

The Sadat-Begin Meeting:

# More Than Geneva Hangs In The Balance

The prospect for a stable Middle East peace settlement, an OPEC price freeze, and vastly expanded Arab-Western trade hangs in the balance pending the outcome of the historic meeting between Egyptian President Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Begin in Jerusalem.

Sadat's repeated pledge not to abandon the common Arab position during his talks with Begin, combined with the Israeli prime minister's assurances not to seek to split the Arabs, led most observers to believe that the chief result of the Sadat-Begin exchange, in concrete terms, will be an agreement to reconvene the Geneva conference with a formula for Palestinian participation.

But, in a broader sense, the first direct Arab-Israeli talks in 30 years carries a symbolic importance that is already being felt in Israel and throughout the Arab world, ending decades of British manipulation of the Arab-Zionist conflict and four years of Henry Kissinger's step-by-step shuttle diplomacy.

The moves toward an Arab-Israeli settlement raised hopes of putting an end to the Middle East as a flashpoint for thermonuclear confrontation and brinkmanship, according to the precepts of the Schlesinger Doctrine. In addition, with the Shah of Iran's pledge to back a freeze in prices at the Dec. 21 OPEC meeting, there is a virtual certainty that Saudi Arabia will lead OPEC into a zero price increase. Finally, the ever-present threat of a Middle East crisis, wielded by London-centered financial interests, aimed at Western Europe and Japan will be removed.

Instead, the entire Middle East can become the world's primary market for high-technology exports from the industrial countries, including nuclear power plants and facilities. Already, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, and Algeria are in various stages of negotiations for nuclear plants worth billions of dollars.

### *The Romania Connection*

Both Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Israel's Menachem Begin have named Romania as the primary interlocutor for the unprecedented Arab-Israeli rapprochement. On Nov. 18, the eve of the Sadat arrival, Begin expressed his "gratitude to the Romanian authorities for its contribution" to arranging the meeting during the Aug. 27-29 visit to Romania by Begin, and then later during the Sadat trip two weeks ago. Sadat, in a Nov. 16 press conference, stated that he had "mulled over the idea" during his trip to Romania, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

The Sadat strategy in visiting Israel is to create a fait accompli for peace. The enormous momentum that has been generated by the Sadat trip and the raised hopes for breakthrough would mean a virtually certain war if there should be an abrupt breakdown of the Sadat-Begin initiative, and one U.S. analyst said that Sadat was trying to "force the issue" by going public as he did.

According to U.S. analysts, the Sadat visit will have as its primary goal the working out of a formula for Geneva, and perhaps the key point is the crucial question of the West Bank. It is suggested that Sadat will try to have the Arab League receive a mandate over the occupied West Bank after an Israeli withdrawal, to overcome Israeli objections to dealing with the PLO. Otherwise, said a Pentagon expert, Sadat and Begin will agree on a withdrawal from the Sinai peninsula by Israel, but linked to withdrawals on other fronts, and the whole package will be taken to Geneva.

It is also suggested by West German sources that the Israelis may agree to the formula proposed by Sadat last week to have an American professor of Palestinian origin represent the PLO at Geneva. Arafat, the PLO chairman, has reportedly agreed to such an arrangement.

Just as important as the procedural aspects of the Geneva approach, the Egyptians are seeking to reach out to Israeli public opinion, an Egyptian official said. The idea that an Arab leader would visit Israel, with the obvious implication of official recognition of the Israeli state, is a powerful tool to break down the Israeli paranoia and sense of isolation.

### *Arab Support for Sadat*

Contrary to the general tenor of the U.S. press, the Arab world, though highly suspicious of the Sadat initiative, is generally supportive of Sadat.

First of all, within Egypt, there is hardly the domestic crisis that the resignation of the Foreign Minister Fahmi on Nov. 17 might imply. Although the Egyptian army has been generally opposed to Sadat's policies, especially on economic and military grounds for many years, and although there is always the possibility of a coup d'etat in Egypt on these grounds, the *primary* idea behind the Sadat trip — peace with Israel — is welcomed enthusiastically by the entire Egyptian population. A West German newspaper hinted that the Fahmi resignation was a defeat for the pro-Kissinger forces in Egypt, since Fahmi was appointed immediately after the 1973 war to

deal with Kissinger. A Sadat appearance today rallied his chief Cabinet officers behind him to back the Israeli trip.

The primary motivation behind the Arab side of the trip came, it is believed, from Saudi Arabia, whose interest in the Middle East is stability. The Saudis, who are known to support the Sadat trip to Israel, also worked behind the scenes at the Nov. 12-13 Arab League meetings of foreign ministers to ensure that the Arabs did not take any action that could upset the Sadat trip.

On Nov. 17, Sadat paid a one-day visit to Syria to consult with Syrian President Hafez Assad. The outcome of the meeting was an open disagreement between Assad and Sadat, the former fearing that Sadat might, under pressure, abandon the Arab cause and strike a separate

deal with Israel that would leave Syria isolated and vulnerable. But although the disagreement between Syria and Egypt did become public, there was no sign that Syria was prepared to launch a mobilization to sabotage the Sadat trip. In fact, one day before the Sadat visit to Syria, Assad ordered the Iraq-Syria border closed to forestall any violence or opposition to Syria's weak denunciation of Sadat. All informed observers in the U.S. agreed that Syria was not in fact strongly opposed to Sadat's move.

From the PLO, despite anti-Sadat statements from Fatah and Saiqa, the two largest guerrilla groups, it is widely known that PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat is quietly supporting Sadat.

—Bob Dreyfuss

**EXCLUSIVE**

## Sadat Visit Reveals Geneva Policy Split

*Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's planned visit to Israel has pulled the lid off an intense factional split between those who favor a "Kissingerian" separate peace between Egypt and Israel and those who advocate an overall Mideast settlement. Reprinted here are excerpts of conversations with leading Mideast policymakers and press accounts reflecting both points of view.*

### Best Bet Is Separate Peace

*Joseph Churba, former head of Airforce Mideast Intelligence:*

**Q:** Would you comment on Sadat's upcoming trip to Israel?

**A:** Let me explain how the goddamn thing works. In September, Sadat offered Vance a separate peace deal with Israel. So what happened next? The State Department exhumes the PLO — a move which outflanked Sadat. Now, at State, it's the same shit. A comprehensive settlement! The people who are fucking it up are god-damned State people. State will kill any Egypt-Israel separate deal! They will insist on exhuming the PLO — at a time when Sadat is open to dealing with the Israelis on a different basis.

*A National Security Advisor during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations:*

**Q:** What is your opinion of the upcoming Sadat-Begin meeting?

**A:** Everything going on now is delightful, entertaining. He's telling the PLO to go to hell; he's saying that Egypt is the biggest Mideast state and if it wants to, it can make a deal. He's saying that it's not up to the Saudis or anybody else to legitimize the PLO. The Egyptians were appalled by our legitimizing the PLO; the Jordanians were appalled by the U.S.-Soviet joint statement. After all, the Jordanians had just agreed to all Saudi money to the Palestinians would come through Jordan, and so they were horrified by the statement. Sadat will now go to

Israel and say he wants Geneva, but he'll threaten to have a separate deal. It's easy to do that. He can get the deal we offered him in 1968: the whole Sinai will be demilitarized according to a timetable, and Israel will release Sharm el-Sheikh. That is the place where Israel's General Gur is warning about new maneuvers and violations of the second disengagement. Sadat's deal would then be a clear way for Hussein to do the same. He's always wanted to sign a separate deal. This would then isolate Assad who could do absolutely nothing about it.

*Washington Post, editorial, Nov. 16: "Washington's Mideast Response":*

Now, however, a way (Sadat's overture to Israel — ed.) to resume the easier step-by-step approach is in sight. Egypt has stepped outside the American-directed Geneva process and made its own bid to Israel. Obviously, Mr. Sadat will present all the Arabs' aims. No less obviously, he will emphasize Egypt's particular aims. Being primarily territorial, these are substantially easier for Israel to meet. So prospects of a separate Israeli-Egyptian peace, presented no doubt as a way station to a larger settlement, are greatly enhanced.

*New York Times, op-editorial, Nov. 1, by William Safire:*

The reason Mr. Sadat broke away from the Carter approach will be vigorously denied by our red-faced State Department: The Carter Middle East plan, with its "comprehensive demands keyed to a quick Geneva showdown, was as bad for moderate Arabs as it was for Israel. . . .

Beneath the hard-line words will be the contrary basic interests. Egypt's national interest is to get back the Sinai, get on an even economic keel, and get away from using its soldiers as cannon fodder in wars started by Arab radicals with Soviet arms. . . .

What should the U.S. do? Restrain Zbigniew Butinskiy. . . . Israel and Egypt were wise not to panic in the face of the Carter rush to Geneva. When it comes to accepting