

BOOK REVIEWS

The Arabs, Israelis and Kissinger: A Secret History of American Diplomacy in the Middle East, by Edward R.F. Sheehan. Reader's Digest Press, \$8.95.

When major segments from Edward Sheehan's fascinating documentation of Henry Kissinger's post-Yom Kippur War diplomatic saga appeared in *Foreign Policy* last March, the Secretary of State proclaimed, "I was thunderstruck." Yet just a year earlier Kissinger was personally intervening with Arab leaders on Sheehan's behalf; and it is common knowledge that Sheehan was given unprecedented cooperation by the State Department.

Apparently the timing of Sheehan's revelations had put Kissinger on a hot seat. For only a few weeks before he had passionately denounced a Congressional committee for "leaking" intelligence documents and now there appeared (indeed there was) a "double standard." Kissinger's repudiations aside, this book is a striking example of how much can be told about the intricacies of international diplomacy by an enterprising journalist who has managed to enlist the trust and aid of top government officials themselves eager for a sympathetic recording of history.

Sheehan set out early in 1975 "to write the most comprehensive — and readable — account of Dr. Kissinger's diplomacy in the Middle East published in our present time." He did it. Even before the book's appearance, *New York Times* columnist William Safire called the journal article a "journalistic coup", while Stanley Hoffman at Harvard strung together a number of accolades — "fine, scrupulous, sober, balanced and incisive — a model of its kind."

Though Sheehan occasionally shows his proclivity for fancy words which break the easiness of his masterful writing — for instance in the opening few pages he uses "amanuensis," "peregrination," "cornucopia," and

"escutcheoned" — the book is a brilliantly constructed narrative with touches of essential history and glimpses of key personalities.

If there is a single theme to Sheehan's efforts it revolves around the "Palestinian problem" on which there is repeated emphasis. For Sheehan's judgement is that though Kissinger for the first time created for the US a realistic Arab policy — one that offers hope for regional stability and peace — he failed fully to exploit the unique opportunity that existed to fashion a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli quagmire.

Before an American Jewish audience during 1976, Kissinger solemnly expressed his conviction that "the Middle East is at a moment of unprecedented opportunity" due to the successes of step-by-step diplomacy. But for Sheehan, the opportunity may have come and gone; and Kissinger, by his avoidance of "the very essence" of the Middle East conflict — the tragedy of the Palestinian people — was excessively cautious in deference to the power of the Israeli-Jewish lobby at home.

"Though his tactics of partial peace were brilliant and his techniques, too, strategically he sinned on the side of caution. Perhaps Dr. Kissinger's greatest achievement is to have bought time . . . to have erected the foundation for the pursuit of real peace. But the method he chose was simply too slow, and if clung to may imperil peace for the great future." It is with this evaluation that Sheehan takes to advocacy and prophecy in a concluding chapter titled "Futurology."

The Arabs, Israelis and Kissinger is not simply a recording of the Kissinger Middle East shuttle. It is a book combining remarkable journalism with outspoken advocacy. "The consensus that prevails amongst most levels of the United States government — in the State Department, in the CIA, in the Pentagon, and elsewhere — favoring a settlement based upon the 1967 boundaries, a state for the Palestinians, strong guarantees for Israel, must be translated into the imperatives of high policy."

This is precisely what Kissinger failed to achieve, though the March

1975 "reassessment" was the historical moment when the political configuration might have allowed success. Sheehan insists that Kissinger misread the political constellation, but when he confronted the Secretary with his reservations Kissinger explained: "What were the alternatives? The conflict in the Middle East has a history of decades. Only during the last two years have we produced progress. It's easy to say that what we've done is not enough, but the steps we've taken are the biggest steps so far. They were *the attainable* — given our prevailing domestic situation."

Sheehan's expose will hardly end the debate about Kissinger's involvements in the Middle East. Nor will his rather simplified discussion of the requirements for a real Middle East peace go unchallenged.

But he has uniquely provided the essential details from which the future of American efforts to bring about co-existence between Israel and the Arabs will proceed. And he is largely correct in both his assertion that an international consensus on the nature of a fair settlement is gradually isolating Israel and that "peace in the Middle East . . . will require a resolute [American] president ready to undertake arduous decisions, prepared to encourage the forces of conciliation in both Israel and Arab and resolved, when necessary, to apply strong pressure upon Israel for the sake of concessions that will produce peace. It will all be very difficult, but the alternatives of war and radical upheaval will be much worse."

Mark Bruzonsky