

Haig criticizes policy confusion in Middle East

By Shirlee Rose Iden
staff writer

A man of many titles who prefers to be called "General" laid out what he considers our nation's Mideast options last Thursday before a large Southfield audience.

Alexander M. Haig Jr. said the United States can "cut and run, can muddle through as we are doing tonight," or we can put more leverage on Syria.

Haig — the former supreme allied commander in Europe, once President Reagan's secretary of state, the chief of staff in the Nixon White House, a senior military advisor to Henry Kissinger, who has served six presidents — indicated he would place his bet on pressuring the Syrians.

Haig was the keynote speaker for the 35th annual dinner of the Detroit Chapter of the American Technion Society. The event, which supports Israel's Technion in Haifa, drew about 535 people to Congregation Shaarey Zedek.

Technion is a major source of engineering and scientific manpower for Israel's growth and a center of applied research carrying out projects in indus-

try, agriculture, bio-medicine, information sciences and other fields.

Gregarious and affable, Haig spoke to everyone who walked over to greet him during a social hour. Then, in the midst of a crowded banquet floor with 50-plus tables, he dined at table 35, climbing the dais for his talk afterward.

THE MAN who eyed a run for the presidency in 1979, but demurred to affiliate first with United Technologies and presently with the Hudson Institute, a think tank, was introduced as "one of the first in Washington to call Israel a 'strategic asset,' an admirer of Menachem Begin, and a supporter of Peace for Galilee (the Israeli incursion into Lebanon in June 1982) and a man who believes the Samaria and Judea issues should be solved locally rather than dictated by the U.S."

Technion's 20,000 graduates, Haig responded, will continue to define the capabilities of Israel. "Technology is an investment for the future, for Israel and for all other western countries."

Regarding his criticism of U.S. foreign policy, Haig assured his audience that as a Republican he supports the

president, but added: "I've had profound difficulty with our foreign policy in the past and I do now."

"In the Middle East, there's a sense of confusion over U.S. policy. Sometimes, crisis management is mistaken for policy/Real policy means relating events to the long picture."

HAIG SAID the killing of U.S. Marines in Lebanon on a recent Sunday is not really something new but the continuation of an attitude about American objectives.

"We have a combat unit in a combat area without a combat mission and that forebodes more tragedy," he said, adding that the overall security of the Persian gulf and the middle east are in jeopardy.

"Our whole policy since 1973 has been toward those who favor peaceful changes and a relationship with the West. Today, it's changing to those who don't want peace and in favor of the USSR."

The former secretary of state said the United States last year fumbled an opportunity to widen the peace process when the Soviet and PLO failures were evident and the Syrians were reeling in

defeat.

"But U.S. policy managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of reality," he charged. "We constrained the Israeli operation by stopping them from advancing into West Beirut."

Affirming that he has often been accused of giving Israel the green light to go into Lebanon, Haig said "nothing could be further from the truth."

"BUT ONCE that happened, it was in our interest to see that it succeeded."

Taking aim at the Reagan peace plan, Haig contended that because it linked Middle East peace to Lebanon and made "one process hostage to the other" a year and more has passed and the stalemate continues.

Separating the Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian in the belief Syria would leave, even putting Marines there without an agreement of a Syrian withdrawal, were serious errors, he said.

Haig said Americans keep "looking for Henry Kissingers" or other geniuses who will suddenly appear and solve the riddle and dissolve the problems when our goals must be "serving our best purposes and preserving the peace."

Camp David to Haig was a reflection of reality, with two statesmen, Sadat and Begin, sitting down and working out solutions far below their own expectations for the good of the region.

"There's an old Bedouin saying," he recalled. "Never set aside the cloudy water until the clear water is in hand."

The autonomy process is still the best, Haig believes. On a single note of optimism, he said: "Tonight the PLO belongs to Syria and this may offer hope. I believe the leaders of the West Bank and Gaza may learn, too, dealing for autonomy."

HAIG CAUTIONED that the U.S. government must learn when it disagrees with a democracy such as Israel, it must do so quietly, around a table, talking as friends. "When we criticize publicly, we take away the platform of the democratic opposition who can't side with a foreign government."

Progress in the middle east has only

been made when the U.S. proceeded with Israel, Haig said, adding that Israel is a strategic asset whose ideals are American ideals.

"When we are true to Israel, we are true to ourselves."

Answering questions from the audience, Haig said barring the press from the Golan Heights was a mistake since "a free press is the best policeman itself."

He shrugged off European demonstrations against Cruise and Pershing II missiles saying: "The fuss doesn't represent the majority opinion. The Europeans will stand fast behind the missiles and their deployment will help cool the arms race."

And Saudi Arabia, though heavy financiers of the PLO and Syria, are not the most influential culprits in the area, he said, since the Soviets would have sent their arms and advisers whether the Saudis were active or not.

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