

World cannot decide Palestinian destiny

THIRD part of MARK A. BRUZONSKY'S interview with NAFEZ YOUSEF NAZZAL, Director of Middle East Studies at Birzeit University in the occupied West Bank.

Q: What about Jordan?
A: This is not our problem.

Q: Both Sadat and Carter have repeated in recent weeks that they believe that the Palestinian entity must have a link to Jordan.

A: Yes, we agree to this. But we say that we would like to have our independence and then we should decide that. Why should Begin, Sadat and Carter decide for us what is best for us? We are saying that we want to decide for ourselves what's best for us.

We are saying to the world, please give us our right to self-determination. And we are saying — and I think the PLO's policy is — we are not against Arab unity. Our dream is to have a united Arab nation. So, no doubt about it, the Palestinian nation would work for Arab unity. I don't think the Palestinians would be against federation with Jordan. I don't think they would be against federation with Lebanon, with Syria, with Iraq. But this has to be decided by the Palestinians and this decision will have to be based on self-interest. If it is in the interest of a Palestinian state to have a federation with Jordan, then they will decide that.

But I don't think it is fair for the world to decide our destiny and they say we are giving the Palestinians self-determination. Self-determination means to give the people the right to determine their own destiny. And unfortunately, the world is unwilling to realise that we are capable of deciding for ourselves. I think the world is failing to realise that we are people who have been deprived of our human rights. And we are asking for our human rights without attaching this to other things which might be achieved but we want this to be achieved by our own choice.

Solving problem

Q: If Sadat makes an agreement with the Israelis, as many Egyptians are talking about, which gives Egypt sovereignty over Sinai and talks vaguely about how the Palestinian problem will be solved and how the Syrian-Israeli problem will be solved, how will the West Bankers view Sadat? Will they consider him to be a traitor?

A: Already Sadat is being viewed as a man who's bankrupt. So far he has nothing from the Israelis.

Q: He has Sinai.

A: I don't think Sadat needed to come to Israel and needed to go through this commotion in order to get back Sinai. Sadat could have done this without any trouble. And

'Our dream is a united Arab nation'

I don't think Sadat's aim is to get back Sinai. He could have done this without risking his own life by coming here.

Q: You think he's very serious, that he will hold out for a Palestinian state, that he won't compromise with Begin about self-rule?

A: This is what he said publicly. And, of course, I don't know what there is behind the scenes. But he stated it over and over again that he is not interested in a separate settlement. And I believe this because he did not have to go through all these things in order to get Sinai. I think he's interested in solving the problem once and for all.

However, the problem is that Israel is not responding to his initiative.

Q: And he's being pushed into a corner from which he may have to make a separate accommodation — which is the feeling of many people in Cairo.

A: Why don't you look at it the other way around. Why don't we say that after a while Sadat will look at the situation and say, "Well, I have done enough. I came to Israel, I talked to the Israelis, and the Israelis are adamant about not letting go of the occupied territories."

Still hoping

Then he is apt to consult the Arabs because he did say over and over that he will continue with his initiative, continue talking to the Israelis, and then he will try to get as much as possible and present it to the Arabs and let them decide.

I feel personally that the Israelis are not going to give him anything. The Israelis are not going to withdraw from the occupied territories.

Q: You mean the West Bank?

A: Yes, the West Bank and Gaza. I think Begin's idea of home rule for the Palestinians is a way out. It is really in place of complete withdrawal. And I don't think any Arab in his right mind would accept such a proposal and I don't think Sadat himself will accept it.

Of course, at present, he's accepting it as a basis for negotiations. Because he's still hoping that the Israelis would somehow be pressured to withdraw from most of the West Bank and Gaza specially after the security questions have been considered. He has said he's willing to consider the security of Israel — that is to say to modify the borders.

— but I don't think he would accept the idea of not seeing Israel withdraw from the occupied territories.

Q: Do you prefer the Labour Party policy better — not to allow a separate Palestinian state but to return some areas to Jordanian sovereignty and to have maybe two parliaments, a Palestinian parliament on the West Bank and a Jordanian parliament on the east bank, but to have one state?

A: No, no. This is again evading the issue. We were very happy to see Begin in power because we thank him for being very honest and stating Israel's positions, aims and objectives as far as the occupied territories are concerned.

Again, this is not the issue. The issue is not to have a Palestinian parliament and a Jordanian parliament. The issue is, are they willing to recognise the people as a political entity.

Q: And the answer is no.

A: And the answer is no. So the struggle will continue.

PLO Unity

Q: The American answer is also no.

A: They are trying to solve the problem without pressuring Israel at this moment and without risking anything. But soon the United States of America will have to decide.

I think that the Palestinian problem will have to be solved. There has been talk about establishing a Palestinian state and the idea of replacing the PLO is not acceptable by most of the people in the West Bank.

Q: But doesn't it seem to you the PLO is beginning to disintegrate, to divide into factions?

A: On the contrary, the PLO is for the first time in many years united.

Q: ... are publicly united and behind the scenes somebody is sending assassins to kill.

A: Well, I don't know about that. It's not for sure that the assassination of Said Hammami was by Palestinians. There is some speculation on the West Bank that the rejectionists in the PLO have nothing to gain by killing Hammami. There is speculation, but of course nobody can verify these, that the Israelis have more to gain by the assassination of Hammami than the PLO. The aim could be to get the rejectionists and the moderates in conflict with each other because for the first time in many years the rejectionists and the moderates are together, they sit and talk with each other. Maybe this is a threat to the Israelis to see the Palestinians united. The same thinking goes for the assassination of the Syrians in London. Maybe the Israelis, seeing that Syria and Iraq may be getting together with the help of Boumediene in Algeria, would like to see the assassination looked on as a plot by the Iraqis. Who knows? These are only speculation. Personally, I don't believe the rejectionists have anything to gain by the assassination of Said Hammami.

(To be concluded tomorrow)