

THE TRADE DILEMMA

The situation in Iran provides a peek into the Middle East future. It is a most dangerous future for Israel.

Modern history is hard on two-bit oligarchic dictatorships. It will not be possible for one-man or one-family right-wing tyrannies to last very much longer in underdeveloped countries. Special targets will go first.

So, Jimmy the Greek would surely give hundred-to-one odds that, sooner or later, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Jordan will be under new management. It would also be a safe bet that such management will eventually be left-wing populist tyranny, under the covert wing of the Soviet Union. Along with Iraq and Syria, that would be a solid anti-Israel and anti-American phalanx.

It is, of course, in America's interest to keep that from happening. But can we? How can we prevent the regimes from collapsing internally? Of course, the ideal would be to replace the current regimes with more populist regimes of a democratic nature. But we have had no success doing that in countries without democratic traditions or foundations. Unless we can come up with some better card than we have shown in the recent past, that is the prospect which faces Israel in the middle future.

With those probabilities, the current peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt take on even more significance. And, with those probabilities, Israel's hesitation about committing too much, too fast on the West Bank makes eminent sense. Of course, some State Department people believe that if Israel gift-wraps the West Bank the tide can be turned. We hope that isn't the best card the U.S. has up its sleeve.

In any case, these prospects suggest that Israel's survival is going to be dependent on America's support and strength for some time to come. That support is not going to come for sentimental reasons; nor because of American Jewish power -- but because America's national interest, and Israel's national interest are one and the same in this matter -- and will be even more clearly identical if the above scenario comes to pass.

But now comes a more complex problem in that "American national interest" which may give the American Jewish community some trouble in the future. Dozens of the most powerful corporations and banks in the country have just banded together to fight "human rights" trade restrictions, including some applied to the Soviet Union, and to some Arab countries.

This effort is being made under the name of the "Emergency Committee for American Trade," and includes such corner stores as General Motors, Xerox, Bank of America, Chase Manhattan Bank, Boeing, Otis, Litton, Goodrich, Hewlett-Packard, General Mills and so on. The plight of the American dollar is related to exports; inflation in America is related to the plight of the American dollar. And, in their examples, the "Emergency Committee" spells out the loss of about 20 million American man-hours of work.

This may be a classic case of being caught on the horns of a dilemma. It is one thing to talk about sacrificing corporate profits for the sake of human rights. It is another thing to talk about sacrificing the strength of the American society, on which much of the world's human rights depend, not to mention Israel.

Because of our stake on America's strength, we have to take into account the concerns expressed by the "Emergency Committee." But we also have to make sure that it is not puffing up its case. The prohibited contracts they cite so far wouldn't add much to America's export balance. They would be more important for the receiving countries. Our unemployment problem in this country today is one of structural unemployment, and trade restrictions have nothing to do with that.

The key would seem to be continuing but *selective* use of trade restrictions as a political weapon.