CHAPTER VI
Before the First World War, the US showed little interest in the Middle East and had negligible contact with the region; the prime US interest was the Christian missions which had established various educational and clinical centres in different parts of the region. During the First World War, oil became an important source of energy, leading to competition between the warring powers to control it. The US realized that its domestic oil production would not be able to meet its growing demand, and thus began to look for foreign oil, including that of the Middle East. The US protested against the San Remo Pact concluded between Britain and France on the ground that dividing the Great Syria and Iraq into British and French mandates represent violation to the fair and equal opportunity in the mandated territories for the Allied powers. Subsequently, the US government asked for a share in the Turkish Petroleum Company and after long negotiations it secured 25 participation share in that company.
Between the two World Wars, though the American economic and cultural interests in the Middle East increased, at the onset of the hostilities in 1939, Britain continued to be the major power in the region. The US policy during the inter-war period can be described as one of continued non-involvement in the political intrigue that surrounded the settlement of the Eastern Question immediately after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and in the political activities of the Middle East people who wanted self-determination.

The US had no clear-cut and well defined policy for the Middle East at the conclusion of the Second World War beyond its traditional policy guidelines. However, the realignment of the power configuration in the Middle East due to the decline of the British and French influences and the rise of the Soviet power made the US to develop a comprehensive Middle Eastern policy in the years after the war.

Therefore, after the Second World War, US started taking keen interest in the affairs of the Middle East. This interest was prompted by the geographical location of the region which occupy a strategic position in the old world, the existence of oil reserves which was a critical factor in the post-war recovery of western economy and the US goal to check the spread of communism in the world. The US
started a multi-million project to assist the countries of the region and to ensure their political stability against the alleged communist threat. It had succeeded in 1955 in persuading Iraq, Turkey and Pakistan to sign the Baghdad Pact.

During the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, the US supported the UN action for the withdrawal of the British and French forces from the Egyptian soil. This marginally increased the US prestige among the Arabs. But instead of capitalising on the new American image and using Arab nationalism as an obstacle to the Soviet encroachment in the region, President Eisenhower elected to pronounce what became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine in which the US sought to guarantee the political sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries of the region against the communist threat. The doctrine was applied in Jordan in 1957 when the Prime Minister, Suleiman Nabulsi, tried to establish friendly relations with the Soviet Union and in Lebanon in 1958 when the pro-western policy of the government led to a civil war concurrented with the overthrow of the pro-western government in Iraq. The US determination to protect the pro-western regimes in Jordan and Lebanon had prevented the two countries from falling under pro-Soviet regimes.
During the Yemeni crisis of 1962, the US sided with the Saudis in their efforts to restore the Imam regime. The US had taken such a stand mainly due to its fear that the pro-Nasser regime in Yemen would put in jeopardy the Western oil interests in the region. The US did not recognize the new regime in Yemen until it got assurance that the British and Saudis interest would be protected. In the subsequently period when the US realised that it could no longer ignore the progressive Arab countries, it tried to be friend to them. It tried to balance Israeli power vis-a-vis the Arabs in order to prevent the outbreak of any war that might jeopardize the continuation of oil supply from the region. declared its support to the territorial integrity of all countries in the region and opposed the use of force against any country. However, the outbreak of the 1967 war had brought changes in the US policy towards the region.

During the 1967 war one of the reasons for the US to take a pro-Israeli stand was due to its belief that a Israeli victory against the Arabs, particularly Egypt, would be the best means of check-mating simultaneously the expansion of Soviet communism and Nasser's nationalism in the region. The Arab's reaction to the US stand was in the form of imposing oil embargo against it. However, the 1967 oil embargo did not have much effect on the US policy towards the region, because the Arabs did not carry out the embargo
in a united fashion and the international oil companies did not abide by the Arab decision. Perhaps the only benefit derived by the Arabs from the 1967 oil embargo was the creation of the feeling in the West including the US that the Arab would never use their oil weapon in future because they lack the solidarity necessary for it; so the US and other Western countries were caught unprepared when the 1973 oil embargo was imposed.

President Nixon viewed the situation in the Middle East as "very explosive" and felt that solving Arab-Israeli dispute was essential to improve the US position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Nixon wanted to strengthen the pro-western regimes in the region and push Israel into an agreement with the Arab countries. Therefore, when the pro-western government of King Hussein in Jordan was threatened by Palestinian militants and Syrian army, presumably with the Soviet knowledge, the US made it clear that it would intervene on the side of King Hussein. When the Arab countries, backed by the Soviets, insisted on the complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories before signing any peace agreement, the US feared that the Arabs might start a full scale war with the Soviet help unless it increased its arms shipment to Israel so as to maintain the military balance in Israel's favour.
This US policy risked polarising the region by driving the Arab countries to seek comparable support from the Soviet Union.

The US, therefore, tried to counterbalance its arms shipments to Israel with peace initiatives that required Israel to accept certain conditions which satisfied the minimum demands of the Arabs. The first of such peace initiative was the Rogers Plan which called for peace negotiations between the Arab countries and Israel based on the UN Security Council resolution 242. This plan achieved a ceasefire between the Arabs and Israel which lasted until the outbreak of the October war in 1973.

The success of King Hussein in consolidating his power in Jordan, the death of Nasser, the emergence of King Faisal as 'the new hero' of the Arab world, and the holding of Arab-Israel truce made the US to characterise the Middle East as a stabilized region. Subsequently, it initiated a new version of the Rogers plan and acknowledged, verbally, the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people, but it was not prepared to put substantial pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories. This plan too failed to achieve a lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli dispute.
The US policy during the period 1967-1973 was based on the assumption that a war can be prevented in the region by maintaining the military balance in Israel's favour, but the outbreak of the October war in 1973 belied that assumption. It proved that the narrow certainty of losing the war is not by itself enough to deter the Arab from initiate a war against Israel. Also during the same period, the US pronouncement that the Soviet Union was responsible for the happenings in the region was not a correct assessment of the situation. In fact, there was no cleancut evidence to suggest that the Soviets were responsible for the Arab decision to go for the 1967 war, the Jordan crisis of 1970 and the October war of 1973.

During the October war, one of the reasons for the US to supply arms to Israel was its belief that the Soviet Union was trying to alter the balance of power in the Middle East in favour of the Arabs and that would jeopardize the US and Western oil interests in the region. The US administration's public posture that the Soviet influence would be enhanced, if the Arabs won the war was not a correct assessment because King Faisal was deadly against any increase of the communist Soviet influence in the Middle East and Sadat the other leader in the Arab world was going ally with the West.
Soon after the US help to Israel, the Arab oil-producing countries met in Kuwait on October 17, 1973 and declared an embargo on the shipment of oil to the US in order to force it to change its policy towards Israel. The Arab linkage strategy between lifting the oil embargo and the US changing its pro-Israeli stand in the Arab-Israeli dispute had borne some fruits. The careful planning, the avoidance of the many pitfalls stewed along its path, the tough stand adopted in the face of the US thinly-veiled threats of intervention by the Arabs were the factors which contributed to the success of the linkage strategy. Of course, the oil embargo was not fully effective because first, some Arab oil reached the US market despite the embargo and second, the international oil distribution system was managed by the international oil companies in such a way as to spread the damage fairly evenly to all the Western countries. However, the Arab oil embargo had left the US with two option, i.e., either to live with it as a semi-permanent imposition or solve the Arab-Israeli conflict and live with it as an Arab tactical weapon to be used again in the future. The US chose the second option which presented certain advantages stemming from the limitation of the embargo as a tactical weapon in the absence of a state of war and with the non-availability of the surprise element.
The US redoubled its efforts to bring peace after the October war, though it was publicly denied by the US officials, because it recognized the oil power of the Arabs. The embargo had changed the earlier US foreign policy decision-making paradigm which was based on the separation of the Arab-Israeli dispute from the oil issue. It also belied the US assumption in the region that the Arab countries of Persian Gulf area and the heartland of the Arab-Israeli dispute (Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon) are separate and distinct areas. The skillful usage of the linkage strategy had proved this assumption wrong. The October war had brought to light the impact of the Arab-Israeli dispute on the flow of oil to the west, including the US, forcing the US to take new efforts to resolve the dispute and to abandon its one side support to Israel.

Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy which was adopted to solve the problems emerging from the October war is a clear indication of the change which took place in the US policy towards the region. Kissinger diplomacy during President Nixon's period had succeeded in achieving two disengagement agreements between the Arabs and Israel, restored the US relations with Egypt and Syria and strengthened the US relations with Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the US came to enjoy greater influence in the region than ever before.
But several issues remained to be solved when President Ford assumed office, viz. the problem of oil prices which quadrupled after the October war, sustaining the momentum which had led to the disengagement agreement and transforming that momentum into activities which would be necessary to bring a peace satisfactory to all, and what should be the US attitude towards the Palestinians.

One of the unintended achievement of the oil embargo for the Arabs was the sudden increase in oil price. The oil-producing countries argued that they had many projects which need to be financed and that the real price of oil had, in actual terms, fallen due to the continuous increases in the prices of the imported goods by them from the Western industrialized countries. Saudi Arabia was the only country that asked for the lowering the oil prices. It argued that the high oil prices would provide unfair advantage to the Soviet Union which was self sufficient in oil and that the high prices might trigger a world-wide economic depression which would in turn adversely affect the oil-exporting countries. However, Saudi's efforts to halt the oil prices did not succeed and finally the Saudis realized that exhorting more pressure on the OPEC members would even disintegrate the organisation which had brought to their country economic and political influence in the world. The US did not show any sign of economic or political co-opera-
tion with the oil-producing countries to reduce the oil prices. Had the US and Western countries reduced the prices of some of the industrialized goods, it is possible that the Arab oil producing countries would have reciprocated by reducing the oil prices. It is also possible that if the US had adopted an evenhanded policy towards the Arab-Israeli dispute by putting more pressure on Israel, the Arabs would have increased their oil supply and reduced the oil prices.

The US insisted that it would never be blackmailed. It felt that the challenge of the high oil prices should be met by a collective approach from the oil-consuming countries. France objected to the US idea by arguing that it would put the consumers and the producers in direct confrontation and might even invite the imposition of another oil embargo. New oil embargo, it argued, would devastate West European economy with only marginal impact on the US as it was less dependent on the Arab oil. However, despite the French opposition, the US managed to form the International Energy Agency (IAE) in November, 1974, with sixteen countries as members and France as an observer. The US tried through this agency to encourage the development of other sources of energy in order to reduce the dependence on oil. The agency was considered by the US as the proper forum for long-term dealings with the oil-exporting countries. From the way in which the US had formulated the
agenda items for the agency, it become apparent that in case of another oil embargo its effect would be less than that of 1973 and the Western countries would back a possible US intervention to break such an embargo.

Despite the decision of the Rabat Summit of the Arab heads of states, which convened in late October, 1973, to recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and the Arab oil-producing countries pronouncement that all their wealth including that of oil would be used for protecting the Palestinians rights, the US insisted that it would not invite the PLO to any peace negotiation unless it recognized the right of Israel to exist. The US also promised Israel that it would not take any decision on the PLO issue without the prior approval of Israel. Such a stand of the US administration, apart from the domestic pressure, may be attributed to the US belief that Israel was the safest ally in the Middle East to protect and advance the American interests. Therefore, the US did not want to take a decision on the PLO which would harm, in its view, Israel's interests in the future.

The impact of the October war and the subsequent oil embargo continued to haunt the US during President Ford period, especially in the light of many statements made by the Arab leaders which linked the Arab oil wealth with the
Arab-Israeli dispute. The US tried to maintain the stability in the region through achieving another disengagement agreement between the Arabs and the Israelis. The US tried to negotiate a settlement between Jordan and Israel to match the disengagement agreements reached on the Egyptian and Syrian fronts and to undercut the Palestine Liberation Organisation. But Israel was not enthusiastic to sign an agreement with Jordan because such an agreement would cost it to relinquish the West Bank to Jordan. But before the US could proceed to persuade Israel to make concessions so that an agreement with Jordan might be reached, the Arab heads of States declared in their meeting in Rabat that the PLO was the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. This was a setback to the US diplomacy because it made Jordan, which was willing to have an agreement with Israel, to refuse to have any negotiation with Israel regarding the future of the West Bank. Instead, the PLO was qualified to be a party in any Middle East negotiation.

The failure of the US diplomacy to achieve an agreement on the Jordanian front and the improvement in the Soviet-Egyptian relations led the US to redouble its efforts to achieve a disengagement agreement between Egypt and Israel. However, the US failed in its attempt because of certain differences between the two countries.
Subsequently, the US had to reassess its policy in the region. The reassessment was designed to put pressure on Israel to adopt a more flexibly negotiating stand in order to reduce the mounting tension in the region and to avoid a war in which the US would be involved in one way or another. During the reassessment, the US suspended its arms sales to Israel and started searching for new diplomatic options including the abandonment of Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy and retaining to the Geneva option. However, latter option was just a tactic to influence Israel because it would result in the Soviet Union becoming a co-chairman in the negotiation. Israel felt that it should show some signs of co-operation with the United States. On September 4 1975, Kissinger, after completing a new round of shuttle diplomacy which took him seven times to Egypt and Israel, with side visits to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Algeria, succeeded in bringing both Egypt and Israel to sign the Sinai-II Agreement.

The US found in the outbreak of the civil war in Lebanon an opportunity to reduce the PLO influence in the region and thus pave the way for more bilateral settlements between Israel and the Arab countries. The US had accepted the Syrian role in Lebanon because in its view Syria was trying to provide stability to that country by eliminating the PLO militants, thus reducing the possibility of a war with Israel.
During the Nixon and Ford periods, the US opted for the Kissinger step-by-step diplomacy, because in its view a comprehensive settlement to the Middle East problems was not attainable. It adopted such a strategy because, at least, without a partial solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute, there would be another war followed by another oil embargo and these would lead to a possible increase to the Soviet influence in the region.

The US diplomatic involvements in the Middle East continued during President Carter period with a new belief that the Kissinger step-by-step approach had run out its course and thus it was necessary to find a new approach in dealing with the regional problems, i.e., through a comprehensive scheme to deal with each party and each issue. The new administration at first sought to reconvene a Geneva conference attended by all the parties involved in the Middle East conflict, and by the US and the Soviet Union as co-chairman. As a part of this undertaking, the US suggested Palestinians' participation in the negotiations. In October, 1977, the prospect of the Geneva conference was brightened by a joint Soviet-American communique. This communique included for the first time the US acceptance of the "legitimate right" of the Palestinian people. However, the situation in the Middle East had taken a different turn when President Sadat shocked the world by his bold visit to
Israel on November, 19, 1977, in search for peace. This move forced the US to readopt its outward form strategy because an agreement between Egypt and Israel now seemed possible. The subsequent US diplomatic efforts, had facilitated the negotiations between Israel and Egypt which led to the Camp David accords.

The dominant idea behind the Carter administration to announce its adoption of a comprehensive approach towards the Middle East problem was to facilitate the establishment of good relations with as many Arab countries as possible and to reduce the possibility of the eruption of a fifth Arab-Israeli war. The Carter administration too saw the linkage between the Arab-Israeli dispute and the energy crisis. It believed that the stability in the Middle East was crucial for the well-being of the US and the west and a solution to the outstanding issues in the region were as important as preventing the Soviet penetration into the region.

However, the direct talks between Egypt and Israel and the subsequent Camp David accords had recreated the anti-Western feeling among the Arab masses. All the Arab countries, including the conservatives, condemned the talks and the US role in it. The unexpected unfolding of events in the region - the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Yemen
crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had put an end to the US effort to resolve the Arab-Israeli dispute.

The Iranian revolution had created disturbances in the international oil market which had adversely affected the US and other Western countries. Apart from its economic consequences, the revolution had tremendous impact on the regional stability due to Iran's commitment to export its revolution to the entire Islamic world, starting from its neighboring countries. The failure of the US to protect the Shah regime against the Islamic revolution had an adverse effect on the US position in the region. The Gulf regimes were greatly shocked by the fall of the Shah and the inability of the US administration to do anything to save him. This created disenchantment among the Gulf regimes about the US ability to bring peace to the regime and even led to their acknowledgement to the role of the Soviet Union in the Arab affairs.

As a matter of fact the US was caught totally unprepared for the Islamic revolution and found itself in a position of not able to change the course of events in Iran. Therefore, it chose not to intervene in spite of the geopolitical implication of the revolution for the United States.
At about the same time hostilities between North and South Yemen had again flared up causing much concern to the United States. The Yemen war had given the US timely opportunity to prove its creditability in the Arab world. Apart from this, the US concern in North Yemen was due to its strategic location on the straight of Babel Mandeb through which most of the Gulf oil passes and its proximity to the oil-producing countries. In fact, had South Yemen succeeded in invading the North, the US interests in the region would have been put into jeopardy not only because of the possibility of the interruption of oil flow but also because Yemen would have become a strong Soviet base in the area.

The third crisis which shocked the US was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In response to the new threats in the region, President Carter enunciated in January, 1980, what is known as the Carter Doctrine wherein he tried to convey a message to the Soviet Union that the US would not tolerate any outside power controlling the Persian Gulf region.

At the outset of the Iran-Iraq war, one of the important concerns of the US was that the war should not result in the stoppage of the flow of oil from the region. The US, though it had intervened indirectly in ways other
than open military intervention, had overtly adopted a neutral posture towards the warring parties. This was mainly due to the US belief that if Iraq was defeated then Iran would constitute a danger to the regional stability and if Iraq was defeated then it would strengthen Iraq's regional influence and provide scope for the Soviet penetration into the region.

Ever since the Arab oil embargo of 1973, President Nixon, Ford and Carter had repeatedly relied on a policy of threatening militarily the Arab oil-producing countries. However, this policy had generated great deal of opposition from the US public opinion, and there were several indications of dissatisfaction with the intervention scenario in the US military establishment. The success of a military adventure against the Arabs oil fields would depend, to a large extent, on whether the key oil installations could be captured without damage and whether the Soviet Union would refrain from any counter action. Since neither of these essentials could be assured, military intervention to solve the US and Western energy crisis would carry high costs with high risks which the US did not dare to undertake at that time.

The US policy towards the Middle East from 1967 to 1981 which aimed at protecting the US and Western interests, had been influenced by the Domino theory which assumed that
the defeat of any pro-western conservative regime by a pro-
Soviet radical regime would result in a chain reaction in the region. The US had firmly looked into the region as a "Zero-Sum" game situation with the Soviet Union, i.e., a situation where the loss of one of the super-power in the region represent the gain of the other and vis versa. Thus, it did all it could to prevent the Soviet control of the region which possesses the world's largest oil reserves.