

most optimistic hypothesis.

Egyptian President Sadat had this to say on the role of France at his Dec. 10 press conference transmitted by the French radio station Europe 1:

France has played a pioneer role in Western Europe; she was the first country to have understood that our cause is just and she has developed a very objective attitude. You know perhaps that I have close, friendly relations with President Giscard d'Estaing... What I demand is that France not remain aloof from the solution to the problem of the Middle East and assume its role as guarantor in the final peace solution that we understand now. I am very happy to know that my dear friend President Giscard d'Estaing is ready for that.

The Economist, "Bilateral Track" (editorial), Dec. 10:

(Sadat's diplomatic break with Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Libya and South Yemen) raises anew the question of whether Egypt's president is trying, as he says he is, for a comprehensive peace settlement or for the far easier target of a bilateral Israeli-Egyptian peace...

The temptation for Egypt to think of itself first and last is all too plain and all too understandable: an Egyptian-Israeli deal looks possible; a comprehensive one does not.

Long before Mr. Sadat dazzled Israel with his friendliness, Israelis had accepted that they could not indefinitely hold on to Sinai. They may nigger about Sharm el Sheikh and haggle about oil, but the elements of a deal are there. This is not true of a deal with Syria or Jordan, let alone with the Palestine Liberation Organization which has now knotted itself into the absurd tangle of announcing that it will accept the West Bank-Gaza state but will not, in the process, negotiate with, or recognize, Israel. Envoys from the West Bank are in Damascus questioning the PLO on this contradiction.

Short of another miracle, it is impractical to speak of an early Arab-Israeli peace; on the other hand, it has now suddenly become possible to speak of an early Egyptian-Israeli peace.

How can the Egyptians be held back from a peace which they desperately need and which they have earned with their blood? It is hardly for a British newspaper to look an Egyptian in the eye and speak of justice for the Palestinians. But without a solution that offers, at least, a measure of what Palestinians reckon to be justice, the poison of the 30-year conflict will go bubbling on - and could boil over in unpredictable ways and places, including Cairo. No Egyptian-Israeli goodwill can neutralize that.

President Sadat's great moral courage in going to Jerusalem is being dissipated by his own, and by others', impatience. It can be argued that Egypt's longer-term interest lies in waiting for the others to catch up before it signs, seals or delivers a final peace treaty.

But, if Egypt is to wait, the others, including the Palestinians, must hurry. At present they are stalking off in the opposite direction. Saudi Arabia is trying to turn them round again. Mr. Begin in London politely told outsiders that they should keep out and shut up. On the contrary: anybody with any influence on any of the governments or organizations concerned should use it to

try to gather them together again and to salvage the fading hope of a general move towards an Arab-Israeli peace.

France, Europe Offer Helping Hand For Mideast Peace

On Dec. 14 French President Giscard d'Estaing went on national television to present France's foreign policy, particularly in regard to the Middle East. Excerpts of those remarks follow:

The interest of all Middle East countries is peace. That is my conviction. French policy, contrary to what has been written, is not dictated by consideration of interests, even less by oil interests. (This is so—ed.) for a very simple reason, which is that we buy our oil at the international price, and if there were a crisis and an embargo, no country could protect itself alone. We saw that very well during the events of the fall of 1973. In reality, the international and European oil market is one and the same: thus, the idea that we would seek advantages either in price or supplies through our Middle East policy is totally unfounded. I think that peace is the objective. And in order for that peace to exist, it can only be a global peace, or there will be no peace in the Middle East. There will be a more or less limited disengagement in part of the Middle East. This is what Mr. Sadat says.

A global peace must be acceptable to all the parties concerned; that is on the one hand, by all the Arab countries concerned and, on the other hand, by Israel. To be acceptable overall, it must be a just peace. That is, a peace under which everyone finds an answer to their fundamental preoccupations. We have never deviated from that line. Thus it is striking to see that, when President Sadat goes much further in those theses than we do, he is applauded... This is a problem which involves certain rights:

There is the right of the Arab countries to recover the occupied territories. Why? Because the 1967 war was not a war of territorial annexation, it was a defensive war. Therefore, there are no moral or juridical elements which justify depriving the Arab countries of the recovery of their territories. The second element is the right for the Palestinians to exist and to exist under the modern form of existence, which means that the population must be organized, represented, and granted a certain number of administrative means for participation in the life of our times. The third important element is the right of the Israeli people to live in security.

In President Sadat's visit there is, in my opinion, a partial answer to this last question because...he has shown that a state of relations is conceivable which would not simply be relations of precautions between hostile countries, but a certain relation of cohabitation....

(In response to a journalist's question—ed.) You say that we were shy at the time of President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. We weren't shy; we simply did not express ourselves against it...In the debate, France can express an opinion on the questions under consideration, but she

has no practical or direct element to bring to bear either on the question of the occupied territories or that of Palestinian rights and a homeland.

On the other hand, there is a problem which has been raised recently and which will be key: the problem of security in the region. Up until now, the security question has been posed in terms of military precautions: occupation of the land, availability of armaments of all sorts. If we enter into a peace situation, there will be a network of regional or international guarantees which could be substituted for this set of precautions. I am convinced that the final phase of the discussion will bear

on these guarantees, and I think that France and Europe, as industrial powers, will have or can have, an important contribution to bring to this definition and perhaps to the implementation of the guarantees. This problem of guarantees is a problem that I would like to discuss personally with Mr. Begin.

A global solution is a solution that is acceptable to the parties concerned; that is, by the countries of the Middle East. It is to be hoped that this solution will be deemed good by other interested parties; that is, by the United States, the Soviet Union, and Europe.

Assad Bows To Pressure, Maintains Opposition To Egypt-Israel Talks

Despite signs that Syria's President Assad would prefer to become directly involved in the regional peace talks in Cairo, intense internal pressures in Syria are keeping Assad in hard-line opposition to the Cairo talks.

When U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance arrived in Damascus Dec. 13, he received a cool reception, and was greeted with several press denunciations of U.S. diplomacy. Assad reportedly postponed the meeting for several hours in order to first discuss the Mideast situation with a Soviet envoy, thereby showing his displeasure with the Cairo talks.

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Prior to Vance's trip, Assad and Foreign Minister Abdul-halib Khaddam traveled throughout the Arabian Gulf, trying to mobilize the oil-producing states against any possible deal between Egypt and Israel emerging from the talks. Expressing his most profound fear of such a deal, Assad warned that Syria would be the target of "Israeli aggression" after the talks in Cairo proceeded. Khaddam was even more blunt, affirming that Syria would go to "neither Cairo nor Geneva" to discuss peace, because such a move would only confirm the reality of Egyptian President Sadat's "capitulatory" trip to Jerusalem and ensuing regional diplomacy moves.

Several informed observers affirm, nonetheless, that Assad is in reality angling for a particular type of deal with Israel, and is therefore only tactically maneuvering to avoid the appearances of "capitulation" to Israel. These sources claim that Assad is most intent on securing an ultimate package that would include substantial control over a Lebanon which would be restored as a regional world banking center; full control over the agriculturally rich Bekaa Valley region of eastern Lebanon; and a voice in the final arrangements for the West Bank.

According to the Dec. 14 *Christian Science Monitor*, Assad and about 50 other top-level Syrian military men would prefer to follow Sadat's route to peace, but are numerically overwhelmed by the vast number of military men who belong to the Syrian Baath Party and who have been nurtured in its virtually religious view that Israel is the enemy of the Arab world. One informed Washington source reported that Assad is very wary of the actual and potential hegemony of Iraqi networks within the armed forces, and is therefore forced into an intransigent attitude on regional negotiations.

A Washington source favoring Israel went one step further, asserting that Assad has "lost control of the internal situation," as evidenced by the recent assassination wave against leading government officials belonging to his own Alawite community. The source predicted increasing instability throughout Syria, echoing the Dec. 5 prediction of Sadat, in an interview in the *London Financial Times*, that Syria and Lebanon would both experience "bloodshed" in the next days and weeks.

Lending credence to such predictions has been the recent sudden flareup of instability in Lebanon. Two border incidents involving Israel occurred in the south this week, precipitating Israeli military retaliation, and extremists in the Christian sector of Beirut this week began a protest strike. Ostensibly the strike was against press censorship, but in actuality it was against Syria's "refusal" to crack down on the Palestinians in Lebanon — a preview of future tension between the extremists and the Palestinians in the country.

Syrian Press on U.S. Diplomacy in Cairo

The following editorial excerpts from the Syrian official press indicate the intensity of opposition prevailing in ruling circles to the Cairo talks and to linked U.S. diplomatic moves.

Tishrin, "Syria Will Not Kneel," Dec. 12: