

# Shimon Peres's plan for peace and development in the Middle East

*The following article by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, "The Middle East in a New Era," appeared in Acque & Terre in April 1993. We reprint it here with the magazine's permission. The magazine is published in Italy, in English.*

The Middle East has not changed, but the world has. The central question facing this region is the following: What is its place in the changing world—facing winds of glory and ghosts of the past, or facing winds of change bearing hope for a new era?

Today every person belongs to two entities. There is the national entity, based on the land and the homeland, rooted in the memories we hold, the language we speak, the political identification we carry, the physical and spiritual collective heritage passed on by our parents and forebears, and the identity fed by our collective memory flowing from the past. The Middle East is abundantly endowed with such collective memory.

Yet, almost without notice another story has been added to our national home, a second story, a universal space based on science, technology, and information, all unfettered by the boundaries of politics and nationalism. Science and technology, in fact, recognize no borders, for nature has no artificial, man-made boundaries or dimensions. There always exists something more minute than the most microscopic matter, and for the largest object there is something even greater in size. The only limit is our ability to penetrate a universe infinite in dimension.

This second story faces the future. The Middle East, like the rest of the human family, must place its national rivalries, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, in proper perspective. This story is founded not on the existent but on the potential. To a large extent our future depends on it. We study a country by learning about its geographic dimensions, climate, population, natural resources, and history, and with this information we determine whether a country is large or small, rich or poor, yet what we should be looking at is that nation's level of education, its scientific and technological capacity, and its capability to meet the challenges of change in the future.

In what ways has the world changed, and how might these ways affect the future of the Middle East and the settlement of conflicts in this region?

## **The challenges of universal change**

To begin with, there is economic change. The production of bread today depends more on production efficiency than on the quality of the soil. Today we require less work, less land, and less water in order to produce more and more crops. The United States, which employs 1.5% of its work force in agriculture, produces 25% of the total world food supply, while the ex-Soviet Union, employing 33% of its work force in agriculture, cannot supply its own food needs. The U.S.S.R., for example, bought cows from Israel. Why? Because the Israeli cow gives three times more milk than the Russian. The cows are the same ones with the same horns; the difference is in the method that can increase production threefold. In other words, if in the past successful agriculture depended on land, water, sun, and the farmer, today it is increasingly dependent on science.

And that is not the last word. Science will eventually adapt and harness the two great reservoirs of future food production, the salty seas and arid deserts. With a threefold worldwide population growth in the 20th century, efforts will concentrate on tapping these two reluctant factors for the world food supply. People will harvest directly from the sea or create potable water by desalination, and they will make the desert bloom by cultivating rocky terrain that until now has mocked man's plow.

With fewer materials we produce increasingly greater amounts at higher quality and greater usefulness. Robots produce cars, as well as the robots and computers which design them. And those very computers are becoming ever more minuscule: They require less material as they become more sophisticated and their uses are diversified.

Even raw materials are no longer derived solely from the earth. Synthetic materials are increasingly replacing organic materials, and a synthetic diamond can sparkle just like a natural one. Almost anything can be used as raw material—air, sun, sea, and, in the future, who knows, perhaps even outer space. Services are no longer dependent on servants. Machines are replacing and improving the functioning of legs and hands, ears and eyes. Telephone, fax, tape recorders, compact disc, and television are portable, accompanying human beings everywhere—we no longer have to seek them out. The day will surely come when school instruction will be based on diskettes, and hospitals will be able to report

directly to their patients on their condition, thanks to minuscule personal monitors attached to their bodies.

Military strategy, long based on narrow national concepts of space and time, also has undergone a thorough revolution. Prior to armies meeting on the battlefield to wage war, technological clashes will take place where technological supremacy will crown the victor, precluding battles on land, in the air, or on the sea. This scenario is very nearly what happened in the Gulf war, when the American Army and the coalition forces hardly suffered the cost of war in physical terms, while the Iraq Army incurred heavy blows without knowing the position of the front line or even the basic battle strategy. A missile does not require a pilot, nor are mountains, rivers, and fortifications obstacles to its flight. Nuclear warheads are not measured by quantity, as their potential for destruction mocks any mathematical computation, and smart bombs, even in the hands of rather average-minded people, make military know-how a negotiable coin.

We must keep in mind that we are not dealing in futurism but rather in the present situation, before we could fully grasp what was happening, a new era began to evolve. A new era has dawned; not in the realm of the familiar past but in the unknown future, and has issued each of us a new passport—a universal one.

### **The preconditions for scientific progress**

There is no scientific economy, as the Marxists claim, but the modern economy derives its independence from scientific development, and the real question facing every country today is not how to expand in territory but how to advance in science.

Scientific progress depends on two preconditions; political freedom that allows uncensored research and, secondly, a rational, as opposed to automatic, thinking process in which freedom of research is not hampered by political or clerical dictatorship. Science can develop only in a regime that allows humans to question, to doubt, to discover, to amass information and to discredit information, to be unprejudiced, and to be, at times, anti-establishment.

Dictatorship despises freedom, novelty, nonconformity, and the unknown. Dictatorship is methodical repression, and any form of repression thwarts originality and renewal. In the end, all the dictatorships of the 20th century have been toppled: Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and Ceausescu, among others. They had hoped to censor by force those who were wiser in spirit.

Scientific progress demands democratization of all levels of government, for only democratic rule is open and unrestricted enough to allow the full development of science in every sphere of a country's life. People, not regimes, create scientific progress. Regimes can assist or prevent but they cannot create thoughts or new awareness, and therefore decentralized democracy is the best framework within which modern science can flourish.

When it becomes apparent that the sources of wealth and power are dependent not on the physical side of life but rather on the intellectual side, the question arises as to the strategic position of armies. Are they defending existing national interests or future values? Here, too, it is clear that all thought, education, and science cannot be conquered by an army, whereas everything an army can attain—coercive power, land, seas, markets—is no longer so decisive in defining power for both the first and second stories of the future national home as in the past. Moreover, the cost of progressing from bow and arrow to missiles and nuclear warheads is far greater than the cost of progressing from horse to tractor. Since the military effort has always taken precedence over the civilian effort, its costs are always higher, too.

We have reached a stage, where maintaining a modern army can threaten the state's economy in no less measure than the danger of an enemy army attack. It is more economically sound to develop and maintain good relationships between nations than to build expensive armies required to ensure deadlock.

### **The dangers of the new era**

The modern age excels, therefore, in three positive phenomena: scientific development of the economy, democratization of regimes, and demilitarization of foreign relations. Yet the new era has introduced some dangers, the greatest among them being a population explosion of unprecedented rate, disruption of the ecological balance and endangerment of world health, and proliferation of nuclear arms.

Population growth is largely due to medical advancement in the new era. Infant mortality has declined; life expectancy has grown. Cures and inoculations against many, though not all, fatal diseases have been discovered. World population has increased threefold, but in the Middle East the population growth has been nine- or tenfold.

More and more people live in our world, a world of depleted fresh water and pure air. The great battle that will demand drafting armies and supplies will be waged not between countries in the future but between humans and their environment, which they have commercialized and nearly devastated. We will have to confront the environment and replenish it by new means and through tremendous investment.

As if this contradiction between population growth and ecological damage threatening world stability and human security were not enough, the proliferation of nuclear weapons never provided man with the ability to create a world, but the nuclear era granted him the ability to destroy the earth. Moreover, there is no correspondence between the capability to acquire nuclear weapons and the degree of responsibility among those who have control of them. Irresponsible nations as well as blood-thirsty tyrants desire and may even acquire nuclear arms. What Hitler lacked in his arsenal could be in the hands of Saddam Hussein, and just the thought

is horrendous—that a madman like him could control nuclear weapons.

The new dangers, like the new prospects, are not limited to a certain country. They are worldwide and touch everyone, every country, every region—the entire planet. Ecology knows no borders, nor do nuclear warheads respect them. In other words, global developments play a far more central role in man's life and the state's existence, a greater role than the national or political framework.

### **The countries of the Middle East in the new era**

The countries of the Middle East must ask themselves six major questions arising out of the new era and touching on their very existence:

- What kind of economy do they want? A new economy based on science and technology and regional cooperation, or an outdated economy based on land, oil, and nationalism?

- What form of government do they prefer? An authoritarian, monarchical, militarization regime frozen in the past, or a democratic, presidential, or parliamentary regime that would allow an atmosphere of freedom to develop the economy, society, science, and regional cooperation?

- How do they want to distribute their resources, those allocated to war and those allocated to development, education, and society?

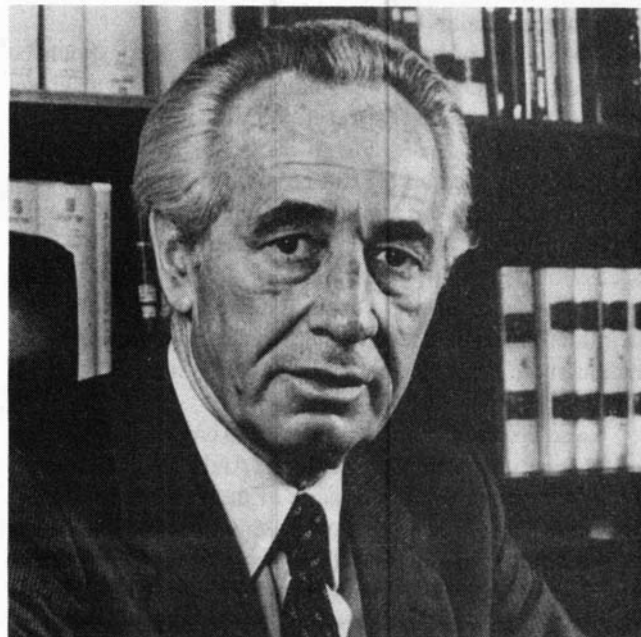
- Do they want to ignore environmental devastation, air pollution, waste of water resources, destruction of beaches, and erosion of fertile soil, or do they welcome regional cooperation in order to ensure air to breathe, seas to sail, land to cultivate, and water to drink for the children of future generations?

- How do they want to deal with the population explosion? By family planning and projecting food production and supply to new families, or by letting poverty make havoc and allowing fundamentalists (those who promise free meals and heaven knows what) to destroy every realistic and promising initiative?

- Will they allow the future to be determined by the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, or will they take charge of determining future policies for disarmament by clearing zones of unconventional weapons? Will they remain part of a passing world or sail ahead with sails full-blown by the winds of a new era?

I know many will say that these questions cannot be answered until a clear and explicit solution is found to the problem of the great conflicts of the region, the Arab-Israeli conflict above all. Indeed, in my opinion, the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole should be given first priority, particularly a solution to the Palestinian problem.

Nevertheless, peace in the Middle East is not a matter of clinical surgery, we are not dealing in amputation or transplantation of parts of the body. Peace falls, above all, within the realm of fine architecture, historic architecture, and the



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reconstruction of a Middle East free of past conflicts, set to take its place in the new era—an era which will not tolerate backwardness or ignorance.

Before I discuss this new structure for the Middle East, I would like to preface my comments with a few points about the Arab-Israeli conflict and how to solve it.

### **Solving the Arab-Israeli conflict**

The main dispute, in fact the source of the conflict between Israel and the Arab world, is rooted in the Palestinian problem and is centered territorially in two areas: Judea and Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. These are not very large territories. The area of Judea and Samaria covers 5,000 square kilometers of western Israel (Israel's total area is 24,000 square kilometers), and the Gaza Strip is only 350 square kilometers. These two territories have no oil or other natural resources and not much cultivable land. Both suffer a severe shortage of water and employment opportunities. Yet there is a great difference between them. The Gaza Strip is a compact area with few Israeli settlements, while Judea and Samaria present at least three serious issues from Israel's perspective: a united Jerusalem, the problem of strategic depth for an Israel that lacks geographic width, and the Israeli settlements that are, in essence, an enduring fact.

I do not believe that this dispute can be solved without territorial and bilateral compromise. In other words, Israel must give up some territory, and Palestinians must relinquish

some of their claims to territory.

The subject of Jerusalem, it is virtually agreed, should be left until the end of any negotiations or should be a subject that both sides agree not to set precise dates for, allowing the course of everyday life to evolve its own resolution. Alternatively, the subject can be divided into two aspects: political and religious. Politically, Jerusalem would be the capital of Israel. As for religion, the city would allow free access to all religions practicing there.

The issue of strategic depth for Israel can be solved by demilitarization of the territories to be returned and by designation of the Jordan River as a line not to be crossed by alien armies.

I also believe that there is no need to create confrontation on the issue of settlements. Just as the Arabs would live under an Israeli administration in parts of the West Bank, so the Jews may live under a non-Jewish administration.

At any rate, just as in war there is no substitute for victory, so in peace there is no substitute for compromise. While victory is unilateral, compromise must be bilateral or multilateral. Under existing conditions, it seems to me that the proper solution would be the establishment of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation composed of the kingdom of Jordan, including its army and government, the Gaza Strip as a demilitarized canton, and a canton of Judea and Samaria as a third flank. Although there are divisions among the residents of Gaza, Judea and Samaria, and Jordan, these divisions are no deeper than between Catholics and Protestants in Christendom or between Sunnis and Shiites in Islam. In fact, many of the residents of Judea and Samaria have familial, not just political, ties to residents of Jordan. Any distinction drawn between these populations is completely artificial; as David Fromkin writes in his book, *A Peace to End All Peaces*, "The European powers at that time . . . introduced an artificial state system in the Middle East that has made it into a region of countries that have not become nations even today."

Even if the Palestinians acquired all the territory of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, it is doubtful that it could serve as a territorial basis for an independent state, and it is even more doubtful that Israel could depend on the commitment to a demilitarization of this state, to a large extent a nation of poverty and bitterness. The establishment of two separate entities, a Jordanian and Palestinian one, would also serve as a new source of endless future disputes, for it is better to solve a problem with one solution. Two solutions to the same problem create the potential for constant rivalry and covert appetite.

I believe that after a solution to the Palestinian problem is reached, it will be easier to attain a solution to the conflict between Israel and Syria. This conflict should not cast a shadow over the attempt to find a resolution to the Palestinian dispute, whereas a solution on the Palestinian problem would facilitate resolving the dispute with Syria.

In order for a majority of Israelis to support a territorial compromise, the Israeli public must be convinced that terrorism will pass, that the thirst for war will disappear, and that on the foundation of compromise a new, historic coexistence between the Arab and Jewish worlds can be erected. Nothing strengthens reluctant groups in Israel more than Molotov cocktails thrown at public buses, indiscriminately striking mothers and children. The greatest pillar supporting extremists in Israel is Palestinian terrorism. Had the Palestinians established a political movement in place of violent organizations, Israel-Palestinian negotiations would have begun long ago, and perhaps a solution would have already been reached.

From the Israeli perspective, the picture is very clear. There are no such entities as "territories." If the territories were empty, it would be possible to discuss them as territories, but they are populated, and so we must talk about the population living there. Furthermore, since in both moral and political terms we have no desire to dominate the Palestinian people, Israel must withdraw from this domination without sacrificing security. The term *territories* must stand a double test from the two aspects of a people and a security threat. Israel must give back the territories populated by Palestinians on condition that the Palestinians understand that real guarantees must be created so that these territories cannot be used as a springboard for attacking Israel. Gaza is not a territory but a population; it can be allowed self-rule on condition that no threat arises from within or because of its proximity to Israeli settlements.

Is such a peace settlement possible? The answer is yes, because there is a precedent. The distance between Gaza and Ashkelon is greater than the distance between Aqaba and Eilat. Nonetheless, terrorists have crossed from Gaza to Israel, while not a shot has been fired from Aqaba to Eilat or vice versa. This is also one of the reasons why many in Israel have more faith in King Hussein than in Yasser Arafat.

It is my greatest hope that a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation will adopt democratic rule, even if it be a democratic monarchy. Jordan has already taken steps toward democratization. Aside from linking Jordan to Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, there is no doubt that a democratic system is the best guarantee for peace. Elections cannot be stipulated as a condition for negotiation, because I fear that negotiations about the nature of the elections would in themselves postpone indefinitely the opening of negotiations for peace. Nevertheless, a Palestinian-Jordanian declaration of intent to hold free elections would serve as a considerable contribution to peace in the region, for never has any democratic country launched an attack on another democratic country.

### **Regional reconstruction and the peace settlement**

Concurrently with the opening of negotiations for peace between Jordanians and Palestinians on one side and Israel

on the other, plans for the reconstruction of the region should be started. The Gulf war proved beyond doubt that without a regional approach it is impossible to guarantee either the security of states or their economic development in the Middle East. Missiles do not stop at borders and, with their high speeds, do not respect distances, thus requiring all of us to realize that the range of solutions cannot fall short of the range of dangers. It is senseless that a missile should cover a distance of 1,000 kilometers and we, at the same time, should be occupied with marking borders 30 kilometers from our population centers. Today we require not only defensible borders but defensible distances. In other words, we must build a network of region-wide political relations that will have the power to overcome the dangers inherent in purely military relations.

The same need for a regional emphasis holds true for the economy. Of course, it is important for every state in the region and for the entire region to have a close network of relations with the European Community, but not to the exclusion of developing a comparable network in the Middle East itself. Europe is experiencing monumental changes. While in the past the EC lived in fear of a military threat from the Communist bloc, today it lives with anxiety as to the fate of the same bloc of countries threatened now with hunger. Lech Walesa, the President of Poland, has told me that he is no longer afraid of a Soviet Army invasion but rather of an invasion of unemployed Russians. Due to the serious economic situation in eastern Europe, the wages in eastern European countries are very low; it will be difficult for nations in the Middle East to compete in the EC against such levels of pay.

### **The future of the Middle East**

The future of Middle Eastern countries lies in the Middle East. In spite of all the improvements in transportation and communication, the geographic factor still serves as an important one in economics. It is odd, for example, that the Middle East imports annually \$32 billion in foodstuffs, paying high transportation costs. It also spends about the same on importing weapons. If we could only reach a political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, then we could surely save part of the expenditure on food transportation costs and on arms purchases. Instead of importing arms and foodstuffs, the Middle East could establish peace and produce food for itself. In order for our region to cope with the great possibilities inherent in the new era, it must formulate policy in three major areas:

- 1) the greening of the region;
- 2) the computerization of its industries and services; and
- 3) the just distribution of its wealth.

As for the greening of the Middle East, it is already obvious that the region suffers more from a shortage of water than from land deficiency. If the outbreak of war is to be averted over this scarce resource, then the production of

water must be confronted by everyone in the region. It can be produced by desalination, by recycling used water, by reservoirs, by producing rainfall, by more effective distribution of existing water, by purchase, and by introducing new and efficient irrigation. Each of these systems requires regional coordination. For example, the most viable method for producing water by desalination may be nuclear energy, yet it is possible to harness this power only if there is a regional agreement to establish international islands on which the stations can be constructed under full supervision.

One might also note the idea raised by President Turgut Özal of Turkey that a pipeline be laid from his country, which enjoys a water surplus, to the Saudi Arabian peninsula, selling water to every country along the way. Such a plan is possible, of course, only if peace reigns in the places the pipeline crosses.

### **Uniting the region around water**

Water and peace flow together; otherwise nothing will come of either. Logic dictates that we establish a council of agricultural ministers of the whole region that will set to work immediately on planning a solution to the water problem, in order to supply food to the entire population of the Middle East without relying on foreign currency and without fear of either nature or man. Such a program would receive the finest European, American, Japanese, and Soviet assistance. It would serve as a tremendous effort to unite the Middle East through water, rather than divide it by force and fire.

The same approach used for water can be applied to computers, services, and industries in the Middle East. Let us imagine that we agreed to educational computers in every school in the region. Computers of this sort operated by batteries are relatively inexpensive to produce and would create a new language common to all children. Here, too, we can expect considerable assistance from the industrialized nations and the great electronics companies. This would immediately move the Middle East one phase ahead toward modernization in the new era I discussed at the beginning of this article.

A great fund could be established for regional development. Oil-producing and oil-purchasing countries might agree that for every barrel produced, \$1 be set aside for developing the Middle East, amounting to \$8 billion annually. The imposition of this dollar surcharge on the price would have no effect whatsoever on the economies of either producing or consuming states, but it could be a kind of self-devised Marshall Plan for the future survival of the Middle East. Israel would see its role in this case not as a recipient but as a contributor to the aid program through both money and know-how.

### **Leadership for peace and development in the Middle East**

A program like the one proposed above would require

vast coordination both within the region and beyond it. In my view, Egypt should take the lead in the Middle East as the most populous Arab nation and the first to cross the barrier of war, demonstrating ever since its peace treaty with Israel a praiseworthy political maturity. The fact that Egypt's foreign minister, Esmet Abdel Meguid, was selected this year to be secretary general of the Arab League and the fact that he returned its headquarters to Cairo shows that the greater part of the Arab world continues to think of present-day Egypt as its leading country. Egypt also has free access to Israel, the Palestinians, Europe, and the United States. The problems facing Egypt are economic and political and can be solved only within the kind of general framework I have outlined. I am convinced that if Egypt took this initiative, it would have the widest support both within the Middle East and beyond it. Egypt would also have the consent of Jordan, the Palestinians, and, later, Syria to open wider peace negotiations between the Arabs and Israel.

Beyond our region, it is fitting that the United States maintain its involvement and initiative. The Americans have taken the lead for peace and military aid in the Middle East and have, in essence, proved throughout their history that even when the United States goes to war it does not develop a territorial appetite. The United States has withdrawn from Iraq as it withdrew from Japan, in both cases having become involved only to stop aggression and not to profit in any sense. The United States must be a leader for peace in the Middle East, a peace to be observed by countries that until now have either fought with each other or been in a state of war.

It is also most desirable that there be full coordination between the United States and the Russians on peace in the Middle East, although Russia no longer plays the role it did in the past. Nonetheless, it is important that Russia work for peace in the Middle East, rather than supply arms to one of the sides in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

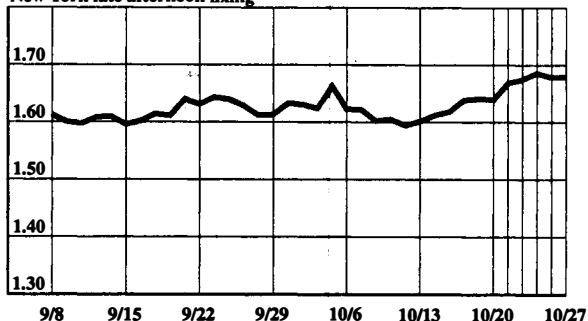
Second place on the list of international parties having influence in the region must be given to Europe, which is undergoing historic geographical, economic, and political unification. The Middle East is close to Europe and Europe close to it. If great industries are to be set up in the region, then Europe's industrial power, and not just the governments of the EC, can play a role as chief planner for the new era in the Middle East. In the present political situation, there need not be a contradiction among the roles of the United States, Russia, and the European Community, as Italy's ex-foreign minister, Gianni De Michelis, made clear in the summer of 1992.

A rare opportunity to create a Golden Age in the Middle East has arisen after the Gulf war. We are all in need of it, and any other alternative would be a collective punishment for all peoples in our region. We can begin today with skeletal plans, an archway through which we might begin a long journey. The way is open. We need brave travelers.

## Currency Rates

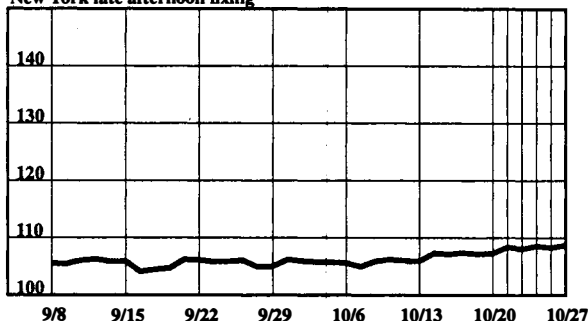
### The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



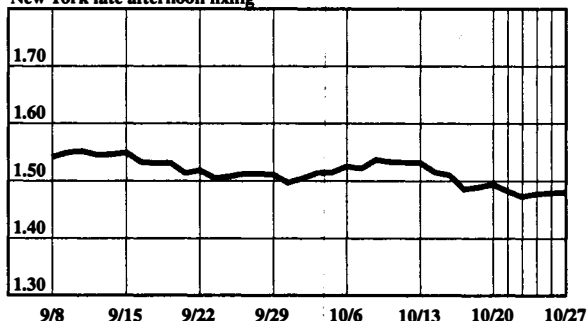
### The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



### The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



### The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

