

# FORUM



With the Egyptian-Israeli treaty signed and the process of implementation about to begin, Forum Editor *Mark Bruzonsky* sought the views of three distinguished scholars at the Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies: *Michael C. Hudson*, Director of the Center and author of *Arab Politics: the Search for Legitimacy*; *Halim I. Barakat*, Visiting Associate Professor in Sociology; and *John Reudy*, Associate Professor of Islamic History and Chairman, Program of Arab Studies.

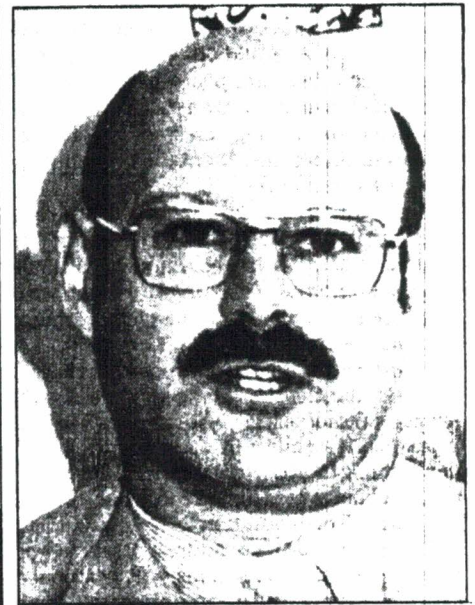
## HALIM BARAKAT



## JOHN REUDY



## MICHAEL HUDSON



## Georgetown Profs dissect "separate peace"

*Bruzonsky:* What are the overall historical ramifications of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty to the Middle East region?

*Hudson:* It's a historic document and if it remains in force – assuming there isn't a revolutionary change in government in Egypt – it will very much reshape the whole international balance of forces in the area.

For Israel it really does mean that Israel is there to stay. I wouldn't have really believed that up until now. But I think having broken off the largest Arab opponent, Israel's long-term security and its future is much brighter. If it were to last, I think it would have these major consequences, on the whole very positive for Israel. It's an economic foot in the door as well as a tremendous security boost for Israel.

I think it's much more difficult to see what this means for the rest of the Arab

world. But it certainly will further weaken the notion that there ever can be meaningful all-Arab coordination – or obviously unity – in as much as Egypt occupies that important geographical position and is pretty much out of the game now and marching to a different drummer.

What it may mean is that within the Asian part of the Arab world there will be more coordination among regimes and possibly more radicalisation. I would tend to think, contrary to what the Carter Administration is hoping and predicting, that the treaty will not tend to bring others along after they've gotten over their emotional anger. I think that everybody – no matter what his ideology – will feel increasingly threatened. The situation will be much more intense and will call for much more Arab solidarity.

So I see the possibility that there could be

another smallish and localised Arab-Israeli military conflict as a result. And that in turn depends on an assumption that "autonomy" – the whole process of doing something for the Palestinians – has been so attenuated by the treaty as it was hammered out that Israel will feel no obligation to make significant moves and Egypt will simply wash its hands of it. Egypt will make a strong stand and the Israelis will be unyielding and the Egyptians will say, "Well, we certainly did our best. If the Palestinians don't want to play ball, then..."

*Reudy:* The cornerstone of Israeli foreign policy is an effort to legitimise itself. As early as 1949 there was an effort to detach Egypt from the Arab coalition. There was a fundamental assumption that with Jordan – which was the only Arab winner in the 1948 war – it would be difficult to make peace because there were basic territorial conflicts.

But Egypt and Israel had no really outstandingly difficult problems. And if one could detach Egypt, the largest Arab state, from the Arab coalition then Israel would be secured.

It seems to me that this is a moment of enormous victory for the Israelis. Israel has achieved its fundamental foreign policy objective – apparently.

Jimmy Carter, I think, allowed himself to get pulled down this road. He started out with a very accurate perception that American interests in the Middle East could never be secured, as long as this Arab-Israeli conflict continued to fester, given the fundamental commitment of America to the preservation of Israel and the constant potential of having to come to Israel's support and thereby alienating other countries in the Middle East.

Carter, it seems to me, managed to get himself into a situation of backing and sponsoring a bilateral peace between Egypt and Israel which in many ways could be perceived as having created an Israeli-Egyptian-American entente standing against the rest of the Middle East.

If we can't somehow change the image of a tri-partite alliance against the rest of the Middle East, then we may have done ourselves enormous harm. And then we'd have been much better off just letting things go on as they were.

*Barakat:* From an Arab point-of-view, I feel that the treaty is going to have several results, but not lasting results in the sense of introducing stability in the area, because I don't think it attacked the basic problems that originally contributed to what's called the "Arab-Israeli question".

The treaty did not address itself to the Palestinian question seriously. It postponed it. It's trying now to appease some Palestinian elements and some Arab countries by projecting some possibilities for the future – that this is only the beginning, not the end of the process, that there will be further compromises. But the indications, as I see it, do not point in that direction.

The other ramification as far as Arab countries are concerned is isolation of Egypt which means several things. One is the diminution of Egypt itself in the Arab world. The importance of Egypt in the Arab world has been because it was the leader of Arab countries. Now, by isolating Egypt, Egypt itself is being undermined and its role will diminish in the area. The importance of Egypt is not in itself, but vis-a-vis the Arab countries. And if it gives up this role of being the leader of the Arab countries, I think it will diminish in power.

But on the other hand, I believe that making of Egypt another base for the West means not only that Egypt will be a police state of the area. It means, unfortunately, that Egypt is going to move from the role of being an instigator for change in the area to

a role of maintaining the status quo in the area.

This is a big loss for the Arab countries. Egypt has been seen as a power for change – a force for change. Now it will be seen, on the contrary, as a force for counter-change, not only in the Arab countries but in Africa too.

*Bruzonsky:* What caused Egypt to line itself up historically now with Israel and the US and to break away from its alignment with the Arabs?

*Barakat:* There has been an emergence in Egypt of a certain ruling class that believes they can do better economically by aligning



**HALIM BARAKAT: "The West has not been very concerned about Arab rights and self-determination... the US sees the whole problem in terms of its strategy vis-a-vis the Soviet Union... after losing Iran, maybe Egypt will make up"**

themselves with the West and with the conservative Arab governments. I don't know how much they calculated the risks with the conservative Arab governments, though, because Saudi Arabia and Jordan have many pressures on them which these Egyptian ruling classes may not have taken into account.

I don't think these classes mean it when they say there will be development and let's direct our activities toward development rather than armaments. I don't think this will happen. And the fact that they are seeking more armaments and that they want to play the role of the Shah means they will have increasing demands for arms and the strengthening of their army.

But in any case I don't think development will happen. What will happen is that some

proportion of Egyptians will benefit from the open-door policy and the link to the West; but the rest of the population will not share any fruits of development. Then there will be more polarisation – not only between Egypt and other countries but between the Egyptian ruling class and its own people. They are going to suffer more from poverty, I think, and a greater gap between these ruling classes and the masses of the Egyptian people will occur.

*Reudy:* I don't know that I'd agree totally with Halim. He seems to be saying that this is a function of certain capitalist-leaning classes or Western-oriented classes. I think there's a little more to it than that.

Egypt commands a certain authority and a certain respect in the Arab struggle with Zionism – an authority which comes from the fact that Egypt has borne a greater burden than any other of the Arab states by far. Not a greater burden, obviously, than the Palestinian people, but a greater burden than any of the Arab states. One has the feeling that the Iraqis and some of the other states would fight for Palestine to the last drop of Egyptian blood.

I think probably the critical turning point was 1973. By then, if it wasn't clear before, it was crystal clear that no power in the Arab Middle East was ever going to evict Israel from its foothold because the US was going to stand behind Israel. There was the massive rearmament of Israel (during the 1973 war) when the Egyptians were out there in the desert and it looked as if they might be able to break away into Palestine. The US then came in.

I think Sadat suddenly faced reality. Arabs could not destroy Israel. Arabs could not force Israel to do anything that the US didn't want it to do.

From then on I think Sadat just got drawn down the track, one step after another. I don't think Sadat started out to make a separate peace. He started out for a comprehensive peace and got himself finally outmanoeuvred.

*Bruzonsky:* As late as January Dr Brzezinski was saying: "The Administration is very conscious of the fact that unless there is a rapid and wider resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict then the continuation of this conflict will act as a catalyst for the more rapid radicalisation and for the wider penetration of the region by Soviet influence." What has happened to an Administration which now has made what you all seem to agree is an unstable, potentially damaging "peace"?

*Hudson:* I think Brzezinski's comment is a basically sound one. And my reading of what has happened since then is that the US Administration has learned, or has convinced itself, that it does not have the power over Israel that theoretically one might have

thought it did have.

And so there has been a continual scaling down of expectations in the face of very considerable US domestic support for a tough Israeli stand.

The US-Soviet statement of October, 1977, was quickly thrown into reverse. And of course, the Administration also found that it had brought the wrath of all the hard-line anti-Soviet and pro-Israel elements in the country on its head at the same time.

But I believe that just as Sadat thinks he's not making a separate peace, I think Brzezinski and the Administration are totally convinced that this is not the end of the process, that all they've had to do is adjust their tactical priorities a little bit to get the snowball rolling. They've been willing to cut-back successively on linkage and on what "autonomy" really means. I would guess that Brzezinski still means what he says - and he certainly should.

Another element is - in their calculations, as Halim indicated earlier - that we feel we have moderate friends in the Arab world. And just as Sadat moderately placed Egyptian interests over Arab responsibilities, I think there's a feeling in Washington that the Saudi elite and the Jordanian elite and maybe even the Syrians, in due course, can be brought into an acceptable process.

**Bruzonsky: But even if the Administration has good intentions, do they have a serious well thought-out understanding of what a comprehensive peace requires?**

**Hudson:** The farthest Carter ever went was to talk about "legitimate rights of the Palestinian people." He never really talked about a state. In fact, he said he didn't mean a state. And Brzezinski said "Bye-bye PLO."

So what I see as their ultimate vision of where the road ends is a lot sooner than where it would end for even relatively moderate Palestinians. And I don't think they're being duplicitous in following a road to that point. I think they feel that if they can do that then they're doing OK and they will pull along, reluctantly, the more conservative ruling elites in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf and even, possibly, in Syria which they regard as really crucial.

**Barakat:** I believe, historically, that the Arabs can judge that the West has not been very concerned about Arab rights and self-determination - ever since the 30's.

There's always been two trends among the Arabs. One trend led to peaceful negotiations, to moderation and to realism in attempts to solve the Palestinian problem. This argument in all instances has failed by showing that the West is not really interested in solving the Palestinian problem. Historically I think there is much evidence to indicate that the West is not

going to go as far as supporting the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Secondly, the US sees the whole problem in terms of its strategy vis-a-vis the Soviet Union in the area. It's more genuinely concerned with the Soviet Union than in solving the basic regional problems.

This treaty, the isolation of Egypt, is seen as a victory. After losing Iran, maybe Egypt will make up. The concern is not with the Palestinians as such.

Because of this treaty, Israel is going to be much tougher in dealing with the question of the West Bank and Gaza than with Sinai.



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And even that was a very frustrating situation for the US in its relations with Israel. In the future it will even be more sensitive for the US to pressure Israel because the West Bank has a different meaning to all the parties. The Israelis are going to be less compromising.

**Bruzonsky: Is this treaty, potentially, a fatal blow to Palestinian nationalism?**

**Reudy:** Potentially. I said last September that I thought tactically it would have been much wiser for the Palestinians to have at least agreed to test the Israelis - to put them on the spot then and find out what they really meant by a process of autonomy - instead of boycotting. I don't believe that the Palestinians, as any other people who've ever existed, have any God-given right to eternal existence.

**Barakat:** I don't believe so myself. This is another battle. It's a blow, but not a fatal blow. The Palestinian community is well-rooted and strong, highly developed relative to other Arab countries.

And they have popular support all over the Arab world. This increasingly is going to mean that they have to establish better alliances with the people in Lebanon and Syria, in Jordan and Iran, and even Saudi Arabia.

**Reudy:** Halim, I think there's a fundamental error here on the Palestinian side, on the Arab side, in strategy. The assumption for years has been that time is with the Arabs and against the Jews in this situation. I don't agree. I think the Arab character of Jerusalem and the West Bank is being transformed daily before our eyes. There's a progressive erosion of Palestinian society, it seems to me, as the product not necessarily of dramatic things like confiscation of land or the intrusion of Zionist settlements per se, but of individual choices of young men particularly and young women who see no future in the Israeli-dominated areas. Politically it may be interesting to try to stick it out, but not in professional terms and in terms of the one life one has to live. The Palestinian diaspora grows and grows and the Palestine in Palestine shrinks and shrinks. This is the reality.

**Hudson:** I would think that what Jack says about the Israelisation of the West Bank in terms of many things is certainly true enough, but you still have a very rapidly growing population there, a population that is increasingly politicised to a far greater extent than it ever was in the past. Even Israeli Arabs who were quiescent for a long time have now become very outspoken and are starting to support the PLO. And I think the salience of the Palestinian issue does not diminish. And I'm inclined to think it won't diminish as a result of this treaty.

This doesn't mean that the Palestinians are an inch closer to getting anything tangible. Tangible gains do seem an awful long way off. But I can't see anybody saying "bye-bye-PLO" or "bye-bye Palestinian rights or self-determination".

**Barakat:** I see the Arab world as emerging. Arab society is being transformed. It's not a declining society. And we have to see the Palestinian society as part of this Arab world.

I expect changes in Egypt and in North Africa. And what's starting to take place in the eastern Arab world, the unity between Iraq and Syria, these are responses to the Israeli challenge and also to internal challenges, contradictions, within the Arab world.

So, I see the Arab world as dynamic and the Palestinians as part of this. And that's why nothing can be a fatal blow to the Palestinians.

**Bruzonsky: Do any of you think the**

**autonomy process will go forward with any significant participation by the Palestinians resulting in any kind of Palestinian self-rule?**

*Hudson:* It's difficult to imagine any politically credible Palestinians on the West Bank standing for the elections that will be conducted.

*Reudy:* One can't ever close the door completely. But I'm very pessimistic. It's not just Menachem Begin who wants to hold on to what he sees as "Eretz Yisrael." It's the people of Israel. And if you look at public opinion polls since summer of 1967, if you look at the Allon plan, if you look at all of the colonisation that was done almost a decade before Begin came in; the determination of Israel to hold on to the territory and in fact to Israelise it progressively comes out of Israeli public opinion; it's the will of the people overwhelmingly, and I don't think that they intend to let go. Perhaps they'll agree to create what's being called a "Bantustan" of some type to solve the immediate problem, but...

*Barakat:* Even if it succeeds at all, it's going to be a very limited autonomy. And because of the radicalisation process it means the Israelis have to be a stronger and a more repressive force. They won't be able to solve their problems with the Palestinians on the West Bank. And as Michael indicated, expect more radicalisation also of the Arab Israelis, those who have lived under the Israelis since 1948.

*Bruzonsky:* **What about US-Saudi relations a year and a half from now?**

*Hudson:* The dilemma for the Saudis is that they fear the rise of a radical ruler in Egypt such as Nasser was. They remember that Nasser had designs on Saudi Arabia back in the 1960s. So it's a cruel choice they have to make.

But relations will be very stormy with the US. There are and presumably will remain internal factions in the Saudi government. The US will be very concerned what is going on in Saudi internal politics. It's very hard to predict what will happen, but it's not going to be the same old friendly relationship that prevailed.

*Bruzonsky:* **And why is King Hussain so out-front, almost to the point of provoking the US?**

*Barakat:* I think this is because of the emerging Syrian-Iraqi alliance, on one hand, and the crisis between Saudi Arabia and the US on the other. And also because of Jordan's assessment of what the Israelis will give back on the West Bank - Hussain thinks they are not going to give it back.

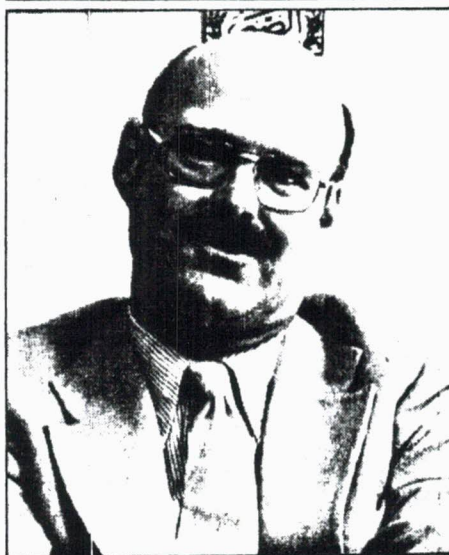
*Hudson:* I think the Jordanian rulers are more advanced in the degree of their disillusionment with the US than the Saudi rulers are. Hussain has come out strongly because he's really made a decision that the US is not able to or interested in delivering

on key issues, of which to him, in particular, Jerusalem is very important. Hussain knows there's a long struggle ahead and he might as well get his act together with his friends to the north and the east.

He wants to try to reestablish his credibility as the leader of the Palestinians. And he's trying to roll with the tide. He's trying to improve his legitimacy in this way.

*Bruzonsky:* **What kind of policy do you expect the Soviet Union to pursue in the area as the autonomy process continually disenchant everyone?**

*Reudy:* This is very hard. But it's a very important question. Obviously their policy



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is to step in and exploit wherever possible and to make every kind of effort to exploit the disillusionment where it exists with the American role.

*Bruzonsky:* **Are the Saudis serious about a possible Soviet relationship?**

*Reudy:* We're beginning to think this is so. This isn't the strangest thing that could happen. I don't believe that ideology, fundamentally, holds people apart forever. Common interest brings them together. And the absence of common interest drives them apart. I wouldn't be at all surprised to see very peculiar things happen.

*Bruzonsky:* **What do any of you think the Soviets could do? Where do they have leverage? Where do they have influence?**

*Reudy:* Well, I think it's much more

difficult to envision basic, fundamental Soviet development in Iran than it is in the Arab world. Everything is against it in Iran - the whole tradition of Iranian nationalism is against a relationship with the Soviets. They're just kind of hereditary enemies. They've got to be. And Iran has got to hold Russia off or there won't be an Iran.

On the other hand it seems to me that by this kind of chess-board effect that we see in the Middle East as well as in other parts of the world a leap-frogging by the Soviet Union down the Gulf makes sense.

*Bruzonsky:* **Is there a serious possibility of an Eastern Front against Israel backed and armed by the Soviet Union?**

*Hudson:* Well, the Eastern Front, such as it is, is now armed by the Soviet Union with the exception of Jordan. I think the Soviets will continue to draw the line before any confrontation develops between their friends versus our friend, Israel. They always have drawn this line. Their priorities, it seems to me, are pretty clear. The Soviets are pretty cautious and consistent players, and they're pretty successful players on the whole in the Middle East despite what's happened in Egypt. I don't think that they will encourage - if they have the leverage to do these delicate things - the development of an eye-ball to eye-ball situation between standing armies. I would think their strategy is one of making political gains.

The Soviets are well aware that they will lose potential advantage and influence if they overplay their hand. They must have noticed very clearly that there's a general Arab consensus, one indeed in which Egypt joins with everybody else, against South Yemen. And the reason the Syrians and Iraqis are alarmed about South Yemen is that it's just too controlled by the Soviet Union. So I think the Soviets realise that the Arabs don't like to see any of their people too controlled.

But short of that, I think there's all kinds of room to manoeuvre. One of the ironic consequences of the treaty process will be the opening up of all sorts of new vistas for the extension of Soviet influence in the Arab world - throughout.

*Bruzonsky:* **Let's go back to "autonomy" now. You were suggesting, Dr Reudy, that if the Palestinians were smart they might keep condemning the whole thing publicly but they might get in on the action privately. You said you suggested this last September. Do you still believe this?**

*Reudy:* I didn't even say privately. I said they should try the Israelis out and find out exactly what they meant. I said I personally would understand why they would not want to trust the Israelis' motives, but, fundamentally, had the Palestinians stepped in last fall and challenged the Israelis to say

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more precisely what they mean by autonomy we might not have got to this separate peace situation.

*Barakat:* The Palestinians have made several signals to be part of the negotiating process. For instance, in accepting or referring to revising UN resolution 242 to assert their national self-determination. This is a signal. I think Israel and the US have been stressing that the PLO should recognise Israel. That would have been a blow to the PLO. It would have undermined its position among the Palestinians themselves and split the Palestinians; and this is something the PLO cannot do. Furthermore, Israel has never come out and recognised that the PLO represents the Palestinians.

*Bruzonsky:* **Do any of you have any hope that the US dialogue with the PLO will be continued in the near future - restarted that is?**

*Hudson:* The problem there is that as long as the US is hooked into the Camp David-type of focus which essentially involves only Israel and Egypt, the PLO cannot show very much interest.

I'm sure the US would like to extend its hand to the PLO under the table (and it's probably doing this even now). But I think it's very hard for the PLO to shake this hand, even under the table, because the process has been narrowed and the notion of Palestinian rights has been so unmistakably

watered down that for a PLO leader to go along with this kind of conception is doing real harm to his cause and his position.

*Bruzonsky:* **But a council could get elected and then three months later send a message to the UN saying we represent the Palestinian people and our goal is to have a Palestinian state and so we demand membership in the UN. They might even get it, except for the US veto.**

*Hudson:* I'm not sure the selection of such a council can be carried out in a free way.

*Bruzonsky:* **But the whole world will be watching.**

*Hudson:* But this has to be done with the approval and veto of Israel.

*Reudy:* It's interesting though. You get those TV cameras there. The first time you get the TV cameras showing the tanks coming up to city hall and putting the elected leaders in jail . . .

*Bruzonsky:* **Edward Said, said in last month's "Forum" that the Palestinian movement could no longer avoid becoming a national movement asserting the goal of an independent state and an uneasy coexistence with Israel. You seem to be saying the Palestinian movement can't decide to do that.**

*Barakat:* Well, I don't mean they can't decide. But there is always the fear of confusing their own people. The people of the Palestinian movement see the PLO as a

liberation movement, not as a government. The PLO on the other hand has sometimes behaved like a government. They have made many signals to the US and world community. Now the PLO feels Carter betrayed them. There had been certain links and certain expectations. There are certain groups who want a Palestinian state, who want to be part of the negotiations. But not so much as to undermine the PLO's role in the Palestinian community.

*Bruzonsky:* **Would you agree though that the fact that the PLO has such limited room to manoeuvre is something the Israelis rely on?**

*Barakat:* I'm not sure how much they rely on this. I think they rely more on working on Arab governments such as Egypt and on their military.

*Hudson:* I think the Israelis and the Americans think they've got the Palestinians in a heads I win, tails you lose situation. If they accept and play the game, then whatever they might say they still acknowledge the legitimacy of the process and tacitly seem prepared to accept the end in sight - the shadow of Palestinian rights. And in the process they also muddle their own Arab support.

If they don't accept, then from the Israeli point-of-view that's fine. This could be even more important for the Egyptians who can say, "Well, they weren't very interested and so it's not our fault." □