

BY HIS MIDEAST swing President Nixon put the United States firmly in a position—for the first time in a generation—to pursue good relations with Arabs as well as Israelis and to promote accommodation between them. One can argue whether the United States had and missed earlier opportunities to follow this policy. Much less arguable is the proposition that this is a responsible policy, consistent with broad American interests and with American values too. Many hazards remain. But Mr. Nixon deserves general respect for making the change. He and Dr. Kissinger perceived that the Arabs, by their war effort of last fall, had gone a long way to liberate themselves from old myths and were now prepared to countenance a new approach by the United States. If it was Dr. Kissinger's diplomatic skill which consummated this American opening, it was on Mr. Nixon's political authority that he did so. The President's visit has added an extra and useful level of commitment to the new American policy.

There is a nice symbolism to the fact that Mr. Nixon visited Israel in between his visits to Arab states. Israel sits between Arab states, and the United States has solid reason to be on good terms with them all. For many years it appeared that Washington had to choose between Israeli and Arab friendship. To the extent that the region inches towards settlement, that choice now appears obsolete, if not false. The United States is "rapidly moving into an era of close cooperation and interdependence" with the Arabs, Mr. Nixon now correctly says. Yet he could also reaffirm the United States' traditional friendship with Israel—and sweeten his dealings with Arabs by making the same nuclear offer to Israel as to Egypt, and by making to Israel an unprecedented pledge of substantial and continuing military and economic aid. Surely Congress, which must approve all these offers, will agree that the United States should try to stay on both tracks.

The issue of the nuclear reactors makes the point precisely. Mr. Nixon announced he would supply reactors and fuel to both Egypt and Israel. The economic fruits of nuclear power, though exciting, are uncertain and lie a decade ahead. The political effects are immediate and real. Israelis, ever anxious about their security, at once wondered if Egypt would someday cheat and build a bomb; some Israelis and some Americans would therefore block the nuclear plan. We think that would be extraordinarily shortsighted. Worries about military diversion are legitimate but the way to address them is for the administration to tell Congress fully and publicly how the "safeguards," American and international, are to work. Politically, to pull out of the Egyptian nuclear project would be to repeat John Foster Dulles' error of retracting support for the Aswan Dam: in reaction, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal (which led to the Suez War) and went to Moscow for his Aswan Dam. In fact, nothing better serves Israel's security than for Egypt to absorb itself in economic development, with the United States closely watching. Israel, after all, has had its own nuclear reactor, with no foreign "safeguards," for nearly two decades.

The President contributed to a better atmosphere in the Mideast. He did not, of course, resolve the region's great problems. He leaves; they stay. Along his parade route in Damascus, for instance, were posters of the Palestinians who did the murdering at Maalot. The Israelis remain acutely apprehensive, the Arabs equally volatile: fear and emotion have produced war too many times before in the Mideast. The Russians, moreover, may be licking their political wounds, waiting to reassert their fallen influence by, say, egging on extremists of one sort or another. For all of these risks, nonetheless, we think that a relative and cautious optimism is warranted. Mr. Nixon, who carried off his Mideast trip with a sure and purposeful hand, deserves appropriate credit.