

An Early Test: The Reagan Administration and the Osirak Raid of 1981

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On June 7, 1981, fourteen American-manufactured F-16 fighter jets took off from an Israeli airstrip near the Egyptian border, flying north across Jordanian and then Saudi airspace to a target deep in central Iraq. With no possibility of an emergency landing, the pilots raced below radar, evading detection by – and potential response from—U.S. Airborne Early-Warning and Control Systems (AWACs) temporarily stationed in the region. In less than an hour, the jets reached their target: the Tamuz 1 reactor site, a French manufactured and Italian supported nuclear facility in El-Tuwaitha, 10 miles south of the Iraqi capital. As senior Israeli ministers tracked the operation from Prime Minister Menachem Begin’s Jerusalem home, eight of the jets dropped nearly a dozen 2000-pound ‘dumb’ bombs upon the cement reactor shell below. In five minutes, Iraq’s fledgling nuclear program was destroyed.

This unprecedented strike upon an internationally sanctioned nuclear facility drew condemnation from governments across the world and dominated the front-pages of international press for weeks. Yet, scholars have given the event little sustained attention since. In the United States, diplomatic historians have largely overlooked the Reagan administration’s response to the Israeli raid on the Iraqi Osirak reactor, burying discussion of the subsequent congressional and international debates within broader surveys of Middle Eastern or nuclear policy. The few scholars who do tackle Osirak remain divided on their interpretation of the strike as alternatively a rejection or an embrace of closer U.S.-Israeli relations. No work, however, has sought to resolve this contradiction, and so analysis of Osirak is typically superficial, ideological, and brief.¹

¹ The majority of histories on Reagan’s foreign policy provide only a passing reference, typically under two lines, to the Osirak raid, a neglect often mirrored in general scholarship on U.S. Middle East policy at large. Neither H.W. Brand’s *Into the Labyrinth: The United States and the Middle East, 1945-93*, Ussama Makdisi’s *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations, 1820-2001*, William Quandt’s *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics*, nor Rashid Khalidi’s *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle*

Such scholarly neglect obscures Osirak's implications for U.S. objectives in the Middle East and overlooks an opportunity to explore a central theme in Reagan's foreign policy making: the struggle to balance ideology, strategy, and contingency. News of the Israeli raid rose to the highest desks of American foreign policymaking, sparking heated debate from the closed-door sessions of the National Security Council to the public hearings of the House and Senate foreign affairs committees. Impacting nuclear, Middle Eastern, and Cold War policy, the raid challenged three of the administration's stated policy priorities and drew public attention to the foreign strategy of a new administration that had until then emphasized economic and domestic affairs. As a case study, the Reagan administration's response to the raid illustrates the fledgling administration's limited capacity to identify, manage, and respond to international events and illuminates many of the personnel and leadership tensions that would come to define Reagan's foreign policy in the first term. Divided by internal factions and operating without sustained executive guidance, administration officials failed to develop and implement a coherent strategy, control the domestic and international response, and effectively communicate their position to audiences at home and abroad. Lacking clear guidance from the president and operating without clear policy priorities, officials proved unable to rise above the flood of events. U.S. actions in the wake of the Osirak raid thus illustrates the administration's early failure to develop a coherent strategic vision for the Middle East and provides evidence for the existence of structural faults in the policy planning apparatus at large.

East mention the raid. Quandt's later work, *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David*, frames Osirak as a one-liner blip in U.S.-Israeli relations, a narrative common throughout other major histories (see: Peter Hanh, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* and Stephen L. Spiegel's timely analysis, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*). None of these works, however, dedicate much attention to the raid or its aftermath. An exception to this claim can be found in the post-2003 debates over the United States' international legal precedent for its "preemptive strike" in Iraq. Political scientists and legal scholars have generally dominated this debate and there remains a need for sustained, historical analysis.

Israel & the Conservative Imagination

American anxiety over the Middle East had reached a fever pitch by Reagan's election in 1980. The Iranian revolution and the dramatic capture of U.S. embassy officials had destabilized Americans' perception of their nation's power in the region and heightened fears of national weakness. Memories of the 1973 oil embargo loomed large and revealed the uncomfortable extent of U.S. dependence on the region. "Nowhere in the world," noted Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr, "had the post-Vietnam hesitancy of the United States been more visible, or more sweeping in its consequences."² Ford and Carter's weak presidencies had left the Middle East "literally in flames" and the American electorate anxious over their nation's ability to maintain peace in a rapidly changing world.³

For the crowds gathered for the presidential inauguration in Washington, Reagan's promise to restore American strength sparked corresponding hope for renewed stability. The Iranian Hostage crisis had reached its final day, and when news broke after the inauguration that the remaining hostages were, after 444 traumatic days, finally freed, few in the administration could escape the sense that the opportunity for a strategic reorientation had arisen. This would be no easy task. Reagan's inherited challenges ranged from the Persian Gulf deep into central Asia and included a full portfolio of economic, regional, and geopolitical risks. Immediate crises like the increasingly bloody Iran-Iraq War distracted from long-simmering conflicts, such as the sputtering Arab-Israeli peace process that, barely four years after Camp David, now faced derailment in the wake of renewed violence in Syria and Lebanon. The administration's red-

² Alexander M. Haig Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984): 169

³ Philip S. Khoury, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East," in David E. Kyvig, *Reagan and the World* (New York: Praeger, 1990): 67.; Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 157-97.

tinted glasses only confounded the challenge; conservative strategists, introduced in the 1970s to the dual specter of extremist terrorism and Arab communism, feared a U.S.-Soviet rivalry for the hearts—and oil—of Arab leaders. Strategists watched as Soviet forces, newly entangled in Afghanistan, drew ever closer to the Persian Gulf and dreamt of a regional ally that could secure stability and preserve U.S. influence.⁴

Israel was the obvious choice. Overwhelmingly popular with American conservatives, Israel's ability to project force, defend its citizenry, and decisively secure military victories appealed to an American citizenry shamed by its nation's failure in Vietnam. Support for the Jewish state served as a rare consensus-issue for the New Right coalition, drawing evangelical conservatives and neo-conservative hawks alike to argue for Israel as a viable political model for a revitalized America. So strong was the Right's belief that "it was at once morally just and in U.S. national interests to act not only *with* Israel but also *like* Israel" that the question defined both the RNC Platform and the newly-formed Moral Majority manifesto. In the words of the first, American conservatives "fully recognize[ed] the strategic importance of Israel and the deterrent role of its armed forces in the Middle East and East-West military equations." Unsurprisingly, Jerry Falwell put his support more explicitly, declaring the Moral Majority willing to work with all who "shared our views on the family and abortion, strong national defense, and Israel."⁵

Yet, Israel was also a strategic inconvenience for a new administration concerned with potential Soviet encroachment in the Middle East. Officials had witnessed Arab leaders rapid

⁴ Khoury, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East," 67.; Nicholas Laham, *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia: The Reagan Administration and the Balancing of America's Competing Interests in the Middle East* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002): x-xi.

⁵ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 157-75, 93.; Republican Party Platforms, "Republican Party Platform of 1980," July 15, 1980. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. See also: William C. Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996).

isolation of Egypt after Anwar Sadat's agreement to recognize Israel in 1976 and many U.S. strategists feared that the perception of American bias towards Israel would simultaneously undermine American overtures and smooth the way for Soviets to further their influence. On the campaign trail, Reagan had publicly echoed the conservative movement's unconditional support for the Israeli state, but strains of resistance emerged in his security team soon after the election. Middle East scholar William Quandt has noted that several key officials, most notably Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, began to push the president away from the 'Carter' model, which viewed the Middle East through the prism of the Israel-Arab conflict, to a more realist 'Nixon' model, which emphasized the region's implications for U.S. Cold War objectives. Weinberger and his allies in the administration pushed for greater overtures to the Arab bloc at the risk of Israeli relations, proposing such contentious policies as the 1981 Saudi AWACs sale, overturning the U.S.'s long term policy of maintaining Israel's qualitative military superiority in the region.⁶ While Carter had committed the United States to a long-term mediatory role between Israeli and Arab interests, Weinberger and his allies displayed little eagerness to "pick up the dangling ends of Carter's Camp David process" and risk losing the Arab world to the Soviet Union.⁷

Weinberger's regional anticommunism model pitted the Secretary of Defense against two powerful opponents: Permanent Ambassador to the UN Jeane J. Kirkpatrick and Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr. The Ambassador and the Secretary made an unlikely pair. Notoriously divided on most issues—Haig, upon learning of Kirkpatrick's nomination,

⁶ U.S. officials began exploring the sale of five AWACS to Saudi Arabia shortly after Reagan's inauguration. The sale faced stiff opposition in a pro-Israel Congress, where both parties denounced the deal as "blackmail" and "one of the worst and most dangerous arms sales ever," but eventually passed in late 1981. See: Laham; Haig, 169-178.

⁷ William Quandt, *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 1988) 239; Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 1986); Stephen L. Spiegel *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986): 409.; Laham.

infamously asked “how anybody expects that I will work with that bitch”—the two shared a genuine belief in a unique American responsibility to support the Jewish state. Echoing the public belief that Iran’s loss left Israel “the only true ally” prepared to support the United States in its fight against “Soviet-sponsored international terrorism” in the region, the two shared the administration’s turn to a Cold War framework for Middle East analysis while denying Weinberger’s proposed abandonment of Israel. Both expressed doubt about the Reagan administration’s efforts to expand arms sales to neighboring Arab states and endorsed continued military support to Israel despite the reservations of more recalcitrant advisors. Their alliance on this specific issue provided a bridge between the administration’s Nixon-era conservatives, represented by Haig, and its growing neo-conservative branch, championed by Kirkpatrick. Combined, they exerted a powerful pro-Israel influence on Reagan’s foreign and national security team.⁸ Articulating their position through confirmation hearings, public statements, and internal memoranda, the two groups promoted continued U.S. support for Israel to an already attentive president and public.

Yet Haig and Kirkpatrick’s divergent political pedigrees ensured disagreements over the practical arrangement of American support. While Kirkpatrick welcomed American confrontation with the Arab bloc, which she viewed as largely weak, Haig’s personal writings reveal a genuine fear that the United States would risk losing the Persian Gulf’s alliance if it failed to befriend oil-rich and politically moderate Arab states. Haig stopped short of Weinberger’s belief that properly-armed Arab nations could provide a regional security guarantee, and the Secretary maintained a deep-seated belief that only Israel could provide an

⁸ Lou Cannon, “Iraq Demands U.N. Sanctions on Israel; U.S. Threatens Veto: Reagan Said to Oppose ‘Punitive Measures,’” *Washington Post*, July 13, 1981, A1.; Haig, 167.; Jeane Jordan Kirkpatrick, interview by Ann Miller Morin, Women Ambassador Series, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, May 28, 1987.; Laham, 52; Khoury, 73.

appropriately powerful military presence in the region. Contesting the “regional anti-communism” model, Haig proposed an alternative “strategic-consensus” strategy in which the United States strove to commit both Arab and Israeli forces under one security coalition. Where Weinberger saw the region’s two forces as mutually exclusive, Haig believed a “consensus of strategic concern” over Soviet influence in the region would allow the U.S. to coordinate cooperation between an otherwise recalcitrant coalition of Arab and Israeli leaders, even if they would be unwilling to cooperate independently. Though Haig lent support to Weinberger’s push for the AWACS sale, his support was counter-balanced by his plan to make Israel a formal “strategic ally.” U.S. military assistance was not zero-sum, and Haig planned to strengthen all forces in the region into a single, powerful, anti-communist coalition. Rather than turn away from Israel to embrace moderate Arab nations, Haig sought to protect Israel *and* American interests at once.⁹

In contrast to Haig’s realist pragmatism, Kirkpatrick’s ideological defense of Israel’s strategic importance was tied to her emerging neo-conservatism. “She acts and speaks out of ideological conviction,” *Foreign Affairs* remarked in 1983 “as the representative of an Administration that is, by American standards, unusually ideological.” Less concerned about the region’s importance to American Cold War objectives, Kirkpatrick viewed the region through her belief in the United States’ moral obligation to protect Israel. Her sense of Israeli’s isolation

⁹ This belief was supported by a sense that Arab nations, “now threatened by a theocratic regime in Teheran that seemed to have abandoned reason” were eager to find an alternative to Soviet patronage. The Middle East seemed to teeter on the brink of proxy war. As Haig writes in his memoir: “That the Soviets had ambitions in the Gulf and beyond no one doubted. The Red Army occupied Afghanistan. Ethiopia and the Yemeni were in the hands of Soviet clients. There were Cuban troops in three African countries, and it was an open secret that Soviet troops were present also. Muammar al-Qaddafi was arming an international conspiracy of leftist cutthroats with Soviet weapons and explosives.” See: Haig, 30. See also: Seymour Maxwell Finger, “The Reagan-Kirkpatrick Policies and the United Nations” *Foreign Affairs* 62, no. 2 (Winter, 1983): 448.; Harvey Sicherman, *Palestinian Autonomy, Self-Government & Peace* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993): 54.

only deepened in the early months of her service at the U.S. Mission in New York. “I learned quickly,” Kirkpatrick commented to her counsel, Allan Gerson, “that they viewed Israel as a terrible embarrassment and nuisance,” recalling her shock at an Arab ambassador’s casual reference to “Israel as a ‘Crusader remnant,’ as if it were a matter of time until Israel would disappear.” More cautious in her appraisal of moderate Arab states than other foreign policy officials, Kirkpatrick warned of a UN-incubated “political agenda: anti-Israel, anti-West, anti-U.S.” Convinced of an international plot to undermine Israel’s political legitimacy, she increasingly viewed her position at the UN as a place to protect entwined American and Israeli interests. Here Kirkpatrick diverged from the Secretary of State’s position; Haig viewed U.S. support of Israel as a strategic maneuver to build a bastion against “an international conspiracy of leftist cutthroats with Soviet weapons and explosives,” but Kirkpatrick viewed support of Israel as an objective within itself.¹⁰

While Haig and Weinberger debated strategy, Kirkpatrick appeared in 1981 determined to take full and immediate advantage of the visibility afforded by her position. It was her combination of “hardheaded realism and excessive moralism” that earned her the nomination, and she sought to translate her seat at the United Nations into a political weapon against a “mischievous ideological struggle against the fundamental principle of the United States and its friends.” Kirkpatrick viewed herself the successor of former-ambassador Patrick Moynihan, repeatedly evoking his famous 1976 Zionism is not Racism speech to public and domestic audiences alike. “Like Moynihan,” the press commented at the time, “She has not hesitated to

¹⁰ Allan Gerson, *The Kirkpatrick Mission: Diplomacy Without Apology: America at the United Nations, 1981-1985* (New York: Free Press, 1991): 23.; Haig, 30. See also: Finger, “The Reagan-Kirkpatrick Policies and the United Nations,” 448; Robert C. Johansen, “The Reagan Administration and the U.N.: The Costs of Unilateralism,” *World Policy Journal* 3 (4) Fall 1986: 603.; *The Nomination of Jeane J. Kirkpatrick: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 97th Cong. 1* (1981) (statement of Jeane Kirkpatrick), 40-41.

stand alone on issues.” And, just like Moynihan, Kirkpatrick’s saw the defense of the Israeli state as a cornerstone of her obligation at the United Nations writ large. Echoing the dominant conservative association of American and Israeli interests and confident that the president stood behind her, Kirkpatrick promised during her Senate Confirmation to “stand firm and defend Israel as well as ourselves.”¹¹

Kirkpatrick’s pointed language offered little insight into how the ambassador intended to implement her agenda once stationed in New York. When pressed on the issue, the then-nominee admitted: “I cannot really say what I think can be done. I can only assure you that I intend to fully explore what can be done.” Her staffing decisions offered little possibility of experienced guidance; while it is not unusual for new ambassadors to bring “congenial individuals” with them to Turtle Bay, Kirkpatrick’s removal of experienced staff and Foreign Service personnel stepped beyond precedent. U.S. Mission to the UN (USUN) quickly became a haven for neoconservatives who compensated for their inexperience by their commitment to Kirkpatrick’s vision of ideological combat. “What seemed beyond doubt in the winter and spring of 1981,” a close deputy recalled in his memoirs, “was that the United Nations was at war with the United States, that the United States was not faring well, and that it was no accident that its fortunes around the world were at an equally low ebb.”¹² The Osirak Raid in 1981 and Iraq’s turn to the UN Security Council would push Kirkpatrick to the frontlines.

¹¹ Kirkpatrick’s eagerness to take full advantage of her position at the United Nations should not be misconstrued as fondness for the international organization. Like many conservatives of her era, Kirkpatrick feared that the United Nations had strayed far from its founding purpose and now risked infringing upon American sovereignty. Again, this fear was closely tied to her belief in an international coalition of communist, anti-Israel, and anti-Western forces. See: Finger, 436-38.; Gary B. Ostrower, *The United Nations and the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers/Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998): 174.; *The Nomination of Jeane J. Kirkpatrick to Be Representative to the United Nations*, 40-41.

¹² *The Nomination of Jeane J. Kirkpatrick*, 37.; As one commenter noted at the time: “Her top staff, especially her close ideological friends in the inner circle of USUN, also lack diplomatic

The Reagan administration entered office without a predetermined strategy for the Middle East. Two competing interpretations of the United States' interests in the Middle East jostled for the president's attention but none could yet claim enacted policy. A powerful pro-Israel bent, represented to differing extents by Kirkpatrick and Haig, sought to enforce the president's ideological commitment to Israel, but faced stiff resistance from powerful factions within the defense establishment. Presidential intervention might have resolved this tension but, characteristically unwilling to mediate his advisor's differences, Reagan continued to voice sympathy for both sides.¹³ The balance between the administration's ideological support for Israel and its realist urge to secure the Arab bloc's allegiance was thus not yet set in the early months of 1981. When Israel struck Iraq's nuclear reactor, the battle to define Reagan's Middle East policy still lacked a clear victor.

The Osirak Raid & the White House Scramble

News of the Israeli raid reached U.S. officials late Sunday afternoon. American AWACS stationed in Saudi Arabia failed to detect the Israeli flyover and no Arab state proved able – or willing—to warn of the strike's planning, implementation, or impact. Iraqi officials, meanwhile, denied any damage to the reactor, attributing evidence of anti-aircraft machine gun fire “variously to the Iranians, the Israelis, the Shia Dawa party, or Iraqi imagination.” American officials were thus unaware of the raid for several hours until Prime Minister Begin personally informed U.S. Ambassador Samuel W. Lewis in Tel Aviv. Horrified, Lewis ordered a flash cable

and U.N. experience. They are having to learn the skills of listening, lobbying and negotiating at the United Nations and have not progressed rapidly.” See: Finger, 439-45.; See also: John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995): 149, 157.; Gerson, *The Kirkpatrick Mission*, xii.

¹³ Reagan's management style has been closely studied for many years. For a general overview, see Schaller, 120-125. For an insightful critique of Reagan's foreign policy leadership, see Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007): 347-349

to Washington, where Israeli ambassador Ephraim Evron was beginning to inform Haig's staff. It was late in the night before an operation center could be organized and the raid confirmed by foreign embassies in Baghdad. Haig personally informed Congressional leaders and principal European allies of the raid and stressed the lack of American complicity despite repeated assumptions of U.S. foreknowledge. Though Iraqi officials refused to verify the raid, early intelligence analysis revealed a carefully plotted Israeli attack, timed to limit civilian casualties and minimize the risk of radiation.¹⁴

There is no evidence to suggest that Haig or Reagan knew of the raid in advance. Nonetheless, recently declassified documents indicate that both the State Department and American intelligence community had received sufficient warning to predict and prepare for a pre-emptive strike by December 1980. Carter administration officials had engaged in six months of sensitive dialogue with the Israelis in which Begin repeatedly stressed his willingness to take extraordinary measures to avoid an Iraqi bomb. At least one participant, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Samuel W. Lewis, a career diplomat, found in the discussions a "number of thinly veiled straws in the wind" that provided sufficient evidence for Israeli planning of a pre-emptive strike as early as mid-1980. Noting that the warnings came directly from the Prime Minister's office,

¹⁴ Samuel W. Lewis, interview by Peter Jessup, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training/Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, August 9, 1998; Department of State Operations Center Situation Report No. 1, "Israeli Attack on Iraqi Nuclear Facilities," June 8, 1981, Near East and South Asia Directorate, NSC, "Israeli Raid Crisis, June 7, 1981," Box 91141, Ronald Reagan Library (RRL); Cable from USINT Baghdad to Department of State, June 8, 1981, "Attack on Iraqi Nuclear Reactor," Digital National Security Archive (DNSA); Ambassador Samuel W. Lewis to Alexander M. Haig, Jr. "Israeli Jets Destroy Iraqi Nuclear Facility," June 7 1981, Near East and South Asia Directorate, NSC.; "Israeli Raid Crisis, June 7, 1981," Box 91141, RRL.; Haig, 183-4.

Lewis concluded with “no doubt” that the Israelis would destroy the reactor before it became operational.¹⁵

Fearful that these reports would be buried in the transition, Lewis personally contacted incoming Reagan officials to draw attention to the Israeli strike as a top-three risk for the new administration. Yet, Lewis’ transition paper “wasn’t considered in the White House at all” and by “the turn of the year, the subject seemed to have disappeared from any conversations.”

Preoccupied with crafting the president’s first budget, the Reagan transition team either ignored or neglected Lewis’ records and let the sensitive dialogues with the Israelis lag. Despite the warnings, strategists failed to conceptualize, let alone prepare contingency plans for, a pre-emptive strike. In a cable sent directly to Haig two days after the raid, Lewis concluded that the White House could have known about the raid if it wished to pursue the matter and warned the Secretary that the raid illustrated a widening—and increasingly dangerous—“gap in our institutional memory.” Unfortunately, Reagan officials never reached this conclusion: though Lewis’s post-raid cable was heavily annotated and filed by the NSC, there is little evidence to indicate that his analysis informed post-strike planning.¹⁶

¹⁵ Cable from Samuel W. Lewis to Alexander Haig, “Israeli strike on Iraqi nuclear facility: Background for the decision,” June 9 1981, Near East and South Asia Directorate, NSC, “Israeli Raid Crisis, June 7, 1981,” Box 91141, RRL.; Samuel W. Lewis, interview by Jessup.

¹⁶ Ibid. Lewis was not the only government official to discover indicators of an impending attack. Public fears that U.S. officials had overlooked signs were validated when the Washington Post broke a story on Nuclear Regulatory Commission technicians direct consultations with Israeli engineers on strategies to destroy reactors from the air. An internal NSC memorandum days after the raid is worth quoting at length:

“on Oct. 8 – 1980 – two Israeli engineers from Haifa came in and sat down with 3 NRC engineers to discuss the general subject of protecting reactors from explosives. There is in existence: 1. A brief paragraph summarizing this meeting...in which one of the NRC engineers...wonders if [the Israelis] were not interested in the offensive use of explosives against reactors [...] Apparently after that October meeting, the NRC engineers did not think to do anything about it – but now in hindsight—it might have been a good idea to be more alert.”

Lewis had reason for concern. The Osirak raid reverberated across key arenas of American strategy and threatened to destabilize – if not derail – several major objectives. The surprise attack came in the midst of special envoy Phillip Habib’s effort to mediate the Lebanese Civil War, complicating a mission already weakened by the stationing of Syrian anti-aircraft missiles near the Israeli border. On his way to Beirut at the time of the raid, Habib was forced to reroute his landing after Lebanese officials, assuming U.S. complicity in the raid, refused a meeting. U.S. officials feared a similar reception in Saudi Arabia where officials, angered by Israel’s violation of Saudi airspace, threatened to lessen their pressure on Syria and weaken mediation. Habib’s cables reveal the extent of the disruption and detail Saudi, Syrian, and Lebanese diplomats’ efforts to manipulate the Osirak strike into leverage or, worse, justification to withdraw from negotiations. Though then-State Department Counsel Robert McFarlane attempted to downplay the potential danger, senior officials privately confided to reporters that the mission’s success had been thrown into question. “The Israeli raid on Iraq overhung the entire conversation” with Saudi and Syrian officials, who repeatedly referenced the raid as evidence of an Israeli threat and justification of contentious military deployments. “It’s hard to underestimate the damage the Israeli move has had on the Habib mission,” said a State Department official. “We’re trying to keep it going, though at a slower pace, but there isn’t any assurance we’ll succeed.”¹⁷

Internal Paper, “Nuclear Regulatory Commission Meeting with Israelis,” c. June 8, 1981, NSC Executive Secretariat: Country Files, Near East and South Asia [Middle East]. “Israeli Strikes in Iraqi Nuclear Facility, 6/8/81 [3 of 6],” Box 1 of 2, RRL.

¹⁷ Cable from Samuel W. Lewis to Alexander M. Haig, Jr., President Ronald Reagan, “For the President and the Secretary of State: Criticism From Abroad,” June 7 1981, Near East and South Asia Directorate, NSC, “Israeli Raid Crisis, June 7, 1981,” Box 91141, RRL.; Cable from Ambassador Robert G. Neumann to Alexander M. Haig, Jr., “Israeli Raid into Iraq,” June 7 1981, Near East and South Asia Directorate, NSC, “Israeli Raid Crisis, June 8, 1981,” Box 91141.; Phillip Habib, Cable from American Embassy Jidda to Secretary of State & American Embassy Beirut, 10 June 1981 “Habib Mission: Meeting with Prince Saud,” DNAS; Cable from

While such reticence is not unfamiliar to students of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Saudi officials' sudden resistance drew both the Weinberger and Haig strategies into question. Oil rich, regionally respected, and relatively moderate for the region, Saudi Arabia was either the key to Weinberger's regional anti-communism, or the third partner to Haig's strategic consensus. Its unexpected defiance of American policy triggered officials' anxiety that Saudi Arabia might permanently turn against the United States and, fearful it might too become an Israeli raid target, accept Soviet patronage. Intelligence analysts summarized these fears, warning in no uncertain language that the raid had given "the USSR an opportunity to improve its position in the Middle East and to further discredit the Camp David process." Legislators on the Hill echoed the concern, forcing the State Department to reassure congressional leaders that the administration's "chief concern was that the Israeli attack not be turned by the Soviet Union and its backers in the Middle East into a major setback for the United States and its interests."¹⁸

Lastly, the Osirak raid complicated the White House's plans to unveil a nuclear non-proliferation agenda by the summer's end. While the administration had been reluctant to outline

American Embassy Cairo to Secretary of State, June 11 1981, "Cairo Press Review: Sadat Shocked at Israel's Strike on Iraq but Remains Committed to peace Process Highlights," Executive Secretariat, National Security Council: Country File V: Near East and South Asia [Middle East], "Israeli/Iraq-Book 1(2)" Box 37, 41; *On the Israeli Air Strike and Related Issues: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 97th Cong. 1 (1981)* (Testimony of State Department Counselor Robert McFarlane): 32.; "Habib Returns To Beirut; Mission Hurt by Israeli Raid," June 10 1981, *Wall Street Journal*, 35.;

¹⁸ Skeptics might dismiss this as yet another example of officials exaggerating risks to compete for limited attention and resources. This assumption overlooks both the argument's prevalence and its interagency support. Regardless of its validity from the Soviet perspective, policy makers in the White House and on the Hill all repeatedly vocalized this concern, implying a shared sense of genuine fear. Interagency Intelligence Assessment, "Implications of Israeli Attack on Iraq," 1 July 1981, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSPG Meetings, "NSPG 0017 06/30/1981 [Israeli Attack on Iraq; Leaks]," Box 91305, RRL.; Hedrick Smith, "Nettles for Reagan: Raid Brings Confrontation with Israel and Obstacles to Strategy on MidEast," *New York Times*, June 9, 1981.; "Mideast Muddle: Israel's Raid in Iraq Ensnarls Diplomacy And Arms Sales Plans," *Wall Street Journal*, June 9, 1981.; Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Trying to Determine if Attack Violated Accord," *The New York Times*, June 10, 1981.

its objectives before the formal announcement, leaked statements indicated that the administration, seeking to encourage peaceful development while preventing international militarization, was poised to ease export restrictions and endorse plutonium reprocessing for “reliable” countries. Yet, Israel’s strike on a NPT-signatory’s internationally sanctioned, IAEA-inspected, and European constructed reactor threw the administration’s stated ability to define “safe” nuclear projects into question. Democrats on the Hill jumped at the opportunity, crowing, “the raid has clearly demonstrated the need for a tough nonproliferation policy” and calling for an expedited announcement. One of the few foreign policy topics “close to Reagan’s heart,” the nuclear non-proliferation agenda’s potential destabilization ensured the crisis would reach the president’s desk. And that it was Israel that precipitated the non-proliferation question ensured it would trigger debate.¹⁹

Posing a threat to the Reagan administration’s core Cold War concerns, inciting perceptions of future instability in a key region, and heightened by surprise, the Israeli strike passes the threshold for traditional definitions of strategic crisis. State Department officials certainly perceived it as such; one high-ranking official confessed that strategists shared “institutional memories of what happened in 1967, and [were] trying our best to avoid a repetition,” drawing parallels to the Israeli surprise attack on Egypt’s air force that had resulted in the severance of U.S. diplomatic ties in the region and escalated into war.²⁰ Though conditions after Osirak never deteriorated so far, the comparison was apt. An Israeli raid had for a second time enraged a regional hot zone and left an American administration only a narrow window of opportunity to stabilize existing operations and preserve substantial national interests in the region. And, as in

¹⁹ “When you talked about getting rid of nuclear weapons, you got his attention.” See: Frank Carlucci, interview by Phillip Zelikow et al., Ronald Reagan Oral History Collection, August 28, 2001.; Judith Miller, “Attack Complicates New Reagan Policy” *The New York Times*, June 10 1981.

²⁰ Bernard Gwertzman, “U.S. Trying to Determine if Attack Violated Accord.”

1967, events in the Middle East had offered a rhetorically resolute president the opportunity to translate campaign rhetoric into action. How President Reagan met such a complex crisis would potentially define the early administration's policy in the region and illustrate to naysayers his capacity to meet geopolitical challenges with the vigor candidate-Reagan had promised.

The Reagan Test Case

Despite Haig's efforts to maintain secrecy and Iraqi officials' continued denial, news of the raid leaked across international wires early Monday afternoon. Coverage of the strike plastered the front page of every major American newspaper and pushed Reagan's controversial tax proposals below the fold. While official statements tried to downplay the event's severity and emphasize continuity of American activities in the region, the press interpreted the event as a dramatic test case for a new president with an unproven foreign affairs record. Osirak "threatened to build into one of the biggest crises of his young administration," remarked one eager *Washington Post* reporter. The prognosis was soon repeated across liberal and conservative papers alike; outlining the complications for Reagan non-proliferation, Cold War, and peace process objectives, journalists gleefully highlighted White House's difficulties under headlines like "Middle East Muddle" and "Nettles for Reagan." More important, the press – and the American public – seemed to perceive the crisis as a "watershed event" for Arab-Israeli relations and the Reagan administration's ability to respond to international pressure. Noting "eventual repercussions in the Middle east will depend in part on what the U.S. does," both domestic and international papers alike called for the Reagan administration to take a clear stand.²¹ Foreign affairs, like all politics, is a game of perception; whether rooted in fact or not, the public

²¹ George C. Wilson & John M. Goshko, "President Facing Decision On More F16s for Israel: Reagan to Decide on Jets for Israel," *Washington Post*, June 10, 1981 See also: Smith, June 9 1981.

consensus that this was a genuine crisis elevated the event and transformed a limited raid into a test of American, Israeli, and Arab credibility.

Caught off guard, the administration was forced on the defensive. High-level staff, stranded at Camp David for an official state visit, were unable to meet for two full days, leaving each American embassy, agency, and department to formulate an independent response to press questioning. Operating without guidance from the White House, U.S. officials issued contradictory and often inaccurate statements to forestall questioning. Yet public interest in the crisis, fueled by Soviet rumors of American complicity in the raid, had grown too large to be contained and U.S. foes and allies alike issued demands for American comment. The Reagan administration had lost the opportunity to control the international interpretation of events. Finally convened Tuesday as a “hastily expanded session” of the president’s nightly briefing, the NSC discussion conceded that public understanding of the facts had been set. Unable to spin the event, strategists debated how to respond without committing American credibility. “Obvious dangers for the United States” were identified. First, the raid had risked the administration’s inherited peace process by throwing the legitimacy of ongoing negotiations into question. More worryingly, Israel’s use of American weapons had uncovered Arab militaries’ continued technological weakness. Already teetering between U.S. and Soviet patronage, many states, their sense of insecurity renewed, might turn to embrace Russian arms. With Soviet forces stationed in Afghanistan and military advisors in Libya, the Middle East might very well go Red.²²

The Haig-Weinberger dispute, already agitated by ongoing debates over the proposed AWACs sale to Saudi Arabia, flared immediately. Differing over how best to pursue regional anticommunism, presidential advisors divided on whether the administration should signal a turn

²² John M Goshko, “How Events Overtook the Best of Plans,” *The Washington Post*, June 14, 1981,; Gwertzman, June 10, 1981.

to the Arab nations by taking “strong, even punitive, measures against Israel” or embrace its allies by expressing disapproval without humiliation.²³ A DOD report defined the battleground; noting international pressure from Arab and European powers alike, the report proposed four potential responses: 1) a significant cut in U.S. economic aid for Israel, which by 1980 had reached an estimated \$2.185 billion; 2) a suspension of all military equipment assistance; 3) high-level diplomatic pressure for Israel to submit its own nuclear facilities to IAEA observation; and 4) a public call for Israel to compensate Iraq for all damages.²⁴ Though concerned by the raid’s potential negative impact on the peace mission, Haig demanded the new administration prove the strength of its commitment to Israel and publicly stand behind its regional military ally.²⁵ A competing coalition arose, however, that advocated for an aggressive combination of all DOD recommendations. Maintaining his insistence that Saudi Arabia, not Israel, represented the best regional bulwark against communism, Weinberger pushed for the president to reassure Arab leaders of continued American commitment by distancing the administration from Israel with punitive sanctions.²⁶ Though no one dared to stray so far as to propose a severance of ties, their proposals questioned Israel’s centrality to the conservative worldview and revealed the difficulty of translating ideology into policy. Faced with their first foreign policy scuffle, officials discovered they couldn’t present the president with the neat solutions he demanded.

²³ Haig, 184

²⁴ The DOD report poses an important challenge to an oft-repeated error in contemporary press coverage—since repeated by many historians – that the administration considered only one option at the June 9th NSC meeting. See: Haig, 184; *Hearings before the Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs on Europe and the Middle East and on International Economic Policy and Trade of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 97th Cong. 1* (1981) (Testimony of Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Walter J. Stoessel Jr.): 11.; William Safire, “Hail to the Nuclear Entebbe,” June 11, 1981, *The New York Times*, A23.

²⁵ Walter Mossberg & Gerald Seib, “Reagan Delays Sending Israel Four F16 Planes,” June 11, 1981, *The Wall Street Journal*, 2.

²⁶ Laham, 162; Safire, June 11, 1981.

The advisors need not have worried about presenting the president with a single position. The president's ardent anti-communism had made him receptive to advisors' warnings of an Arab red tide and Reagan approved of plans for expanded arms sales despite the potential security implications for Israel. He seemed unwilling in early 1981, however, to pivot fully away from the state he had supported since its creation in 1948. Reagan's noticeable disinterest in policy details and his insistence that "there *are* simple answers" to complex questions allowed him to maintain his rhetorical support for the Israeli state while simultaneously pursuing policies contrary to its interests.²⁷ While his advisors grappled to reconcile their competing Cold War objectives – to, on one hand, woo Arab states away from the lure of Soviet support and, on the other, to maintain Israel's security commitment – Reagan's comments on the conflict reveal a general refusal to acknowledge potential contradictions or complications. Drawing from his personal suspicion of the Iraq leader Sadaam Hussein and a "natural sympathy" for the Begin government, President Reagan ruled out punitive action before the first NSC session. Additional meetings held over the next two days could do little to dissuade his intention to limit American actions to minimal condemnation; typically blunt, Reagan's diary entries on the Osirak raid reveal a president determined to support the Israeli state out of a genuine fear of Iraqi nuclear weaponization and a hope that continued American support might stabilize the peace process. His conclusion was thus appropriately simple: as he confided in his diary, the United States could never "[turn] on Israel—that would be an invitation for the Arabs to attack."²⁸

Reagan's strong words did not, however, guarantee clear leadership on the issue. After stating his opposition to punitive action, the President withdrew from the debate, trusting policy planning and implementation to advisors. Weinberger's hardline stance was rejected quickly, but

²⁷ Emphasis original. Michael Schaller, *Reckoning With Reagan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 120.

²⁸ Reagan, 24.

the urgency to develop a viable alternative faded as shock and the probability of Arab retaliation receded. While the details of these discussions remain classified, press coverage and official memoirs reveal that U.S. officials, already sensitive to Israeli security concerns and anxious to avoid a “point-of-no return confrontation” with the Israeli government (or American Jewish voters) easily decided that they would deliver little more than a slap on the wrist. Seizing upon the symbol of U.S. complicity, the use of American manufactured F-15 and F-16 fighter jets, the White House ordered a short-term delivery freeze of four additional aircraft scheduled to depart for Israel June 11.²⁹ Though they stopped short of declaring public support for Israel, officials seemed to share Reagan’s private observation that “the truth is that Arab indignation on behalf of Iraq is a waste.”³⁰ Leaning toward Israel but avoiding the appearance of a policy tilt in either direction, officials hoped that a limited response might allow the simmering crisis to burn itself out without committing American credibility to the conflict.

The White House’s embrace of the temporary suspension contradicted the administration’s campaign promise to renew American assertiveness on the world stage. Instead of leading the international response to the Osirak raid by standing behind Israel and refusing condemnation (or, alternatively, championing the international backlash), the administration treaded water in the hopes that the crisis would recede on its own. This was, in part, the inevitable trap of governing; as the *Washington Post* commented at the time, “events invariably get in the way of plans and priorities and timetables and, as a result, foreign policy often is reduced to the necessity of reacting to events, even when it means going against the grain of the

²⁹ Goshko, Jun 14, 1981.

³⁰ Worryingly, President Reagan’s June 10 diary entry includes an inaccurate description of legal commitment to inform Congress; it seems the President was either improperly informed or failed to grasp the specifics of the complicated legislative requirement governing the use of defensive arms in potentially aggressive acts. See: Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009): 24-25

most elaborately planned policies.” White House officials’ statements, however, point to a more worrying failure to effectively organize within the imposed time constraints. As one participant in the NSC debates admitted, “It didn’t really matter whether we made a decision immediately or put it off... There really wasn’t even much of a decision-making process involved.” Rather, the administration decided to react to events as they occurred, employing, officials conceded, “at best, damage-control measures” that might allow for the possibility of recovery later down the road.³¹

The delivery suspension served the additional function of providing the administration a response to growing voices of concerns from the Hill. The Israeli use of American aircraft potentially violated the recently amended Arms Export Control that limited foreign states’ use of American weaponry to “legitimate self defense” and obliged the White House to promptly inform Congress of any potential “substantial” violation. Concession of an Israeli act of aggression would automatically require the White House to order punitive retribution, but the Act stipulated neither the criteria for defining aggression nor contingency requirements governing the conditions of the President’s response. In practice, the decision was left to the White House: as Pentagon spokesman Henry Catto explained to reporters, “The Law doesn’t spell out substantial. That becomes a matter of art, not science.”³²

The Reagan administration took full advantage of this ambiguity. Though Haig, acting on behalf of the president, released a letter to Congress conceding that a “violation... may have occurred,” officials left its internal policy debates to congressional imagination. Haig’s letter noted continuing internal discussions, pointed to potential congressional cooperation, and concluded with a reminder of continuing engagement with the Israeli government but offered

³¹ Ibid.

³² Gwertzman, June 10, 1981.; Smith, June 9, 1981.; Wilson & Goshko, June 10, 1981.

neither a hint of condemnation nor a specific timeline for the review, Mentioned quickly, “the suspension *for the time being* of the immediate shipment of four F-16 aircraft” was offered as a temporary salve to calm angered Arab leaders and appease congressional leaders’ demands for an administrative review. Its practical implications, however, remained unclear: unconstrained by a reporting deadline, the administration could wait to review the status of aircraft sales till public attention faded.³³

In the context of this congressional maneuvering, Haig’s letter appears little more than a formality. The sheer volume of U.S. military assistance overwhelmed the temporary delay of four planes; 25 F-16s had already been delivered, and another 155 howitzers, 28 mortar carriers, 84 Ambulances, 65,000 ammunition rounds, 1,000 MARK 84 bombs, 49 M60-A3 tanks, 135 armored personnel carriers, 25 recovery vehicles, 71,000 mortar rounds, and 2216 Sidewinder, TOW, and HAWK missiles continued their steady pace to Israeli arsenals.³⁴ Despite Haig’s protests to the contrary, it was unlikely that the suspension would be expanded to include these additional areas of military aid. White House officials privately debated the president’s obligation to report on its internal review of the Arms Trade Act, concluding June 11 – the same of day of the suspension’s announcement – that the bill’s ambiguity made its recommendations non-obligatory. Privately justified as a prioritization of immediate political risks, the

³³ The administration’s response was far milder than that of previous administrations. Turkey’s use of American weaponry in the 1974 invasion of Cyprus forced President Ford to impose a complete arms embargo and halt all military assistance. The embargo was lifted one year later via congressional legislation.; Letter from Alexander M. Haig to Charles H. Percy, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate Pursuant to Section 3(c)(2) of the Arms Export Control Act, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File V: Near East and South Asia [Middle East] “Israeli/Iraq-Book 1(2),” Box 37, 41.; Smith, A1; Mossberg & Seib, 2

³⁴ Testimony of Walter J. Stoessel Jr., 11.

administration's maneuvering around legal concerns illustrates a concerted effort to avoid taking an assertive stance on any element of the broader Osirak issue.³⁵

In contrast to this advisors' policy moderation, the president privately pushed an aggressive rhetoric more in line with his ideological obligation to Israel. "I feel like I've spent the day in the UN" Reagan complained the night before the suspension's public announcement, commenting on his series of personal meetings with ambassadors from Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. Though Press Secretary Larry Speakes assured the press that Reagan simply wished to reiterate his commitment "to the furtherance of the peace process in that critical region of the world," the President took the opportunity to warn the Arab representatives that "his own displeasure over the incident would not lead to any 'fundamental re-evaluation' of American-Israeli relations." State Department officials' comments to the press reaffirmed the chief executive's intransigence, reminding reporters that the ultimate determination resided with the president; though Congress could move to ban arm shipments through a joint resolution, the President reserved (and, as his diaries reveal, was prepared to use) the power to veto. "There isn't any specific action that must be taken," and administration official conceded, "That is a matter of judgment."³⁶

The administration's public indecision reflected more troubling internal difficulties. Delays, confusion, and a lack of inter-departmental cooperation plagued the process and caused significant political embarrassment. Still reeling with embarrassment, American intelligence

³⁵ National Security Council Memorandum from Robert M. Kimmit to Richard Allen, "Israeli Strike--Legal Aspects," June 11 1981, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File V: Near East and South Asia [Middle East], "(Israeli Strikes in Iraqi Nuclear Facility, 6/8/81)," Box 1 of 2, RRL.

³⁶ Reagan, 24-5.; Memorandum for Richard V. Allen from Geoffrey Kemp, "Summaries of the President's Meetings with Saudi Ambassador Alhegelan and Five Arab Ambassadors, June 11, 1981," June 12, 1981, Near East and South Asia Directorate, NSC, "President's Meeting with Arab Ambassadors Re Israeli Raid" Box 91141. "Israel Says U.S. Can't Tell It How to Use Arms," *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1981; Mossberg & Seib, June 11, 1981.

officials offered contradictory—and often incomplete assessments— of the Iraqi nuclear program. Though a consensus gradually emerged that Iraqi scientists had the enrichment capacity and the political intention to produce a weapon by year’s end,³⁷ internal reports of the structural damage, jet numbers, and radiation impact differed widely. Similarly, DOD and State Department spokesman offered conflicting statements on the administration’s intentions, misleading reporters and leading to several leaks. In the most egregious example of failed integration, Secretary Weinberger leaked Reagan’s decision to delay F-16 shipment before its official announcement to Congress—or the Israeli government. Believing Weinberger had intentionally revealed the information out of anger that the administration had not taken a firmer stance against Israel, a furious Haig called the Secretary of Defense and demanded the Pentagon cease holding press briefings on the subject.³⁸ Quickly losing its ability to control public perception of the crisis and manage domestic and foreign expectations, the administration was responding to events, not leading them.

Executive disarray did not go unnoticed by Capitol Hill. Ostensibly held to expedite the White House’s internal review of the Osirak raid, Senate and House hearings the week after Haig’s announcement quickly devolved into sustained inquisitions of the Reagan

³⁷ White House records indicate the Iraqi decision to purchase an OSIRIS type reactor left “no real doubt about the real intention of its purchase.” See: “The Iraqi Nuclear Threat,” (undated), Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File V: Near East and South Asia [Middle East], “Israel-Iraq Book (I),” Box 37, 41, RRL.

³⁸ Take, for example, State Department spokesman Dean Fischer’s denial of any intention to suspend the F-16 deal the same day that DOD spokesman Henry Catto admitted the department was “seriously considering suspension.” Cables from the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv repeatedly warned that the Israeli press was reporting these contradictions and pleaded for clarification. See: Cable from USICA/Tel Aviv to Department of State, “Media Reaction/Press Review, June 17, 1981,” June 17, 1981, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File V: Near East and South Asia [Middle East], Israeli/Iraq-Book 1(2) Box 37, 41. Department of State Cable “Department Press Briefing June 10, 1981,” June 11, 1981, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File V: Near East and South Asia [Middle East], “Israeli/Iraq-Book 1(2)” 37, 41; ; Judith Miller “U.S. Officials Say Iraq Had Ability To Make Nuclear Weapon in 1981,” June 9, 1981, *The New York Times*, A9.; “F-16 Delivery in Doubt,” *The Chicago Tribune*, June 10, 1981.; Haig, 184;

administration's regional strategy. Congressman Lee Hamilton (D.-Indiana) summarized the general atmosphere of exasperation when he called for "the administration [to] now come forward, in public, and state precisely what U.S. policies are toward Israel and what the ramifications of this raid are for our interests in the Middle East." His demands were echoed in the Senate where debate over "one of the most disturbing events in recent history" quickly turned into bipartisan calls for strategic context.³⁹

White House officials were unprepared. Hemming and hawing, they proposed contradictory legal interpretations of the president's obligation to report Arms Trade Act violations and refused to clarify the administration's objectives for Middle East or nuclear non-proliferation strategy.⁴⁰ After Under Secretary of State Walter Stoessel refused to state the administration's stance on Iraq's nuclear intentions, Representative John Bingham (D-NY) broke the hearing's usual decorum with a cry of exasperation. "I think a dentist would find it easier to pull teeth without the aid of novocaine," he chastised Stoessel, "than it is to get a definitive answer from you on this question."⁴¹ While congressional needling of administrative officials is far from uncommon—particularly in such times of partisan division—the hearings expressed an unusual level of exasperation with the administration's perceived obstructionism. White House advisors attempted to qualify their hesitation to offer concrete answers by repeatedly emphasizing the

³⁹ *The Israeli Action and U.S. Policy: Hearings before the Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs on Europe and the Middle East and on International Economic Policy and Trade of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 97th Cong. 1 (1981)* (Statement of Representative Lee H. Hamilton): 2, 27.; (Testimony of Acting Secretary of State Walter J. Stoessel): 10-11.

⁴⁰ Testimony of Robert McFarlane.; Memorandum for Charles Percy from Fred Tipson, "Determination Under Section 3(c) of the Arms Export Control Act," as Submitted to the Record, *On the Israeli Air Strike and Related Issues: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 97th Cong. 1(1981)* , 93-94; Memorandum for Senator Percy from David Lawther Johnson, "Majority Counsel's Analysis of Responsibilities for Determinations Under Section 3(c) of the Arms Export Control Act, July 9, 1981," as Submitted to the Record, *On the Israeli Air Strike and Related Issues*, 95.

⁴¹ Testimony of Walter J. Stoessel Jr, 14.

administration believed “this issue at its core is political rather than legal,” but their refusal to clarify the nature of those political concerns left congressmen fearful that the White House lacked a long-term plan.⁴²

Congressional frustration focused on the White House’s perceived failure to control its own foreign policy apparatus. Administrative leaks had not gone unnoticed and exasperated lingering disbelief that U.S. intelligence had failed to predict the raid. Noting contradictory press statements, reversals of stated policy objectives, and hesitation to maintain the president’s own public language on the strike, legislators questioned the State Department’s allegiance to the White House and demanded clarification of its non-proliferation and Middle East policies. In one striking moment, Assistant Secretary of State Veliotis – the same State Department official who had briefed Hill officials after the raid – was forced to defend the State Department’s commitment to the “policies and policy statements of the President of the United States,” inciting an increasingly irritated representative to snap: “I am pleased to get that on the record because I don't always have the same impression.”⁴³

Congressional hearings provide ample opportunities for partisan potshots, but the Osirak hearings exceeded even cynics’ expectations. Embarrassment over U.S. intelligence failures and exasperation with the White House’s lackluster response emanated from both the Democratically-held House and the Republican Senate, producing a wave of unusually bipartisan opposition to the new president’s leadership on the issue. Conservative factions of both parties spoke out in defense of Israel’s strike, decrying Sadaam Hussein’s nuclear program and expressing a belief that Israel was “fighting the good fight—and doing it well.” Even the vocal legislators that disapproved of Israel’s unilateral action shied from defending Iraq, and a consensus

⁴² Ibid., 4-6.

⁴³ Testimony of Robert McFarlane.

quickly emerged that Hussein's nuclear program had posed a significant and immediate danger to Israel's security and a potential long-term challenge to U.S. nonproliferation interests. Many congressmen and women thus condemned the strike but concentrated their anger on what they perceived as a failure to prevent the situation's deterioration and preempt Israeli actions. The vitriol extended beyond constituent-base appeasement as congressmen voiced their displeasure with a failed intelligence effort, an obstinate State Department, and a White House that seemed unable to craft a stable response. Though divided on a broad array of issues from school prayer to taxation, both houses of Congress believed they were more committed to resolving the Middle East crisis than the Reagan administration itself.⁴⁴

International Condemnation & the U.S. Response

Though Reagan's interest in the Osirak raid petered out after the F-16 suspension, the administration's challenges only intensified as the month wore on. On June 9, Iraq filed for the Security Council to consider condemnation, a request UN Secretary General Waldheim eagerly accepted. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) responded immediately by convening an emergency session that reaffirmed Iraq's right to civilian nuclear technology, "strongly condemned" the strike, and recommended Israel's expulsion and the suspension of all rights and privileges of membership. Director General Sigvard Eklund made his intentions clear during a later address to the Security Council's own discussion of the event. Denying allegations of weaponization, he blamed Israel for threatening international non-proliferation efforts by denying the IAEA and NPT regime's credibility. "The International Atomic Energy Agency, since its establishment, has not been faced with a more serious matter as the implications of this

⁴⁴ McAlister, 196.; Khoury, 73.

development, Eklund warned, “From a point of principle, one can only conclude that it is the [IAEA] which has also been attacked.”⁴⁵

Its anger legitimized by the IAEA’s action, Arab League states met June 12 in Baghdad to discuss and organize a “collective Arab action.” Though American strategists feared use of “the oil weapon,” Saudi resistance quickly preempted the possibility of an embargo while internal political fractures, worsened by the Iran-Iraq conflict that split the Persian Gulf, made effective military action unlikely. Instead, Arab League debate turned to three alternatives: 1) a petition to the Security Council to impose sanctions; 2) the presentation of a resolution to oust Israel from the United Nations; and 3) regional pressure to force the United States to punish its ally and prove its genuine commitment to U.S.-Arab alliances. While some of the League’s more militant leaders pushed for violent retaliation, moderate forces secured a notably restrained resolution. Shying from recommendation of Israeli expulsion, the text calling for “binding sanctions” and urged the U.S. to “curb Israel, “put an end to Zionist aggression and to adopt practical and tangible steps to terminate assistance.”⁴⁶ Despite its domestic evasions, the United States was being forced to take a stance by the very nations it wished to woo.

Permanent Ambassador Kirkpatrick was recalled to Washington to attend the final White House meeting on June 11, where discussion turned from the F-16 suspension to the American negotiating line at the upcoming emergency Security Council session. Though officials claimed the president was “considering ‘a dozen different options,’” the disposal of the hardliner’s

⁴⁵ Text of a Resolution adopted by the Board of Governors on 12 June 1981, Twenty-Fifth Regular Session, Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda (GC(CCV)/640), “Military Attack on Iraqi Nuclear Research Centre and its Implications for the Agency.”; Sigvard Eklund, *Text of the Statement Made by the Director General to the Security Council on 19 June 1981*.

⁴⁶ Edward Cody, “Arabs Vow Joint Response to Israel,” *The Washington Post*, June 9 1981.; William E. Farrell, “Arab League Urges Sanctions on Israel for Attack on Iraq,” June 12, 1981, *The New York Times*, A1; David Ignatius and Karen Elliot House, “Arab Options: Diplomatic Offensive Is Likeliest Response To Israeli Raid in Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 1981.

position days before left only two valid alternatives: a veto of any UN effort to condemn Israel (an action certain to antagonize Arab leaders) or acceptance of a moderate condemnation without punitive action. The first would strike a blow to the regional anti-communism model but the latter might preserve the administration's flexibility to pursue either Haig or Weinberger's proposed strategies. Reagan and his chief advisors quickly agreed that they were unwilling to escalate American reprimands beyond the level that had already been established. In private and in public, they announced the U.S. would veto any attempt to impose punitive economic or political sanctions but would potentially accept lesser condemnatory measures.⁴⁷

American warnings failed to diminish Iraqi hopes for collective punitive action. Buttressed by the Arab League's apparent support and certain that global condemnation signaled "the further isolation of the racist and aggressive Zionist entity," Iraqi Foreign Minister Saadun Hammadi opened the Security Council's emergency session on June 12 with a call for the imposition of mandatory sanctions. Though State Department officials, knowing that public rhetoric often differed from private negotiations, viewed the speech as "restrained, in comparison with the normal flow of Arab rhetoric" and its demands the minimum Iraq could request, Kirkpatrick responded aggressively.⁴⁸ Determined to end the "Turkish bath" model of UN politics that viewed the UN as "a place to let off steam," Kirkpatrick took offense at the introduction of PLO representative Zehdi Labib Terzi and demanded a vote on his expulsion. The motion was quickly defeated 11-1, with the U.S. representative casting the sole ballot

⁴⁷ Cable from US Mission at the United Nations to the Department of State, "June 9 Session of Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean," June 10 1981, DNSA.; Gwetzman, June 11, 1981.; Lou Cannon, "Iraq Demands U.N. Sanctions on Israel; U.S. Threatens Veto: Reagan Said to Oppose 'Punitive Measures'" *The Washington Post*, July 13, 1981.

⁴⁸ Don Shannon, "Iraq Asks U.N. for Sanctions Against Israel: Move Is Expected to Draw U.S. Veto," *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1981; Michael J. Berlin, "Iraq Demands U.N. Sanctions on Israel; U.S. Threatens Veto: Israel Calls Air Raid Legitimate Self Defense," *The Washington Post*, June 13, 1981.

against Terzi's presence. In the process, however, Kirkpatrick illustrated her intention "to take a stronger line in defense of Israel" at the United Nations and threw her influence behind Israeli representative Yehuda Zvi Blum, who was banned from the level of participation his Security Council seat normally afforded. The other delegates, however, lost no ground publicly shaming the Israeli diplomat. Arab delegates left the chamber when Council President Porfiro Munoz Ledo of Mexico recognized Blum. "We are not going to get one word of support, and we know it," an Israeli diplomat admitted in advance of the session. That more than 40 nations signified their desire to voice condemnation of the raid by the first session's conclusion seemed to outpace even the Israeli delegation's worst expectations.⁴⁹

Seizing a perceived opportunity, the Iraq delegation escalated the confrontation by reviving demands for a "total arms embargo." Charging the Israeli government of "full-scale war to subjugate Arab countries and impose full Zionist domination over the whole Middle East," the Iraqi government capitalized on public sympathy to translate the Osirak debate into a broader hearing of Arab-Israel relations. An informal resolution draft condemning the Israeli government and calling for a full embargo of military, economic, and technical aid received vocal support from many Security Council members and was matched by a Non-Aligned Movement draft that proposed similar, though non-binding, recommendations. Western allied delegations, meanwhile, called for full condemnation and reparations before stopping short of punitive sanctions, revealing only a superficial allegiance with the American delegation's agenda. Blum dismissed the recommendations offhand, asking the Council: "Did the Allies pay reparations after they destroyed the Nazi's atomic plants at Peenemunde during World War II?"⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Kirkpatrick, interview, Shannon, June 13, 1981; Berlin, June 13, 1981.

⁵⁰ Berlin, June 13, 1981.; "Soviets urge UN sanctions for Israel: Soviets call for Israel sanctions," *Chicago Tribune*, June 16, 1981.

Yet, the major complication to Kirkpatrick's negotiating position came not from the Arab League but from within her own administration. Holding his first press conference since the spring assassination attempt, President Reagan strayed from prepared talking points and amended his previous comments on the raid. Where the president had previously chastised Israel for not first exhausting diplomatic channels, Reagan now expressed his sympathy for the Israeli position, agreeing, "that Israel had reason for concern in view of the past history of Iraq." Continuing on to admit his difficulty "envision[ing] Israel as being a threat to its neighbors," Reagan put the full strength of his reputation behind Israel. As was typical, he was unable to back his rhetorical support with a policy commitment, worsening suspicions that the administration lacked a long-term strategy for the region. Visibly agitated after a reporter inquired if recent events had sparked "some serious thought to a foreign policy program across the board," Reagan refused to comment on any policy or issue preparation, denying even support for the ongoing peace process.⁵¹ Though this supported Kirkpatrick's ideological intentions at the Security Council, Reagan's movement away from previous statements obscured the administration's intentions and muddied other nation's perception of the White House's stance. As a negotiator, Kirkpatrick needed to prove her delegation's commitment to genuine consideration of the Iraqi raid and preserve the incentive of a U.S. agreement to non-punitive condemnation. Instead, the president's statements had publicly contradicted her bottom line and strengthened allegations of insincere negotiation. Israeli press coverage summarized the dilemma when it asked: "who, then, is speaking for the U.S.? The president or the State department spokesmen?"⁵²

⁵¹ Ronald Reagan, Presidential News Conference, June 16 1981.

⁵² Cable from USICA/Tel Aviv to Department of State, "Media Reaction/Press Review, June 17, 1981," Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File V: Near East and South Asia [Middle East], "Israeli/Iraq-Book 1(2)," Box 37, 41, RRL.; Cable from USICA/Tel Aviv to Department of

Complications emerged quickly. After Kirkpatrick cancelled her planned statements, Western and Arab officials openly suggested Reagan's public remarks, widely viewed by the Security Council as aggressively pro-Israeli, weakened the U.S. position by making it difficult for Iraq to agree to a minimal resolution. A Non-Aligned Movement communiqué demanding further condemnation and a halt of U.S. military and economic assistance seemed to fulfill this fear, reviving Iraq's original, more aggressive draft resolution. Expanding upon proposals first put forward at the Arab League meetings, several delegates proposed the introduction of two resolutions to force the United States into both an embarrassing veto and an acceptance of Iraqi terms. Separating condemnation of Israel from calls for broad sanctions, the proposal would allow Arab leaders to save face by blaming sanctions' failure on the United States while also securing the credibility of an American-backed condemnation. More radical factions, however, laughed the proposal aside: as Terzi commented to the AP, "why propose two resolutions when you can isolate Israel psychologically with one?"⁵³

By that Wednesday, however, Hammadi and Kirkpatrick signalled that the Security Council would meet its expected Friday, June 19 deadline. "There's been some movement," Kirkpatrick admitted after a two hour, closed-door session with Hammadi and other UN officials, "there's some hope." Finally, news of a negotiating breakthrough leaked the next evening and by Friday UN Secretary General Waldheim, Kirkpatrick, and Hammadi had reached agreement. The reconciliation of the three most important officials signaled the end of negotiations and the draft text was quickly approved by international delegations. Striking "act of aggression" from the final draft text while "strongly condemning" the raid and requesting "appropriate redress," the

State, "Media Reaction/Press Review, June 21, 1981," Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File V: Near East and South Asia [Middle East], "Israeli/Iraq-Book 1(2)," Box 37, 41.

⁵³ Michael J Berlin. "Nonaligned group at U.N. urges halt in aid to Israel," *The Washington Post*, June 17 1981.

consensus draft afforded the Iraqis the power of an American denunciation but preserved U.S. opposition to sanctions. Passed unanimously the next evening, Resolution 247 marked one of the United States' harshest rebukes of Israel since the state's formation.⁵⁴

Kirkpatrick deserves praise for her negotiating success. Despite complications, both Iraqi and U.S. negotiators preserved their bottom line. "The draft is important for what it omits as well as what it says," *the New York Times* noted at the time, "It makes no mention of embargoing arms to Israel, nor does it place any new obligation on its military suppliers," preserving the American interests in arming its regional ally. Moreover, in striking the term 'aggression' from the resolution's condemnation, Kirkpatrick preempted the creation of a legal precedent for later punitive action, effectively declawing the resolution. This decision reverberated in Washington, affording international credibility to those who, unable to fully prove Israel's argument of self-defense, could at least now prove the raid was not an act of war. For Iraq, the victory was self-evident: condemnation of Israel by its strongest historical ally. Skeptics who wonder at a resolution's practical significance miss the mechanism's historical importance to Arab states. A political tool with the hallmarks of international credibility at a time when military victory appeared uncertain, international resolutions were seen by many Arab leaders as a an effective means to gain both a propaganda victory at home and further isolation of the Jewish state abroad. As international law scholar William Orbach notes, "It was the realization that a military victory... was not possible that encouraged the Arabs to hope for political victory as a substitute.

⁵⁴ Within the context of UN conventions, UN S/RES/487 issued the strongest possible verbal action short of a declaration of aggression. Moreover, that the condemnation was in the operative paragraph indicated the violation's severity. See: Orbach, 7-8. Details of the negotiations remain unclear, but U.S. intelligence reports indicate that Sadaam Hussein overrode cabinet opposition and personally approved the modified text as a final opportunity to save face and avoid an American veto. See: "Implications of Israeli Attack on Iraq," ; Bernard Nossiter, "U.S. and Iraq Agree on U.N. Resolution to 'Condemn' Raid," *The New York Times*, 19 June 1981,.; "Harshest U.S. Rebuke," *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 1981.

Each condemnation was welcomed...for bringing the final political victory over Israel closer; each encouraged many Arabs to believe that the great powers would repeat their interventions of 1956 and force Israel to withdraw.” Diplomats at the time conceded as much, noting that Iraq’s bottom line was “some credible truth that would damage America’s ties with Israel so a Baghdad can say that the relationship will never be the same.”⁵⁵

The limited victory did little to sooth Kirkpatrick’s obvious displeasure. The ambassador failed to contain her visible disgust when the formal vote was called, barely lifting her hand in approval of the final resolution text. Those who might have missed her facial expression were reassured of her displeasure by her public statements before and after the vote. Condemning the raid as “shocking” only because “diplomatic means available to Israel had not been exhausted,” she used her vote against Israel as a podium to declare Israel’s right to self-defense. In a speech approved by both the White House and State, she promised “nothing has happened that in any way alters the strength of our commitment or the warmth of our feelings” toward “an important and valued ally.”⁵⁶ The vote concluded, Kirkpatrick seized upon Reagan’s press conference comments, cited specifically in her speech, as justification to return to her soapbox.

It had been the USUN mission itself that constrained Kirkpatrick’s wish to signal “her intent not to continue a ‘business as usual’ policy.” While the White House had warned Congress that its consideration of Israeli action was a question of politics, not law, Kirkpatrick found her vote predetermined by her counsel’s belief Israel had simply failed to fulfill Article 51’s criterion outlining the use of force in self-defense. This was not about the raid itself. As one of her counsels recalled later, “there was no disagreement” over Iraq’s capacity for plutonium production or Israel’s international efforts to impose a moratorium; rather, “The issue was what

⁵⁵Bernard Nossiter, “U.S. and Iraq Agree on U.N. Resolution to ‘Condemn’ Raid: Check on Israeli Sites Urged,” *The New York Times*, 19 June 1981.; Gerson, 1.; Orbach, 120.

⁵⁶ UN S/RES/487 (19 June 1981); Ostrower, 174.; Berlin, June 20, 1981.

the law required in such circumstances. For [USUN counselors] the law was very clear, and had to be taken literally.” As she admitted at the time, Kirkpatrick had “fought hard to delete the really bad language in that resolution when it first came up” but, upon removing the difficult language, was forced to agree to the resolution’s legal standing. She had achieved “the minimum possible punishment” but was ultimately unsatisfied: in Kirkpatrick’s eyes, the U.S. had staved off defeat but failed to achieve a true ideological victory at United Nations.⁵⁷

Conclusion

American officials were overwhelmed by the crisis before it even began. Reagan’s transition team had overlooked major warnings about the likelihood of a strike, the intelligence community had failed to predict the operation or alert Washington of its implementation, and officials scrambled for days before a meeting of high-level security officials could be arranged. Even with the delay, the administration’s response was haphazard and unorganized, conditions only worsened by contradictory and misleading public statements—including several by the President himself. Israel’s strike had sparked a regional crisis and, un-tested and ill-prepared, officials scrambled to put out simultaneous fire in the press, in Congress, and, most importantly, on the international stage.

The Reagan administration’s chaotic efforts were the product of deep institutional faults in its crisis management strategy. As Ambassador Lewis warned days after the strike, the administration’s dogged focus on economic affairs had undermined its institutional capacity for long-term planning and forced key decisions over the nature of the administration’s foreign policy objectives on to the back burner. The result was that when news of the raid finally reached Washington, officials had to both formulate a response that preserved American interests and define what those interests were—all in a span of mere days. Policymakers, Henry Kissinger has

⁵⁷ Gerson, 14.; Mossberg & Seib, Jun 11, 1981.

quipped, are unavoidably “locked in an endless battle in which the urgent constantly gains on the important.”⁵⁸ It’s apparent that Reagan officials, lacking a definition of the ‘important,’ could do little but respond to the ‘urgent.’

And the Orisak crisis was urgent. An interagency intelligence estimate completed in July confirmed the worst of Congress’s fears, noting the strike had “struck a hard blow” to several American interests in the region: the promotion of “Arab cooperation against a Soviet threat,” the mediation of the Arab-Israeli peace process, the maintenance of U.S. leadership, and the erosion of Soviet influence in the region. Worse, the U.S. response had drawn American credibility into question, damaged the IAEA and NPT non-proliferation regimes, and made nuclear development “a symbol of Third World aspirations.” Representing a consensus of military, diplomatic, and intelligence opinion, the report blamed the Reagan administration’s poor performance on the absence of a clear articulation of security objectives or priorities.⁵⁹

Fault resided at the top. Though the raid had tapped lingering anxieties and incited powerful public and congressional demands for change, it failed to incite a meaningful resolution of competing strategies, most notably the Haig-Weinberger contest to define U.S. objectives in the Middle East. Rather than commit to the strategic consensus or regional anti-communism model, the administration repeatedly tried to achieve both. Officials’ contradictory statements to the press—and, more worryingly, to Kirkpatrick mid-negotiations—were products of this confusion: was the crisis an opportunity to embrace the Arab nations and, in the process, close the door on Soviet overtures in the region? Or was it a reminder to stand behind Israel? The White House could not provide an answer.

⁵⁸ Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, and co, 1979): 54.

⁵⁹ Interagency Intelligence Assessment, “Implications of Israeli Attack on Iraq,” 1 July 1981, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSPG Meetings, “NSPG 0017 06/30/1981 [Israeli Attack on Iraq; Leaks],” Box 91305, RRL.

The absence of a coherent framework of priorities at the top meant American officials had to consistently chose the minimum possible response in hope of maintaining flexibility to pursue either strategy in the future. Yet, the absence of prior planning that resulted from the refusal to define objectives also narrowed the White House's options: having lost the window of opportunity to lead the international response, the administration quickly lost control of the crisis and was forced into responsive tactics by an angry Congress at home and a militant coalition at the United Nations.

More worryingly, the Reagan administration did not act to resolve these contradictions. The crisis could have triggered a re-thinking of the relationship between policy planning and crisis management: as official statements attest, the Israeli raid illustrated that events in the Middle East could challenge American interests and affirmed calls to prioritize and plan for contingencies. But at no point did the White House acknowledge that its efforts were not working. To the contrary, the president largely withdrew from the debate, abdicating responsibility to his feuding secretaries. When he finally did intervene, Reagan's public statements only complicated an already fragile plan and threatened to derail American objectives at the UN altogether.

Would another administration, faced with a similar international crisis so early in its first term, have fared much better? Crises will by nature strain the preparations of even the most experienced foreign policy team, particularly when events require confronting the byzantine labyrinth of Persian Gulf alliances. What is nonetheless unusual in the Osirak case is that the administration's response to the raid contradicted its previously expressed commitment to strengthening American resolve and displayed an inability to translate rhetorical guarantees into the institutional structures necessary for strong governance. As a January 1982 NSC evaluation of the raid and other first year crises concluded, the White House lacked any "meaningful policy

structure under which the analysis can be made and implemented.” Unfortunately, one did “not appear to be forthcoming in the near term.”⁶⁰

The Osirak raid would not evolve into the watershed moment feared at the time. Arab retaliation never reached the threshold of a viable threat, the Middle East remained contested territory, and, though international delegations did initially unite in a coalition against the raid, neither the IAEA nor the UN enacted meaningful punitive sanctions. The likelihood of escalation faded as the weeks passed, and the temporary freeze on U.S. military assistance was quietly lifted in August. Half-hearted waves of condemnation rose again in the fall at the IAEA conference and the UN General Assembly, but neither meeting produced more than a strongly worded advisory against similar action. Many of the states that once rallied against the raid – most notably, Saudi Arabia—have since reversed their public stance and the event’s justification remains a matter of debate.

The absence of escalation should not, however, serve as a justification for continued scholarly silence. The administration had been thrown a test in the middle of its first year, one that, by its own admission, it failed to pass. Forced by an international crisis in an already tense region to assume the full burden of international leadership, the administration struggled to strike a balance between its pragmatic, ideological, and geopolitical objectives. Its failure to do so went unpunished, affirming the administration’s tendency to treat crisis as they emerged and allowing officials to continue postponing serious planning for U.S. policy in the Middle East. The Osirak response was just one example of the administration’s continued inability to face the practical requirements of foreign policy making; the structural faults illuminated in June 1981 would worsen during the U.S. peacekeeping mission in Lebanon, where the bombing of the Marine

⁶⁰ Richard S. Beal to Edwin Meese, James Baker, Michael Deaver, William Clark, “NSC Strategic Evaluation Memorandum #11” (January 25, 1982) NSArch.

barracks in 1983 would make the implications of this refusal to seriously grapple with the region's volatility deadly clear.