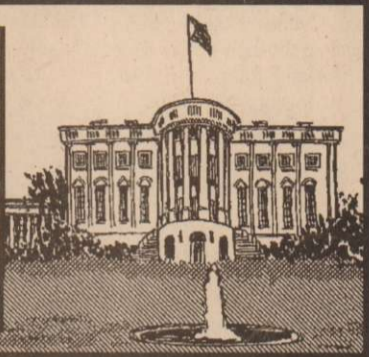


LOOKING AHEAD A BIT

From



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Washington

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not even to begin this kind of political theatrics raising all the intractable issues to a new visibility and stature.

But when they no longer could avoid the political dance altogether -- but still only after the dance had been considerably altered to their own style -- the Israelis have done what they could to make their totally intransigent positions sound, at least in parts, reasonable and rational.

Benjamin Netanyahu is a master political linguist able to twist any argument beyond recognition while grinning agreeably. Netanyahu even audaciously made a trial run at convincing everyone in Madrid that Israel really does accept resolutions 242 and 338 after all, even though his description of them isn't likely to get any nods other than from his own delegation.

So while nearly everyone seems to be focusing on the diplomacy of the moment while imbibing the atmosphere of hope, it seems to me the job of historically-aware analysts should be not just to focus on the moment but to look a bit ahead.

True, the Palestinians are understandably excited that their case is finally being heard on the international stage with delegates of their own -- though admittedly kozherized by both the Israelis and the Americans -- speaking up and

getting heard.

Moreover, the various major media organs of both the American establishment and the Arab establishment -- mostly owned and manipulated by a privileged class that has so much to gain by an accommodation with Israel -- are constantly touting the virtues of the new world order, constantly explaining why a political path is now likely to succeed though it has failed for much of the century; constantly justifying and rationalising things that just a few years ago would have seemed unacceptable.

It is precisely this kind of self-deception, precisely this kind of overall failure to realistically look ahead that has been responsible in past decades for getting all of us into today's tangled political mess.

And if such failure to honestly look ahead continues, then tomorrow's mess may be even bigger and more tragic.

What is really happening, obscured by the new atmosphere of Madrid, is something like this:

◆ Lacking military and economic power, quite exhausted by the struggle and the creeping transformation of the last parts of Palestine into Israel -- and with much of the Arab World having abandoned them, at least from their point-of-view -- the Palestinian establishment has embarked on a

new kind of struggle using the only weapons they feel available to them .. the weapons of public relations.

Admittedly, the Palestinians are better at PR this time than they've ever been before -- which says of course a lot about the past -- but then their case has always been a very good one badly handled.

And yet PR is no serious substitute for real power. And while their PR has improved, their geopolitical situation further deteriorates quite literally as their spokesmen speak. The bulk of their territories are already occupied; the growing majority of even the 22 percent of the area of historic Palestine that lies across the Green Line already taken by the Israelis. Soviet Jews continue to swell Israel's numbers; worldwide Jewish support continues to further empower and embolden the Jewish entity; and American financial and military support -- as opposed to rhetorical slights of hand -- continues in substantial amounts, notwithstanding what happens to the further grant now being contemplated in the form of "loan guarantees".

◆ The Arab World, coming out of the complex civil war that has been fought out primarily in the territory of Lebanon and Iraq, desperately seeks a stabilising accommodation with the US and understandably has concluded this requires

a historic deal with Israel, even at the expense of the Palestinians.

In a sense, the Arab establishment seems to have concluded that it have much bigger fish to fry than either worrying about Israel or the Palestinians.

◆ As for the Israelis, they have always understood that they must await their historic moments to be able to get what many have always told them they could not achieve simultaneously -- final control over the whole land of Israel as well as an accommodation with the Arabs.

Possibly tragically, that's the lesson the Israelis basically derived from what we all now call "Camp David" -- i.e., no need for a comprehensive settlement, no need to accept the will of the international community no matter how often expressed; no need to ever accept Palestinian nationalism other than possibly in Jordan.

Rather, from the Israeli point of view, they need just wait until some Arab leader comes along who either purposely can be bought off in one way or another or else can be tricked in one way or another.

Now the Israelis are playing the same game with the various Arab regimes and the various Palestinian factions. And meanwhile the Americans are much more helpless when dealing with Israel than it may seem; which is why so much of Washington's focus has been strictly on procedure avoiding the gut issues of substance.

Next week, in this column, it will be important to delve further into the realities of political life in America when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian quagmire.

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