

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Less than two years ago Israelis like Amnon Rubinstein were writing, "There are no more doves in Israel," and the pleas of leftist Israeli intellectuals for international appreciation of Israel's struggle for survival were heard. Today it seems even more commonplace to encounter the thesis that the Arab world is now permeated with "moderates" suddenly desirous of coexistence and eventually of true peace with Israel.

Joan Peters's "In Search of Moderate Egyptians" is a most welcome challenge to this false contemporary wisdom. She is to be commended for the courage to write it as she found it (needless to say, she's not heading back to Cairo soon).

No matter how much all of us want to find a basic change in the overall Arab desire to defeat Israel and bury Zionism, we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of such wishful thinking or the self-deception which too many Americans are prone to pursue. Realism remains the approach most likely to safeguard Israeli interests as well as American interests.

When I visited Egypt in 1972 as United Nations Representative of the International Student Movement, I had two basic reactions. First, I was amazed at the charm of Cairo and of so many of the Egyptians I met during my two one-week visits. It being my first visit to the Arab Middle East, I was rather pleasantly surprised by the magnetism of the civilization. But secondly, I found a profound antagonism toward Jews and a determination to fight Israel and "the Zionists" whatever the cost. I spoke with officials of the newly created United Nations Association, with an official of the Youth Department of the Arab Socialist Union, with student leaders of the General Union of Student, and with any English-speaking people I came in contact with. Nowhere was there an acceptance of Israel, pre- or post-1967. A

conflict between civilizations was my impression. And the deeper the conversations, the more profound and intractable the confrontation.

In my conversations here in the United States with Arab students and Third World supporters of the Arab cause, I find an underlying conviction that Israel's destruction is a historical certainty. Thus, short-term "moderation" with the goal of weakening Israel is acceptable—but not as a step to real peace, only as a means of eventual triumph. Coexistence might evolve under such circumstances, it is true, but it should not be mistaken for acceptance of a Jewish state in the Middle East. At best there might be toleration in view of the potential cost of attempting the final destruction. But even then the likelihood of a renewal of warfare would always remain if Israel's strength or her international position were such that further weakening or potential victory were contemplated.

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