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BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

LOCAL ID
AUTHOR

ARTICLE AUTHOR Mark Bruzonsky

TITLE The Middle East.

ARTICLE TITLE More Than Rhetoric

IMPRINT [London, U.K. : IC Publications Ltd., c1985-

FORMAT Serial
EDITION
VOLUME May 1978
NUMBER
DATE 1978
PAGES

UNIFORM TITLE Middle East (London, England : 1985)
ISSN 0305-0734

Page 56-

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FORUM



MORE THAN RHETORIC

Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Israel all have a common interest in a moderate solution to the Middle East conflict, Joseph Sisco, former US Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs (*left in photo*), told Mark Bruzonsky in one of the rare interviews he has given since he left his post as Henry Kissinger's Middle East trouble-shooter. The discussion touches on the position of the Palestinians, the US attitude to Saudi Arabia and the "special relationship" with Israel. (*Photos by Mark Bruzonsky*)

□ When you were Assistant Secretary for the Near East and then Under-Secretary for Political Affairs at the State Department did you ever envisage that, within a few years, we would have either Menahem Begin as the Israeli Prime Minister or Anwar Sadat recognising Israel by a dramatic visit to Jerusalem?

○ I never assumed that the situation would develop in a way that the Likud Party would supplant the Labour Party in the leadership of Israel. But I think a more interesting response to your question is that Menahem Begin himself never expected to be Prime Minister. I spoke with him shortly afterwards and we focused, very briefly, on the matter. He had been in opposition 29 years and found himself in this very critical position at a very important time.

□ And Sadat, did you ever think he would take the steps he did?

○ I don't think any of us either predicted or thought that we would ever see the day when a major Arab leader would take the kind of initiative that Sadat took last November. However, knowing Sadat as well as I do, I think it's clear when you look at his pattern of leadership that he has normally taken the unexpected, the unusual step.

Moreover, you can see this kind of characteristic in his method of negotiation. His method is to take the broad, strategic decisions and leave the details to his Foreign Minister, in contrast, by the way, to the negotiating method of Asad.

Asad, in the 33-day talks which culminated in the Syrian-Israeli agreement, negotiated every inch of that withdrawal. And I'll tell you an interesting story. The Israelis, every time we came back with the latest Syrian position, raised questions about how Asad could behave in this way.

The implication of what was said at these lighter moments was that Asad really had no business negotiating the same way that the Israelis negotiate.

□ Amazing things have happened since you left office. Do you think that the peace process, which you were so much a part of in the last decade, is on track today? Are you generally hopeful?

○ At present there is an impasse. But the peace process is not at an end. Both Sadat and Begin have underscored the importance of maintaining contact, and I think there are some very good reasons for this. Sadat started his initiative in November, and for him to declare the death knell on that initiative would face Egypt with some very, very hard and difficult and critical decisions as to the alternative.

On the Israeli side, regardless of the fact that the negotiations on a face-to-face basis are really stalled, they have a very strong interest in assuring that the peace

process is not declared at an end. This would be saying that Sadat has been lost as a partner in the peace process. And that too has implications in the area, because as long as both sides — and I mean specifically now Egypt and Israel — maintain that, regardless of the difficulties, the process has not come to an end, the focus is still on discussion and this remains a deterrent against a possible resumption of hostilities in the area.

□ **I wonder if maybe we're not taking Sadat seriously enough now. The Egyptians are telling people, especially in private, that they feel they have very limited time, maybe only months, to make progress. And yet you're giving me the impression that the peace process is barely alive and not going anywhere at the moment.**

○ I do not believe that it is necessary at present to estimate the time limit that we have in regard to the peace process or to speculate about how much time Sadat has if there isn't much progress. I have seen these predictions time and time again. I don't want to take anything lightly, but these predictions have been historically overdrawn.

President Sadat has an obvious firm interest in his own survival. And I do not assume that, if the peace process were at an end, this would mean that Sadat's position of leadership in Egypt had come to an end.

I don't believe that there is any known, viable alternative to President Sadat's leadership. No one can predict for certain what might happen in circumstances where his vulnerability would be increased. But I was struck that his initiative in November really reflected very, very strong and deep yearnings for peace on the part of the peoples on both sides — in Israel as well as in Egypt.

I believe that people in the area are absolutely sick and tired of war and that, in this respect, the people have been ahead of the governments. I think that the kind of public reaction that we've seen to the events that surrounded the November initiative are basically a reflection of the psychological mood of the people. The broad masses of people on both sides want to find a way to achieve a just and durable peace, and I don't think this is just rhetoric.

□ **Does that include the Syrians, the PLO and the Palestinians?**

○ No. With respect to Syria, I would include the Syrian people. As for Asad himself, his posture is to wait and see on the sidelines. He, obviously, has serious doubts, and has expressed them publicly, about Sadat's initiative. But, if that initiative should lead to an agreement between Egypt and Israel, if it should bring Hussain into the negotiations, I think Asad will show that he has kept all of his options open. The last thing that President Asad

wants, in my judgement, is to be left out of the peace process if it makes progress.

As for the extremist elements within the PLO, I think, within the whole Palestinian movement there are some real divisions. Some Palestinians are prepared to proceed and negotiate, to recognise Israel, and to adapt a live-and-let-live attitude.

□ **You mean within the PLO, within the Palestinian national movement?**

○ Within the Palestinian movement itself. But there are a number of other elements, whose objectives are still the destruction of Israel, and who are deeply committed to the Covenant, and therefore are not willing to negotiate or to accommodate themselves to the continuing existence of Israel.

The critical question today is: are there Palestinian elements residing primarily in the West Bank with whom, in the first instance, Jordan and Israel could work co-operatively? I believe that Jordan and Israel, and I would add Egypt and Saudi Arabia, have a common interest that it should not be a radical solution which would jeopardise Israel. Hussain knows that that kind of leadership would be a serious threat to his own security, that those guns could just as well point eastward as westward.

The parallel interests of Jordan and Israel, which are manifested on a day-to-day basis by de facto co-operation over the years in preventing violence and terrorist attacks in the West Bank, are bulwarked by the parallel interests of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This makes it possible for the principle of withdrawal to be applicable to the West Bank subject to specific negotiations on borders and specific negotiations provisions to meet the needs of security.

□ **So, you favour a West Bank, at least in the majority, returned to Jordan?**

○ First of all, the interpretation of (Security Council Resolution) 242 given by the Begin Government is unsustainable, and, in my judgement, is contrary not only to the position of the Carter administration but contrary to the position adopted by the Labour Party over the years — Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Yigal Allon . . .

□ **But perfectly consistent with the platform Begin won on.**

○ Yes, and, moreover, in 1970 he actually resigned from the Cabinet on this particular issue. But what I'm trying to say is that the security concerns of Israel are entirely understandable. The Labour Government position was that some portion of the West Bank would be returned to Jordan and that it would be under Jordanian sovereignty.

There's no doubt in my mind that if there is to be achieved an accommodation between Jordan and Israel there is going to

have to be some Israeli withdrawal. Whatever is returned should return to Jordanian sovereignty, and Jordan and Israel should negotiate the specific agreement on the borders as well as the security arrangements.

□ **You mentioned only the West Bank — less than a third of the Palestinian people. You've read our interview in the March issue of *The Middle East* with Professor Nafez Nazzal at Birzeit University in Ramallah. The majority opinion in the West Bank seems to be that they cannot separate their identity from the broader concept of the entire Palestinian people: second, although there are some differences, the PLO remains their political representative, and third, return to Jordan is not satisfactory because it doesn't provide for any kind of self-determination.**

○ I don't take these as the final views. Take, for example, the recent elections in the West Bank. Most of the Palestinians that were elected, certainly in their public pronouncements, were at great pains not to draw any distinction between themselves and the PLO. That is the political environment one is operating in, but, I think, the issue remains unsettled.

Given the parallel interests of Jordan and Israel in assuring that the West Bank is not a threat to the security of either, Jordan, Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are not without influence in this situation.

Let's assume for the purposes of discussion that we have negotiations between Israel and Jordan and they are able to work out an agreement including a contractual peace, withdrawal and return of some territory, and an agreement on borders. Let's assume that this comes along with a specific agreement between Egypt and Israel as well. Political views are not immutable. It would produce a different environment.

I can't believe that there are no Palestinian leaders who would be disposed to co-operate in an agreement which returned territory and provided an opportunity. But, again, I emphasise that Jordan, Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are not without influence on the political evolution.

□ **You seem to differ with President Carter and his National Security Adviser, Brzezinski, about a "Palestinian homeland". That hasn't been mentioned by you at all as what's coming or what should come.**

○ My own feeling has been that the territories from which Israel withdraws in the West Bank would be linked to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. And this is a proposal that Jordan and Egypt have talked about. It is also a position which — prior to the present position enunciated by Prime Minister Begin — was spoken of by the Israeli Government. There was, before

Begin, an open-minded attitude on this in Israel itself.

Self-rule, you think — the “autonomy” that Begin has come forward with — is of no real significance?

○ The “self-rule” proposal does represent a step forward on Begin’s part, particularly when you compare it with his position during the political campaign. The question is, however — and I think the individual who has raised it in the most specific sense is the former Israeli Foreign Minister, Abba Eban — if self-rule were applied, what does this mean geographically and demographically for Israel?

If this means that thousands of Arabs would remain under Israeli rule, what does this mean in terms of the fundamental character of the Jewish state of Israel? How many Arabs — and I’m not sure I know the answer to this question — could Israel absorb and still retain its fundamental Jewish character?

It will become bi-national you mean?

○ Yes. But, even so, I don’t think the self-rule proposal will prove viable, even though, as I said at the outset, it does represent a step forward.

You seem to be saying you do not believe self-rule for the Palestinians under Israeli sovereignty is a concept that can go very far, for a number of reasons. But, self-rule — some kind of local autonomy — within the Hashemite Kingdom does raise for you the possibility of a solution.

○ A possibility. And certainly an important and significant step forward beyond the present position.

And when you speak of moderate elements in the Palestinian movement I gather you do not have in mind any major element within the PLO or Arafat’s Fateh?

○ No, I do not. I believe there are parts of the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank that have an interest in retaining leadership in the West Bank and have no interest in being supplanted by Palestinian interests from Lebanon or other parts of the world.

So the 2 million Palestinians outside the West Bank and Gaza — I assume you mean Gaza, too — would have to find some way of settling, on a permanent basis, in the countries they are now in?

○ I very much doubt that many Palestinians would move from their present locations. In Kuwait the Palestinians are doing well. In Syria it is a satisfactory situation from their point of view.

The Palestinian problem is critical in one place — Lebanon, where they were a state within a state. The Syrian intervention weakened the PLO both politically and militarily. The Syrians moved into Lebanon, in my opinion, for one principal reason — they were afraid that Palestinian guerrilla action might draw Syria into a one-front war with Israel. The same over-



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riding consideration, I think, explains Syrian restraint when Israel moved into southern Lebanon militarily.

As long as Sadat continues to say that the peace process is still alive, Syria only has the prospect of a one-front war against Israel. In other words, as long as there is some hope there is no united Arab front focusing on the possible resumption of hostilities. I do not believe that these are imminent, but I do believe that the Sadat initiative means the end of the no-war, no-peace situation in the area. Either there will be practical progress toward peace, or we will be seeing in today’s circumstances the early beginnings of the fifth blood-letting in the region.

Why does Sadat continue, time after time, to emphasise that there must be Palestinian self-determination — he often even says “Palestinian state”? And what is

it that you are proposing for the half-million Palestinian refugees scattered around Lebanon and Syria and elsewhere?

○ The problem is most difficult, as I indicated, in Lebanon itself. There is no alternative, so far as Lebanon is concerned, other than to continue to develop the capacity of the central government. Lebanon today does not have the ability to keep its own house in order. And as long as that is the case it will have a Palestinian problem.

You can say it the other way — as long as there is a Palestinian problem the Lebanese central government will never have the authority to control the country.

○ Yes, you can put it that way, but I’m more inclined to the first for this reason. Whatever force the Palestinians have within Lebanon is affected by the fact that there has been no significant practical progress toward peace. That’s the issue that the PLO seeks to exploit. The situation in Lebanon is intimately related to the question of practical progress towards peace — progress that moderate Arab governments are willing to commit themselves to. This can, in time, have an impact on the situation.

But there’s no doubt in my mind, it will be an extremely difficult period because the situation in Lebanon is such that it’s fractionalised today as a result of the civil war; the centralised authority is insufficient. Therefore I don’t assume that, even if agreements are achieved, the situation in Lebanon will not offer serious difficulties in the future.

Why does Sadat keep focusing on the need for Palestinian self-determination?

○ Well, I think that here one has to distinguish between the rhetoric and the reality. All of the Arab states, in public pronouncements, essentially take the same line on the Palestinians. But what strikes me is, if you take an event like the Lebanese civil war, it proves that each one of the Arab states is, in the first instance, pursuing its own national interest.

And I happen to believe that each of the Arab states will pursue their own perceived national interest in negotiations. For this reason, given the present political environment, there will be continuing statements made in the public domain, but I don’t take these public statements as the final position in the actual negotiations.

Now, I’m not saying there can be peace in the area by disregarding the legitimate interests of the Palestinians. There is a Palestinian movement in the area — that’s a reality. . . .

Whose legitimate interests are what?

○ That’s what the argument is all about.

But in your view?

○ In my opinion there ought to be an opportunity for choice — a negotiated set-



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tlement that returned part of the West Bank to Jordan. A negotiated settlement that gives Palestinians an opportunity to participate in the governing of such a territory, it seems to me, goes a long way towards meeting the legitimate interests of the Palestinians.

□ Does this include the possibility of the Hashemite Kingdom's becoming a democracy, in which case the Palestinians would have their state? They would by far be the majority of such a state.

○ That's something for the Jordanians to decide. I don't think they have that result by right. We're talking about a political process. Look at the number of Palestinians already in the East Bank. The question of the form of government within Jordan — whether limited to the East Bank or including some part of the West Bank is for the Jordanian people themselves to determine, and that includes the Palestinians in the East and West Banks.

□ If you squeeze the Palestinian movement into the Hashemite Kingdom aren't you setting up the conditions for a resumption of the 1970 civil war, especially if you assume the USSR will continue to play a destabilising role within that kind of semi-settlement? One day you could wake up with the PLO in control of much more than the West Bank.

○ Sure. Moreover, there is no doubt in my mind that at some point the people who reside in Jordan — including the East Bank and whatever portion of the West Bank is returned — are the ones who really have to determine their way of life and their governmental structure. But that is a political process which would not only be influenced by developments in the West Bank and the East Bank, but would also be influenced by the nature of the peace relationship and what it had evolved into as a matter of day-to-day practice. It would be influenced by the political situation in other parts of the Arab world — Saudi Arabia and so on.

This is not a static political situation. And it's not a situation that carries with it no risk. There is no solution to the problem that can give absolute security and absolute assurances as to its ultimate outcome.

□ Are you saying that a Jordanian-Palestinian entity and a Middle East framework where stability is more likely is a better risk than some sort of Palestinian self-determination on the West Bank? Are you saying this because you don't believe Palestinian self-determination in the West Bank would be a stabilising influence, although you recognise the movement's existence?

○ I would put it a little differently. The alternative to the kind of possible solution that we're talking about is continual turmoil, which in time would not only carry



... one leading Israeli has often said that the more friends the US has in the Arab world the better it is for Israel...

the risk of renewed hostilities, but also the risk of a radicalisation. This is the real threat, bringing with it danger not only to Jordan but to the kind of moderate regimes that we have today in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. There are no easy alternatives as you well know.

□ Are you saying that you don't think the PLO can be tamed by offering it half a loaf — a small state in the West Bank and Gaza? Are you saying that what the Carter administration got involved in last year was a bad idea and it's good that the US didn't enter a formal relationship with the PLO?

○ I'm more comfortable with the present Carter Administration position — the President has said explicitly that a PLO state in the West Bank and a part of Gaza would be destabilising and a threat to the security of Israel. I would add that it would also be a potential threat to the state of Jordan.

□ One final question about the Palestinian problem. In the last issue of our magazine I interviewed Muhammad Sid Ahmad — I believe you know him — and he said that in power politics the Palestinian issue was the weakest link. The Palestinian issue is just a small piece of territory, but in the mechanism of the conflict it is the heart

and looks enormous, he added. He felt that it could only be dealt with properly in the logic of the genuine, justifiable aspirations of the various parties at the origins of the conflict. How do you respond to this?

○ My response is that in the last analysis the Palestinian problem is primarily an Arab problem. Obviously it's an Israeli problem in the sense that the very heart and the security of Israel are involved. But we're dealing with a political force in the Arab world and we're seeing a tussle, essentially, between political forces in the Arab world that are ready to seek an accommodation with Israel on the basis of recognition and forces who are basically unwilling to make that accommodation.

It is also a tussle between elements of the Palestinian movement itself as to what would satisfy their legitimate interests and aspirations.

□ Muhammad would probably say that the peace you are advocating is a conservative peace, linked to the oil interests and privileged class interests — a peace which in itself would not stabilise the Arab world but would do the opposite.

○ No, I wouldn't agree. You imply that those who hold this view are in the majority as far as the Palestinian movement is concerned. The attitudes within the Arab world are not static. Not only are they influenced by what happens within the Arab world itself; they are also influenced by what happens in Israel and what happens in these negotiations.

There is a substantial force on both sides that wants a stable, peaceful relationship based on coexistence? And I would argue that this represents the preponderant thrust and force of a majority of the people in the area.

□ Some three weeks ago Crown Prince Fahd made a statement, which was little reported in America. He spoke of Saudi recognition of Israel, opening this up as a possibility. Did you interpret this statement as potentially an ideological breakthrough for the Saudis?

○ Saudi Arabia has been playing a quiet role in support of the peace process. Saudi Arabia has no interest in a radicalised Middle East because it would be a threat, and Saudi Arabia has been giving support — material and otherwise — to Egypt and Jordan. While it has never pursued an intrusive policy in the peace process, it has intervened at the critical moments, for example, in helping to bring an end to the Lebanese civil war and in giving support to the kind of initiative that Sadat has taken.

The Saudis will continue to exercise their quiet influence to this end. And a statement such as Fahd's does represent an evolution. It also reflects what I said a moment ago, that the preponderant majority in the Arab world are ready to try to

negotiate a settlement.

Does Fahd's statement, to the best of your knowledge, represent an opening to normalisation of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel as well as between Egypt and Israel?

That's very premature in my judgement.

But is it now conceivable?

I think it's now conceivable because I don't really think that normalisation is going to prove the major stumbling block in these negotiations, even though it is going to take a long while. And Saudi Arabia will tend to follow the Egyptian lead in this regard.

What would you say are the major differences between the Carter-Brzezinski approach to reaching a Middle East peace and the Ford-Kissinger-Sisco approach?

Well, first of all, the interim agreements that we achieved in the last three years of the Nixon-Ford Administration helped to create the minimum conditions in the area which kept open the option for diplomacy and made it possible for the Carter Administration to move from the piecemeal step-by-step approach to an overall settlement. This objective was broadly agreed on not only by the US, but by the Israelis and the Arab states. So conditions had changed and it was possible to begin to move diplomatically towards an overall settlement.

The major difference came with Sadat's November initiative, which has made possible for the first time face-to-face negotiations at the highest level. Therefore the Carter Administration can direct itself more than under the previous Administration — because of the changed environment — to facilitating these discussions.

This doesn't mean that the role of the US in seeking to reconcile differences has changed. I think that the new Administration had an opportunity — and took it — to try to get the parties together to the maximum in the aftermath of the November initiative. But it's obvious that there have been impasses and that the US is still the only party acceptable to both sides. Our mediation role is a reflection of continuity, not of differences.

Last year, when this Administration came into power, it not only supported a "Palestinian homeland", but the President said that "the PLO represents a substantial part of the Palestinians". And behind the scenes it was trying to get the PLO to accept 242, in return for direct dealings. The implication was that the PLO would be recognised by the US as the political representative of the Palestinians and possibly invited to Geneva. Was that the major difference compared with previous policy?

Well, there's no doubt there was a tremendous evolution in the position of the Administration on the Palestinian ques-



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tion. The Soviet-American memorandum talked in terms of the "rights of the Palestinians" whereas the previous Administration limited its public expressions to "legitimate interests". And these are code words as you well know. At no time had the previous Administration supported either the concept of a "homeland", an "entity" or a "Palestinian state". All of these pronouncements obviously go well beyond the position of the previous Administration.

But the previous Administration was approaching this problem in small steps, interim steps, piecemeal steps, and there-

fore there was absolutely no need to define positions on the substance of an overall settlement.

The peace process has been carried forward. After all, the Israelis have made a very far-reaching proposal on Sinai — they have indicated a willingness to return Sinai to Egyptian sovereignty. Granted, the settlements have proved to be an obstacle in this regard. There has been further evolution by all the parties concerned — Egypt, Israel and the US — simply because diplomacy has been directed at an overall settlement.

Do you think Carter and Brzezinski have rethought their Palestinian policy and have returned to the policy you were involved in?

There's been an obvious change. In the first months of the Administration the President talked in terms of a "homeland" and indicated that if the Palestinians were willing to accept 242 the Administration would take another look at its position.

Now the Administration is opposed to a PLO state. There has been a drawing back of Carter's position with respect to the Palestinians — a drawing back from what he expressed in the early months.

Do you consider the Joint Statement in early October to have been a mistake on the part of the Administration?

I think its timing was unfortunate. Only the US is acceptable to both sides. Neither Israel nor Egypt wants the Soviet Union to play a role. The Soviet Union is still a power in the Middle East and no peace is possible without at least Soviet acquiescence, because their presence is a reality.

On the other hand, Soviet diplomacy in the Middle East is diplomacy with one hand behind its back. It has relations with only one side. And even then the US has more influence than the Soviet Union in Cairo, Amman, Jedda and Lebanon. Moreover it has at least as much influence as the USSR in Damascus, in spite of the military assistance relationship between Syria and the Soviet Union.

President Asad is a strong Syrian nationalist. He is not going to be a tool of either the Soviet Union or the US. While the Soviet Union can help Syria with arms, there is a broad perception in the Arab world, including Syria, that it's only the US that can help achieve peace.

This was brought home to me in the clearest way during the 33 days in which Dr Kissinger and I negotiated with President Asad on the Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement.

Has the US-Israel relationship ever been as strained as it is today?

Oh yes. I have seen more difficult periods — Suez, for example, in 1957 when Golda and Dulles negotiated the Israeli withdrawal. But the seriousness of

the present situation must not be discounted.

But in 1957 our relationship with Israel was still evolving and had not reached the intimacy of recent years.

○ Well, these things are very hard to compare, but the commitment to Israel's security and survival is firm. The strain is in an environment where neither side believes that war is imminent. The strain is in the context of differences within a negotiating framework. Not that anybody can be totally relaxed in this situation, because ultimately the risk of a resumption of hostilities becomes great in the event of the failure of the peace process. But this strain in relations is based on very explicit differences about Israel's position in the negotiations. There's been no threat to cut off military assistance. Take, for example, the period of so-called "reassessment" in March 1975. There was very deep feeling at that particular juncture.

Were there threats then?

○ There were more threats at that time. I don't know of any official threats, but the environment was one of threats.

Has Begin, as a man representing Revisionist Zionism, exacerbated the tensions or would they have existed anyway?

○ I think it's enough to say there's a clear Israeli-US difference on two critical issues: the settlements and withdrawal in the West Bank. The Begin proposal of self-rule precludes withdrawal and precludes the return of any territories to Jordanian sovereignty. Since these two positions are viewed by the Carter Administration as a retrogression from positions held by previous Israeli governments, obviously one has to assess who has contributed what to the strained relations.

After being in the State Department for 25 years and knowing how difficult it is to take these decisions under the gun, one is not prone to level critical broadsides at policy-makers.

The differences the US has with Israel are honest differences. I have no hesitation in saying that I'd like to see the Israeli Government alter its positions on the settlements issue and on 242, because I think it's required in order to get on with the face-to-face negotiations.

Those of us who have lived, breathed, worried and dreamed about this area know that it has been a history of lost opportunities. And I just don't want to see this best of opportunities lost at the present time.

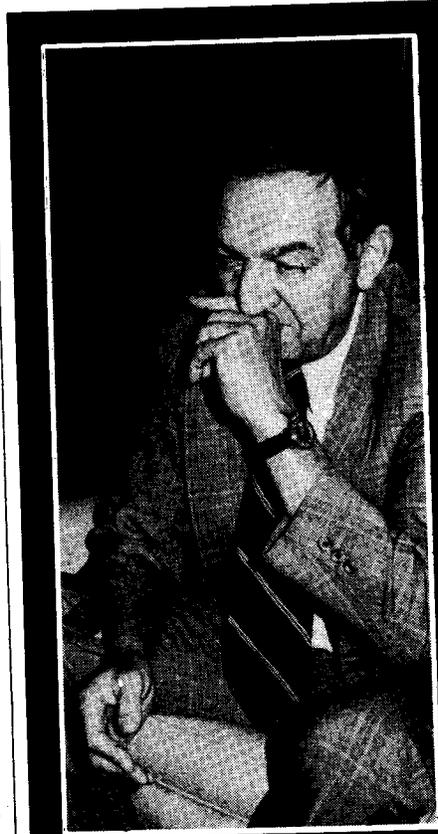
If the joint statement was a mistake, what about the idea of linking Israel's supply of arms to the supply of arms to Egypt and Saudi Arabia? Doesn't this alter the "special relationship"?

○ No, I do not think it does. These are individual commitments. It isn't possible

for the US to pick and choose which part of a relationship it wishes to pursue. The F-5s for Sadat are primarily psychological. They're obviously no match for either the Phantoms, the F-15s or the F-16s. The F-15s and F-16s for Israel are a continuation of the special relationship that exists and our continuing commitments to Israel's security and survival.

The arms commitment to Saudi Arabia is intended to meet what is a primary Saudi Arabian concern: its security in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula.

I do not believe that there is any realistic way for the US to avoid provision of some F-15s to Saudi Arabia. It is a risk. But in the overall interests of the US there is not only the commitment to Israel but also the question of the need for continuing



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friendly relations with the moderate Arab states in the area.

This is an example of where there are parallel interests in Israel and the US, but they are not totally identical. Israel understandably looks at this question of arms from the point of view of the region itself and its own immediate problem of 3 million people surrounded by Arab governments and states which are viewed as inimical. The US has to view this from a global position.

I don't find anything inconsistent in the special relationship and pursuing a policy of friendly relations with the Arab states. And I don't see how that policy can be pursued with Saudi Arabia without the US being at least modestly responsive to Saudi Arabian military needs.

There is no absolute guarantee that these planes cannot be used at some time in the future on the Israeli front. But, in my judgement, on balance, it is in the interest of the US to provide these planes. There are some appropriate safeguards against third-party transfer which can give some assurance — not absolute assurance.

Moreover, I think it's important to bear in mind that Saudi Arabia does have legitimate self-defence and security needs, and these planes are intended to help meet these needs. If we don't it will be met by others. And I think that it is prudent for us to try to meet them, as the Administration is trying to do, with minimum impact on the balance of forces in the area.

But the Israelis are incensed that should the Congress take a different view on arms to Saudi Arabia or Egypt the Administration will not supply Israel either.

○ You've got to remember that our relations with the Arab world in the past few years have evolved. Moreover, in terms of the definition of our own interest in this situation, one has to be fairly blunt about it. In the overall national interest the question of continuing friendly relations with Saudi Arabia, particularly in the aftermath of the '73 embargo, has taken on an added importance.

What I'm suggesting is, if this relationship is to be maintained, in our mutual interests — while the package might be conceivably delayed by the Congress (and I can also conceive of the Congress deciding to increase the numbers on the Israeli side and decrease them on the Saudi side) — I just don't believe it is possible for any American Administration today, given our overall interests, to avoid entirely the question of supplying military assistance to Saudi Arabia.

But if we're going to be candid as you said don't we have to admit that the Administration's primary interest in putting everything into a package is to get round the fact that the Jewish lobby might

block the Saudi sale if they were to put up simultaneously but independently.

○ Well, I suppose there is a tactical element in relation to the Congress. On the other hand, in perhaps a broader and a more fundamental sense, it is also a reflection of the state of matters in the area. We are having to look at the situation on an overall basis and are trying to pursue a policy of arms assistance which does not weaken either the commitment or the security of Israel but at the same time deepens the friendly relations that exist between ourselves and friendly Arab states.

Moreover, this has an impact on the peace process itself. Saudi Arabia has been helping to keep Egypt and Jordan on the peace process track and, though I don't want to put any Israeli leader on the spot, one leading Israeli had often said that the more friends the US has in the Arab world the better it is for Israel. I happen to believe that the special commitment to Israel and the policy of friendship with Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Jordan are complementary rather than conflicting.

□ Does this mean that the special relationship might evolve into a security treaty — something that was discussed by President Carter and Prime Minister Begin in March?

○ I think it's altogether possible. And the interesting thing is that if one talked in terms of a security relationship between Israel and the US 10 years ago the reaction in the Arab world would have been strongly, firmly, categorically negative. But there is a new realistic perception and understanding in the Arab world — and when I say the Arab world remember I'm focusing on Egypt and Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the "moderates" — that such a treaty relationship (and this has been said to me directly by a number of these leaders) would really be a reflection of what the real US-Israeli relationship has been and is.

And I don't think that there would be any significant adverse reaction in the Arab world if — as part of an overall settlement and as part of the assurances that would have to be given — the US and Israel entered a precise, more formal security arrangement.

After all, consider the kinds of commitments that the US made in connection with the interim agreements. They weren't formal treaties, but they were submitted to the Congress; they were reviewed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. And the commitment to Israel and Israel's security is bipartisan in character. I think you would find that it would not be a major problem in our Congress, because of the bipartisan commitment to Israel's security, even in this post-Vietnam environment. These concerns are directed at other parts



... there has been a drawing back of Carter's position with respect to the Palestinians — a drawing back from what he expressed in the early months...

of the world — Angola, the Horn of Africa and so on.

□ Would you say there would have to be some sort of American presence to make such a security treaty really meaningful?

○ Not necessarily. I don't preclude this as a possibility, but I think both Israel and the US would want to weigh very carefully any concrete element in such a security arrangement which would call in time of peace for an actual American presence. One of the things that would have to be

weighed is whether this would bring pressure on the other side for a Soviet presence.

□ For years you've been the primary advocate of the thesis that only a strong Israel — one militarily confident in its own military credibility and confident of its relationship with the US — could be psychologically prepared to risk the kind of settlement that we've discussed.

○ Yes, I've long held this view.

□ Some think this view is not accurate. The US has its special relationship with Israel, it continues to arm Israel at a much higher rate than ever before, yet, the result has been the hardline Likud Government.

○ We've pursued this kind of a policy over the years, and we achieved two withdrawal agreements in the Sinai and one on the Syrian-Israeli front. I'm absolutely convinced that only an Israel that feels reasonably secure would risk peace negotiations for peace. And I don't conclude that this approach has failed. There is an inherent asymmetry in the situation. You've got 3 million people in one state surrounded by a number of states with a considerably greater population. The basic idea that one hears in Israel time and time again — that Israel can only afford to make one fundamental mistake — is more than just rhetoric.

Therefore I feel that the policy which made a reality of the commitment to the security of Israel is one that has produced concessions in the past, and I think that the interim agreements are examples of this. I'm not convinced that a policy which sought to cut off arms would be effective. I think that such a policy carries the risk that Israel and the Israeli people would feel isolated, and that might lead to less rationality.

□ Do things look different to you from the perspective of President of an American University?

○ No, things don't, because I'm still very close to it in every respect. I follow developments very carefully. I am fortunate enough to be located just a few miles from Foggy Bottom and therefore I get an opportunity to see all the principal leaders from the area as they make their frequent trips to Washington.

Therefore, although I'm no longer in office I have an incurable disease and I follow developments on the Arab-Israeli dispute as closely as I did when I was in the State Department.

The one critical difference is that I have no official responsibility. The decisions are being made by others. From time to time, I look back with a little nostalgia but it doesn't last very long. When you've been actively involved in decision-making, at periods of heightened tension, you miss the action. □