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Middle East Prospects for the 1960's

January 27, 1960

POLLYANNA VS. CASSANDRA?

A touch of Cassandra has become increasingly common in Americans interested in the Middle East. One of the talks, for instance, at a recent foreign affairs gathering here in New York was a portentous analysis of area prospects for stability. Any hopes planted among those present by the current lull in tensions were soon withered by the analyst, a Middle East correspondent for one of the major TV networks. Some of his comments: "Things are always coming unstuck just when they look best ... (The Middle East) has none of the raw materials of stability ... (instead) the Arab-Israel Cold War ... Iraq's turmoil ... Russian influence ..." In the question-period that followed, someone asked: When will the Arabs and Israelis have "normal relations"? "Never," said the correspondent, drawing a laugh.

The prophets among Middle East reporters are customarily on the side of the raven. Nevertheless, we believe -- setting ourselves against tradition -- that there are rational grounds for a more encouraging appraisal. Somewhat nervously we predict that the 1960's will be a period of comparative stability in the Middle East.

We are not quite sure what the 'raw materials' of stability are -- in any part of the world -- but Middle East instability, during the 1950's, took the rawest form possible: a never-hardening flow of major crises and policy reversals, of revolutions and war (civil and international). The close of the same period, however, saw some explosive situations deactivated and others cordoned off. This was true, although in varying degrees, at all tensional levels.

East-West Affairs At Large

Overarching the Middle East, but also setting limits on the activities of area governments, are U.S.-U.S.S.R. relations. The Spirit of Camp David may still go the way of the Spirit of Geneva. But it is not likely. Since Sputnik 1957, the "balance of terror", no longer just a clever phrase, has kept the two giants on tip-toe. While determined to maintain the equilibrium, they are now negotiating removal of the deadlier weights from the scales. The Soviet Union is believed by observers to be pressing its disarmament proposals seriously -- whatever the motives may be -- and general realization of this in the West has contributed further to public pressure for peaceful settlements.

A spate of lesser Camp David exchanges, of peace-and-good-will trips and a partial freeing of the trade log-jam, have also helped to keep East and West from