

## Geneva By Christmas?

"The purpose of the visit was to make real preparations for a Geneva conference and this has been completed," an Egyptian official told a semi-official Middle East News Agency this week, concerning the historic visit to Israel by Egypt's Anwar Sadat. Replied an Israeli official, "Israel is determined to reconvene the Geneva conference by Christmas."

That exchange, typical of the warm exchanges between the two warring countries this week, reflects the general optimism about breakthrough toward a peace in the Middle East. Such a breakthrough, which still hinges on an Israeli willingness to recognize the necessity for a Palestinian state on the West Bank, has already begun to conjure visions of a vast development surge throughout the Middle East. West Germany and France, in particular, have given indications of their willingness to underwrite a Middle East peace by oil-for-technology deals with the Arab countries, including nuclear power plants.

Pending a concrete statement by either Egypt or Israel of reported behind-the-scenes concessions by the Israelis on the core question of Palestinian rights — a statement that may come in Sadat's Nov. 26 speech to the Egyptian people — the key outcome of the Sadat-Begin talks is the shattering of 30 years of absence of direct Arab-Israeli talks. The shuttle diplomacy of Henry Kissinger was soundly repudiated for what it was: a cynical and manipulative game of control. Sadat's trip to Israel, the right-wing Egyptian daily *Al Akhbar* stated, has managed to "free the Arab cause of middlemen and powers that put their own interests above those of the Arabs."

What happened in effect during the stunning Egypt-Israel meeting was that two national leaders each acted in the national interest of his own country. "It was a 'breakout' policy by both sides," said a top Pentagon analyst, who said that the two leaders — whose meeting was arranged by Romania's President Ceausescu to the surprise of both Washington and Moscow — has simply decided to move together toward peace. "Sadat decided to become his own Kissinger," he said.

### *The PLO Question*

In the wake of the Sadat-Begin talks, tremendous pressure has developed on Israel to show some conciliation on the crucial question on the Palestine Liberation Organization and on the rights of the Palestinians to a homeland. The *Baltimore Sun* reported that even within Israel's own population, the often reiterated refusal to recognize the Palestinians has come under attack. And despite the lack of visible signs, there were widespread reports that, in fact, Begin had agreed during his secret talks with Sadat to move Israel in that direction.

"We are not worried," an Egyptian official was quoted as saying in regard to Arab criticism of the Sadat initiative. "There will be an important, highly significant development shortly, we were given to understand in Jerusalem."

According to French radio, Begin agreed to accept a formula to have "low-level PLO members" represent the Palestinians at Geneva, in a delegation headed by an American professor of Palestinian origin. Two weeks ago, Sadat made that suggestion and reportedly received PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's approval. The report also mentioned Dec. 25 as the date for reconvening the Geneva conference.

An intensive policy review is underway in Israel — in secret — to discuss Israel's response to the Sadat visit. By throwing himself open to the criticism of other Arab leaders, Sadat risked "his regime and his life," said one analyst, and it is widely assumed that Prime Minister Begin must have given Sadat some prior assurance about a compromise — provided that the Dayan action is defeated within Begin's cabinet. Said an Egyptian official, "The results are not far off, and will be as dramatic as this visit." Commented a Washington diplomat: "I hope for Sadat's sake it's true."

### *Assad, Arafat Silent*

Both Arafat and Syrian President Hafez Assad have so far remained relatively silent on the Sadat trip, although Syrian and Palestinian officials are loudly attacking the Egyptian as a "traitor" to the Arab cause. The rhetorical crescendo came in a speech to the United Nations last week by the Syrian ambassador, who accused Sadat of "shaking hands with Zionist butchers" and "kissing the cheek of the racist Golda Meir." The speech provoked an Egyptian walkout.

But in informed circles, it is known that neither Assad nor Arafat wish to cut their ties with Egypt, and are merely playing it cautiously to prevent an Egyptian sellout. Sudan, Morocco, Oman, and most important Jordan, have already endorsed the Sadat trip, and Saudi Arabia is known to back Sadat as well, along with the Gulf states and North Yemen. The Saudi chargé d'affaires in Cairo told the press, concerning the Sadat visit to Israel, "I personally am satisfied." But officially, so far, the Saudis have maintained silence in order to mediate between the Egyptians and Syria.

Arab "radicals," led by Libya and Algeria, are organizing for an Arab countermove to oppose Sadat's policies. Libyan Prime Minister Jalloud and Algerian President Boumediene visited Syria and Iraq to organize for an intended "Arab summit" of the Rejection Front. But even before it began, Iraq rejected the Rejection Front, citing Sadat and Assad as "criminals" and "capitulationists." Libya broke diplomatic relations

with Egypt. But most observers agreed with Israel's Abba Eban, who described Arab opposition to Sadat as "cries of impotence and despair."

By the end of last week, pending the Nov. 26 Sadat address to Egypt, there were mounting signs that the USSR, Syria, and the PLO were moderating their initial opposition to Sadat's trip. The *Washington Post* reported that official Syrian media had shifted from calling Sadat a "traitor" to a "dupe," while the PLO's Khalid Fahoum, chairman of the Palestine National Council, welcomed the Sadat speech to the Israel Knesset for its hardline

defense of the Arab position and Palestinian rights.

The Soviet Union itself, under the influence of the Arbatov "Fabian" faction, has largely refrained from supporting the Sadat initiative, but has not yet issued a strong official condemnation of Sadat, preferring to quote Syrian and other Arab attacks on Egypt in *Pravda*. But the Hungarian Communist party daily late last week gave cautious approval to Sadat's voyage, joining the enthusiastic Romanians — and portending, perhaps, a Soviet shift.

— Bob Dreyfuss

## Sadat-Begin Talks Lay Foundation For Mideast Economic Development

In the aftermath of the historic meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in Jerusalem, the world is viewing the Middle East as an emergency center for Arab-Israeli economic development projects involving extensive Western European and U.S. financial and technological input.

In their speeches before the Israeli Knesset Nov. 20, both Begin and Sadat explicitly addressed the need for cooperation between the Arab world and Israel to develop the region. Begin endorsed the recent call of Morocco's King Hassan II for combining Arab and Jewish genius to "turn this area into a paradise on earth." Sadat stressed the urgent need for the construction of "a huge edifice of peace ... that serves as a beacon for generations to come with the human message for construction, development, and the dignity of man."

In the Nov. 24 *New York Times*, financial writer Leonard Silk commented on the possibilities for joint economic cooperation in the region. While Israel is a country oriented toward high technology, Egypt is primarily agricultural, Silk observed. Both countries are reeling under the burden of devoting more than one-fourth of their respective national budgets to defense, problems that "a deep and lasting peace in the Middle East" would do much to ease. "If the politics of peace can lead the way," wrote Silk, "the economics of development seems bound to follow."

### *French Push Nuclear Development*

Leading Western European countries are making it clear that they are more than merely "interested" in involving themselves in the newly-created prospects for

"Why don't we stand together with the same courage and daring to erect a huge edifice of peace? An edifice that builds and does not destroy. An edifice that serves as a beacon for generations to come with the human message for construction, development, and the dignity of man."

—Anwar Sadat, Nov. 20, 1977, before the Israeli Knesset

Mideast economic growth. Last week, the Egyptian daily *Al Ahram* reported that French and Egyptian officials are discussing the possibility of building a string of nuclear power plants along the Mediterranean and Red Seas to deal with Egypt's power needs until the year 2000. At the same time, the French daily *Les Echos* wrote of the "high hopes" for a "powerful economic takeoff in the Middle East," while leading French strategist Gen.

"We are proposing economic cooperation for the development of our countries. There are wonderful countries in the Middle East. The Lord created it thus: oases in the desert, but there are deserts as well and we can make them flourish. Let us cooperate in this field. Let us develop our countries. Let us eliminate poverty, hunger, and the lack of shelter. Let us raise our peoples to the level of developed countries ... And with all due respect, I am willing to confirm the words of his majesty the King of Morocco, who said—in public, too—that if peace arises in the Middle East, the combination of Arab genius and Jewish genius together can turn this area into a paradise on earth."

—Menachem Begin, Nov. 20, 1977, before the Israeli Knesset

Georges Buis discussed in depth the possibilities for "economic unity" that the peace drive has opened up.

On Dec. 21, West German Prime Minister Helmut Schmidt, who fully backs France's energy development initiatives, arrives in Egypt. The West German government is known to favor a debt moratorium for Egypt's debt-strapped economy as well as investment to develop Egyptian industry.

The Nov. 22 West German financial daily *Handelsblatt*, in reporting on the Begin-Sadat meeting, revealed that Israeli Finance Minister Simcha Ehrlich has prepared a memorandum on the prospects of future Egyptian-Israeli economic cooperation involving agricultural coordination, free trade between both countries, and the construction of nuclear power plants. Talks are currently