

U.S. oil embargo fears 'to end Mid-east stalemate'

THE final 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: Let's talk about American policy. How do the West Bankers view the Carter Administration which first came into office and declared there should be a Palestinian homeland and now seems to be saying the Palestinians, at best, should find their existence within Jordan?

A: Well, you know, the people in the West Bank first look upon Carter as someone who is interested in solving their problem because for the first time you have a president who thinks it is in the American interest to do so.

But what happens is that Carter's policy has been one step forward, two backward. He did state that the Palestinians should have a home in the West Bank, but unfortunately he has backed away from this. This is maybe only a technique. Because we know the U.S. can pressure Israel, but we also know here in the West Bank that Israel also can pressure the U.S.

But, let me tell you that most West Bankers feel the following: Sooner or later Carter will put pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. This is simply because the U.S. would not want to see another oil embargo or the radicalisation of the Arab countries.

We foresee Sadat's initiative would fail. I don't think that Israel will commit herself to withdraw from the occupied territories. As a result, Sadat will be able to reunify the Arab countries, but in a different perspective.

You see, now the Arab countries are disunited. There are two factions: Sadat wants peace, the other countries feel that Sadat will not accomplish it. Sadat, I think, afterwards, will be willing to convince the Arabs that Israel is unwilling to commit itself to withdrawal and therefore he will ask the rejectionists to be more responsible and do more action rather than just talk. He would champion the Arab world again.

Here, the Arab countries would be united again and the U.S. then would take a different attitude as

'Israelis have to change, Sadat has to reunify the Arabs'

far as the situation is concerned. Then the U.S. would not want to risk its interests in the Arab world and would pressure Israel to withdraw.

This pressure would create internal political problems within the political parties in Israel and hopefully a new liberal party would emerge that would accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank. This pressure, I think, would be brought by the U.S. fear of an oil embargo and the radicalisation of all the Arab countries.

Q: Basically you are saying no real hope with the current political constellation: Begin is not going to yield, Sadat is not going to get what he needs, eventually the Americans have to come in again. Israeli politics has to change, Sadat will have to reunify the Arab world, the Saudis will have to pressure. There's a lot of ifs, a lot of hopes.

A: This is because Israel is adamant about not withdrawing from the occupied territories. As long as this continues there cannot be peace. As long as Israel is unwilling to recognise the PLO there cannot be peace.

Q: And you discount the widely-discussed possibility in Cairo that Egypt will have to make an accommodation which will be called the first step toward a comprehensive settlement but which in reality will be like the Sinai Agreement — a separate arrangement and the crux of the matter will be left dangling. You discount this possibility?

A: It is a possibility, but it is not very beneficial for the U.S.

Q: But its very beneficial for Egypt which just wants to get the conflict behind it.

A: Yes, its beneficial for Egypt and for Israel, but I don't think Egypt would want to be isolated from the Arab countries. Egypt's initiative is not to be isolated from the Arab world; on the contrary, Egypt's initiative is to continue championing the

Arab cause. And I don't think Sadat came here on behalf of Egypt. He came here on behalf of the Arab world although he did not consult the Arab countries.

Q: This is your desire, your hope, your belief. But is it really your political analysis?

A: Yes, yes, it is. Because I see U.S. interests in the area since the 40s. And I know one of the most important things for the U.S. is to prevent Russian expansionism into this area. This was the case before and this is the case today and will be the case tomorrow. And I don't believe the U.S. would want to have peace by strengthening the USSR position in the Middle East.

Q: But many American officials believe a separate settlement at this point is preferable to attempting to achieve the impossible.

A: What is the impossible?

Q: Maybe getting the Israelis to accept in the near future any real independent Palestinian existence, any dealings with the PLO. Many in the American government do not feel we have such an influence or power. They might desire it, but they feel the domestic political situation in the U.S. does not allow the U.S. even to use the power it has.

But, from what you are saying, the Palestinians here are not going to co-operate in that kind of a framework. They want to know what they're going to get. They don't want to deal with this Council. They don't want 15 years of political bickering.

A: But this is not only the position of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. This is also the position of Hussein, who is also concerned about the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. His position is also to wait and see. And I think this is the position of the PLO.

Q: Hussein doesn't want an independent Palestinian state?

A: Well, I don't know about that. Before the Rvabat conference I think he was assured by the Arab states that a Palestinian state would be to his benefit rather than a threat because financially he would be secured by the Arab countries and politically some kind of federation with Jordan would result.

Q: I saw Jordanian Minister of Information Adnan Abuoda — whom I believe is a Palestinian — a few weeks ago in Amman. And he confided to me that Jordan knows what it wants. They want the old 1972 plan. Let the Palestinians have a parliament in the West Bank, let them call themselves Palestinians. But, under Jordanian rule, only one state. That's what they want, isn't it?

A: That's what they want, but it's not what the Palestinians want. You see, the Palestinians want to have their own state and in the future they do not object to federation with Jordan. After all, federation with Jordan would mean the unification of the Palestinian people — in the East and the West Bank. As far as the Jordanians are concerned, this might be a threat to them since they would be a minority.

Q: Suppose you have your state. Who do you expect to come back? Will the West Bankers really welcome these outsiders — you have your own economic and cultural problems here? And if they will welcome them, who's going to come?

A: We'll have to speculate. I think the people on the West Bank will have to accommodate the Palestinians who want to return. No doubt about it.

Q: No "return" actually, for most of them have never lived here. So, we are speaking actually about those who would want to come to a Palestinian state.

A: We in the West Bank have to accommodate this. But also the Israelis will have to accommodate those Palestinians who want to come back to Jaffa and Haifa. They have to agree in principle that those who want to return must be permitted to do so.

Personally, I also believe — and this is something that has not been discussed — that it is also important for the Arab countries to accommodate all of the Palestinians who choose to remain in these Arab countries and become citizens of them.

So, you see, it's a very difficult problem and the Palestinians question will have to be solved by all of the Arab countries and Israel.