

distortion? In any event, once again a book is in the

news,<sup>2</sup> provoking the citizenry, and keeping the French penchant for polemics at the boil.

<sup>2</sup> ED NOTE: We hope to publish shortly two differing comments on the book by Raymond Aron and Jean-François Revel.

*François Bondy*

### *International Commentary*

## Israel, the Palestinians, & the West

*On Dangerous Options—By ALUN CHALFONT*



IT WAS George Will, that most urbane of American columnists, who distilled the essence of the Arab-Israel dilemma when he wrote (in 1977): "Arab political concessions could be repudiated overnight; Israel's physical concessions could not be

reclaimed without war." It is a message which should be engraved prominently on the cover of every briefing-folder prepared by the industrious Foreign Offices of the Western world for their political masters. It came vividly into my mind on a recent visit to an Arab country, in the course of a conversation with a senior member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, a man of urbane and agreeable presence. Confronted with Articles 15, 19 and 22 of the *Palestinian National Covenant* (the central document of the PLO) and the inevitable argument that Israel was unlikely to agree to negotiate with an organisation which was openly committed to its destruction, his reply was disarmingly accommodating. It was, he insisted, a negotiable position, but not one to be abandoned *in advance* of negotiations. If Israel would agree to withdraw from the occupied territories, the rhetoric of the PLO might undergo a radical transformation. Well, yes, but then, as George Will says. . . .

It is not too much to say that the Arab-Israel confrontation is entering a critical and possibly decisive phase. Indeed it cannot be too much to say, since someone has said it at least once a year for a quarter-of-a-century. There is, however, something especially significant and disturbing about the present conjunction of events. There is turbulence and conflict, either actual or imminent,

from Pakistan to Morocco, from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, throughout the entire world of Islam—a potential scene of conflagration and confrontation which might prove to be the flash point of a major international upheaval.

THE DISASTROUS REVOLUTION in Iran, followed by the war with Iraq, has created a new focus of strategic uncertainty in South-west Asia. With Soviet forces now on the Iran-Afghanistan border, five hours from the Persian Gulf and with no effective opposition in their way, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the Gulf States are beginning to feel unpleasantly exposed.

Now that the long-running saga of the American hostages has ended, the power struggle within Iran is bound to be intensified. The credibility of the mullahs has been undermined by the rapid decline of Iranian industry, growing unemployment and the shortages created by the war with Iraq, which includes a sharp reduction in the amount of oil available for domestic heating during the winter. It seems to be only a matter of time before one or more of the factions competing for power in Iran decide to make their move. One of the most likely results of any attempt at a counter-revolution is a civil war, in which the super-powers would almost certainly become involved. It is not difficult to postulate a number of contingencies in which a "call for help" to the Soviet Union—from, for example, the *Tudeh* or a rebellious Azerbaijan—would be answered, with incalculably dangerous consequences.

Meanwhile Syria, which has concluded a security agreement with the Soviet Union, faces the real possibility of a fundamentalist Islamic revolution of its own, led by the Syrian Moslem Brotherhood. In the North African countries of Islam the unpredictable Colonel Gaddafi is engaged in an attempt to annex Chad, one of the key strategic areas of central Africa; and King Hussan of Morocco is locked in a struggle with the

*Polisario* insurgents. In both these conflicts the influence of the Soviet Union is never far from the heart of the matter.

FACED WITH this catalogue of wars and rumours of wars, it may seem difficult to sustain the proposition that the Israel-Palestinian issue is the key to the peace and stability of the Middle East. Yet this is still the almost unanimous view of the Arab world. The extreme formulation of this attitude is that Israeli intransigence has forced the Palestine Liberation Organisation into a programme of international violence which has had a fundamental and far-reaching destabilising effect. "There would", said one normally moderate and perceptive Arab leader recently, "have been no Iranian revolution, no Iran-Iraq war and no Russian invasion of Afghanistan had it not been for the Palestinian problem..." As he went on to say that there would have been no revolution in El Salvador either, it might be possible to doubt his devotion to strict objectivity. It was, however, clear from the proceedings of the Islamic Conference in January at Taif, in Saudi Arabia, that there is almost unanimous belief among the Arab leaders that the Palestine issue is at the heart of their concerns, and that the "liberation" of Jerusalem and its "return to Arab sovereignty" is one of their principal and most immediate foreign-policy aims.

IT IS, THEREFORE, not unduly alarmist to suggest that another outbreak of war between Israel and some of its Arab neighbours might before long exacerbate the already precarious state of affairs in the area. This time, however, the implications would be considerably more disturbing than they were in 1967 or 1973.

The possibility of the use, or the threatened use, of nuclear weapons becomes greater with every resort to military operations in the Arab-Israel confrontation. In Pakistan the development of a nuclear weapon is technically well advanced, and it is reasonably clear that some of the money needed to finance the programme, which has in the past come from Libya, now comes from Saudi Arabia. Colonel Gaddafi is believed to have demanded access to fissionable material in exchange for his own assistance, and the Saudis, worried by the growing power of Iraq, are unlikely to help in the development of Pakistan's "Islamic bomb" without demanding in return a place in the dubious shelter of its umbrella when it finally appears. Meanwhile, Gaddafi, confirming his unique reputation for eccentricity, has approached the Chinese in an attempt to secure the means of creating his own private mushroom-shaped cloud.

The Saudi fears of Iraq are not entirely without

foundation. The Iraqis have a French "Osiris"-type reactor, and they have been supplied with a consignment of weapons-grade plutonium on the somewhat disingenuous grounds that they are debarred by the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty from using it for military purposes. Although it is true that Iraq has signed and ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and also, in 1972, the "Safeguards Agreement" with the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is also true that there is nothing to prevent any country repudiating either agreement if it believes that its national security is at risk. The Iraqis have an advanced nuclear centre at Al-Tawit, north of Bagdad; it was damaged in an air-raid early in the war with Iran, but the weapons research programme was not seriously affected. Most serious analysts believe that Iraq is capable of testing a nuclear weapon in the course of the next five years.

WHAT IS MORE significant is the status of Israel, often referred to as "one of the most advanced of the near-nuclear powers." There is, in fact, little doubt that Israel is, for all practical purposes, already a nuclear power. There was never any real possibility that the Israelis would accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty; and since 1956 it has been the policy of the United States, while discharging its own obligations under the treaty and subscribing to the diplomatic rhetoric of the non-proliferation strategy, to refrain from bringing pressure to bear on successive Israeli governments to prevent them acquiring or developing nuclear weapons. The result is that Israel is now believed to have a substantial stockpile of nuclear weapons together with delivery-systems capable of striking at any potential enemy in the region.

The implications of this are underlined by the current economic crisis in Israel. With inflation running at well over 100% the defence establishment, for many years a sacred cow, is now a much less assiduously protected species. Since the Six-Day War of 1967, the Israeli defence establishment and its industrial infrastructure have grown prodigiously. Israel now (according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London) has a standing army of 164,000 with over 200,000 reserves on a permanent 48-hour standby. Since the "Yom Kippur" War of 1975, military growth has accelerated until almost 30% of the gross national product is devoted, directly or indirectly, to national defence. During the last 15 years the defence budget has accounted for almost the entire growth in the national product. Already, even under the hawkish administration of Mr Begin, this state of affairs has come under increasingly heavy attack from those who, like the former Israeli Finance Minister, Yigal Hurwitz, believe that a rearrangement of priorities is urgently needed. "The

State", said Mr Hurwitz at a meeting shortly before his resignation in January, "has an Army, and not the other way round. . . ." If, as seems likely, there are to be substantial reductions in the strength of the armed forces and in the planned level of expenditure on tanks, aircraft and artillery, the Israelis, unless they are to repeat the fundamental mistakes of some of their Western friends, will have to devise new strategic concepts and doctrines. It is not difficult to predict that some of the position-papers emerging from the inevitable "defence review" will examine the option of nuclear deterrence; and, if Israel were confined within its pre-1967 frontiers, this would almost certainly involve a first-strike strategy.

THE ECONOMIC and strategic crisis in Israel is, of course, complicated by the political crisis which has arisen from it. Begin's present administration will come to an end in June, and the most probable outcome of the election is a victory for Shimon Peres and his Labour Party. Whatever this may mean for Israel's fragile economy, it will almost certainly bring a new direction to the conduct of foreign policy and especially to the handling of the Palestinian problem. Peres does not subscribe to the ideological conviction that Israel owns the title deeds to the West Bank; and Abba Eban, one of his

principal foreign-policy experts, has frequently expressed his doubts about the dubious wisdom of continuing to govern over a million Palestinians against their will. Peres' preferred solution is the "Jordanian option" (in which a substantial area of the West Bank would be reabsorbed by Jordan). He points with impeccable common sense to the advantages of collaboration between Israel and Jordan in roads, railways, ports, and other aspects of economic infrastructure; and to the obvious benefits to the Middle East and to the rest of the world of an area of cooperation and stability stretching from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea.

Within that general context Shimon Peres seems to accept some of the criteria of the "Brookings formula" for Jerusalem. In 1975, the Brookings Institute produced a comprehensive study which included the following passage on Jerusalem:

"The issue of Jerusalem is especially hard to resolve because it involves intense emotions on the part of both Israelis and Arabs. It embraces sites that are among the most holy for Muslims, Jews, and Christians. It has been the focus of Jewish messianic yearning and has had special significance in Muslim history. The city was bitterly contested in the wars of 1948 and 1967 and its division in the inter-war years left a heritage of deep mutual recrimination.

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Finally, it is the capital of Israel and might also be sought as the capital of a Palestine state. For all these reasons the issue is highly symbolic for both sides. Consequently, it may prove wise to leave its resolution to a late stage of the negotiation. Whatever that resolution may be, it should meet as a minimum the following criteria:

(a) There should be unimpeded access to all the holy places and each should be under the custodianship of its own faith.

(b) There should be no barriers dividing the city which would prevent free circulation throughout it.

(c) Each national group within the city should, if it so desires, have substantial political autonomy within the area where it predominates. All these criteria should be met within a city (1) under Israeli sovereign jurisdiction with free access to the holy places, (2) under divided sovereign jurisdiction between Israel and an Arab state with assured free circulation, or (3) under either of these arrangements with an international authority in an agreed area, such as the old walled city, with free access to it from both Israel and the Arab state. These or any other possible solutions should incorporate all three of the criteria set forth above.

No solution will be able to satisfy fully the demands of either side. Yet the issue must be resolved if there is to be a stable peace. We are convinced that ingenuity and patience should be able to find a compromise which will be fair and ultimately acceptable, even though not ideal from the point of view of any party."

Peres certainly favours free access to the Holy Places ("they can fly their flags over them if they want to") and a system of autonomous boroughs within the city.

THE DIFFICULTIES in the way of these apparently reasonable proposals are, however, formidable. In the first place it is hardly necessary to observe that a production of *Hamlet* loses much of its point without the Prince of Denmark; and King Hussein is scarcely likely to accept with becoming docility the role for which he is being cast. Indeed, he has said as much at the Taif summit, and there is some reason to believe that he meant what he said. He has gained impressively in political stature over recent years; he has a powerful and loyal Army behind him; and he is (to put the matter in its most uncontroversial terms) unlikely to put his power and prestige at risk in order to provide a formula which will allow Israel to avoid the central issue of Palestinian aspirations for a political and geographical identity of their own.

IT HAS OFTEN been said that if there is one powerful argument against a proposed course of action it is superfluous to deploy any more. Yet there are at least two other groups to whom the "Jordanian option" would be unacceptable—the Palestinians themselves and, perhaps more significantly, a large number of Israelis. These will include not only the uncompromising *Eretz Yisrael* faction of the Likud party in opposition and the ideologically intransigent *Gush Emunim*, but also the inhabitants of the West Bank settlements, who would presumably have to be persuaded to leave, or be forcibly removed, under the "Jordanian option." In this context it is by no means certain that the Army could be entirely relied upon to implement the Peres policy. It is not surprising that President Sadat, that enduring symbol of courage and realism in the Middle East, has expressed grave doubts about the relevance of the Jordanian solution, preferring the "autonomous state" envisaged in the Camp David agreement. Furthermore, there is so far no evidence to suggest that the Peres formula for Jerusalem is likely to be more successful than any other proposal or "option." Indeed, the likelihood is that Jerusalem will continue to be the stumbling-block against which all attempts at a peace settlement will ultimately come to grief.

The situation, then, remains as intractable and as explosive as it has ever been—and with the introduction of the nuclear factor into the equation, incalculably more dangerous. It would be comforting to record that, faced not only with the destabilisation of an area of vital strategic importance, but also with the appalling dangers of a regional nuclear confrontation, the West had a coordinated approach for the preservation of peace and the security of their own strategic interests. That is, however, not the case.

The Carter Administration, influenced by some of its European allies and discouraged by the apparent intransigence of Prime Minister Begin, had, before its inglorious departure, begun to dismantle the familiar framework of America's Middle East policy; and there is so far no consensus among President Reagan's advisers about what is to be erected in its place. Mr Reagan himself has expressed strongly pro-Israeli sentiments; but there are those in his administration for whom a settlement of the Palestinian problem is a more important matter; and yet others whose plans for establishing military bases in some of the Arab countries of the Middle East to contain Russian expansionism would not get much further if the American government adopted the uncompromisingly pro-Israeli stance suggested by some of the campaign rhetoric. Certainly in his confirmation hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January, General Haig, the Secretary of State, was clearly determined to keep the options open, while wholly accepting that "the right of the

State of Israel to exist" remained central to the United States' foreign policy (he could scarcely have done less). He underlined American dependence on supplies of Middle East oil, and spoke circumspectly of "those Arab states whose goodwill and hopefully convergency of policy we would seek. . . ."

In the complicated process of making up his mind about American policy, President Reagan enjoys the benefit (if that is the appropriate word to use) of the so-called "European initiative", formally enunciated in the Venice Declaration of June 1980. The declaration is a document of almost unexceptionable probity and rectitude. It recognises that "the growing tensions affecting the region constitute a serious danger", and it proceeds from a point of departure which it regards, perhaps with excessive complacency, as being universally accepted by the international community, namely:

*"The right to existence of all the states in the region, including Israel, and justice for all the peoples, which implies the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people."*

It goes on to declare that "the achievement of these objectives requires the involvement and support of all the parties concerned in the peace settlement" and, even more significantly, to refer to the PLO "which will have to be associated with the negotiations."

Here it seems safe to predict that the "European initiative" will run into at least as much difficulty from the Israelis as the Jordanian option might meet from the Palestinians and their allies. Abba Eban, the most likely Foreign Minister in a Peres government, has already dismissed the European initiative with magisterial contempt, referring to Western Europe's "manifest lack of concern for Israel's sensitivities" and its "supercilious and envious attitude to the American role." Shlomo Argov, the Ambassador of Israel in London, has, with characteristic candour, described the initiative as "a question of European interests versus Israeli interests" and has commented bitterly on Western Europe's "inability to do more than abstain on a UN resolution equating Zionism with racism."

There is indeed, something about the Venice Declaration which suggests that its principal architect, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, has been seduced by his diplomatic triumph over Zimbabwe into believing that the irreconcilable can be reconciled by the magic formula of bringing "all the parties concerned around a negotiating table. . . ." Lord Carrington insists that there is no conflict between the European initiative and the American approach to the Middle East—a view which is not entirely shared in Washington. He claims that "all parties concerned in the Middle East—whether they approve of the European ideas or not—clearly take them seriously." Yet the

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national position-papers which seek to translate the sentiments of the Venice Declaration into the hard realities of a durable settlement provide no reason for unbridled optimism.

AT THE DECEMBER MEETING in Luxembourg of the heads of government of the EEC, a document was evidently tabled and adopted which set out a series of options to form the bases for exploratory discussions with "all the parties concerned" in the Palestinian problem. The essential prerequisite (deriving from the United Nations Resolution 242) is to be total withdrawal by Israel from the territories occupied in June 1967. This is to be completed in a period of two years, beginning with an immediate substantial withdrawal, leaving only temporary "security points." A transition authority is to be established during this period, possibly under the supervision of the United Nations. On the pattern of the Israel-Egypt treaty there is to be parallel progress between withdrawal and the normalisation of relations between Israel and the other parties.

The West Bank settlements are to be dismantled (with the possible exception of those which existed before the 1948 War). Three options are envisaged for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—an independent Palestinian State or one of the two Jordanian options, namely a Jordan-Palestinian Federation or one including Israel as well. The choice is to be made by a referendum of the Palestinian people weighted in favour of those living in the occupied territories. There are plans for "demilitarised zones", "security zones", and United Nations guarantees, as well as suggestions for arms control, disarmament, and the renunciation of force. So far as Jerusalem is concerned the "European initiative" seems to rely heavily on the Brookings criteria. The proposals vary from a return to the "international status" proposed by the partition plan of 1947 to the placing of the Holy Places under the control of religious authorities and the "internationalisation" of the Old City.

IT REQUIRES no effort of the imagination to conclude that these "options" are likely to have little appeal to an Israeli government of any political persuasion. To the great majority of Israelis, the idea of a United Nations "guarantee" is almost comically irrelevant. The crucial question is whether the approach is likely to be accepted by the United States and pressed by them upon the Israelis, or whether President Reagan will attempt some new variation or development of the Camp David approach when a new government is in control in Israel in the summer. Behind this lies the central issue of how the strategic interests of the West in the area are perceived. The experience of European

countries in the Middle East in 1973 has left a permanent scar on their collective psyche. Common Market countries were then importing a large proportion (in the case of France, Germany, and Italy over 70%) of their crude oil from the Arab world. Their Middle East policy has ever since been dominated by fears of an oil embargo.

The principal danger of this approach is that it accepts too readily the Arab perception that the Palestinian problem is at the root of all the troubles of the Middle East and the dangers which they pose for the West. The instabilities in Iran and Syria—the fears aroused in Saudi Arabia by the attack on the Great Mosque—the ambitions of Iraq and the sense of exposure and vulnerability among the smaller Gulf sheikdoms—all add up to a perilously unstable state of affairs which will not be directly affected by a solution of the Palestinian problem.

The principal threat to the permanent supply of Middle East oil is posed by the Soviet Union. Of course, it is in the interests of the West that the oil-producing countries should be ruled by people whose instinctive sympathies are with the West rather than with the Russians; and, of course, as long as the Palestinian problem remains unsolved the Arab countries will be more susceptible to the blandishments of Soviet diplomacy and more vulnerable to Soviet exploitation by subversion and destabilisation.

YET ANY ATTEMPT to solve the Palestinian problem at the expense of Israel's sense of security—on the basis that once Palestinian aspirations have been realised "everything else will fall into place"—is doomed from the outset to failure, possibly of apocalyptic proportions.

For it is possible to argue that the Palestine issue has been exploited to divert attention from the two crucial facts of Middle Eastern life. One is that many Arab countries regard as intolerable the presence in their midst of a sovereign non-Arab, non-Muslim state. For those who take this view, the achievement of a Palestinian homeland is of little significance unless it is accompanied by the destruction of Israel. The second important fact is that the Soviet Union is determined to dominate the Middle East. The events in Afghanistan and South Yemen, the agreement with Syria, and the destabilising of Iran were not random happenings—they were part of a systematic plan to destroy Western influence in the region; and, to the Russians, Israel is the focal point of the Western strategic presence in the Middle East.

Any belief that Western interests can be secured by appeasing extreme Arab attitudes ignores the decisive factor that it is the Russians, and the Russians alone, who can effectively disrupt oil supplies—the oil-producing countries have to sell their oil, however high the price; and the fallacy

that Islam is the only effective barrier to the spread of Communism in the Middle East has surely by now been cruelly exposed. It is difficult to resist the conclusion advanced by many moderate Israelis, namely that the Palestine problem is largely irrelevant to Gulf security, and that Western policy in the Middle East should be based upon the clear recognition that a secure and well-armed Israel is the lynch-pin of any intelligently conceived Western defence system in the area. The Israeli attitude towards Western Europe contains a perceptible element of contempt for a collection of countries which have apparently decided to abdicate from the responsibilities of power and who have chosen instead to base their foreign policies on the historically precarious foundation of appeasement. This opinion was articulated most uncompromisingly by Shlomo Argov in the course of a speech to the Institute of Jewish Affairs last summer. He accused Western Europe of undermining the Camp David approach. "The true logic and purpose of present European diplomacy is none other than . . . Israel for Oil." Although this somewhat abrasive judgment is angrily dismissed by Western European leaders, it is difficult to deny that there is some justification for Israel's current disenchantment not only with Western Europe, but with the recent record of the West as a whole.

ONE OF THE principal criticisms of President Carter and his Administration is that they gave little evidence of understanding the legitimate uses of power. A willingness to defend one's national interests, or those of one's allies, is not nowadays either the most popular or the most fashionable method of conducting international relations. It has, however, the quite considerable merit of inspiring confidence in friends and respect in potential enemies. When it became known in 1973<sup>1</sup> that the United States had rehearsed a contingency plan to send ground, sea, and air forces to Saudi Arabia to prevent sabotage and to forestall any possible takeover of the oilfields, there was, predictably, bitter public criticism from many Arab leaders at this regrettable demonstration of "sabre rattling . . . neo-imperialism . . . gunboat diplomacy." Privately however, a number of Middle Eastern leaders admitted that the American response was realistic and consistent with the role of the United States as the principal defender of Western interests.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. a report published by the Institute for the Study of Conflict, *The Security of Middle East Oil* (London, 1979).

Since then there has been a steady erosion of American credibility in foreign policy. This apparent lack of resolution has been attributed by some observers to the "psychological wounds" of Viet Nam, by others to the temperamental idiosyncracies of the Carter Administration. Angola, Iran, and Afghanistan all reinforced a growing belief that the United States had abdicated not only from its role as the natural leader of the free world, but from any role requiring a realistic conception of the uses of power. There are clear signs that the Reagan Administration intends to reverse this trend. Certainly, even before the President had taken the oath of office, his transition team was active in the Middle East, examining the various technical and tactical options for the distant application of American military power.

IT IS STILL TOO EARLY to discern precisely how President Reagan's Middle East policy will take shape. It will, quite obviously, be much affected by the results of the Israeli election and by the attitudes of the new Israeli government. If a Peres government clearly identifies its aims as being peace between Israel and the Palestinians within the context of a Palestinian homeland, the question of how it is to be achieved remains, but at once becomes less intractable. The realistic and constructive elements within the Palestine Liberation Organisation are probably ready to accept the concept of a homeland in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. At some stage (and it will have to be a fairly early stage) they will have to translate this into the commitment to full peace with Israel. There will have to be a final abandonment of the suggestion that Israel's withdrawal to the 1967 boundaries would be no more than a first step. Israel itself is not "occupied territory", and it is simply unrealistic to suppose that Israel, under a government of any complexion, will be confident to negotiate a permanent settlement until the PLO have repudiated the aim of the destruction of the State of Israel embodied in the Palestinian Covenant.

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IN SPITE OF the appalling difficulties which arise from the apparently irreconcilable positions of the two sides, and the general instability in the area, there is now a real possibility that President Reagan may be able to complete with Shimon Peres what President Carter began at Camp David.

The attitude of America's West European allies will be a critically important factor, and they will have to consider with great care how far and how fast they are prepared to press the approach implicit in the Venice Declaration. In the course of Mrs Thatcher's recent visit to Washington, Lord Carrington tried, without notable success, to impress Mr Alexander Haig with its virtues. The consensus in Washington, most unequivocally articulated by Senator John Tower (the Chairman of the Senate Armed Forces Committee), is that Western Europe would be better employed in supporting America's lucid and constructive con-

cept of the Middle East than in advancing dubious initiations of its own. It is, as the Venice Declaration insists, important that a just solution should finally be found to the Palestinian problem. Justice, however, is indivisible. It is right that West European leaders should play their part in the search for a lasting settlement. They should, however, be in no doubt that of all the dangers which lie ahead none is greater than that which will follow any attempt to serve perceived Western interests by attempting to contrive a settlement which does not, in the eyes of the Israelis, enshrine permanently their security and their survival as a nation. To do so will, in the long term, irreparably damage the *real* interests of the West. This is the measure of the danger inherent in any ill-considered attempt by the Western Europeans to become involved in a situation which it is very largely beyond their capacity to influence.

## Wine-Making

Patience, and the room, cool  
for the dry wine to clear:  
hold the flask up, the lamp  
peers through like the red moon  
I saw that evening—well,  
just one evening I saw  
the moon, red, for that's

the simple truth: which is clear  
also, like wine, and also  
among the things that improve  
with time. More, old friend,  
than we can say of ourselves:  
if we could simply maintain,  
like a moon, say, what we do,

over a very long time  
almost exactly the same  
or at least, not any worse,  
that indeed would call  
for what even so I shall do  
looking towards yourself and  
raising my glass, when the wine

matures. I shall raise my glass,  
speak the truth of you, drink a health:  
which, may you long enjoy  
to enjoy such wine as this  
may clear to in time. I raise  
to it now, an empty glass  
that you, in time, may fill.

*John Holloway*