remain as they were before.

These changes are related to two sequences of events: one short-term and regional, namely the war in Kuwait and Iraq; the other long-
term and global, namely the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Some changes may perhaps be ascribed directly to these events; others — probably most — had been in progress for some time, and were revealed, and perhaps also accelerated, by the cataclysmic events in the region and in the world.

We may begin with the regional events — the Gulf War and its aftermath. Many of the consequences of this war are still problematic. Some are becoming clear, and can be listed without much danger of disagreement. One of them, a cause rather than a consequence of the Gulf crisis and war, is the failure — some would say the demise — of pan-Arabism, and perhaps even of the Arab world as a political entity or bloc. The decline of pan-Arabism as a force shaping the policies of Arab governments can be measured in the level and intensity of their support for other Arab governments and peoples. In 1948, the Arab states were unanimous in rejecting the United Nations’ partition resolution, and in attempting, by military as well as political and economic measures, to prevent the establishment of the Jewish — and also, incidentally, the Arab — states proposed by that resolution.

By 1982, when the Israelis invaded Lebanon, entered its capital, and evicted the PLO, the reaction in Arab countries was remarkably restrained. One reason for this restraint was the Iraq-Iran war, when both governments and public opinion in the Arab world were sharply divided, and Syria, a major Arab country, was a non-belligerent ally of Iran against Iraq.

Perhaps even more striking was the American bomber raid on Tripoli in 1986, when the Middle East experts in the academy, the media, and government all gave warning that this action would unite the whole Arab world in wrath against the West in general, and against the United States in particular. Nothing of the kind happened. In 1967, a false rumor that the United States had intervened in the war on Israel’s side brought attacks by enraged crowds on American installations in many Arab capitals. By 1986, a direct American assault on an Arab capital evoked, at the most, mixed feelings in other Arab capitals, and virtually no popular outcry. And in the meantime, the Arab states were increasingly indifferent to the plight of the Palestinians. Some of them are now even willing to call Israel by its name and — apart from Egypt, for the first time since the cease-fire negotiations of 1948 - 1949 — to sit and talk face to face with Israeli representatives.

There have of course always been quarrels and rivalries between Arab states, and these sometimes impeded Arab unity or even cooperation — such as the mutual distrust between King Farouk of Egypt and King Abdallah of Jordan, which hampered Arab military operations in 1948. There have been frontier disputes and even border skirmishes, for example between Algeria and Morocco, between Egypt and Libya,
between the Saudi kingdom and its Arabian neighbors. When Saddam Hussein invaded, conquered, and annexed Kuwait in August 1990, he completed, and in a sense formalized, a change which had been developing over a long period. Now, for the first time, in defiance of all the accepted norms of inter-Arab relations, and also, incidentally, in violation of the Arab League charter, which precludes the resort to arms in inter-Arab disputes, one Arab state had launched a full-scale war against another, and this in turn led to an inter-Arab conflict, in which a group of Arab states made war, with Western powers as allies, against another Arab state. This was not an American-Arab war, despite attempts to present it as such. It was not an Israel-Arab war, despite the determined and violent attempt to transform it into one. It was not an ideological war, despite Saddam Hussein's belated but surprisingly effective appeal to fundamentalism and populism, and the coalition's brief and perfunctory obeisance to democracy. It was, in the last analysis, a war between Arab rulers, in which America reluctantly became involved, in support of its allies and in defense of the perceived common interests of the free world, and in which Israel was used, briefly, painfully, and unsuccessfully, as a distraction.

These events marked, one might say, the formal abandonment of the long-cherished dream of pan-Arabism — of a united Arab state from the Gulf to the Atlantic, or even of a coherent Arab political bloc. It would be rash to say that pan-Arabism is dead, since many of the features which led to its emergence are still there. But, as a matter of current politics, and for the foreseeable future, it no longer counts as a political force. It survives among diminishing groups of intellectuals, mainly outside the Arab lands; it is still cherished by a variety of special interests, often for reasons unrelated to the concerns or well-being of the Arabs themselves. But it is not a factor in international or inter-Arab or even domestic Arab politics.

Is this change irreversible? Nothing is impossible, and it may be that the government of the United States or of Israel may succeed where all the Arab governments have failed in reviving the cause of pan-Arabism and re-creating an Arab political bloc. What is much more likely, however, is that the position of the Arab world will more closely resemble that of Latin America — a group of countries united by a common language and culture, a common religion, a common history, a common sense, even, of destiny. But the Arab world from the Gulf to the Atlantic is no more a political bloc than the Hispanic-American world from the Rio Grande to the Antarctic — perhaps even less, since the Arab world, unlike the Hispanic world, does not have a common spoken language.

One of the great attractions of pan-Arabism was the sense that it offered of belonging to something vaster and greater than the petty local
sovereignties into which the Arab world was divided after the breakup of the Ottoman and Western empires; the sense of aspiring to something cleaner and nobler than the often rather squalid politics that had become usual in the individual states. The discrediting of pan-Arabism gives greater scope and attraction to the competing ideal — that of pan-Islam, nowadays usually linked with radical and militant religious movements. Religious radicalism has been a growing force in the Muslim world for some time and especially since the Iranian revolution. The Gulf crisis, the Gulf War, and the continuing tensions have given it new scope and new strength.

A second major change which has been revealed rather than caused by the Gulf War is the end — at least for the time being — of the effectiveness of oil as a weapon in the hands of the producer countries. This weapon, so powerful as an instrument of policy in past crises, was in this particular crisis totally ineffectual. At a time when the oil supplies of two major producers was cut off — of Kuwait, by the Iraqis; of Iraq, by the coalition — and the consequent serious drop in the productive capacity available, the price of oil actually fell.

Is this change reversible? Perhaps, though it seems unlikely. Other sources of oil are being found and developed, existing producer countries will desperately need oil revenues, and will compete with each other in production. Meanwhile, growing awareness of the environmental and political fall-out of oil has spurred the search for less destructive and less hazardous fuels. A time will come, perhaps in twenty-five, perhaps in fifty years, when oil will be superseded by other cleaner, safer sources of energy. That time is not near, but producers are increasingly aware that the unwise use of oil power for financial extortion or political blackmail will bring that time nearer. To make oil a weapon again in the hands of the producers would require a special combination of foolishness and incompetence on the part of those who make the world’s political and commercial decisions. I need hardly tell you that this possibility cannot be excluded, though it seems unlikely at the present time.

The war — as is the way of wars — shattered some illusions and endangered other cherished beliefs. One of these concerned the efficacy of bought technology. If you have the money, you can buy all kinds of sophisticated technology and weaponry — there is no lack of sellers, suppliers, and expert advisers, even of credit. But buying technology does not make an advanced technological society, nor does it enable the buyer to field an advanced technological army. In the military sense, this was probably the most important lesson of the war in Iraq. The swift and overwhelming defeat of the Iraqi armed forces reminded the world of something that it had begun to forget — of the technological and military edge which the modern West had achieved over the rest of the world, and which in the past had enabled even small European
countries like Holland and Portugal to conquer and govern vast empires in Asia and Africa. That technological edge is much diminished and in some countries, for example Japan, it has gone altogether. It still remains in our day in the Middle East, and may help to explain the repeated victories of Israel against vastly more numerous and powerful neighbors.

The Gulf War, and more particularly, events since the cease-fire, have also demonstrated the baselessness of the illusions that were held concerning the effectiveness of sanctions as a way of bringing Saddam Hussein to heel. There were many who argued that we should "give sanctions time to work;" often with the unspoken second line, "and if they don't work, let's forget about it." By now it should be clear, even to those who had no such original intention, that the second line would have been the inevitable result.

Both the Western and the regional powers, still, it would seem, hold on to beliefs that, though battered, are not dead. But there are questions. Can the Western powers really safeguard their vital interests in the region through local proxies or proteges? Do they even have such interests? Can Middle Eastern powers defend themselves from subversion and invasion without Western help, and if not, what level and type of help would they need? All these are very much open questions at the present time. It is sadly probable that the course of events during the coming months and years will provide answers to them.

All these regional changes, however important to the countries and peoples of the Middle East, are of little interest to the rest of the world, except insofar as they may affect the availability of Middle Eastern oil. Even that little is diminishing rapidly, as the ending of the Cold War undercuts the other main cause of Middle Eastern importance: the overland transit routes and bridges between Europe, Asia and Africa.

The ending of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the disappearance of Russia as a major player on the international scene, have brought, and will continue to bring, changes of global importance, affecting the Middle East as every other part of the world.

Some of the consequences are already obvious, as for example, in the diplomatic relations between regional and outside powers. Ex-Soviet client states, suddenly finding themselves bereft of the patronage and protection they had once enjoyed, are now looking elsewhere. There is an interesting diplomatic waltz in progress between proteges in need of a patron and a patron in search of proteges. There is also a new danger. The withdrawal of the Soviet Union ended not only Soviet mischief-making, but also a certain discipline. Both superpowers engaged in the Cold War had to some extent maintained a kind of bi-polar order among their allies and associates. One may wonder whether previous rulers of the Soviet Union would have permitted Saddam Hussein to invade and then annex Kuwait, and thus throw the entire Middle East into turmoil.
The most immediately visible, and probably the most enduring of the regional consequences of this global change is the redefinition of the Middle East. We have always been a little vague about the geographical meaning of this expression, which was invented in the West in the early years of this century, and which has since — illogically and indeed absurdly — been adopted by the whole world, including the Middle East itself. Originally denoting only the countries around the Persian Gulf, it has since extended in all directions. Eastward it includes Iran; some would add Afghanistan; a few, even Pakistan. Westward, it undoubtedly includes Egypt, and has been somewhat vaguely extended across North Africa, sometimes as far as Morocco. The southern limit of the Middle East is clear enough in Asia, being provided by the sea that washes the shores of Iran and Arabia. In the African continent the Middle East tapers off into that ill-defined area where Arab meets Black, in the Sudan and Chad and Mauritania, in regions of endemic conflict. Hitherto, there has however been no doubt at all about the northern limit of the Middle East, which was, of course, the Soviet frontier.

That boundary no longer exists. It was always artificial, alien and misleading, a frontier established by the expanding power of Imperial Russia, which in the early and mid-19th century conquered and annexed vast territories in Transcaucasia and Central Asia that culturally, ethnically, linguistically and religiously formed part of the historic Middle East.

With the breakup of the last of the great European empires, and the independence of the southern republics, the Middle East has resumed its historic dimensions. Six of these republics are predominantly Muslim. One of them, Tajikistan, speaks a form of Persian; the other five languages are closely related to Turkish. In addition, there are important enclaves of Turkish-speaking Muslims in many places in the Russian and other non-Muslim republics. The countries north of the former Soviet frontier are closely related to the countries south of it, speaking the same or similar languages, professing the same religion, and sharing the same historical memories. Samarkand and Bukhara are after all as much part of the historic Middle East as are Isfahan and Damascus. Many of the great creators of Middle Eastern Islamic civilization were born in these countries — to name but a few examples: the poet Nizami, the scientists Biruni and Kharazmi, the philosophers Farabi and Ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna, and perhaps most remarkable of all, Bukhari, whose magisterial collection of Muslim traditions is second only to the Quran itself in the reverence in which it is held all over the Muslim world.

The emergence of this new Middle East may indeed be one of the most important changes of all for the older Middle East. Even the Islamic bloc will not be the same again, with six new republics added to
it from an entirely different background. Already, these newly-independent republics are being intensively courted from various quarters in the Middle East. Saudi agencies and individuals have been spending vast sums of money to finance a revival of Islam — meaning, of course, their own traditional and conservative version of Islam. The Iranians, with somewhat less money but at least equal personal dedication, and with far closer contacts alike in geography, language, and culture, are working hard to spread their own brand of radical, militant, anti-Western fundamentalism. In some ways, the Saudis are unwittingly making their task easier. Secular, modern Muslims are usually immune to the Iranian type of propaganda, while those who have received a traditional Islamic education are open and responsive. Saudi religious activities are, in a sense, funding prep schools to prepare candidates for Iranian-style advanced education. Pakistan appears to be interested in establishing diplomatic, cultural and commercial links; even Israel has won noteworthy initial success in cultivating good relations with these republics, through technical and agricultural aid of various kinds.

More important than any of these is the effort being made by the Turkish Republic to restore the links, long since broken, with their Turkish brethren to the east, and to share with them the Turkish vision for the future — a lay state, an open society, a market economy, a liberal democracy, and a westward orientation.

The choices before these republics are symbolized in the debate which is going on at the present time over the alphabet. Before the Russian revolution, they wrote their languages in the Arabic script. Under Soviet rule, after a brief interval with the Latin alphabet, they were given new alphabets, based on the Cyrillic script, which have remained in exclusive use for all of these languages. They are now discussing three possible choices. Some wish to retain the Cyrillic script which the Russians gave them, a choice that would obviously involve a continuing relationship with whatever replaces the Soviet Union. Some wish to return to the Arabic alphabet, to restore their broken links with the Muslim world to the south — with Iran and Pakistan and more remotely with the Arab lands. Some wish to adopt the Latin alphabet as it is used in the Turkish republic — a choice that has already been made in Azerbaijan. Their alternatives might be summarized as Khomeinism, or Kemalism, or some form of post-Soviet association. The choices they make will be momentous, not only for themselves, but for the whole of the Middle East.

Both for them and for the older independent countries of the Middle East, there is one great change that transcends all of the others, and will shape their history for a long time — perhaps centuries — to come. This change is still unrealized, or perhaps half-realized. What is
happening is the end of an era in history, and some time may yet pass before its full effects are felt and its implications are understood.

By common convention, the modern era in Middle East history began in the year 1798, when a French general called Napoleon Bonaparte landed in Egypt, then an Ottoman province, and occupied the country with surprisingly little difficulty. The French stayed there for several years, and, significantly, they were evicted, not by the Egyptians, nor yet by the Ottomans, but by the British. This inaugurated a period of almost two hundred years when the Middle East was dominated by foreign great powers, sometimes from outside, sometimes, as in the interwar period, from within the region.

This means that as far back as living memory can reach, and for some time farther than that, the countries of the Middle East have been disputed between rival, more developed outside powers whose strength greatly exceeded their own. There were times, before the rise of Rome, and again after the fall of Rome, when Middle Eastern powers competed for the domination of the known world. But those times are long past, and for many centuries now the countries of the Middle East have variously enjoyed and endured the attention of outsiders; first, the commercial and diplomatic rivalries of mercantilist European states, then the successive clashes of the British, French, and Russian empires, of the Allies and the Axis, and most recently, of the United States and the Soviet Union. In both peace and war, the governments, and sometimes the peoples, of the Middle East were the object of intensive efforts by outside powers to win their hearts and minds, so as to gain access to their communications and resources. Governments, ministers, and foreign policy experts in the Middle Eastern countries have known no situation other than that in which ultimate power resides elsewhere, and in which their task is to avoid the dangers, and exploit the opportunities, that this rivalry presents. This was the only way they could look at politics — they had known no other. Much the same is true of the Middle East experts of these self-same powers, whose professional task it is to deal with these statesmen, and who often interpreted their task as doing whatever was necessary, preferably at third-party expense, to gain and retain their good will. Like their regional colleagues, they too have known no other situation.

Few of them appear to have understood the momentous change that has taken place, and its meaning for them and for their countries — indeed, many politicians and advisers continue to operate rather like those familiar characters in movie cartoons, who walk off the edge of a cliff and advance some distance in the air before they look down, realize there is nothing underneath, and drop.

Half the change was understood fairly quickly. Russia, because of its internal problems, is, at least for a while, out of the game. It has in
consequence been observed, again and again, that now for the first time ever there is only one superpower, with overwhelming strength, and no real rival to challenge its power or will, in the Middle East or anywhere else.

In a substantial sense, this perception is true. But some of the inferences drawn from it, especially regarding the Middle East, rest on dubious or false assumptions.

Because of some superficial resemblances of language and institutions, there is a widespread belief in the Middle East that the United States is the British empire back in business, with new management, a new trading name, and a new address. This is not so. The United States is not an imperial power in the sense in which that term could be applied in the past to Britain, to France, to Holland, to Tsarist Russia, or to the Soviet Union. The government of the United States is ultimately answerable in this, as in all else, to the people of the United States, who have no appetite whatsoever for overseas imperial adventures. This is a society different from that of the old empires, with different aspirations, and different policies.

The United States will no doubt seek to remain the predominant outside power in the Middle East — but the operative word is “outside.” Any attempt to get more closely involved inside the region would be bitterly — and probably effectively — opposed. The present mood that one can sense very strongly in this country is one of reluctance bordering on revulsion. This is not due only to current economic difficulties, though obviously they contribute to it significantly, but to something that one might describe as part of the basic structure of the American society and policy. One simply cannot see the United States playing a classical imperial role in the Middle East. It failed painfully to do so even on its doorstep in Central America, and it is not likely to succeed any better in an area that is so remote, both geographically and culturally.

Empire does not go well with liberal democracy. The British and French Empires in their day were doomed when this disruptive idea of freedom affected both their own people and the peoples over whom they were ruling, making the one unwilling to impose, the other to accept, imperial domination. Something of the same sort may be happening in Russia now, but it is basic and intrinsic in America.

I have no doubt at all that Russia will be back — a country with the size, the numbers, the resources, the talents, the experience, the ambitions, of Russia will not stay out indefinitely. There will be a hard time, which may indeed last well into the twenty-first century, but sooner or later Russia — under whatever kind of regime — will be back as a major player in the international game. Unlike the United States, Russia would have no structural impediment. It would also have a well-grounded concern with events in a volatile region adjacent to its southern frontier, wherever that may finally lie.
What other possibilities are there? Europe? Certainly no individual European power, probably not even the European Community, of which Mr. Eyskens, the Belgian Foreign Minister, aptly remarked that it is an economic giant, a political dwarf and a military worm. This judgment was confirmed by the community's failure to deal with the crisis in Yugoslavia — a European state on its borders. Before it could play any significant role in determining the course of events in the Middle East, there would have to be a major restructuring and redistribution of power within the community, and that, for the time being at least, would be strongly resisted both at home and abroad.

Far Eastern powers, Japan, even China? This is a distinct possibility, but not for the immediate future. If the prophets of doom are right, if Western civilization declines and decays, and the center of gravity of the world shifts from the Atlantic to the Pacific, as it had already previously shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, then perhaps the Middle East might be contested by Far Eastern powers, as it was once contested by the powers of Europe. But this is a matter for philosophical speculation rather than for immediate political concern. A less apocalyptic possibility is that the rising powers of east and perhaps south Asia may seek a political and military role to match their growing economic role in the countries of the modern Middle East, from which they are separated by much shorter distances than is the United States.

But that too is not for the immediate future, and in the meantime, the United States, so it would appear, remains alone. Today the only serious restraint on the American administration is American public opinion. Of the many blunders made by Saddam Hussein, the greatest of all was to infuriate the American administration and antagonize American public opinion at the same time. Without this double shock, it is unlikely that the American democracy would have allowed the dispatch of an army to a Middle Eastern battlefield. And after the shock, it is becoming clear that American public opinion will not tolerate keeping American troops in the Middle East a day longer than is strictly necessary, and perhaps not even as long as that.

Since Russia cannot, and America will not, play the imperial role, and since no other claimant is as yet in sight, this creates an entirely new and unprecedented situation. For the time being at least, the countries of the Middle East face a challenging and for some a frightening prospect: the prospect of having to take responsibility for their own affairs. It may be a while before Middle Eastern rulers and leaders realize that they can no longer compel foreign aid, nor plausibly blame foreign domination when things go wrong. In this new situation, both outside and regional powers must reassess their interests, their purposes, and their possibilities. There are as yet few signs that such a reassessment is in progress — few, but not unimportant.
The first concern of any American government is of course to define U.S. interests and to devise policies for their protection. In the period following the Second World War, American policy, in the Middle East as elsewhere, was dominated by the need to prevent Soviet penetration. The United States regretfully relinquished the moral superiority of the sidelines, and became involved in stages; first, in support of the crumbling British position, and then, when that clearly became unworkable, intervening more directly — not indeed to support, but to replace the United Kingdom as defender of the Middle East against outside attack, specifically from the Soviet Union.

The first post-war concern was to resist Soviet pressure on the northern tier — to secure the Soviet withdrawal from Iranian Azerbaijan and to counter the demands on Turkey. This policy was clear and intelligible, and on the whole, successful in saving Turkey and Iran. But the attempt to extend it to the Arab world by means of the Baghdad Pact backfired disastrously, and antagonized or undermined those it was intended to attract. Nasser, seeing the pact as a threat to his leadership, turned to the Soviets; the pro-western regime in Iraq was overthrown, and the friendly regimes in Jordan and Lebanon were endangered to the point that both needed Western military help in order to survive. From 1955, when the Soviets leap-frogged across the northern tier into the Arab world, both the threat and the means of countering it changed radically. While the northern tier held firm, the Arab lands became hostile or — at best — nervously neutral. In this situation, the American relationship with Israel entered on a new phase.

This relationship was for a long time shaped by two entirely different considerations, one of which one might call ideological or sentimental; the other, strategic. Americans find it much easier to empathize with Israel than do Europeans. American national mythology is of people who come across the sea, land on the shore, create a new world, and have some difficulty with the previous inhabitants. All this is very familiar to Americans, who are in a sense conditioned by their own background and education to sympathize with people who seem to be repeating the experience of the pilgrim fathers, the pioneers and their successors. The Arabs of course do not see it that way, and many Europeans share their view.

The other bond between the two countries is the strategic relationship, which began in the 60s, flourished in the 70s and 80s, and appears to be in abeyance now. The value of Israel to the United States as a strategic asset has been much disputed. There have been some in this country who viewed Israel as a major strategic ally in the region, and the one sure bastion against growing Soviet penetration. In this sense, the strategic relationship with Israel, absent in the early years of the state, was a consequence, not a cause, of the growing Soviet influence in the
Arab lands. Others have argued that Israel, far from being a strategic asset, has been a strategic liability, by embittering United States relations with the Arab world, and causing the failure of U.S. policies in the region.

But if one compares the record of American policy in the Middle East with that of other regions, one is struck, not by its failures, but by its success. There is after all no Vietnam in the Middle East, no Cuba or Nicaragua or El Salvador, not even an Angola. On the contrary, throughout the successive crises that have shaken the region, there has always been an imposing political, economic, and cultural American presence, usually in several countries — and this, until the Gulf War, without the need for any significant military interventions. Those who look only at the Middle East are constantly aware of the difficulties and failures of policy in that region, but if one looks at the picture in a wider perspective, one cannot be but astonished at the effectiveness of American policy in the Middle East as contrasted with, say, Southeast Asia, Central America or Southern Africa. It seems likely that this record of relative success may owe much first, to the steadfastness of the northern tier; and second, to the presence of a powerful, self-reliant, and stable democratic power in the region.

Whatever value Israel might have had as a strategic asset during the Cold War, that value obviously ended when the Cold War itself came to an end. The change was clearly manifested in the Gulf War last year, when what the United States most desired from Israel was to keep out of the conflict — to be silent, inactive, and as far as possible, invisible. President Bush was probably right to ask Israel not to respond to the SCUD attacks, and Prime Minister Shamir was probably wise to accede to this request, though it is a pity that those Israelis who warned him that Israel would be taunted for its compliance, were so quickly proved right.

In any case, inaction by Israel was the right policy at that moment for both Israel and the United States, and it was clear that in the Gulf crisis and war, Israel was not an asset, but an irrelevance — some even said, a nuisance. Some of the things that the government of Israel has said and done since then are unlikely to change this perception.

Meanwhile, a new American policy has emerged in the Middle East, concerned with different objectives. Its main aim is to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemony — of a single regional power that could dominate the area, and thus establish monopolistic control of Middle Eastern oil. This has been the basic concern underlying successive American policies towards Iran, towards Iraq, and now perhaps once again towards Iran, or to any other perceived future threat within the region.

The policy adopted so far, in order to prevent such a hegemony, is to encourage, arm, and when necessary support a regional and therefore mainly Arab security pact. This policy inevitably evokes the unhappy
memory of earlier attempts, which certainly did more harm than good. This time the proposed pact has a somewhat better chance. The presumed enemy is no longer the redoubtable Soviet Union, and regional rulers are taking a more sober view of the world and their place in it. But such a pact, based on unstable regimes ruling volatile societies, is inherently precarious, and the chain is no stronger than its weakest link. The recent history of Iraq illustrates the different ways that such a policy can go wrong. By embracing the monarchy, we procured its overthrow; by fostering Saddam Hussein, we nurtured a monster. It would be fatally easy to repeat either or both of these errors, with considerable risk to our interests in the region, and terrible consequences for the people who live there.

In the present situation, the willingness of some Arab governments to talk peace with Israel, and the American concern to push the peace process along become intelligible. Many Arabs are beginning to realize that on the best estimate of Israel’s strength and the worse estimate of Israel’s intentions, Israel is not their most serious problem, nor is it the greatest threat that confronts them. An Israel at war with her neighbors would be a constant danger, a distraction that could always be used by a new — or even the same — Saddam Hussein, perhaps more successfully next time. But an Israel at peace with her neighbors could provide, at the very least, an element of democratic stability in the region.

But the peace process will be long and difficult. There are so many bitter memories, such profound suspicion on both sides, which even now the parties do little to diminish and much to augment. The United States can make a major contribution by convincing both sides of its steadfastness, fairness, and good faith. A posture of judicial impartiality would be neither appropriate nor credible in a power that, like all the other participants, is rightly and inevitably concerned first and last with the pursuit of its own interests. Policy-makers would be wise to recall the excellent advice of a medieval Arab author, Ibn Hazm, who said, “He who befriends and advances friend and enemy alike will only arouse distaste for his friendship and contempt for his enmity. He will earn the scorn of his enemy, and facilitate his hostile designs; he will lose his friend, who will join the ranks of his enemies.”

The principal concern is of course oil. This is not primarily a question of price or access. The general opinion, probably well founded, is that sellers of oil would have greater difficulty in finding other customers than would customers in finding other suppliers. The real danger is not commercial extortion, but politically-motivated monopolies. If Saddam Hussein had been allowed to continue unchecked, he would have controlled the oil resources of both Iraq and Kuwait. If the rest of the region had observed that he could do this with impunity, the remaining Gulf states would sooner rather than later have fallen into his lap, and even the Saudis would have had either to submit or be over-
thrown. The real danger was monopolistic control, by a megalomaniac dictator, of Middle Eastern oil — and that, I would remind you, is a very large proportion of world oil.

In addition to oil, there is another concern, perhaps not immediate, but already causing some alarm — and that is the coming nuclearization of the Middle East by the acquisition of nuclear weapons, or perhaps even the building of a nuclear capacity by one or more potentially hostile powers in the region. This is in the long run probably inevitable. At best, it can be postponed, limited, and perhaps even controlled. It cannot be prevented, and this change, when it comes, will totally transform the situation in the entire region.

In a nuclearized Middle East, with the emergence of one or more nuclear powers, Israel would almost certainly recover, and indeed increase its strategic value to the United States, and more generally to the West. But this is not imminent, and has little effect on current policies. In the current perception, the one urgent issue is to prevent the monopolization of oil by a regional power, and the best way to achieve this is by some sort of security arrangement with regional powers. The Gulf crisis and war showed how such an arrangement could work — and how little a role if any there would be for Israel as long as it continued to work.

That leads to the other aspect, what I called the ideological, or sentimental relationship, which also has a potential strategic value. There are in general two quite different types of alliance. That is to say, we use the same word “alliance” to describe two very different relationships. One of them is strategic, and may be a purely temporary accommodation on the basis of perceived common threats. Such an accommodation may be reached with any sort of ruler — the kind of government he runs, the kind of society he governs, are equally irrelevant. None of us is likely to forget the famous dictum that all countries of a certain type will be ruled by tyrants: the only question is whether they will be “their” tyrants or “our” tyrants. The other party to such an “alliance” can change his mind at any time, or may have it changed for him, if he is overthrown and replaced. The alliance may be ended by a change of leader, a change of regime, or even a change in outlook. What can happen is well-illustrated by events in Libya, Iraq, Iran and in the Sudan, where political changes brought total reversals of policy, or in another sense by Egypt, where even without a change of regime, the rulers were able to switch from a Western to Soviet and back again to a Western alignment.

The same flexibility also exists on the American side. Just as such allies can at any time abandon the United States, the United States has obviously also felt free to abandon such allies, if the alliance becomes too troublesome, or ceases to be cost-effective — as for example, in
South Vietnam, Kurdistan or Lebanon. One could name other examples, and, as the debate has clearly shown, there are many who would have liked to add Kuwait. In abandoning an ally with which there is no more than a strategic accommodation, one can proceed without compunction and without risk of serious criticism at home.

The other kind of alliance is one based on genuine affinity, of institutions, of aspirations, and of way of life, and is far less subject to change. The Soviets in their heyday were well aware of this, and tried to create communist dictatorships wherever they went. Democracies are more difficult to create; they are also more difficult to destroy, and their destruction may require some help from their friends and even some of their citizens as well as their enemies. The fate of prewar Czechoslovakia is the classical example.

True alliances, based on common values and standards, exist between the United States and the democracies of Europe, of Australasia, and of Canada. It seems likely that most Americans would be prepared to add Israel to that list, thereby recognizing stronger links, stronger mutual loyalties and commitments, and a more enduring relationship. This remains true despite some recent Israeli actions which, though not unprecedented in democracies at war, have somewhat tarnished Israel's democratic image. Israel has an obvious vital interest in maintaining such a relationship in addition to — and in the present situation instead of — a purely strategic one. As other examples show very clearly, purely strategic relationships are neither durable nor reliable on either side. Israel had a substantial strategic value in the past, and may well have a major strategic value in the future. But for the moment — that is, as long as the Arab governments of the coalition stay in power, hold together, and remain allies — Israel has little or no strategic value, and that is what counts in a political culture where all too often, foreign policy is a series of improvisations, neither informed by any knowledge of the past nor inspired by any vision of the future — and in which "that's history" denotes something finished and done with and forgotten, and "you're history" is a phrase used to dismiss a discarded lover.

For the governments and peoples of the Middle East, the opportunities — and the dangers — are incomparably greater. What is at stake for them is not only a matter of interests and policies, but the whole future direction of their societies.

What are their choices? The most obvious is the mixture as before — to continue with the same political games, with the same or similar radical dictatorships and traditional autocracies, trying to subvert or invade each other — but with this important difference, that the West would no longer be concerned, but would rather remain indifferent to whatever happened, to wars and disasters and upheavals, as long as the oil continues to flow. There is a parallel, perhaps a precedent, in Angola, a
country that was utterly devastated by internal upheavals, external interventions, civil wars and massacres, to the almost total indifference of the outside world. As long as the oil companies continued to work, and the oil still flowed, no one greatly cared what they did to each other or what others did to them. This could easily happen in the Middle East. The Western capacity for turning a blind eye, already manifested in other respects, should not be underrated.

Another possibility, of which we are acutely aware at the present time, is Islamic fundamentalism, a loose and inaccurate term that designates a number of different, and sometimes contrasting, forms of Islamic religious militancy. As already noted, the eclipse of pan-Arabism has left Islamic fundamentalism as the most attractive alternative to all those who feel that there has to be something better, and truer, and more hopeful, than the inept tyrannies of their rulers, and the bankrupt ideologies foisted on them from outside. These movements feed on privation and humiliation and the frustration and resentments to which they give rise, after the failure of all of the political and economic nostrums, both the foreign imports and the local imitations. As seen by many in the Middle East and North Africa, both capitalism and socialism were tried and have failed; both Western and Eastern models produced only poverty and tyranny. It may seem unjust that in Algeria, for example, the West should be blamed for the pseudo-Stalinist policies of an anti-Western government — for the failure of the one, and the ineptitude of the other. But popular sentiment is not entirely wrong in seeing the Western world, and Western ideas, as the ultimate source of the major changes that have transformed the Islamic world in the last century or more. As a consequence, much of their anger is directed against the Westerner, seen as the ancient and immemorial enemy of Islam since before the Crusades, and against the Westerner, seen as a tool or accomplice of the West, and as a traitor to his own people.

Religious fundamentalism enjoys several advantages against competing ideologies. It is readily intelligible to both educated and uneducated Muslims. It offers a set of themes, slogans and symbols that are profoundly familiar, and therefore effective in mobilizing support and in formulating a critique of what is wrong and a program for putting it right. Religious movements enjoy another practical advantage in societies like those of the Middle East and North Africa, that are under more or less autocratic rule: dictators can forbid parties, they can forbid meetings — they cannot forbid public worship, and they can to only a limited extent control sermons.

As a result, the religious opposition groups are the only ones that have regular meeting places where they can assemble, and have at their disposal a network outside the control of the state, or at least not fully subject to it. The more oppressive the regime, the greater the help it gives to the fundamentalists by eliminating competing oppositions.
Militant Islamic radicalism is not new. Several times since the beginnings of the Western impact in the eighteenth century, there have been religiously-expressed militant opposition movements. So far, they have all failed. Sometimes they have failed in an easy and relatively painless way by being defeated and suppressed, in which case the crown of martyrdom brought them a kind of success. Sometimes they have failed the hard way, by gaining power, and then having to confront great economic and social problems for which they had no real answers. What has usually happened is that they have become, in time, as oppressive and as cynical as their ousted predecessors. It is in this phase that they can become really dangerous; when, to use a European typology, the revolution enters the Napoleonic, or perhaps one should say, the Stalinist phase. In a program of aggression and expansion, these movements would enjoy, like their Jacobin and Bolshevik predecessors, the advantage of fifth columns in every country and community with which they share a common universe of discourse. There is also the possibility that they might have nuclear weapons, either for terrorist or for regular military use. Whatever doubts one may have about the ability of the fundamentalists, once in power, to achieve their declared aims, one should not underrate their capacity to gain and retain power.

Another possibility, which could even be precipitated by fundamentalism, is what it has of late become fashionable to call “Lebanization.” Most of the states of the Middle East — Egypt is an obvious exception — are of recent and artificial construction, and are vulnerable to such a process. If the central power is sufficiently weakened, there is no real civil society to hold the polity together, no real sense of common national identity or overriding allegiance to the nation-state. The state then disintegrates — as happened in Lebanon — into a chaos of squabbling, feuding, fighting sects, tribes, regions and parties. If things go badly, and central governments falter and collapse, the same could happen, not only in the countries of the existing Middle East, but also in the newly-independent republics of the Soviet Union, where the artificial frontiers drawn by the former imperial masters left each of the republics with a mosaic of minorities and claims of one sort or another on or by its neighbors.

It is no doubt to guard against these and other dangers that the Saudis and Egyptians, and some others, with the encouragement and support of the United States, are trying to devise and install some kind of regional security arrangement — less than an alliance, but more than the moribund Arab League — to secure protection against aggression, and more difficult, against subversion. At the lowest, this would mean that each tyrant confines his tyranny to his own subjects, and doesn’t interfere with his neighbors. Apparently, some limited compromise might be permitted on the second of these points. Saddam Hussein was
left to do whatever he pleased in Iraq, but broke the rules by invading Kuwait. Hafiz al-Assad could do what he pleased in Syria, but, playing his cards more skillfully, was accorded a free hand in Lebanon. The two examples which I have just cited illustrate the inherent instability and uncertainty — not to speak of the immorality — of any such arrangement. Sooner or later some tyrant or fanatic, or one who combines both qualities, will break the rules and launch an invasion or subversion leading to a regional conflict, in which non-regional powers might, but in present circumstances probably would not, become involved.

Of late, many voices have been heard in the Arab lands, and more openly in the Arab Diaspora, speaking of freedom, and more specifically, of liberal democracy. For most of modern history, the word "freedom" in Arab political discourse has been a synonym for independence. It meant the freedom of the nation and country from domination by foreigners, and had nothing to do with the place of the individual within the nation. Today that kind of freedom has become axiomatic, even extending to the newly-independent territories of the last great European empire, that of Russia. Only the most inveterate of conspiracy theorists would now pretend otherwise. The word "democracy" in Arab political discourse has for long denoted the sham parliamentary regimes that were installed and bequeathed by the British and French empires — a simulacrum of free institutions, manipulated by small groups of rich and powerful men, unheeded of the mass of the population, and, for the most part, unheeded by them. All these regimes were of brief duration: one after another was overthrown, and replaced by autocratic regimes, which, though in most significant respects no better than the parliaments of the pashas, had at least the somewhat equivocal merit of authenticity, and the ability to maintain themselves in power.

More than forty years have passed since the departure of the British and French imperialists from the Fertile Crescent — longer than the entire period of their rule in those countries. The bittersweet experience of independence has given many Arab thinkers and writers a new awareness of the deeper meaning of freedom, and a truer sense of what democracy can be. Many now argue that the root cause of all the evils and failures of the Arab world is the lack of freedom, and that only democracy can provide the answer to their problems. The record of the past is dismal, but the warning and instruction it provides are all the more cogent.

But democracy is difficult — perhaps the most difficult to operate and maintain of all known forms of government. It arose in a limited region, among the peoples of western and northwestern Europe, and was transplanted by them to their colonies overseas. It has flourished, or at least survived in some other places; sometimes, as in India bequeathed by the departing imperial rulers; sometimes, as in the former
countries, imposed or implanted by the victors. In Israel, democracy was created by a predominantly European population, in the aftermath of a British colonial administration. Remarkably, it has survived both demographic and political change, and has not succumbed to the pressures of decades of military emergency. In Lebanon, a working democracy was operated for a while by a mixed Christian and Muslim political elite, but ended in civil war and foreign occupation.

Only in one country of the Islamic world has democracy continued, despite many difficulties and setbacks, to function and even to flourish. I speak of course of Turkey. In Turkey, democracy was neither bequeathed by imperial rulers, nor imposed by victorious enemies. It was the free choice of the Turks themselves. The path to democracy for Turkey has been long and hard, and beset with obstacles. But the Turks have shown that with goodwill, determination, courage, and above all, persistence, it is possible to overcome these obstacles and advance on the path of freedom. Turkey is not an Arab country, but it shares with the Arabs a very large part of the religious, political, and cultural heritage of the Middle East. The Turks have shown that it can be done, and others may yet find themselves able to do it.

One of the lessons of Turkey’s success and others’ failures is that a major prerequisite for the working of any kind of free institution is the level of social and economic development needed to support it. Even if anti-democratic political traditions and habits can be overcome, the immense economic problems of the region — its poverty, its social and technological backwardness — would present great obstacles. Indeed, until these are resolved, the prospect for any genuine political democracy is likely to remain a mirage.

If indeed the choice is for freedom, the peoples of the Middle East might at long last rid themselves of the politics of tyranny and terror, corruption and cajolery, blackmail and force, domestic or regional or international. They would accept responsibility for their decisions and for the consequences of those decisions, and find a way to live to be freer and better life to which they have for so long proclaimed their commitment. The really important difference is that now, for the first time in more than two centuries, this choice is entirely their own, as will be their success or failure in whatever they choose. Those who care about the Middle East and its peoples can only hope that they will choose well and soon, for this window of opportunity will not long remain open.

---

On behalf of the Henry M. Jackson Foundation and The Seattle Post Intelligencer, I want to thank all of you for attending this evening.
The Henry M. Jackson Foundation

Board of Governors

Helen H. Jackson, Chairman
Nathan S. Auncell
Edward Carlough
Gordon C. Culp
Charles E. Curry
Leonard Davis
S. Harrison Dogole
James R. Ellis
Dorothy Fosdick
Booth Gardner
William P. Gerberding
Nathan Golden
Stanley D. Golub
Gerald Grinstein
D. Michael Harvey
Peter H. Jackson
Max M. Kampelman
Max Karl
Henry Kaufman
Lane Kirkland
Jeane Kirkpatrick
Melvin Laird

Anna Marie Laurence
Charles F. Luce
John D. Mangels
Lloyd Meeds
Margaret Clark Mykut
David Packard
Richard S. Page
Richard Perle
Milton Petrie
Kenneth B. Pyle
William F. Ragan
Albert B. Ratner
William D. Ruckelshaus
James R. Schlesinger
Dorothy Stimpson
Robert S. Strauss
Leonard Strelitz
Samuel N. Stroum
William J. Van Ness, Jr.
James Wickwire
Thornton A. Wilson
Suzanne Woolsey

Officers

Helen Hardin Jackson, Chairman of the Board
Stanley D. Golub, Vice Chairman
William J. Van Ness, Jr., President
Grenville Carside, Vice President
Joel C. Merkel, General Counsel
Julia P. Cancio, Secretary
Howard J. Feldman, Treasurer
Donald D. Donohue, Exec. Asst. to the Chairman

Congressional Advisory Council

Sen. Brock Adams
Sen. Bill Bradley
Sen. Dale Bumpers
Sen. Robert C. Byrd
Rep. Norman D. Dicks
Sen. Robert Dole
Rep. Dante B. Fascell
Rep. Thomas S. Foley
Sen. Wendell H. Ford
Sen. Slade Gorton
Sen. Daniel K. Inouye
Sen. J. Bennett Johnston
Sen. Nancy L. Kassebaum
Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg
Rep. Jim McDermott

Sen. Howard M. Metzenbaum
Rep. John R. Miller
Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan
Sen. Sam Nunn
Rep. Dan Rostenkowski
Rep. Philip R. Sharp
Sen. Alan K. Simpson
Rep. Stephen J. Solarz
Sen. Arlen Specter
Sen. Ted Stevens
Rep. Al Swift
Sen. John W. Warner
Rep. Sidney R. Yates
Rep. Don Young

Staff

Robin K. Pasquarella, Executive Director
Susan H. Gould, Office Manager
Lisa Napoli, Program Officer
Lara Iglitzin, Program Assistant
Wayne Kurlinski, Consultant