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# After the Guns Fall Silent

Peace or Armageddon in the Middle-East

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed





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## After the Guns Fall Silent

First published in 1976, *After the Guns Fall Silent* is an important Arab statement on the Middle East crisis. The central theme is that the October war and détente fundamentally changed the basis of the conflict. The Arab military success and the impact of the oil weapon established a parity between Arab quantity and Israel quality. This new sense of equality has forced both sides into contemplating dialogue rather than unyielding confrontation. The author also predicts that the Palestinian issue is expected to become even more explosive as their advance in diplomatic stature has not produced any political or territorial gain and their struggle has become a world inspiration for the revolt of the dispossessed against the affluent. This book will be of interest to students of history, political science, international relations and Middle Eastern studies.



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**AFTER THE GUNS  
FALL SILENT**

**PEACE OR ARMAGEDDON IN  
THE MIDDLE-EAST**

**Mohamed Sid-Ahmed**

**FOREWORD BY LORD CARADON**



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## Lord Caradon's Foreword

A foreword can do three things. It can praise the writer of the book, it can express some reservation on substance, it can put forward a contrary contention.

I am brave enough to attempt all three.

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed is a very experienced journalist, a brilliantly articulate commentator, original, stimulating, constructive. No one can read this book without realising that we have the privilege of listening to a man who thinks clearly and boldly for himself, and who is not afraid to advocate his own unusual and sometimes unpopular conclusions. Here is some fresh thinking and some intricate argument and some honest judgment.

But I have my own reservations. His proposition that some accommodation can be found to avoid another utterly disastrous Middle East war without abandoning extreme positions is ingeniously argued but, I fear, unconvincing.

I do not believe that a settlement can be reached which would satisfy and pacify both Arab rejectionists and Israeli expansionists.

My own view is that there must be an international agreement on the basis of the recognition of both the Israeli homeland and a Palestinian homeland side by side, with sister cities in Jerusalem and no barrier between them. Once this were accepted relationships between the two over open frontiers could start to improve and to move rapidly, I would hope, towards the state of affairs described by Abba Eban some time ago when he said:

The ultimate guarantee in a peace agreement lies in the creation of common regional interests in such degrees of intensity, in such multiplicity of interaction, in such entanglement of reciprocal advantage, in such accessibility of human contact, as to put the possibility of future war beyond rational contingency.

*Lord Caradon's Foreword*

But such a dream can come true, so I contend, only if both sides start from a position of secure confidence. The key to the new open door to peace must be the recognition of both Israel and a new Palestinian State by the world, and each by the other.

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed shows us in his book the main developments since Resolution 242 was unanimously adopted by the Security Council in November 1967. He well describes the mounting dangers, the growing self-assurance of the Arabs following the 1973 war and, most important of all, the predominant emergence of the cause of the Palestinians, now further reinforced by the local elections on the West Bank. Not even the horrors of the Lebanese conflicts have diminished the importance of that main factor.

So now everything depends, it seems increasingly clear, on rapid advances towards the establishment of a Palestinian homeland in the West Bank and Gaza where the Palestinians can put their talents to work in constructive confidence. My belief is that this can be attained only by a reaffirmation of the principles accepted by all concerned in 1967, and in particular 'the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war' and the right of every State in the area 'to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force'.

So what is the essence of the disagreement? I believe that in order to avoid another war of devastating proportions it is essential for both sides to start with mutual recognition and move from that to a lasting peace.

We share the same purpose, but Mohamed Sid-Ahmed believes that there is another easier route to escape from the present ominous deadlock.

Read what he says, and see if the persuasive eloquence of his argument can convince you.

June, 1976

Hugh Caradon

## Author's Foreword

Two major events have marked the Middle East since this book first appeared in Arabic last year: the second Sinai disengagement agreement and the civil war in Lebanon. Though the two events might appear unrelated, there is a definite connection between them. To the extent that tension between Egypt and Israel was eased beyond the threshold of other Arabs' tolerance, tension in Lebanon rose beyond breaking-point. Arab solidarity, which had been fused by the October war, was shattered. The strife in Lebanon was one expression of this, with implications going much further than the street fighting in Beirut. Traditionally an arena where Arab contrasts and contradictions are played out, Lebanon has been a thermometer of the Arab world and breakdown there is symptomatic of a breakdown on a much wider scale.

Arab thinking has always been inclined to see the Arab-Israeli conflict in absolute terms and any departure from the basic enmity to Israel as abhorrent. The conflict was considered immune to external influences. But this is only true in so far as the basic objectives of the protagonists are irreconcilable. The actual course of the conflict has always proved much more sensitive to the changing international environment.

The Arabs have always regarded their conflict with Israel as one feature of the Arab liberation struggle against western imperialism. The course of this struggle has passed through many stages, all of which were bound to leave their mark on the conflict with Israel. An obvious example of this interplay between the Arab-Israeli *conflict* and the Arab liberation movement's *struggle* against imperialism is the second military round with Israel in 1956. War was declared on Egypt because it nationalised the Suez Canal. Asserting its sovereignty over this vital national asset was a decisive blow to imperialism. Nasser succeeded where Mossadegh had failed. This act of sovereignty ushered in the era of *political independence* for

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most African countries. Another example of this interplay is the way the fourth military round with Israel in 1973 led the Arabs to use the oil weapon, creating a critical precedent in the Third World's struggle for *economic independence*: OPEC succeeded in raising the price of oil where Allende had failed with copper. The primary producers now had a basis of indexing the price of their exports to the price of finished products in the developed western world.

Not only has the Arab-Israeli conflict been shaped by the underlying confrontation with imperialism (and vice versa), it has also often acted as a catalyst in generating world confrontations. Through this process, far from remaining immune to change, it became more and more acute until, after 1967, it was an endemic crisis and earned the name the Middle East crisis.

It is tempting to regard the October war as a way out of this escalating spiral. It seemed in many ways to put the whole process into reverse and so provide an opportunity for a breakthrough towards a settlement. One central theme of this book will be to examine the impact of the October war and the impact which the international environment has had on the crisis since the onset of *détente*.

While the 1973 war did remove many of the obstacles in the way of a settlement, it did not generate enough momentum to create the settlement. What it did was to shatter irreversibly the previous pattern of the conflict. But this by no means implies that the only alternative is a settlement. In fact, short of a total breakthrough, the Middle East crisis could become more explosive than ever. The civil war in Lebanon, like the civil war in Spain before World War Two, could be the testing ground for another world conflagration — this time of nuclear dimensions. In such an eventuality, the second Sinai disengagement agreement could well be a second Munich. In other words, unless a settlement comprises all the conflicting parties, including the Palestinians, the conflict could well become even more volcanic. As it is, three trends are bound to acquire increasing importance:

(1) There are grounds for believing that future clashes in the Arab-Israeli conflict could include a nuclear component. In October 1973, for the first time Israel lost its absolute military superiority in terms of conventional weaponry. Now it will

resist having its security entirely dependent on a third party, even the United States. Nor will it be satisfied with international guarantees unless they are backed by an absolute military deterrent. Israel has been trying to go nuclear for years. The measure of its success is unknown, but one thing is certain: if it does have the bomb, the fact that it has been held in reserve in the past is no guarantee for the future. And certainly the growing importance of the Palestinian issue, which threatens the very integrity of the Israeli state, is an additional incentive for the bomb to figure more and more prominently in Israel's calculations.

If Israel brandishes the nuclear threat the Arabs will have no choice but to acquire their own nuclear arsenal. This would further accelerate the proliferation of nuclear weapons which are no longer confined to the great powers. With China and even India now manufacturing their own bomb, there is nothing to prevent the Arabs from following suit. They lack neither the money nor the ability to purchase the necessary technology and to make it work. And if nuclear diplomacy on the global level created détente, it will not necessarily produce the same result in a regional conflict.

(2) The Palestinian issue is expected to become an even more dangerous factor. People have claimed that the Palestinian problem came to prominence in the aftermath of the 1967 débâcle because it was the only inspiration of Arab resistance — a status that it should have lost after the accomplishments of Egypt and Syria in the October war. However, events disproved these expectations: it was after the October war and not before that Arafat was invited to address the UN General Assembly. The recent UN resolution equating Zionism with racism is another significant indication of the Palestinians' growing international stature.

At the same time, the Palestinians within the Arab world have been subjected to ever-increasing harassment. A case in point is the strife in Lebanon. How does one explain the growing impact of the Palestinian issue in the international arena in spite of periodic crackdowns on the Palestinians in the Arab world?<sup>1</sup> One answer is that the Palestinian issue is acquiring new dimensions which go beyond its original character as the core of the Arab-Israeli dispute. It has come to symbolise the coming confrontation between rich and poor