

WORLDVIEW

EXCURSUS 3

**Mark A. Bruzonsky on
FEZ, THE U.S., AND ISRAEL**

Contrary to many press accounts, the Arab summit at Fez, Morocco, in September was a decided turning point in the history of the Arab-Israeli confrontation. It may, in fact, have far greater impact on the future of the Middle East than even the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and attendant atrocities. And for this, President Reagan's September 1 speech outlining U.S. policies for the region—essentially those first enunciated in U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 and the 1969 Rogers plan—can take a good deal of the credit.

At Fez the Arab world, collectively and without significant dissent, agreed publicly to Arab-Israeli negotiations leading to a full peace settlement and acceptance of Israel as a legitimate state in the region. Continuing condemnations of Zionism and occasional outbursts notwithstanding, this is the contemporary reality.

There were hints of this at the Baghdad summit of 1978, after Egyptian President Sadat had embarked on his inde-

pendent course. The intention is now more clearly set out, and only those who do not wish to see will miss it. The Fez declaration should be interpreted as a willingness to negotiate directly with Israel and to achieve a peace settlement based on Israel's withdrawal from the territories it occupied after 1967, to see the creation of a Palestinian state in association with Jordan, and to come to a political compromise over a united, open city of Jerusalem. It is as clear an Arab call for settlement of its historic grievances with Jewish nationalism as could have been contemplated.

Fez validated Sadat's farsighted vision of the possibility of an Arab-Israel peace even as the ministers were ostracizing Sadat's chosen successor and continued to reject Egyptian participation in Arab summits. Image and reality still conflict in Arab politics—but then the same can be said of the situation within the U.S. and within the Jewish world. In the former, the image is of an unshakeable alliance between Washington and Israel, the reality is tension, growing schism, and disenchantment. In the latter, the image is of a world Jewish community that continues to offer fealty to Jerusalem's policies; the reality is growing disillusionment with the current Israeli government and the nature of Israel-diaspora relations.

True, America's latest efforts are in the form of mere words and are viewed with traditional skepticism by Arab leaders. Yet there are appreciable signs that Washington has nearly exhausted its patience with Israel, whose policies are continually at odds with America's view of its own economic and political interests, and signs too of a public opinion, chastened by the summer's events in Lebanon, that is more willing to see the "Arab side" and to consider America's broader interests in the Mideast.

The ball is now in the Arab camp, and it would be well advised to deal first with the much-trumpeted issue of "recognition of Israel," which has evolved from a matter of principle into a roadblock to political progress. Having done all but recognize Israel anyway, there is little more to lose, and the gains from removing the roadblock may well be considerable—including a considerable shift in world Jewish opinion. Certainly, Arab elites and masses alike

realize that the concept of a Jewish national state has triumphed and will not be destroyed.

Israel's leap into Arab politics through its military assault against the Palestinians in Lebanon has produced a remarkable result: greater, not lesser, Arab willingness to follow a moderate course and seek political accommodation. Whether this was achieved by intimidation or enforced a growing realism is unimportant; the result is the same. Yet the effect is probably transient, as is the ability of the pro-American regimes in the area to continue in the American embrace without being able to show anything for it. The Egyptian government is already displaying signs of desperation.

Washington was right, then, to put both Israel and the Arabs on the spot at this crucial time. However hard they will have to swallow, the Arabs—who might prefer that the PLO take the lead—can further the goals they enunciated at Fez by following Sadat's example and clearly recognizing Israel *prior* to the opening of negotiations. Sadat's genius lay in his appreciation of the psychological underpinnings of Israeli intransigence. His failure was in allowing Egypt to be maneuvered into the separate peace he himself had constantly denounced. Here he was outflanked, as was Jimmy Carter, by a Revisionist Zionist ideology he little understood—one that, as enunciated and implemented by Begin and Sharon, exploited Arab divisions, refused to consider the issue of Palestinian nationalism, and developed a high form of religious and nationalist zealotry of its own.

Today, a bold Arab policy of recognition and firm insistence on a comprehensive plan for peace offers the best hope for reversing Sadat's error. If the Arabs can pursue such a rational course, it will then be up to the U.S. to make good on its policies, as reconfirmed on September 1. Nothing else would do. And the applause from Jews both inside and outside of Israel will be louder than expected.

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