

ANOTHER OCTOBER SURPRISE?

The Americans, with the Soviets in tow and pocket this time, are planning for a symbolic Mid-east conference....In some circles, most notably those of the American and Israeli establishments, there's already an undertow of smugness and self-satisfaction. This is of course greatest especially among those who have wanted for some time to push forward a 'peace process' more modelled on the Camp David approach of the past than the long-discussed now aborting UN international conference approach. In other circles -- most notably those most committed to the mutual recognition and two-state approach -- a still-growing sense of despair, apprehension, and political impotence is increasingly evident

ELIAS Freij has always been considered, in the American-Israeli lexicon, a "moderate". Other far more pejorative terms, however, are used by some of his Palestinian constituents back in the occupied territories.

Just a few days before American Secretary of State James Baker's latest Mid-east visits, and the PLO's latest statements, Freij made these comments on an American visit.

Freij, of course, is himself a potential Palestinian "negotiator" -- a very safe one from the Israeli point-of-view as he lives in the West Bank, has always been pro-Jordanian, and is known for his "accommodating" attitudes. And Freij, of course, is also a Palestinian in considerable danger.

Indeed, the best-known of the potential Palestinian negotiators who live under Israeli occupation, Feisal Hussein, has already been quoted saying -- possibly in a desperate attempt to get Baker to offer the Palestinians something they can use as political cover -- "I am a dead man.... Israeli extremists or Arab radicals will get to me".

There is much still-growing tension, nervousness, and confusion in the air among most Mid-east experts, analysts, and experts these days.

The Americans, with the Soviets in tow and pocket this time, are planning for a symbolic Mid-east conference whose opening is to take place in Washington, if everyone will agree, in October. They also, one way or another, want to get participants up to presidential retreat Camp David, site of the Egyptian-Israeli deal more than a decade ago, to give today's events an air of continuity for the American "peace process" and for anticipated success.

Of course what's going on is a very high-risk, high-visibility effort. In a sense American is luckily in the driver's seat these days. But in another sense everyone is right now both expecting the Americans

From



Mark A. Britzonsky

Washington

to drive and letting the Americans do so. This could still change. Flat tires, rocks on the road, and rocks in the air, can still bring about unforeseen accidents at any time of day or night.

In some circles, most notably those of the American and Israeli establishments, there's already an undertow of smugness and self-satisfaction. This is of course greatest especially among those who have wanted for some time to push forward a "peace process" more modelled on the Camp David approach of the past than the long-discussed now aborting UN international conference approach.

In other circles -- most notably those most committed to the mutual recognition and two-state approach -- a still-growing sense of despair, apprehension, and political impotence is increasingly evident.

Those most supportive of the current Israeli government and its policies seem very hopeful, even though their smugness is being kept tightly hidden from public view.

These circles quite understandably appreciate the need not to be cheering in public lest such admitted glee undermine what seems about to begin to happen. But the sense of self-satisfaction seeps through anyway.

From this point-of-view, Yitzhak Shamir and his Likud bloc are clearly in charge in Israel. He and his party continue eating up occupied Palestinian territories; continue expanding

the boundaries of the Jerusalem area; continue refusing to even discuss territorial compromise.

The Israeli Prime Minister and his friends, including the American Administration whose problems with Israel this analyst continues to believe to be more orchestrated theatrics than actual realities, have pushed Palestinian nationalism off the table (at least for the moment), eclipsed the Intifada, and succeeded in greatly dividing the Arab side.

Shamir and his friends have manoeuvred so that the conference about to be held will not

Chairman Arafat is very eager to see this conference started.... It's going to take place. We are not going to give Israel the pleasure of saying that we scuttled the conference. If we receive an invitation, we will come with the Jordanians.... It has all been worked out.

Bethlehem Mayor **Elias Freij** speaking in Washington on 1 August

I am a dead man.... Israeli extremists or Arab radicals will get to me.

Feisal Hussein quoted in Jerusalem in late July

be UN sponsored, will not include the PLO, will not discuss a Palestinian state in any form, but will break up quickly into bilateral negotiations between Israel and the various Arab states with the Palestinians subsumed into the Jordanian delegation.

This basic arrangement of the negotiating chessboard is a tremendous accomplishment for Shamir, no matter what the public relations aspects of how the Americans and the Israelis have to pretend to be a bit at odds.

Indeed, this new arrangement that has grown out of the

Coalition War is the most the Israelis and their friends could have realistically hoped for; and it would never have been possible but for an accommodating American administration and a desperate Arab World.

The "October Surprise" of 1980 is still much talked about here in Washington.

Originally that term came from the Reagan-Bush camp which greatly feared the Carter White House would one way or another orchestrate a last minute just-before-the-election October hostage release; and thus be sweep by public senti-

ment into another presidential term.

But in recent years, a great deal of circumstantial evidence has come forward making it appear that it was really the Republicans who were the ones who created their own "October Surprise" -- a deal with the Iranians that they hold onto the hostages until the American election and then get a better deal for them from the new American president.

Today, in 1991, the Americans and the Israelis are preparing a new kind of "October Surprise" for the Arabs, especially for the Palestinians. No doubt some of the Arabs, possibly with Syria's President Hafez Assad in the lead, think they may have a few surprises of their own.

But the basic political reality of the moment seems to be that through all kinds of still escalating American-Israeli pressures mixed with occasional smiles the Arabs are being dragged and cajoled to a historic international peace conference aimed at specific agreements between Israel and the Arab states who each have their own desperate needs and concerns.

And just as at the original Camp David affair some 13 years ago everything is being designed to be at the expense of the Palestinians -- they to get only ambiguous promises, undefined concepts, and dubious inducements -- while their homeland is eaten up as their friends desert them one by one.

Shamir and his friends have manoeuvred so that the conference about to be held will not be UN sponsored, will not include the PLO, will not discuss a Palestinian state in any form, but will break up quickly into bilateral negotiations between Israel and the various Arab states with the Palestinians subsumed into the Jordanian delegation. This basic arrangement of the negotiating chessboard is a tremendous accomplishment for Shamir, no matter what the public relations aspects of how the Americans and the Israelis have to pretend to be a bit at odds