

CARTER'S MID EAST CONFERENCE—I

By MARK A' BRUZONSKY

No Palestinian representative

WASHINGTON — Last month Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford hosted a 'consultation' on the Mid East in Atlanta, Georgia — the city Americans increasingly think of as the capital of the south.

Ambassadors, Foreign Ministers, luminaries of differing nationalities and perspectives — including the Russians — paraded their views before an awed Emory University audience that tended to give the two past presidents standing ovations and considerable deference.

Pictures of Carter at Camp David and Carter with Middle East leaders (mostly former ones) decorated the heavily guarded entrance hall. The 60 or 70 participants were wined in and out, speeches were delivered with gusto and fanfare. And no matter how many times the organisers appealed to the audience for restraint, the audience applause meter rather interestingly recorded mid-American reactions and attitudes.

With usual regularity there were serious expressions of urgency about the tinderbox situation in the Mid East, and, less frequently, of despair. Gerry Ford even pounded the table at one point warning the Israelis, who disdainfully were not there, that they would have to accommodate important American interests — this after Zbigniew made tough and pointed comments about how Israel and the U.S. were on a rocky, Brzezinski traumatic course with each other.

There were some Israelis; and they did participate in discussions with representatives from Arab countries, including Syria. But the Israeli government had the audacity to publicly refuse to send any "official representatives" with the falacious excuse that the PLO was invited.

Dr. Walid Khalidi from Harvard University and the Institute of Palestine Studies was there; and as always eloquently presented the case for Palestinian nationalism. But the PLO was nowhere to be found — though the organisation should indeed have been invited, and if not invited should have sent a representative to sit in anyway. Those who watched as spectators or journalists far out-

numbered the actual participants.

According to Jimmy Carter, Menachem Begin had made him another of his rather unreliable promises when Carter visited the region earlier this year making arrangements for this consultation. Indeed, it was termed a 'consultation' because the intent was to bring representatives from the warring parties to an intellectual event for dialogue and a search for ways toward peace.

Begin, so Carter told the audience, had agreed to send a delegation to this inaugural event launching Carter's Center for Conflict Resolution. Yet, after the rather serious matter of Begin's reneging on his promise at Camp David to freeze Israeli settlements, one would have expected Carter to be somewhat wary. Actually he was rather upset with the Israelis for detracting from his consultation. But before the audience he took it all in stride; suggesting that may be the change in government in Israel caused this little mix-up.

One is left only to surmise that Israel's Likud government had decided all along to boycott in view of the positions being taken in public by Ford and Carter — most recently in their joint Readers Digest article. And so they made whatever lame excuse they could. Their absence was nothing short of contemptuous, with two former Presidents of different parties presiding. Yet both Carter and Ford were generous to let the whole matter slide by, filling in with a few 'unofficial' Israelis (mostly with Labour party credentials) ones would have said. Ambassador Gideon Raphael, a retired senior Israeli Foreign Ministry official, often had provocative things to say, but one could not help concluding that while the Mid East is rocketing into the next century, Ambassador Raphael had somehow missed most of the contemporary changes taking place in the Arab world, especially vis-a-vis the possibilities of an honourable peace with Israel.

Moreover, the Israeli government missed not only the chance to participate in a major event with important Arab dignitaries and to learn about the real possibilities for comprehensive peace negotiations. It missed as well

an opportunity to experience and sense the schisms which continue to grow between this country and theirs, no matter how much the Reagan Administration attempts to create a pre-election era of good feelings.

The consultation organisers did make some attempt to 'balance' the proceedings away from a singular focus on the Camp David 'peace process'. The Crown Prince of Jordan and the new Saudi Ambassador to the U.S., Prince Bandar, both gave superb addresses in which they thoughtfully and articularly criticised U.S. policy and respectfully challenged the Camp David approach. The Syrian Minister of State was also given his moment — and his talk was straight forward and well-conceived, though he was greeted with obvious hostility, skepticism, and, in some cases, incredulity, for the most part.

But still — especially in view of Carter's repeated explanations of Camp David and references to those participating in the consultation who were with him for that historic deed — the conference tended to mute criticism of the Carter years and highlight what the former President continues to see as his greatest accomplishment, the Camp David Accords. So to with the Reagan Plan — it was treated with unusual general approval (what it says, that is, not what they has been done with it) and was not subjected to a rigorous historical and political dissection (as it should have been). Indeed, most American participants in the 'consultation' focused not on Israel's total rejection of the plan and subsequent unprecedented aggression aimed at undermining it; but on the Arab world's continuing refusal to negotiate with Israel.

Jimmy Carter was often at his inquisitive, charming best — (including his graceful recovery when he slipped and introduced the Lebanese representative as having been sent by President Assad). But he too often portrayed ignorance of regional subtleties and cowardice about the state of U.S.-Israel relations, such as when he refused to even utter the term 'Jewish lobby' in explaining how the Congress views the Mid East situation and why the Congress often doesn't

follow the same course as the White House. "How can we in this country do what needs to be done when a former President is still such a coward," whispered one American colleague friendly with Carter but troubled by Carter's continuing reluctance to assert in public what are known to be his real views.

What was most sadly missing in Atlanta, though, were not the strident voices of anti-Americanism unleashed by Camp David and more recently by Reagan Administration bravado and complicity with Israeli imperialism, but the more passionately thoughtful voices who now permeate intellectual and foreign policy circles in most Arab capitals, including Egypt.

What was heard from the official representatives of Jordan and Saudi Arabia were but the tempered, 'diplomatic', politely-rounded reflections of what is really going on within the Arab world. And from Egypt itself there were only the official apologists for the Sadat-Carter direction, now transformed into the Mubarak-Reagan course — most notably the Egyptian President's shrewd and wily foreign affairs adviser, Osama el-Baz, who, Cairo-rumours have it, may soon become Egypt's new Ambassador in Washington.

Though Carter continues to believe in his Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, the seminal event of his efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East, there were no representatives from Egypt at the Atlanta consultation to explain why that very same 'Camp David peace of process' has become the focus of so much scorn and derision.

For the uncomfortable truth is that for many who were not invited to present their views at this consultation the legacy of Carter's Camp David is hardly a just and lasting peace. It is instead Sadat's assassination, Israel's brutal invasion of Lebanon, Arafat's downfall coupled to fading hopes for an Israeli-Palestinian rapprochement, an escalating and potentially catastrophic Soviet-American deadlock in the region, and ever-increasing moderate Arab disenchantment with the U.S. with as yet undetermined ramifications.

CARTER'S MID EAST CONFERENCE-II

What Sadat's foreign minister would have said

By MARK A. BRUZONSKI

What is taking place within the political and social fabric of America's most important Arab ally, Egypt, is a significant illustration of the dichotomy between what was on the public agenda for discussion at the Carter Middle East consultation and what may actually be taking place in the Middle East.

Egypt's President Mubarak met with President Reagan in late September in Washington. There were the usual amicable speeches and hopeful commentaries. And yet, beneath the surface, serious, possibly cancerous political tensions continue to grow widening the division between Washington and Cairo. And much of the trouble can be traced right back to Jimmy Carter's Camp David.

It was five years ago in September that the historic Camp David Accords were heralded by Jimmy Carter. Middle East history was altered, regional political and military affairs resigned, and American policy partially determined into the current phase of our confused, costly involvement in Lebanon.

For months Egypt had manoeuvred to avoid a separate peace with Israel. 'Linkage' of Egyptian-Israeli peace to resolution of the Palestinian issue had been the crucial consideration for the Egyptians ever since Anwar Sadat first landed in Jerusalem in November of 1977.

Jimmy Carter returned to Georgia in January 1981, so we will never know if he would have made good on his 'after-reelection' promises to Anwar Sadat to get tough with the Israelis in order to bring about a comprehensive peace with self-determination for the Palestinians. At least this is what Sadat told his colleagues he had been promised in order to justify

the highly controversial agreement he entered into with Israel at Carter's pleadings.

Anwar Sadat was assassinated, partly as a result of his 'traitorous act', partly because of his excessive reliance on Washington which exacerbated his political and personal isolation within Egypt. And Menachem Begin has now been humbled, finally, by his own human weaknesses coupled to his awareness of having brought Israel to a point of spiritual and financial exhaustion. The big three who created the Camp David Accords have all passed from the scene.

But the results of their decisions linger. As a consequence of all that has taken place during the five years since Camp David, the concept of a Palestinian homeland and peaceful coexistence between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples has begun to fade from the realm of the possible. Israel's assault on the Palestinian movement in Lebanon was surely designed to derail the Reagan Plan's option of Palestinian area in association with Jordan as well as any further thought of implementing the crucial 'legitimate rights of the Palestinian people' aspects of the Camp David agreement. Israel is today bent on a clear course of annexation and Palestinian negotiation. Israel has chosen hegemony over fitting-in, power or morality, expansion over compromise.

Israel's new imperial army is currently swallowing southern Lebanon incorporating it into Israel's greater sphere-of-influence, and the West Bank is becoming Israel's Judea and Samara. The Jewish State has taken on certain Romanesque and Spartan features in a tragically misguided attempt to dictate regional political, military and economic arrangements. For the Arabs who live under Israeli rule, there is economic advancement but increasing political repression threatening the

character of Israeli democracy.

It is in this context that I sat down in Cairo a few months ago with Anwar Sadat's Foreign Minister, Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, who quietly resigned in profound protest at Camp David. Kamel, a member of the Egyptian aristocracy, a professional foreign service diplomat, and a confidant of Sadat's for 40 years, told me in simple terms that Camp David has been proven "a terrible failure."

"It was an abortion of the possibility of a real peace in this area," he added. "And we are seeing the repercussions and the after-effects in Lebanon."

Initially in favour of the Sadat initiative to visit Israel and sue for a comprehensive peace, Kamel tells the tale of an increasingly despondent and defeated Egyptian President, a President who in the end had no choice but to accept the pleas and the promises of his weak American counterpart over the advice of nearly all his senior advisers.

"Carter", Kamel told me, "felt that if he didn't reach an agreement he would have destroyed his political future. So he wanted something at any price."

"Sadat", Kamel continues, "had nobody except Carter left. He lost the Soviet Union, he lost the non-aligned, he lost the Arabs, he lost the Muslim countries. He was naked. All his hopes concentrated on Carter, because if he admitted his failure he was finished."

Having been sadly vindicated in his resignation by what has taken place since Camp David, Kamel's vision of the future takes on ominous prophecies for Middle East peace and for American interests in the region.

"Peace is defeated. . . stability in this region is defeated" - that is the legacy of Camp David according to Ibrahim Kamel.

Asked about the future of Washington's influence in Egypt and throughout the region, Kamel

warns that American and Israeli policies have put the Arab peoples and the U.S. on a collision course.

"What counts will be the reaction of the mass of the Egyptian people", Kamel warned, not what the Government says. "Look at the American attitude while the Israelis were invading Lebanon!" Kamel shouted. "I told Atherton (the American Ambassador) after I resigned that I didn't want him to be in the position of the American Ambassador in Iran!"

"You know, when you go back to history, you see that situations like this never continue", Kamel concluded after nearly three hours of conversation. "Sooner or later there will be eruptions here. You cannot tell what is underground." The Israelis at Camp David, as Kamel reads history, only "beat Sadat. They didn't beat the area!"

When President Mubarak was in Washington a few weeks ago he was repeatedly asked when he would return as Ambassador to Tel Aviv. "Public opinion in Egypt does not allow me to do so," was his candid response.

And just hours after the recent destruction of the Marine barracks in Beirut Mubarak appealed to Regan not to retaliate with American military forces for to do so would further "weaken" America's Arab allies.

These were actually two said admissions by an American-oriented regime that Egyptian public opinion is turning against both Camp David and the U.S. now that the Israelis have twisted the American-negotiated Egyptian-Israeli agreement into an undisguised separate peace. These were, in effect, admissions that those who have suggested a different direction for Egypt are increasing in influence and power. And these are realities that unfortunately were not adequately addressed at the Carter-Ford Middle East Consultation. (Concluded)