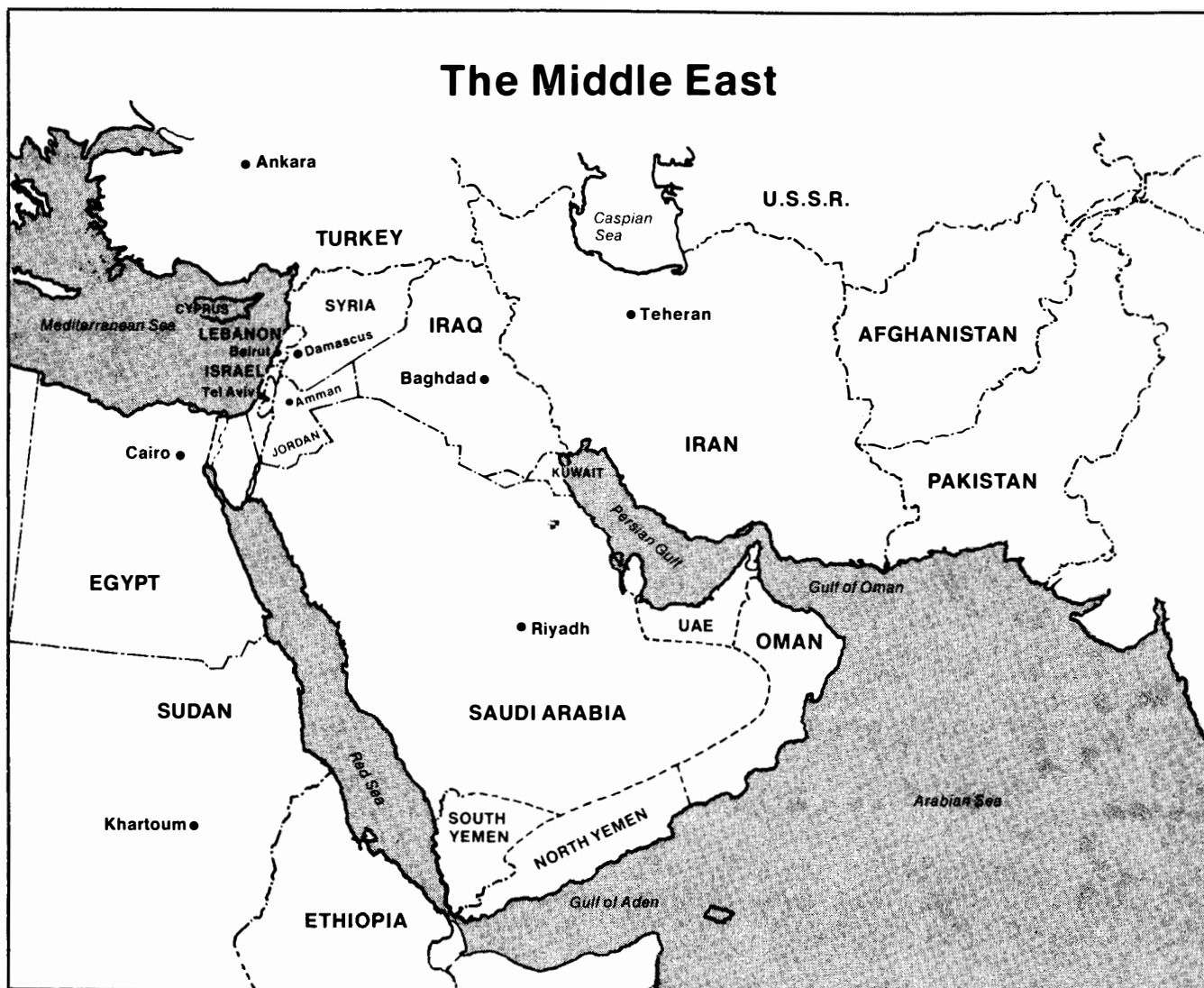


# The politics of the double-cross: the players outsmart themselves

by Robert Dreyfuss



When Israeli troops and armor moved into Lebanon on June 6, not a single relevant government anywhere in the world was surprised. Not only did Israel and Syria have a gentleman's agreement concerning how to conduct the war, but the Soviet Union, Britain and France, the United States, and most of the Arab world had blessed—secretly, of course—the actions by Israel. Each country's leadership had its own understanding of its own interests and advantage in the war, and each, with quiet deliberation, planned to double-cross all the others.

But after only seven days of the war in Lebanon, each one of these elaborate secret understandings had come undone. Everyone had been double-crossed. In fact, the agreements were made before the war *with the intent to violate them*. And, with the Soviet Union as the only real superpower in the Middle East, Moscow stands to reap a windfall and emerge as the dominant force for stability in the region.

This is exactly how the Soviet Politburo planned it. However, in seeking to take advantage of the collapse of American influence in the Middle East, the short-sighted Soviet leadership may have set into motion a process that could unleash World War III.

### **Moscow's 'trap' for the West**

From the Soviet viewpoint, the plan to double-cross the West was simple. President Brezhnev and the Soviet leadership are well aware that Moscow represents the only credible military force with the potential to deploy into the Middle East. The U.S.S.R. has more than 20 divisions stationed in close proximity to the Middle East and an enormous airlift capacity; for Moscow the American Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) is a trifle. This military power is combined with the evident ruthlessness of the Soviet command in deploying its forces, as in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union does not doubt its ability to fill a vacuum that emerges in this part of the world.

At the present time, therefore, the Soviet Union believes that it stands to benefit from a decline in American influence in the Middle East. In order to oust the United States from the Middle East, the Soviet leadership has been quietly cultivating a duplicitous "New Yalta" dialogue with Great Britain, beginning with former Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington's proposals to Moscow that the superpowers' spheres of influence established after World War II be modified. In this process, Moscow has encouraged Great Britain to believe that the Soviet Union would look with favor upon British efforts to replace the United States in the Middle East.

Playing on British susceptibilities and taking full advantage of the desire of the British and Swiss banks and oil companies for hegemony in the Persian Gulf

and North Africa, Moscow has led London to believe that it would accept a deal to carve up the Middle East into pro-European and pro-Soviet "spheres of influence." British geopoliticians and strategists endlessly repeat the refrain that the Soviet Union will accept a regional influence restricted to the so-called "northern tier," that is, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. The geopoliticians believe that Moscow, thus supposedly satiated, will graciously allow Great Britain and Western Europe's Socialist International to ensconce itself as a Third Force in the Middle East, brokering U.S.-Soviet relations in the Persian Gulf and reaping the hefty benefits of controlling the Gulf's oil and financial wealth. Some of these British thinkers have gone so far in their cynical delusion as to assert that Moscow will inherit new troubles along with its new Middle East "turf"—ethnic instabilities and Islamic fundamentalism that will eventually spread into the Soviet Union itself.

The real Soviet view of Carrington's New Yalta plan is: "You give us the northern tier of Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and then we take the rest, too."

That is the essence of the Soviet double-cross. Having learned of London's plans to spark an Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Moscow encouraged the British. With its own well-developed contacts to the Israelis—via channels in Rumania, Austria, and the Russian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem—the Soviets could afford to lead London to believe that the British would gain from Israel's attack on Lebanon. The Soviet KGB secret service, with its far better sense of reality than the British SIS (Secret Intelligence Service), had determined correctly that the consequences of a move by Israel into Lebanon would be an accelerating shift toward the Soviet Union by all the countries in the region, including such unlikely candidates as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and even Israel.

### **British miscalculation**

Masters of deceit and the double-cross for several centuries, the British succeeded in outsmarting themselves. Although they failed to deceive the Soviets, however, they most successfully did outwit and manipulate the Americans. At the start of the Israeli attack, and as the situation worsened, the Reagan administration hardly wavered from its knee-jerk, flag-waving support for Israeli aggression and genocidal butchery. A shocked Arab world waited in vain for some White House action to rein in the Israelis and assert American leadership for stability in the region, as Eisenhower had reined in the British and French in the 1956 crisis over Suez. Such American leadership did not come. A clique of British agents at the State Department—led by Alexander Haig, and including Paul Wolfowitz at Policy Planning, and special envoy Philip Habib—and a

similar crew at the Pentagon, led there by Eugene Rostow, Richard Perle, Steve Bryon, and others, had managed to lock President Reagan onto the most disastrous possible course: full endorsement of the Israeli plan to forcibly redraw the map of the Middle East.

The British scheme was therefore simple. While promising Washington its full support in the pro-Israeli effort, the British government secretly set about to negotiate the ouster of American power in the Middle East. London quickly sought to curry favor with the Arabs, taking advantage of the U.S.-Israeli identification in Arab eyes. Most shocking was Prime Minister Thatcher's remark—despite the suicidal American backing for London's adventurism in the South Atlantic—that she could not agree with the American position on the Middle East. Privately, Mrs. Thatcher was heard to remark that "NATO is worthless" as long as "American Jews control U.S. policy."

The pretext for the invasion itself resulted from a brutal application of British deceit: the attempted assassination of Israel's Ambassador to London, Shlomo Argov. The terrorist who shot Argov on June 3 is a member of the British SIS-controlled "Abu Nidal gang," based in Syria and Iran, and he succeeded in shooting Argov only because the British security screen around Argov had been removed prior to the hit, according to Israeli intelligence sources. That action, orchestrated by the British, gave General Ariel Sharon the pretext he needed to convince Prime Minister Begin and the Israeli cabinet to give the green light for Operation "Peace for Galilee."

"The Europeans can replace the Americans in the Middle East," said a top intelligence official who is close to the SIS. "That is definitely what the British are thinking. Harold Beeley, Patrick Seale, Ian Gilmour, and Lord Mayhew all agree on this. It will be the 'third force.' As long as the conflict can be kept below the nuclear level, it will work. The Saudis are angry at the United States, and they do not have a Soviet option. So they will come to Europe, and Europe will replace the United States."

### Preparing to double-cross France

Based on false assurances from Moscow, London is therefore doing Moscow's dirty work. So euphoric are the British that they have even considered double-crossing the French. Some European sources have asserted that the 1956 Anglo-French "entente cordiale" has been reestablished with French President François Mitterrand, and that the World War I-era Sykes-Picot agreement that carved up the Ottoman Arab territories between Paris and London has been rebuilt. But, just as the U.K. tricked France then, some British officials



today are planning to double-cross France again: "The French have no role in the Gulf," said a British Middle East specialist. "They will be restricted to Lebanon's Christians."

### The 25-mile hoax

In the wake of the attack on Ambassador Argov and the June 4-5 murderous Israeli bombing raids on Lebanon, British agents Ariel Sharon and Alexander Haig went to work to convince their respective governments to support Sharon's crusade into Lebanon. Until that weekend, a shaky accord between Reagan and Begin—in part based on personal assurances—had blocked Sharon. To win approval for his Lebanese invasion, Sharon told Begin, Haig, and Reagan, that Israel would confine its attack to a narrow 25-mile zone north of Israel.

But on the third day of the fighting, Israel expanded the war far beyond this zone. Sharon, of course, had long planned to use a war in Lebanon to achieve a broad reorganization of the area, and he had established a nest of agreements with Syria, Iran, and others to topple King Hussein of Jordan, destroy Iraq, and forcibly reorganize the Palestinian movement before placing it in Jordan, referred to by Sharon as the "real Palestinian state." Therefore, in a fashion prearranged with Syria, Israel began limited clashes with Syrian forces, eventually leading to a strike against Syria's missiles in the Bekaa Valley. Israel was careful, however, not to humiliate Syria and careful to allow Syria an avenue for retreat, repeatedly offering Damascus a

ceasefire—which, after some noise-making, the Syrians accepted.

By this time, Prime Minister Begin had been caught up in the war and eagerly endorsed Sharon's bloodletting. In an emotional outburst, the Israeli Prime Minister called the invasion of Lebanon, which had left 10,000 dead in the first week, the "greatest operation in the history of the Jewish people."

But Reagan began to have reservations when Israel attacked Syrian forces. Undoubtedly, reports are correct that Reagan was upset when Israel broke its promise that it would confine its attack to a 25-mile zone. With pressure from Moscow, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere, the President drafted a series of personal letters to the Israeli Prime Minister. They went unheeded, however, probably because of assurances from Haig and Habib to Israel that Sharon's original plan should proceed on schedule.

To their respective bosses, Sharon and Haig argued that Israel had no option but to attack Syria in force, out of military necessity.

### **Falling out between Israel and Syria**

As the war progressed, then, it became clear that the original agreement between Sharon and the Syrian government of Hafez Assad had also begun to unravel. Before the start of the fighting, Sharon and Assad were united in several causes: their hatred for the Palestine Liberation Organization, their opposition to Jordan and Iraq, and their support for Khomeini's Iran. To consolidate the Israeli-Syrian "strategic consensus," Sharon proposed to divide Lebanon into two separate states, one to be controlled by Israel and one by Syria. But the Israeli advance seemed to indicate that Israel had a broader goal and that Assad had been deceived. The advance by Israel to the gates of Beirut and into the Bekaa Valley revealed Israel's intent to completely reorganize Lebanon in a manner not necessarily coherent with the interests of Syria.

A grave danger of superpower confrontation has developed as a result of the unraveling of the secret agreements that allowed the war to occur. If the British suddenly realize that the Soviet Union does not intend to play their "New Yalta" game, London may demand that American power in the east Mediterranean—now represented by three and possibly four U.S. aircraft carrier task forces—bail out the British in the region. Israel, trapped in an overexposed military position deep in Lebanon, may find its adventure turning into a disastrous predicament. Caught in this position, Sharon might lose restraint and lash out against Syria itself. And the Soviet Union, with troops on alert in Czechoslovakia, the mountainous regions north of Iran, and in Afghanistan, and with its own fleet moving toward the conflict zone, will be forced to respond.

# **Habib shuttling for Ditchley Foundation**

by Barbara Dreyfuss

Since July 1981, President Reagan has dispatched crisis-management negotiator Philip Habib to the Middle East every time Israel has threatened to unleash General Ariel Sharon and the Israeli army against Lebanon. Habib, who served as a Mideast shuttle negotiator under U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in 1979 and was reappointed to this position by Alexander Haig, is put forward as a seasoned U.S. diplomat, whose skill, and in some part perhaps his Lebanese heritage, has reassured Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the other Arab nations that the United States will not abandon their cause in the Middle East.

*Newsweek* and the *Washington Post* call Habib's brand of operations diplomacy. But a closer look at the State Department envoy's pedigree, and the circles in which he travels when he is off the shuttle circuit, reveals that Habib is running a nasty protection racket, built on false promises to the moderate Arab nations that the United States will restrain the Israeli military menace if those nations do not challenge the Haig State Department's Middle East policy.

### **Habib and Ditchley**

Habib in particular maintains a very close working relationship with the elite Ditchley Foundation, a center of Anglo-American policy making. Twenty-four hours before the Israeli blitzkrieg into southern Lebanon on the evening of June 6, Habib could be found chairing a conference on the Camp David peace process at the foundation's Ditchley Park headquarters near Oxford, England. The Ditchley Foundation was created in 1958 by the leadership of Great Britain's Royal Institute for International Affairs and its U.S. subsidiary, the New York Council on Foreign Relations, and has served since then as a transmission belt of Anglo-American establishment policies to educators, diplomats, bankers, legislators, and businessmen at the secondary level of policy implementation.

The Ditchley Council of Management and Board of Directors include the cream of British aristocracy, such men as Lord Saye and Sele, Lord Aldington, Sir John Keswick, Lord Caccia, and the Earl of Cromer. Leaders of the American Ditchley Foundation include George