

# Separate Peace In Mideast Still Strongly Pushed

The British and their allies in this country and in the Mideast are still organizing strongly for a separate Egypt-Israel peace—a “settlement” that would only guarantee a rapid deterioration of diplomatic relations in the area and, ultimately, confrontation between the U.S. and the USSR.

The British efforts are converging on two major points: breaking Egypt's relationship with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO); and convincing Jordan's King Hussein to underwrite in some way a separate deal.

There is still a lot of spurious “news” being circulated in the West and the Mideast that the PLO was in some way involved in the Larnaca Airport affair in which 15 Egyptian commandos died in a firefight with Cypriot National Guardsmen. Larnaca has given the “separate peace faction” within Egypt the ammunition to push President Sadat and the Egyptian population into an abrogation of Palestinian rights. This British faction, which dates back to the days of King Farouk, is led by Egyptian Prime Minister Mamdouh Salem and his cohorts in the rightwing newspaper *Al Akhbar*.

*Al Akhbar* editor Moussa Sabry this week intensified this campaign by announcing in a frontpage editorial to the PLO's leader: “Arafat, You Are Done For!” while labelling him a “rejectionist” and an “agent of international communism.” Simultaneously, Egyptian Prime Minister Mamdouh Salem announced that Palestinians living in Egypt would no longer enjoy special privileges—an indication that a massive harrassment and discrimination campaign would be launched against Egypt's Palestinian population.

This softening-up of Egypt was timed to coincide with British Foreign Secretary David Owen's arrival in the Mideast to coordinate, along with his Israeli counterpart Moshe Dayan, the introduction of Jordan's King Hussein into the Egypt-Israel talks. According to the Dayan-Owen strategy, Jordan's arrival would provide a sufficient cover for the representation of the Palestinians allow Egypt to drop its commitment to a Palestinian state. To drive the point home, Dayan announced in the French daily *Le Matin* that “if President Sadat wants an accord, that can only be a separate accord between Israel and Egypt” and underscored that “Sadat is not at all authorized to speak in the name of the Palestinians” — as the Cyprus affair and the anti-Palestinian riots in

Cairo demonstrated. On *BBC*, Dayan declared flatly that “if there is no separate peace, there is no peace.”

Owen's shuttle in itself was a flop. First, he failed miserably to convince King Hussein to join the negotiations. Hussein reportedly told him that unless Israel agreed to withdraw from the occupied territories and to an eventual Palestinian state, he could not negotiate. But, it was in Israel where Owen's presence brought into relief the Dayan-Begin factional split. Press reports indicate that Owen found Begin “stubborn” and uncooperative while Dayan praised “Britain's revived interest in the Middle East.” According to the *Baltimore Sun*, Owen proposed a “new interim solution to put the Mideast on ice for five years,” an allusion to the Dayan formulation of a “new initiative” to break open the “deadlock”—i.e., a return to the worn-out Kissingerian step-by-step formula. According to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Begin apparently dismissed Owen's gibberish as “childish.” Owen later complained that “Begin treated me like a little boy and preached to me the whole time.”

If the Owen shuttle proved to be a total failure, the Atherton shuttle, still cloaked in secrecy, is faring none the better. So far, U.S. special envoy Alfred Atherton has not succeeded in bringing King Hussein into the talks, and his arrival in Jordan on March 4 is likely to be fruitless. Atherton has also been unsuccessful in convincing either Israel or Egypt to resume the talks; each country refuses to accept the other's draft statement of principles. The danger in the Atherton shuttle is that he is also pushing a Jordanian cover for the Palestinian issue, which would be designed to release Egypt from its global commitments. An indication that Atherton's mission is amounting to no good is the fact that Syria refused to receive him.

Despite the massive push last week to sever Egyptian-PLO ties, the relations between the two remain stable. PLO head Arafat recently appointed a new envoy to Cairo and the French daily *Le Figaro* reports that the Palestinian newspaper *Falastin al Thawra* editorialized that the PLO intends to maintain good ties with the Egyptians. As the report from the U.S. State Department below indicates, the deterioration in Egyptian-PLO relations has been widely exaggerated in recent days and that certain forces intend to block any moves to break these historic ties.

State Department:  
"U.S. Press Overplays Egypt-PLO Split"

The following is an interview with the Palestinian desk officer from the U.S. State Department:

Q: What is the state of PLO-Egyptian relations?

A: While the Egyptian-PLO relationship is in bad straits the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have overplayed this quite a bit. It is wrong to interpret the situation as being one step away from an Egypt-PLO break. Sadat is acting more out of personal pique. Both parties, the PLO and Egypt, need each other; so, Sadat won't go the separate peace route. The Saudis tend to

stay aloof from these affairs but if they picked up signals that Sadat was getting ready to renounce the Rabat decision, they would move into the situation to stop it. There's no sign at this point that he is ready to renounce Rabat, Sadat can't afford this since he needs the legitimacy of the PLO for what he is doing in negotiations. He needs them available for some point in the future. All the Arab states see the PLO as the legitimate Palestinian representative—theoretically, for example, a Rabat renunciation would bring King Hussein into the talks, but it won't work since the King won't bite. It's too transparent. Sadat, in short, has got to have the PLO card to play.

## British Set Up Syria, Lebanon For Destabilization

The paralysis in the Egypt-Israel peace talks and all the current organizing for a suicidal separate deal between the two countries have added new importance to the volatile Lebanese situation. As occurred in 1975-1976 in the wake of Henry Kissinger's Sinai Pact, Lebanon is threatening to become the flashpoint for conflict touched off by rightist anti-Palestinian militias tied to Israel, British intelligence, and the British-connected wing of Iranian intelligence. This conflict, centered both in the southern Lebanese "no-man's land" — where renewed fighting broke out this week — and in Beirut, where ultrarightist militias and their supporters have initiated shoot-outs with Syrian army peacekeeping forces, threatens to directly involve Israel and Syria in a showdown which could trigger a dangerous destabilization in Syria.

British responsibility for unrest along Israel's northern front is emerging clearly. Early last month, intensive Syrian and Lebanese government efforts were successful in cooling down the Beirut tensions; this week leading Lebanese politicians and the Lebanese media attributed continuing dangers of unrest to British and Israeli intervention.

Reporting that the leaders of the right-wing National Liberal Party (NLP) had denied and "expressed astonishment over" media reports that the NLP had harshly criticized the Syrian role in Lebanon, the *Beirut Domestic Service* noted Feb. 17:

The report, which has been denied, had been carried by *Reuters* and *Agence France Presse*. It was soon picked up this morning by the British radio, the Israeli radio, and the Monte Carlo radio, thus intensifying the war of biased rumors which some foreign information quarters have apparently decided to launch against Lebanon. Yesterday we warned the citizens against such rumors.

On the next day, *Syrian Arab News Agency* reported that Lebanon's ex-President Franjeh, during a trip to Damascus to meet the Syrian leadership, "denounced the rumors and propaganda campaigns whose sources

and suspect objectives are known." Calling upon the Lebanese population to support the peacekeeping efforts of the Syrian and Lebanese governments, Franjeh then advised the Lebanese government to "be vigilant and to act firmly in controlling false news and sources which propagate false rumors, and to block the subversion carried out by certain foreign correspondents, particularly Monte Carlo radio, London radio, and the radio of Israel."

The Syrians have every reason themselves to be wary of the British. In a Feb. 18 London *Guardian* piece entitled "New Beirut Clashes Keep Foreign Money Away," correspondent John Palmer had the following analysis of the Syrian internal situation:

The countryside outside Beirut on the dramatic mountain route to Damascus looks both prosperous and peaceful, but a potentially lethal mosaic of Christian, Moslem, Druze, and Armenian villagers all like cheek by jowl in this region. It would not take much for the fighting to spread here in a particularly savage form, if there were partitioning of the Lebanese communities . . . Syria, like Lebanon, consists of a bewildering array of nationalities and religions. As well as Sunni and Shiite Muslims there is an important third sect, the Alawites, who are heavily represented in the military element of the Assad government. There are at least six Christian groups as well as Druze and Kurds. In Damascus there is a small, but by all signs thriving community of Jews in whose quarter the Hebrew language can be heard in shops and cafes. Syria has a tradition of concessional tolerance, though this would be put under immense strain if the Assad regime fails to prevent the breakup of the Lebanon.

The British, of course, realize that a strong central government in Syria, a country that has been one of the most coup-prone in the post-World War II era, would go a long way toward neutralizing any such scenario. Hence