



Nixon's Visit to The Arab World

—Joseph Kraft

THE ARAB world is now tilting towards the United States. So by his present visit, President Nixon visibly identifies himself, in the very midst of his impeachment troubles, with what looks like a success.

But underneath the Arab tilt there is a disruptive process almost certain to pit poor Arabs against rich Arabs in the near future. The real question, accordingly, is not whether this trip is necessary, but whether it isn't risky.

The basic current now running in the Near East is a transition from international tension to economic development. Egypt and Syria have moved to settle their dispute with Israel. The Syrian agreement opens the way to arrangements engaging Jordan and the Palestinian Arabs.

★ ★ ★

THE UNITED States, because of its contacts with Israel and the skillful diplomacy of Henry Kissinger, was able to play a useful role in easing the tension between Jews and Arabs. On his present trip, Mr. Nixon will be basking in the success of Kissinger's efforts.

But even as the Arab dispute with Israel recedes, a new conflict comes forward. It is the conflict of interest between the few thinly populated Arab states, enriched by oil, and the other Arab states, which are impoverished by geography.

A small group of rich Arabs are getting

richer and richer at a rapid rate, a much larger group of poor Arabs are standing still in misery. Explosion is sure to occur unless some way of softening the disparity can be found, and here again the United States has a role to play.

The leaders of the rich Arabs, notably King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, are among the most conservative investors in the world.

But if the United States came into the picture, as an ultimate guarantor of loans and security, their outlook might change. With an American presence, the cautious leaders of the oil-rich countries might be prevailed upon to shoulder some of the burden of helping their fellow Arabs.

★ ★ ★

BUT DOES the United States want to play middleman between the rich and poor Arabs? Does this country want to expand commitments in the Near East? Does it want to be aligned with outmoded regimes apt to be forced out anyway? Isn't there a danger that a prominent American role will bring in the Russians in a new competition for the Near East which Moscow might not lose? Wouldn't it be better to arrange for the transfer of funds from the rich to the poor through multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund?

No one knows the answers to these questions. One sure thing is that this country ought not be rushed into new commitments by a desperate President.