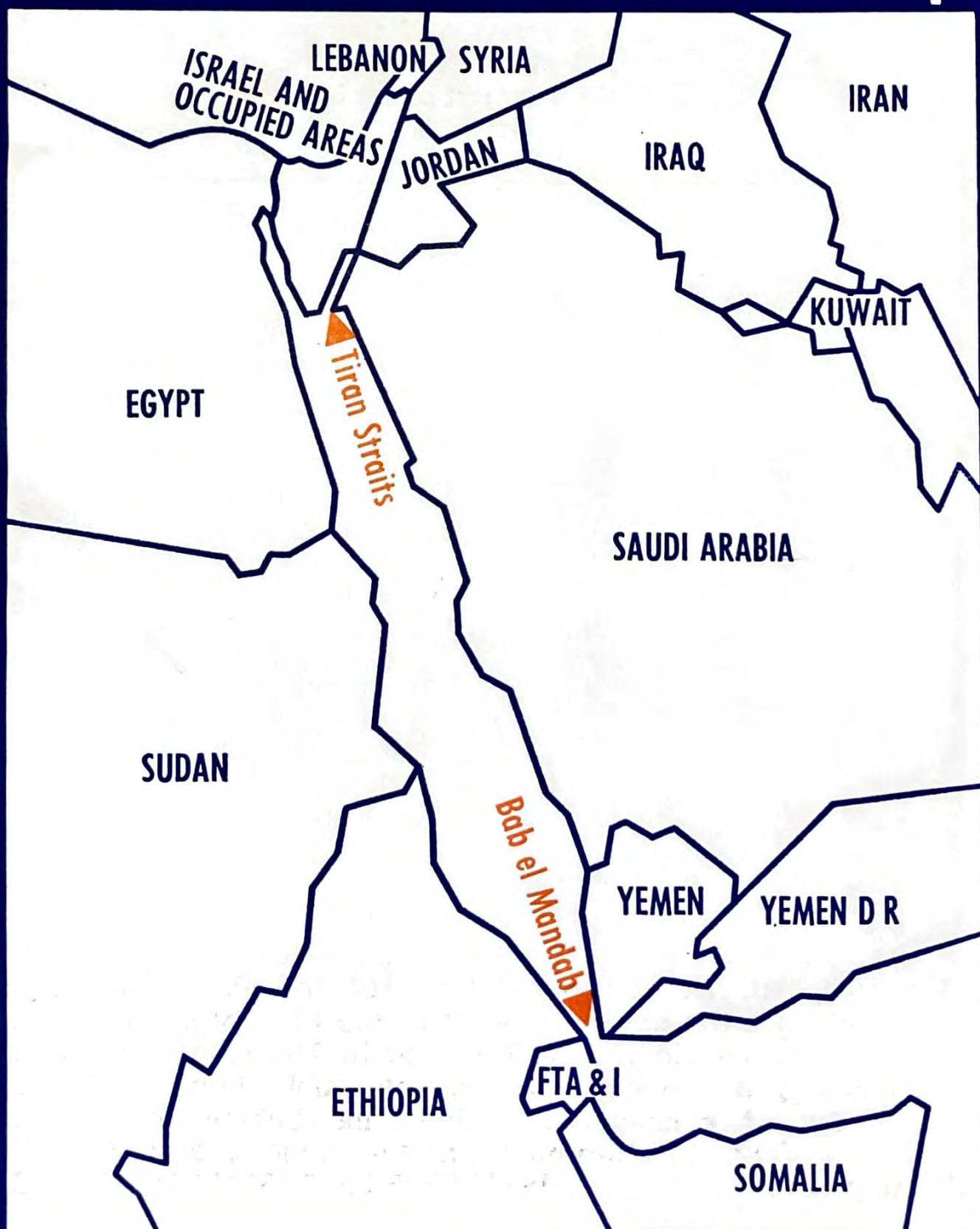


Middle East impasse : the only way out

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1. introduction

Of all international issues, none is as complex and confusing to the ordinary observer as is the agglomeration of conflicts in the Middle East. Almost anything that is ever said on the topic has some measure of truth as the evidence is so abundant and so bewildering that it can be used to support almost any thesis, however contradictory. Some experts argue that peace is just around the corner, others that it is more remote than ever. The one we choose to subscribe to tends to depend more on our predilections, or on the latest news bulletin, than on anything else, and this is true of most assertions concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The partisans of all sides are so deeply committed to their respective causes that the role of evidence is not normally to help them reach rational conclusions, but rather to demonstrate the "correctness" of long standing and deeply held convictions. This they do by a conscious or subconscious selection (or distortion) of supporting evidence. The power of these convictions is so strong that the evidence has to be quite shattering for them to be shaken. The trauma of the 1967 war for the Arabs, and of the 1973 war for the Israelis, exploded some of the myths held by each, but in so doing they also tended to reinforce the illusions of the other so nothing much was gained once the immediate opportunities of a peace settlement were missed.

Perhaps the only way to resist the temptation of evading unwelcome truths, is to make explicit the assumptions on which the convictions are based and subject them to the often, unpleasant test of harsh reality. This pamphlet attempts to show that the most pernicious assumption of all is that a setback for the Palestinians is an advance for the Israelis, and *vice versa*. How many more wars and atrocities are needed until both sides come to terms with the ineluctable fact that their futures as two small peoples sharing the same corner of the earth are inextricably bound up with each other, and that ultimately both will enjoy the benefits of peace and justice or neither will? The question of morality apart, neither side

is capable of annihilating sufficient numbers of the other to eliminate their physical and political realities. No amount of Ma'alots, Kiryat Shemonas or Tel al-Zaatars will prevent both populations from adding, through natural increase, to their respective sizes which stand at around 3 million each at present. While the rest of the world goes about its business, the Palestinians and the Israelis keep rejoicing in the reverses of the other—and the more bitter the loss the greater the rejoicing. The resultant effect over this last decade has been appreciable deteriorations in the net positions of both.

A parallel theme of this pamphlet is that western diplomacy of the last few years, and in particular since the 1973 war, was destined from the outset to fail to break the impasse in the area because it was fundamentally misguided. UN resolutions, Geneva conferences, "shuttle diplomacy" and further "disengagements" were, and still are, incapable, even in theory, of achieving that elemental breakthrough which ultimately might lead to peace. The most they could ever have achieved was to gain time, but since there was no clear idea of how to use that time—except to gain yet more time—further, and more entrenched, stagnation was inevitable.

Peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved in one fell stroke. However, there is a way in which the current total impasse could be broken. In essence, it would require Israel to perform a single, far reaching act of state, but one that would not oblige her to retreat from what the Israeli government has defined—ever since the June war of 1967—as its minimum, irreducible position. The new situation, which would be rapidly fostered by the proposed initiative, would steer the conflict on to an entirely new path which, only then, would be capable of leading to an ultimate resolution of the outstanding issues.

2. Israel's plight

In recent months Israel's situation has appeared more optimistic than the underlying realities truly warrant. The spectacular rescue operation at Entebbe airport, the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) immersion in the nihilism of Lebanon and the extravagant pledges of aspiring American presidents conspired together to temporarily conceal the seriousness of Israel's plight.

When the dust from these events finally settles, Israel will again find herself looking to an existence of near total isolation and permanent instability, peppered by an ongoing series of international and domestic crises.

For Israel and her citizens to be singled out and designated the role of international pariah is more than a travesty of justice, however genuine the grievances of the Palestinians. It also defeats the very purpose which inspired the creation of Israel in the first place, namely to help normalise the relations between the Jewish people and the other peoples of the world. It is a sad irony that today it is precisely the Jews of Israel who, when travelling abroad, often seek to disguise their nationality because of the hostility it now risks evoking, and the physical dangers to which they might be exposed.

If this state of affairs were entirely out of Israel's control, and if she were blameless for the way things have developed, her tragedy would be complete and her only course would be to sit on her bayonets and pray that somehow the situation would miraculously change to her advantage. Yet this is more or less what her strategy has been even though these are not the true circumstances, and the drift of events is certainly not moving in her favour.

For Israel to take the sort of action which would avoid a further decline in her standing and which would enhance her future as a permanent feature in the Middle East will need more than just courage and far sightedness on the part of her leaders. It will first require a fundamental reappraisal of the way they

and their supporters have interpreted recent events, the true significance of which seems repeatedly to have escaped them.

the current (unfair?) isolation of Israel

In contrast with her present position, the years 1948-1967 witnessed great strides in Israel's relations with almost the entire non-Arab world. Diplomatic relations were established early with the western world, the communist world, and with Latin America, and these were soon extended to include most of the newly independent countries of Africa and Asia. Although there were the inevitable detractors, Israel developed a popular image for herself, and her citizens were proud to be known as Israelis. In the mid-fifties, Israel began to offer assistance to grateful developing countries, and especially to the young African republics, in the fields of agriculture and youth training. By 1972, 15,500 foreign trainees had taken courses in Israel, and 4,500 Israeli experts had been on missions overseas in more than 70 different countries.

By the end of the following year, nearly every one of those missions had been closed down. In most cases the host countries broke off all relations with Israel, they complied automatically with just about any resolution condemning the Jewish state and, together with most of the rest of the world, they readily expressed unparalleled enthusiasm for the most implacable of her enemies at various UN agencies.

On each occasion that Israel has been condemned by an international organisation, the "explanation" has been to the effect that Israel has persistently defied the supposedly universally accepted norms of decency and morality. Even in those instances where there might have been some substance in a specific allegation, similar or much worse conduct by dozens of other offenders has invariably escaped all mention, let alone censure. If an international league table of morality were to be constructed, contain-

ing a pecking order of states' violations of human rights, nearly every one of Israel's accusers would fare a lot worse than she would. The world abounds with despotic tyrants for whom torture and other forms of cruelty are integral features of their political systems. One has only to glance through such documents as *The Amnesty International Report 1975-76*, to gain an impression of the scale of the torment. On the question of the Palestinians alone, few Arab states have anything to learn from Israel about the art of repressing them. The Jordanian massacres of "Black September" and the more recent Lebanese atrocities (notably the barbarity of the siege of Tel al-Zaatar) are in a quite different league from even the notorious Deir Yassin of 1948.

These points are not intended to minimise the plight of those Palestinians who have genuinely suffered as a result of the creation of the state of Israel or under Israeli rule (and their sufferings are no less real because conditions elsewhere are worse), but rather to demonstrate that the brutality and hypocrisy of most other states (who demand from Israel codes of practice they persistently spurn themselves) disqualify them from the moral right to sit in judgment and to cast Israel in the role of a leper nation.

Yet none of this is of any practical consequence, as it is not the moral but the political right to judge which counts in the real world. Rightly or wrongly, the fact is that, arising from their newly discovered power and their tenuous solidarity, the Arabs have time and again proven themselves capable of uniting the Afro-Asian bloc and the communist world behind themselves in any confrontation with Israel. The western world can no longer be relied on to provide a counter-weight, since it too is gradually but inexorably swinging behind the Arabs. Apart from the United States, Holland and one or two Latin American countries, the only semi-reliable allies left to Israel are, contrary to all her early ideals, South Africa and Chile. But, most ominously, even the American connection is showing signs of fatigue.

For the friends of Israel to react to this flow of events with self-righteous indignation may have some inherent justification but it is a purposeless emotion and, more seriously, contributes to Israel's continuing false sense of reality. From the very beginning of this new adverse tide, Israel's leaders and their supporters managed to fool themselves into believing that each new blow was just a temporary setback. Self deception was not a noted characteristic of Israeli behaviour in the past but was spawned by the bewitching effect of her euphoric military victory in the Six Day war.

Israel's reaction to her creeping isolation

Following the end of hostilities, Israel eagerly awaited that evasive "telephone call" from one or other Arab leader offering to talk peace at a time when the people of Israel believed they had just fought the war to end wars and were almost certainly prepared to return most of the captured territories. However grim were the motives of the Arabs in spurning Israel's "hand of friendship", the really significant (but totally neglected) lesson which should have been drawn from that episode was that the Israelis completely miscalculated what the Arab response would be. Far from there being a rush to the telephone, there was no real possibility of "recognition, negotiation or peace" (as spelt out at Khartoum in September 1967) as long as the Arabs continued to feel a deep sense of humiliation. "Teaching them a lesson" never stood a chance of eliciting the desired response, and nor does it today.

This was the first and most important indication that the Israelis did not possess that supreme insight into "Arab mentality" on which they habitually claimed to have a monopoly. Sadly, this made no impression on their thought processes, and from that time on the Israeli leadership made a succession of costly miscalculations. A brief review of some of the most notable examples illustrates the tremendous role that has been played by the power of wishful thinking.

1 When the Soviet bloc countries broke off diplomatic relations after the war of June 1967, this was presented in Israel as if it were more their loss than Israel's, and that the rupture would be short lived.

2 When the first African countries severed relations in the early 1970s, it was described as a meaningless gesture involving a small number of Moslem regimes who had always been anti-Israel anyway.

3 When President Sadat of Egypt repeatedly threatened war from 1970 to 1973 if Israel did not pull back, Prime Minister Golda Meir retaliated by promising Sadat a "bloody nose", and she proclaimed that were the Arabs to start a war she would "feel sorry for the Arabs." Defence Minister General Dayan added further spice when he dismissed Sadat's warnings by prophesying a "six hour war."

4 When the potential power of the oil weapon was first debated it was discounted in Israel and elsewhere as an empty threat since, other reasons apart, the Arabs could not drink their oil and were thus as dependent on the major oil consumers as *vice versa*.

5 When the rush to sever diplomatic relations began in earnest, the Israeli authorities and media at first rationalised and absorbed each such announcement. Israelis were exhorted to take comfort in the continuing relations with important countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria and even Cuba. All of these broke relations soon afterwards.

6 Before the war of October 1973, the Israeli economy was at the height of a boom. In contrast with the depression and high unemployment prior to the 1967 war, investment was strong, the growth rate was high and there was, if anything, a shortage of labour. Convinced that her military power was supreme and that her new frontiers were immutable, Israel turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to the new, developing realities beyond her

borders as she began to embark on the "good life." It was in this complacent mood that she disregarded the advice of her "outsider" friends who warned that her state of euphoria was based on a fallacy and that the bubble would some day burst with an almighty bang. At the time, and despite the enormous military budget, there was so much money about that the average Israeli became accustomed to a standard of living not far short of that of his European counterpart, and the prevailing mood was that prosperity had at last arrived and was here to stay. The massive devaluation of the Israeli pound a year after the October hostilities, and the drastic increases in the prices of basic commodities which followed in its wake, shattered the economic hopes of that time and accentuated the divisions within Israeli society itself. Social problems that had been disregarded and other issues that had been neglected soon began to reassert themselves, and in the end they might prove more dangerous than the tensions with Israel's neighbours. Despite these sobering developments, in many important respects the complacency of that period and its accompanying myths have still not been convincingly expurgated from the minds of the leaders and people of Israel.

7 When in the early period of the occupation the first demonstrations and protests in support of the PLO took place in the West Bank and Gaza, they were dismissed as either the unruly behaviour of undisciplined schoolchildren, or the panic actions of shopkeepers under terrorist threats. Despite the mass of evidence of the growing reality of Palestinian nationalism, this sentiment continued to prevail in subsequent years to such an extent that mainstream Israeli opinion was genuinely shocked when the West Bank went into mourning after Israeli marksmen had assassinated three PLO leaders in Beirut in mid 1973. But all the wrong lessons were learnt from this experience too (some even argued that the "liberalism" of Israel's occupation was at the root of the troubles) as was most notably evidenced three years later when the outcome of the West

Bank municipal elections became known. Most informed observers of the scene took it for granted that pro-PLO candidates would be victorious, as indeed they were. But even with the advantages of proximity and a sophisticated intelligence network, somehow the results came as a surprise to the Israeli government which suffered a minor crisis because of the recriminations which followed.

As Israel's isolation has grown, her leaders have been reduced to comforting themselves with the dwindling belief that America will always stand by her. Israeli propaganda elsewhere has almost completely dried up and has been replaced by extensive and increasingly sophisticated pro-Arab and pro-PLO propaganda. Nearly all Israel's resources have long been concentrated on her lobby in the American Congress, and it is revealing that every statement in her favour by a US Senator or Representative gets immediate publicity out of all proportion to its worth. To many Israeli commentators, the election of Henry Jackson as the next president at one time seemed to be a foregone conclusion, but even had they been right the pressures on him to tilt American policy more and more towards the Arabs would have been no less irresistible than they will be for President Carter.

Israel's descent into self delusion

The precariousness of Israel's existence, from her inception onwards, necessitated an unusually keen sense of survival on the part of her leaders and citizens. Her creation from the germ of an idea, her ability to withstand the onslaught of her neighbours, and her progress and development during the early years, were due largely to the ingenuity of her people and their skills in out thinking and out manoeuvring those who sought to destroy her. These talents were acquired during a period when Israel's survival was still in the balance, and when one false move or serious misjudgment could have led to fatal repercussions. The Six Day war, which appeared to put an end to Israel's security problems (although

the "secure borders" did not prevent the atrocious massacres of the last few years), instead dulled those extraordinary instincts which insecurity had bred. Because Israel came to believe that she no longer had a security problem, her people began to think as if that were indeed true. After nineteen years of near suffocation, against a backdrop of two millennia of precarious existence, it is hardly surprising that the Jews of Israel were eager to believe that no longer would they have to depend on anyone else to guarantee their survival as they were now fully able to do so themselves. They were thus perfectly happy to sit precisely where they were for an indefinite period—unless and until the Arabs finally agreed to come round to doing things Israel's way. Having acquired that strategic outlook, Israel effectively stopped looking for alternative procedures and stopped listening to alternative ideas. She did not believe she needed to.

It was in this stupor that she began to lose the diplomatic struggle around the world, that she virtually dropped out of the propaganda battle, and that she failed to appreciate the true aspirations, the grim determination and the improved capabilities of the Arabs. And so she got caught napping on Yom Kippur. This stupor remains responsible for the residual myths that still dominate the basis of Israeli thinking, of which the most prominent are that the demise of the PLO is imminent, and that the Palestinian problem can be resolved without their having their own nation state. On the contrary, although the Palestinians have suffered yet another shattering setback at the hands of their Arab brothers, when Lebanon finally comes to terms with itself, the PLO will regroup with many more embittered recruits, and the Palestinian cause will become increasingly acceptable to "respectable" world opinion and particularly popular among the young (which was once Israel's preserve). In time—even if it means getting round an American veto—the PLO might well take Israel's place in the agencies of the UN, and a number of countries might declare that they are considering withdrawing their recognition of Israel's

right to exist (which will no doubt be judged as unimportant by Israel). If it can sufficiently overcome its own internal divisions, a prudent PLO leadership will form a government-in-exile which would doubtlessly receive diplomatic recognition by the overwhelming majority of nation states.

Because she still sits on most of the territories captured in 1967, and because America still largely continues to stand by her, Israel still imagines herself to be in a position of strength, albeit slightly modified, and this is reflected by her negotiating position. The truth is that she never has been as isolated and as vulnerable as she is now, and her troubles will go on mounting in time.

If any of this is truly recognised by the Israeli leadership, there has been little outward sign of it. In a major interview in December 1974, Prime Minister Rabin described Israel's basic aim in this decade as being to gain time while the western world seeks to free itself from Arab oil dependence. Within seven years, he said, Britain and Scandinavia would be self-sufficient in their oil resources, and the United States would have reduced her own dependence on oil imports from the Middle East. The illusion that time is on Israel's side thus continued to persist. What the coming decade really holds in store was clearly stated two days later by Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada: "We must be realistic and recognise that whatever we do there will be a real transfer of resources to the oil countries. We must not delude ourselves. The Arabs will become richer and the Western economies will be poorer. The problem is how to deal with the new situation without destroying ourselves."

the economic and military ramifications of Arab power

It is not only the supply and control of oil which has substantially improved the Arabs' bargaining position, and will continue to do so despite the Israeli government's apparent delusions (from 1972 to 1976 the share of imported oil in total US oil consumption rose from less than

30 per cent to over 40 per cent), but also the concomitant transfer of resources. The financial sway of Arab interests in the western world is already quite formidable. Not only do they possess the means to create havoc with the financial markets if they were so disposed, but the economic power that is accruing to them through their steady acquisition and control of large chunks of industry, property and commerce throughout the world will continue to expand as they seek new outlets for the investment of their enormous surpluses.

Ever since the establishment of Israel, the Arabs have operated an economic boycott of the Jewish state and of many foreign companies which are deemed to be assisting in her economic, industrial or military development. While Arab economic power was minimal this was of little concern to Israel, and even had its beneficial side inasmuch as it encouraged Israel to achieve a self-sufficiency in sectors that otherwise she might not have developed. But the position has since changed quite dramatically, and for the first time the boycott is beginning to hurt. Because of uncertainty of the boycott regulations, many companies "play safe" and refuse all trading links with Israel and some have eased out their Jewish directors (pro-Zionist or not), despite recent Arab claims that the boycott is not based on religious or ethnic criteria. Faced with what many companies believe to be a simple choice of maintaining economic relations with either Israel or the Arab world, a growing number of firms will opt for the Arab connection regardless of the moral or other non-commercial considerations.

Perhaps even more ominous for Israel is the Arab military potential which inevitably will increase with economic power. Although their rumoured interest in Lockheed was spurned by the American government, there can be little doubt that directly, or through disguised companies, the search for a share in the defence industry of one country or another will continue. Moreover, since the beginning of 1975, apart from Iran, Saudi Arabia has been easily the major customer for

American arms having bought an estimated \$6,000 million worth in under two years. The tripartite agreement involving Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to set up an indigenous Arab armaments industry is still further indication of their serious intentions in this matter. As long as Israel remains the foremost Arab enemy, the Israeli population will see themselves—and with considerable justification—as the intended target of these moves.

If the state of war continues into the far future, Israel's nuclear capability is likely to be given a higher priority as Israel does not have the resources to compete indefinitely with the Arab world in the conventional arms race. Any country which has the technology, and perceives a threat to its survival if it does not use it, is bound to seriously consider the nuclear option despite the pressures and moralising from other quarters. Israel's potential in this field, which is already quite well developed, is one important reason why the United States has so far ensured that the quantity and quality of Israel's conventional weaponry have been of the highest order. Just how long this can be maintained is uncertain, and these doubts coupled with the ever increasing burden of replacing equipment which modern technology renders obsolete so rapidly, has led General Dayan among others to openly advocate a greater reliance on the nuclear deterrent. Should Dayan's views prevail, the day of reckoning might be postponed but in time the Arabs will again narrow the gap, and the financial costs to both sides will go on mounting as the nuclear arms race comes to supplement the conventional arms race. The negative effects these developments would have on urgent domestic priorities is self-evident whereas, on the positive side, the bolstering of national security would be largely illusory. Indeed, the possession of nuclear weapons by the regional powers, together with the unrest which would be stimulated by the neglect of social issues, would make Israel, and the Middle East in general, a more dangerous place to live in. To put it at its most optimistic, a nuclear weapons programme can be no substitute

for a bold initiative for peace aimed at resolving the fundamentals of the conflict.

By turning her head from the centrality of the Palestinian question, and through an obliviousness to the other developing realities, Israel will repeatedly be forced to make the sort of concessions which otherwise would have been unnecessary. This was most conspicuously evidenced in the second (1975) Sinai "disengagement" agreement which was quite different in kind from its 1973 predecessor.

3. American diplomacy

The first of the Sinai "disengagement" agreements, just after the October war had ended, was concluded with little difficulty as the advantages of a mutually beneficial disengagement were all too obvious to both Israel and Egypt (and the climate required a similar arrangement between Israel and Syria on the Golan front). Both sides recognised the urgency of ending the dangerous instability intrinsic to the deployment of troops behind each other's lines, especially at a time when neither was in a position to resume military hostilities.

the second "disengagement" agreement

But very different considerations applied in the case of the second Sinai pact which was not really a "disengagement" agreement at all as the forces had not been "engaged" since the successful implementation of the first pact. What the second agreement actually amounted to was a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the strategic Mitla and Gidi Passes and from the Abu Rodeis oil fields (which supplied over half of Israel's oil needs) in exchange for vague assurances by Sadat—not to Israel, but to the American Secretary of State. These were backed up by much more concrete pledges from America concerning Israel's financial and military requirements, and a less certain commitment concerning Israel's energy needs.

Prime Minister Rabin had stated clearly some months earlier that he was not prepared to evacuate further territory in Sinai unless in return decisive progress towards a political settlement with Egypt was made, including a formal renunciation of belligerency. The Israeli government always seemed perfectly justified in perceiving Israel's national interests as requiring the minimum of a non-belligerency agreement (or at least all the elements of non-belligerency) from Egypt as the lowest acceptable *quid pro quo* for a withdrawal from the oil fields and the passes.

An oblique pledge from the Shah of Iran, who had just reneged on his commitment

to the Kurds, to supply oil to all who could pay for it regardless of political considerations, was hardly a substitute for a substantial indigenous capability. Even if the Shah were good for his word, there could be no certainty that he would not have been replaced by a pro-Arab military junta by the time the obligation most needed honouring. In any event, he is bound to be subjected to greater pressure now that the "non-aligned" conference has resolved to institute an oil boycott against Israel. Besides, the Arabs have the means of preventing oil tankers from reaching Israel from the east by blockading the straits at Bab el Mandab (whether or not Israel controls the Straits of Tiran—see the map on the front cover), and they are likely to do exactly that in the event of another war or, perhaps more seriously, as part of a war of attrition—just when the oil would be needed most urgently. America's pledge to provide oil under such circumstances, or during a wider embargo, was necessarily carefully guarded, and in any case dilutes the worth of that commitment.

Similarly, unless and until Egypt categorically renounced the war option, Israel's retention of the strategic passes always seemed justified from a security point of view. In the end, however, Israel lowered her terms and accepted instead the creation of buffer zones under UN command, the stationing of US government personnel in a "watchdog" role, and mutual electronic surveillance advance warning systems. How effective a substitute these arrangements will prove is uncertain, but it might be recalled that when President Nasser started preparing Egypt for war in May 1967, he simply ordered the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) from Sinai and immediately replaced them with his own troops; a sequence which provoked Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban into cynically comparing the UN force with a fire brigade which rushes away from the scene as soon as there is danger of fire. Yet part of the 1975 Sinai arrangement was that if war should look imminent, the US personnel (no doubt as well as the UN force) will quickly be evacuated—which would

leave the bugging devices as the intact part of the agreement!

Why then did the Israeli government accept these terms after they had emphatically rejected them in principle one year earlier, and rejected them in practice only a few months earlier during Kissinger's first attempt at seeking such an agreement—which ended in failure despite three weeks of intensive "shuttle diplomacy" between Jerusalem and Cairo?

The answer is that they had allowed themselves to be manoeuvred into a position where they had no real choice. What was being demanded of Israel was that she conclude a peace agreement—not with Egypt or with any Arab party, none of whom was prepared to do so anyway under the prevailing conditions—but with the United States of America; and Israel was in no position to refuse. During Kissinger's earlier "shuttle", in March of that year, he tried to work out an agreement between Israel and Egypt which—on its own merits—would be to their mutual advantage, and would keep alive the momentum towards a wider settlement. He failed, as he was bound to, because such an agreement was not obtainable on its own merits.

It took some time for this message to be fully absorbed and understood in the State Department which initially reacted with gloom and despondency, and an almost vindictive determination to blame the failure on Israel's alleged obstinacy. But it was not pigheadedness that was preventing Israel's complicity, but a rational calculation that there was nothing Egypt could offer her—short of non-belligerency—that could compensate for the sacrifices being asked of her.

As far as the US was concerned, however, this stand of Israel's was totally unacceptable as American interests demanded a further agreement between Israel and Egypt. The country was still reeling from its traumatic defeat in Vietnam; the administration badly needed a boost to its sagging prestige, particularly in foreign affairs, and Kissinger's "magic"

had succeeded before in the Middle East; the struggle with the Soviet Union for Arab allegiance was at a critical stage, and America's ability to "deliver the goods" was on trial; the Arabs by this time had their own array of economic and political weaponry which could make life for America and the rest of the western world uncomfortable, especially at a time of economic recession, and the recent oil boycott had demonstrated their capacity to use their new found economic strength.

Meanwhile, Israel's dependence on America was at an unprecedentedly high level. Her political isolation was growing daily; her economic viability rested on American aid in excess of an annual subvention of \$1,000 million; and her armed forces, which before the 1967 war were supplied mainly by France, now depended almost entirely on American equipment. In every important respect, diplomatically, economically and militarily, Israel's reliance on America was almost total.

During the weeks following the failed shuttle, relations between America and Israel plummeted to an all time low. The well publicised American "reassessment" of her policy towards the Middle East was clearly aimed at Israel. No progress was made on the question of economic aid which Israel was desperate for, and curious delays occurred in the supply of weaponry.

If Israel felt she was being blackmailed, she had good cause. But in allowing herself to get into such a vulnerable position in the first place, she had only her own erroneous conceptions to blame. When Kissinger resumed his shuttle in August of the same year, there was no way he was not going to succeed.

But it was not just the fear of sanctions that finally gained Israel's assent; the reward element of the package contained some very tempting incentives too. Financially, America was prepared to be extremely generous, agreeing to aid and compensation for the coming year in the region of \$3,000 million. Militarily,

Washington was reported to have approved the supply of an impressive array of advanced weaponry. In the political arena, America undertook to stand by Israel in the diplomatic battles that lay ahead. This extension of America's protective shield, however, is a double edged sword as it also serves to increase Israel's dependency, and thus will make her even more vulnerable to future American leverage.

the Israel-Egypt agreement

The bilateral agreement between Israel and Egypt contained some seemingly significant advances. Both countries agreed in writing that "the conflict between them and in the Middle East shall not be resolved by military force but by peaceful means" and they undertook "not to resort to the threat or use of force or military blockade against each other." They both accepted that "the United Nations Emergency Force is essential and shall continue its functions, and its mandate shall be extended annually." A joint commission, containing representatives of the two parties, was established with the purpose of assisting UNEF in the execution of its mandate and of considering any problem arising from the agreement. Article 7 of the accord explicitly stated that "non-military cargoes destined for or coming from Israel shall be permitted through the Suez Canal", a right that had been denied Israel throughout her history. The parties regarded the accord "as a significant step towards a just and lasting peace" and they pledged to "continue their efforts to negotiate a final peace agreement within the framework of the Geneva Peace Conference in accordance with Security Council Resolution 338." Finally, they agreed that the accord shall "remain in force until superseded by a new agreement."

The agreement thus contained many fine words, but not even Rabin attempted to sell it as the non-belligerency pact he once stipulated to be the minimum he could accept in exchange for further territorial withdrawals. It is true that

Egypt publicly committed herself to accepting the reality of Israel, and to cease working for her demise—at least through military force. But it is too often forgotten that the armistice agreements which were signed at the end of the 1948/49 war contained commitments by Egypt and the other Arab combatants not very different from those included in this latest accord.

There is, however, reason to attach a lot more significance to the commitments on this latter occasion, but the reason is not born of the accord—it is merely embodied by it. There is a greater Arab readiness today (certainly among the most important elements) to recognise and live with the reality of Israel, because the developments of the last 28 years (and in particular the wars of 1967 and 1973) have impressed a more aware and more self-confident Arab world that devoting its resources to seeking the physical destruction of Israel involves too high a cost with virtually no prospect of success—and is supported by hardly any of the Arabs' allies. (Moreover, it is no longer a truism that the key Arab governments today consider the elimination of Israel to be in their own states' interests.) As a realistic objective, this goal has accordingly been gradually abandoned over recent years, and the Sinai agreement represented little more than a public expression of this. As far as Sadat was concerned, although it meant incurring the wrath of some factions within the Arab camp, by committing himself on paper and in public to what he had anyway been saying for some time in private (and not always so private), he continued to recover valuable territory through diplomacy that he had failed to recover through war.

Part of the agreed function of the American surveillance team was that it would act as arbiter should either side allege a breach of any of the clauses of the accord. If the facts should point to an Egyptian infringement, the presumption was that America would so judge and, accordingly, would require Egypt to take corrective action. Yet America, as a major participant in the power political

contest, is not well suited to the role of arbiter, and her leverage over Egypt is limited partly by the increasing interdependence of the US with the Arab world, and partly by the Egyptian option of tilting back towards the eagerly awaiting Russians (considerations which do not currently apply for Israel.) In other words, now that Israel has actually enacted the withdrawals, Egypt could welch on the agreement if it suited her, as she might well do if Sadat is overthrown or forced to resign—a prospect which is likely to be enhanced if further and more general progress towards a settlement is not made soon.

Until all the major outstanding issues are resolved (and that will be possible only after the Palestinian problem has been satisfactorily dealt with) Egypt will have to maintain a high level of military vigilance even though it might be expedient to foreswear the military option on paper. As long as such a high proportion of her resources remains devoted to the defence budget, other priorities will suffer, and the periodic riots which have been familiar scenes in an Egypt beset with economic difficulties will continue to pose a challenge to Sadat's type of leadership.

Should Sadat or someone else with a similar outlook nevertheless remain in office for an extended period, even he would be unlikely to sanction the new *status quo* indefinitely, the prolonged continuation of which he might choose to interpret as an Israeli breach of the "interim" accord. At the time of its signing, Sadat was at pains to emphasise that he did not consider it to be a separate arrangement but that it was one element in a wider, ongoing process which should also involve the other fronts.

Either way, the accord of itself will make no lasting impression on the nature of the relationships between Israel and any of her Arab neighbours. Unless the time that has been gained (which was its one true achievement) is employed to achieve a general peace settlement, war is likely to break out again sooner or later, and

to be all the more devastating to all parties now that America is starting to supply all sides with modern sophisticated weapons as her contribution to the Sinai accord! The seeds of the next war have not been removed, they have merely been disguised by sowing them more deeply. If and when the next war does break out, the first blow might be struck by either the Arabs or the Israelis; but at that time it would matter little since by then both sides would feel that they had been left with no alternative. It would be untrue to say that none of this was recognised by the Israeli leadership. It was precisely because they did realise the severe limitations of the agreement that they felt obliged to find a new straw to cling to by arguing a case that they had not thought fit to advance before they were compelled to abandon their legitimate resistance to the Sinai pact. This new rationalisation was that they were seeking to sow discord among their enemies by driving a wedge between Egypt and Syria and by prying Egypt away from the blanket hostility of the Arab camp. As a deliberate strategy, a scheme designed to pick off one of their foes at a time and make a separate deal with each has its merits from Israel's point of view, and also has real possibilities in view of the deep divisions within the Arab alliance which are as old as Arab independence.

But, despite short term appearances, time will show that such a strategy cannot succeed as long as the minimum aspirations of the Palestinians go unheeded.

However much Sadat might genuinely want to be rid of the conflict once and for all (and there can be little doubt that he does) no Arab leader, however powerful he may appear to be, can hope to uphold a peace settlement with Israel that ignores the Palestinian claim to statehood.

In recent months, Israeli leaders have confessed, with growing regularity, that they are "disillusioned" about Sadat's alleged violations of the "spirit" of the Sinai agreement, and in particular about his failure to honour informal pledges

to cut back on "diplomatic warfare." They were angered at Egypt's participation in the verbal attack on Israel at the UN Habitat Conference in Vancouver, at the non-aligned conference in Colombo, and again over Egypt's condemnation of Spain's moves towards recognising Israel.

They were even more shocked at what they considered to be blatant incitement of the West Bank and Gaza Strip Arabs whom Sadat called upon in a speech in July 1976 to "continue their struggle and resistance against Israel" and to unite behind the PLO.

As long as the Palestinians remain Israel's blindspot, her position will continue to deteriorate. Recent circumstances have allowed her to pursue a policy of "good fences" with the Lebanese—a situation which she has exploited wisely and with humanity. Should this fortuitous turn of events prove to be only temporary, however, there may well be a reversion to Israel's earlier policy of "massive retaliation" against her hostile neighbours coupled with yet a further hint at the spectre of nuclear war were Israel to again feel too isolated and seriously threatened. Whether it be the fault of the Arabs, Israel, both or neither, these postures are a far cry from the vision of Theodore Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, who envisaged that the Jewish state would have no army as it would necessarily be at permanent peace with its neighbours.

In recent years, besides losing international support, Israel has also lost her senses of direction and purpose. Amongst other reasons, this has contributed to the dramatic decline in Jewish immigration—not least among Soviet Jews, about half of whom have recently been "dropping out" on their way to Israel—and to the marked increase in emigration, even by native born Sabras. There has even been talk for the first time among Moroccan born Israelis that some might be interested in returning to the country of their birth. In stark contrast with years gone by immigration is struggling to even keep up with emigration (see table).

The early idealism can only be recaptured if it is tempered with an aliveness to reality, as it once was. This means recognising the true significance of recent events, and in particular the non-tenability of Israel's *de facto* policy towards the occupied territories. Once acknowledged, a radical reorientation in Israel's diplomacy would automatically follow.

the occupied territories and the Yom Kippur/Ramadan war

Shortly after the 1967 war, Israel's leaders let it be known that they were not contemplating the return of East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, Sharm el Sheikh or the Golan Heights. Other than East Jerusalem (which had special significance and was annexed to the western sector of the city almost at once) this stand was justified in Israel on the grounds of their strategic importance. New military settlements in these locations and on the West Bank, which were originally created to strengthen security, later became security risks themselves as they were handed over to civilian control. The permanent retention of more captured land was then demanded by various groups to serve as a protective buffer for these settlements.

Moreover, the early emphasis on "secure borders" soon became fused with nationalist, historical, religious and mystical demands for the permanent

JEWISH IMMIGRATION AND EMMIGRATION TO ISRAEL.

	immigration	emigration	net immigration
1967 (June War)	14,300	13,000	1,300
1968	20,500	6,000	14,500
1969	37,800	5,400	32,400
1970	36,800	4,900	31,900
1971	41,900	7,200	34,700
1972	55,900	11,200	44,700
1973 (Oct. War)	54,900	11,800	43,100
1974	32,000	26,700	5,300
1975	20,000	16,000	4,000
1976 (estimated)	20,000	20,000	zero?

Source: Richard Mathews in *The Middle East*, December 1976.

retention of certain areas of the occupied territories, notably the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and Gaza, regardless of security considerations. The opposition "Likud" adopted an uninhibited policy of annexation while the National Religious Party, a partner in the coalition government, refused to consider any withdrawal from Judea and Samaria on grounds of religious and historical principle. The ruling Labour Party decided not to decide on its vision of the new borders. Over the years enough evidence accumulated to persuade the neutral observer, let alone the Arabs, that permanent colonisation was intended in many of these areas. Far from this encouraging the Arabs to negotiate a speedy peace treaty before Israel extended her settlements still further, it only increased their resolve that war was the only way of evicting the Israelis.

An empathetic understanding of Arab history, coupled with the knowledge of their new military resources, should have pointed to the inevitability of an Arab attack sooner or later to regain their lost possessions, and thereby indicated the futility of a policy which envisaged the possibility of permanent retention. It is a fact that many friends of Israel accordingly warned of the growing likelihood of war right up to the time of its outbreak. Whether or not the Arab states might have reached a settlement at that time with Israel in her pre-June 1967 borders is still a matter of some conjecture, but there certainly was never a chance that they would do so within the post-war borders. Neither was there a chance that the new borders could be maintained indefinitely. Unfortunately, it took the October war to demonstrate this fact to Israel.

Even today it is by no means clear that this has yet been fully grasped. Partly because the point had some validity, and largely for reasons of morale, the Israeli leadership and media repeatedly stressed that Israel had, in fact, won the war. While conceding their fault in intelligence, their military unpreparedness and the diplomatic setback, the Israelis were

quickly encouraged to comfort themselves with the knowledge that, in strict military terms, Israel was the victor. The focus of attention straight after the war concentrated on the poor state of military vigilance at the time of the Egyptian, Syrian offensive. The "Agranat Commission" was set up, amidst much publicity, with the task of investigating what went wrong and to apportion responsibility. Those who were singled out for blame felt deeply aggrieved, and with good cause as they were made the scapegoats for the false notions generated by the pervading atmosphere of the period.

The crucial political lesson of the whole episode never had the required impact. By seeking to minimise the extent of the Arab victory in every important respect, Israel has remained largely oblivious to the really vital strategic transformation brought about by the war, namely that there no longer exists a viable *status quo* option—if ever there did. That this was not realised before the war, and that time was then thought to be working in Israel's favour, were perhaps excusable errors for which Israel is still paying the price. Today there can no longer be an excuse, and the destiny of Israel hinges entirely on the extent to which the significance of these points is truly appreciated.

Israel, the Palestinians and the USA

The violent clashes in early 1976 between the Arab population and the Israeli authorities, both in the West Bank and in Israel itself (and the events were obviously not unrelated), shocked Israeli no less than international opinion once the newsreels were beamed round the world.

They came as no surprise, however, to a small but growing number of Israeli Jews who had heeded the warning signals of gathering tension. In the West Bank, violent demonstrations had occurred on a number of previous occasions, and notably in November 1974 when the PLO leader Yasir Arafat addressed the UN General Assembly. They were suppressed

only at the cost of many casualties and arrests.

While Israel continues to rule over the West Bank, there are bound to be ever more frequent and more intensive acts of resistance by a population that is suffering the consequences of economic difficulties in Israel, that is feeling encroached upon by a spreading pattern of Jewish colonisation, and whose yearning for independence is no less than was that of the Palestinian Jews in the early months of 1948. As long as Israel continues to govern that territory, she will have little choice but to retaliate in an increasingly oppressive fashion—just to keep order. The charge of the “brutal occupier” which has been spread by Arab propaganda over the recent years and which (with notable exceptions) has been mostly unfounded will eventually, through force of circumstances, come to resemble the truth.

The moral appeal of Israel's case will consequently suffer (alongside the fading memory of the Nazi holocaust) and this will further erode her level of international support although probably not amongst organised opinion within the Jewish diaspora. This sharpening polarisation is bound to contribute to an upsurge in overt anti-Semitism, of which there are already ominous indications. To some, of course, the anti-Israel bandwagon has merely provided the ideal vehicle for giving vent to their bigotry towards all Jews everywhere—a sentiment which they felt they had to suppress in this “enlightened” era until the cloak of anti-Zionism gave it a comparative respectability and a new lease of life. To others, an important distinction can be, and often is, maintained between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. Indeed, some of the most outspoken critics of Zionism are themselves Jews, mostly from ultra-orthodox sects or of the revolutionary left. But the abuse to which the distinction is susceptible has been forcefully demonstrated by the professed recruitment to the “pro-Arab” cause of such as the former British Nazi party leader John Tindall who, in his present capacity as head of the National

Front, recently decreed that he bears no malice against the Jews—he just abhors Zionism!

Perhaps the most regrettable departure of all is that the anti-Zionism of the Arab world has given birth to an anti-Semitism (by which is invariably meant anti-Jewishness) which, in its contemporary guise, was once alien to the Moslem Arab East. Some Arab spokesmen make a genuine attempt to distinguish between the two phenomena, but a lot of Arab propaganda has nevertheless been blatantly anti-Semitic—a fact that has been rued by some Palestinian leaders themselves. While it does not of course excuse it, to some extent this is bound to happen as it is not always easy to differentiate antagonism towards a political movement from antagonism towards its principal supporters. For much the same reason it is difficult to maintain an antipathy towards Arab nationalism without this spilling over into a hostility towards Arabs as a people. The longer the conflict continues, the greater the danger of Arab anti-Semitism (and Jewish anti-Arabism) becoming more firmly rooted—to the obvious detriment of both peoples. The broad and bizarre anti-Israel alliance is in part a product of the dilemma Israel now faces of being caught in a sandwich between, on the one hand, those who are enticed by the growing power and wealth of the numerous Arab states as against the small and comparatively poor state of Israel, and on the other, those who find the moral cause of the Palestinian “underdog” more persuasive than that of the powerful state which occupies and rules their lives. Whichever of self-interest or a sense of justice Israeli propaganda tries to appeal to, Arab propaganda can project a more convincing image. Under the rules of the game as it stands, support for Israel is bound to decline as this vice tightens its grip. Israel's only escape is to change the nature of the game, and she can best do that along the lines detailed later in the pamphlet.

The emerging pattern should thus be clear: as Israel becomes even more

beholden to America, America will in turn have become more vulnerable to Arab pressure and thus more sensitive to charges of being the patron of Palestinian oppression. The American inclination to threaten and censure Israel will rise—acts which were not uncommon in earlier years (such as suspension of economic assistance when Israel ignored a UN ruling about work in the demilitarised zone in 1953; condemnation of Israel's Qibya raid in October 1953; and, most significantly of all, the ultimatum to completely evacuate Sinai in 1956 which, even then, Israel felt she had no choice but to comply with.)

It is not just the logic of the situation that points to these developments. The evidence of recent years is equally compelling. As early as July 1973 there were indications from Washington that a cautious reappraisal of its attitude towards the Palestinians was beginning to take place when the joint Nixon/Brezhnev communique referred to the “legitimate interests” of the Palestinians. In the following year President Ford, albeit inadvertently as was later claimed, spoke about the “Palestinian nation.” Under Secretary of State Joseph Sisco later conceded that his own statement that the US regards the PLO “as the overall umbrella organisation of the Palestinians” was “an unfortunate way to put it.” While General Brown was shortly thereafter admonished by the President, and issued an apology and withdrawal himself, the remarks of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff concerning what he called the “unacceptable power of the Jewish lobby” in favour of Israel, are significant of the times and will have had their effect. Towards the end of 1975, Secretary Kissinger denied complicity in the paper written by Hal Saunders, a senior official in the State Department, which referred to the Palestinian problem as the “heart” of the conflict. Judging from the intensity of Israeli protests, they too believed his denial rang hollow. The statement at the Security Council in early 1976 of the US ambassador, William Scranton, was just one further indication that the American idea for a final peace

settlement has not strayed from the lines of the Roger's Plan of 1969 which called for the restitution of all occupied territories except for minor rectifications. (On the other hand, the American commitment to Israel's survival is firmer than ever, and the PLO would be indulging its own self-delusions if it believed that the pendulum can swing beyond this fixed limit.) All these incidents cannot be ignored except at peril. They are clearly far more significant than the expedient pledges of either political party during the period preceding the presidential election. It is as well to recognise the omens now.

What they amount to is that Israel's position on the Palestinian issue will not be tenable for much longer and that, sooner or later, Israel will have to withdraw from the West Bank. No proposal from any party can be taken seriously which evades the primacy of this point, and any danger which might be said to follow from this course can, at best, only be postponed. All the signs are, however, that Israel has not yet come round to accepting its pre-eminence. Time will continue to work to Israel's disfavour until she does. Once she does, the problem would then boil down to one of method and timing, and the proposal contained in this pamphlet relates to these questions of how and when.

the Geneva conference

Prior to the October war, Israel's policy was to stay put in the absence of a negotiated settlement. The policy laid down by the Knesset, which was adopted in response to King Hussein's proposal for a federated state of Jordan astride the two banks of the river, condemned and flatly rejected the proposal (as did all other Arab parties) and affirmed, *inter alia* “that the historic right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel (which includes the West Bank and Gaza) is beyond challenge . . .” While asserting Israel's continued readiness to negotiate, without prior conditions from either side, the Knesset resolution stated that in the absence of a peace treaty “Israel will

continue to maintain in full the situation established by the cease fire (of 1967) and will consolidate her position in accordance with the vital requirements of her security and development."

Notwithstanding its lack of foresight, under the conditions that then obtained this at least bore some resemblance to a coherent strategy. Ever since the October war, however, the plain fact of the matter is that Israel has not had any intelligible policy—just a declared willingness to compromise in principle, but a rejection of all substantive proposals in practice. At one time her leaders set great store on the Geneva Conference, which was set up by Security Council Resolution 338 in November 1973, under the joint chairmanship of the USA and the Soviet Union. After its first session, from which Syria was absent and the PLO uninvited, it quickly assumed the role of a political football, with Israel opposing its reconvening when the Arabs supported it, and then Israel supporting it when the Arabs opposed it, although the Arabs were themselves divided on their attitude.

The present stand of Israel is that she is eager for the resumption of the Geneva Conference on the condition that the PLO is not invited. Egypt is no less keen to return, provided the PLO is represented. Even if this thorny problem were somehow got round and the conference got under way, what then? Concessions by the Arab parties would be a lot harder to make in a multilateral setting, and both sides would be strongly encouraged not to compromise by the full glare of their respective galleries. None of the parties really wants Geneva because they all know it cannot work. But nearly everyone pretends to want it so as to look peace loving. Besides, it's a way of doing something, and no one can think of what else to do now that Lebanon is out of the way for the time being and all talk of further "disengagement" agreements has thankfully, if temporarily, subsided. The Geneva Conference could only succeed if there were prior agreement on the form and nature of an overall settlement. There is no point holding it except to ratify bilateral decisions hammered out elsewhere, and

the danger of convening it nevertheless is that with its final collapse war would loom a little more menacingly on the horizon. Enough time has been frittered on futile diplomacy; it is time to deal with the Palestinian problem.

4. deadlock over the west bank: who will negotiate?

Now that it no longer is a plausible option, Israel's leaders seem less hostile to Hussein's federal plan. The official platform of the ruling Labour party is that the political structure of a future "Jordanian/Palestinian state" after a settlement has been reached, should be the concern of the citizens of the new state and should accommodate the "self-expression" of the two Arab peoples. The trouble with this proposal is that even if it was once feasible, that time has long gone. Under intense political pressure, and in return for political backing on the East Bank and economic aid by the oil rich states, Hussein relinquished his title to the West Bank: he no longer has the mandate nor the authority to negotiate over that territory, although he will obviously always have an interest in its future. Even if he wanted to regain that right and succeeded in doing so, he would be unable to agree to Israel's conditions of retaining a string of military outposts as far as the Jordan river which would remain Israel's "security border." And nothing short of deadlock could be arrived at over the focal issue of Jerusalem. Moreover, the protracted negotiations would be further obstructed by the combined formidable force of those in both camps who would wish to see them fail whatever the terms.

Israel, the west bank and the PLO

These obstacles would be even greater if Israel's negotiating partner were to be the PLO. Ultimately, Israel might have no choice but to recognise the PLO (and *vice versa*), but there is little chance of that happening in the near future. The deep fears that most Israelis have of the PLO are quite genuine, and have been intensified by that organisation's wild utterances and terrorist deeds. Israel is not likely to bury these fears any more readily than the PLO is likely to forget its extreme and no less genuine animosity towards Israel—for reasons that strike at the very roots of both communities. (It is often forgotten, though, that Israel's position was not always so hardline on this point. In an interview with *Newsweek* on 17 February 1969, Prime Minister Eshkol

declared "... if Al-Fatah wants to talk to us directly we would not say no.") Consequently, the prospects of both parties agreeing to formally negotiate with each other are remote to say the least. The chances of them actually reaching an agreement are non-existent. Apart from the obvious pitfalls like Jerusalem, there are more profound obstacles to a negotiated accord. As with the Israelis, the PLO has managed to manoeuvre itself into a position from which it is now very difficult to retreat, even though certain elements within it might want to. It has been evident for some time that, apart from a minority which, despite the debacle in Lebanon, is becoming increasingly isolated, a clear majority of Palestinians on the West Bank and in the PLO are prepared to settle for a state in part of the land. Rhetorically, however, the demand for the destruction of Israel remains and is likely to continue into the future for political reasons internal to the PLO, but it is already more analogous to other situations in the world such as that between the two Germans.

Even if these immense obstacles were somehow superable, the PLO would still be a poor negotiating partner as it would not want to reach an agreement until it was good and ready to assume the government of the West Bank. The leadership would accordingly deliberately obstruct a settlement until such time as it felt conditions were more propitious to itself (and less so to Israel) on the West Bank and elsewhere. The domestic and international developments necessary for the PLO to derive maximum political advantage will still take some considerable time which Israel can ill afford while her situation deteriorates and her own "hawks" entrench their position.

a west bank leadership?

Apart from Hussein and the PLO, the only other possible negotiating partner over the West Bank would be the inhabitants themselves. Several attempts at setting up negotiations with the traditional leadership were made during the very

early period of the occupation, but they all failed abysmally. However, had Israel encouraged, or just permitted, a more genuine political leadership to emerge in the period from June 1967 onwards, it is possible that by now an authoritative but "moderate" grouping would have been well placed to enter into negotiations.

But for reasons best known to themselves, Israel's leaders forbade all political parties and denied all political activity. The frustrated political energy had to find an outlet, and the PLO was the only credible repository. Eventually, support became widespread, and was consolidated with Arafat's baptism of glory on the international stage. Unperturbed, Israel started talking, after the jolt of the October war, of encouraging an independent political leadership on the West Bank which could develop into a separate party to any future negotiations. The reply to this scheme was given to a stunned Israel in the 1976 municipal elections when the West Bankers voted overwhelmingly for pro-PLO candidates. PLO reverses in Lebanon have provoked some Israelis into hoping that the new mayors may now be prised away from the "discredited" organisation. But this is just one further instance of wishful thinking which will lead to the squandering of still more precious time.

5. the manifold importance of a Palestinian state

In short, there is no one with whom Israel can or will negotiate over the West Bank, and there is even less chance of an agreement. With the American Presidential election out of the way, pressure will again build up for further steps to be taken towards a settlement. If the West Bank is excluded from this process, attention might again focus on further "disengagement" agreements on the Sinai and/or Golan fronts to keep up the pretence of movement and progress, and the charade will be enacted all over again. Any new accord with Egypt or Syria (were one possible) would not only fail to bring peace nearer as it would be an evasion of the Palestinian problem, but since it would amount to little more than yet another unilateral Israeli pull back it could well further endanger Israel's security position, and would lead only to escalating demands for even more withdrawals by Israel. The "salami" tactics that Israel has always feared (namely her being driven back by stages to the borders of 1967 without a peace agreement in exchange) would become through her own wilfulness over the West Bank a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Israel's position is that the key to a peace settlement lies with Egypt, and in a very important respect this is obviously true. With the genuine neutralisation of Egypt's military role in the conflict, further tension and hostilities in the Middle East would, at the worst, be localised. In principle, Israel is prepared to withdraw from virtually the whole of Sinai in exchange for a true peace. But Egypt cannot negotiate a final settlement in the absence of an acceptable solution to the Palestinian problem, and neither need she. Egypt has regained the desert jewels, namely the Abu Rodeis oil fields, ousted Israel from the strategic Sinai passes, and re-opened the Suez Canal under her full sovereignty with her own troops on both banks. She can now afford to wait and allow time to force Israel to evacuate the rest of the peninsula. Should the impasse ultimately lead to war, on the whole Egypt is today better placed to absorb the shock than is Israel. Moreover, there can be no certainty that America will again be so willing to

promptly replace Israel's depleted weaponry, whereas the Arabs' access to arms will become less of a problem with time and wealth.

On the other hand, all the signs are that, in the current period, Sadat would be pleased for the opportunity to settle with Israel if he could get away with it. In common with much of the rest of the world (and not excluding the Palestinians themselves), Egypt now sees the territorial future of the Palestinians as revolving principally around the West Bank, and also the Gaza Strip. The simple truth is that no meaningful progress is possible until the Palestinian claim to statehood is met. As long as Israel occupies the West Bank, Egypt will be unable to reach a settlement with her.

the notion of a democratic, Jewish state

There is another and possibly more important reason why withdrawal from the West Bank (and Gaza) is in Israel's longer term interests which, in essence, is that the notion of a predominantly Jewish, and democratic state of Israel can be sustained only if she leaves that territory (which, despite the scattered Jewish settlements, contains a population which is over 99 per cent Arab). The alternatives are two fold. One is that the occupation continues with no genuine political rights for the Palestinians. This would seriously erode the democratic nature of the state. It may be that Israel will retain the physical power to rule over a hostile population, but the effect this will have on the internal cohesion and moral fabric of Israeli society is likely to be quite devastating. In time, the active resistance of Jewish citizens of Israel may become a not uncommon occurrence.

The situation of structural inequality inherent in any occupation, even one that regards itself as most liberal and benevolent, corrupts the relations between the occupying and the occupied irrespective of the good intentions of the former and the efforts to reach mutual understanding made on either part. Democracy is not just a method of electing representatives,

it also incorporates a system of enlightened values which have been fundamental to the ethos of Israeli society. Israeli children of 10 years old have been brought up to their present age without ever knowing a time when their state was not in military occupation of a million Arabs. In another 10 years, these children will be fully fledged adults, and by then it will be too late for them to develop anything but distorted relationships with their Arab contemporaries.

Moreover, no society can bear such a cross without having to contrive an ideology which attempts to justify such an unnatural condition, and because of the nature of the situation, the developing ideology necessarily has to contain racist undertones. How else, in the longer term, is it possible to rationalise the permanent denial of basic political rights to fellow human beings within the same political unit? The proposal of Shimon Peres, the Israeli Defence Minister, to grant "local autonomy" to the Arabs under occupation is not, as he claims, an attempt to come to terms with the Palestinian problem. It is an attempt to evade it. Neither his scheme nor any variation of it which entails a continuing military occupation will be able to halt the decline in the once proudly proclaimed moral values of Israeli society. This, far more than any military challenge, is the real threat to the continued existence of Israel as a modern, progressive state.

The alternative path is formal annexation with full political rights for all residents of "Greater Israel". If this were achievable, it would fundamentally alter the demography of the state, and increasingly so with time given the much higher birth rate of the Arab population. The erosion of the Jewish character of the state would mean the end of the Zionist experiment as originally envisaged even though it might be supported by the more "militant" Zionists who, after 1967, based their hopes on "massive" Jewish immigration which has anything but materialised. This path would also increase the natural fears that both populations have of being dominated or swamped by the other. Furthermore, it

is by no means certain that the Arabs would accept the rights foisted on them, much as few of the Arabs of East Jerusalem took up their option of citizenship following Israel's annexation of their sector of the city.

In addition, neither path is in the least bit capable of ever leading to peace. Which ever way one looks at it, Israel's future depends on her giving up the West Bank—and the sooner the better for all concerned. Accordingly, and not because the Arab world and the United Nations demand it but purely in her own selfish interest, Israeli policy should now include, as its highest priority, the intention to withdraw from the West Bank, to be followed by a speedy settlement with Egypt while that option is still open.

the centrality of the "Palestinian cause"

The reasoning concerning Egypt's inability to reach a settlement without a resolution of the Palestinian problem raises two important questions. One is: what is so inviolate about the Palestinian cause that it can hold up a peace settlement for the entire Middle East region which is so vital for the cause of world peace? The second (which is particularly puzzling in view of the first) is: why, if the Palestinian cause is so sacred to the whole Arab world, has the behaviour of many Arab states towards the Palestinian people been far more inhumane and brutal than even the worst excesses of Israeli occupation?

A commonplace but wholly erroneous answer to the first question is that the Palestinian cause is a mere fabrication, contrived by the Arab states as an excuse for continuing their struggle against Israel; or that it is only used by corrupt and despotic regimes as a means of distracting the masses from their deprived and neglected lot. The point is not that the issue is not manipulated in the narrow interests of one autocratic regime after the other, but rather that the cause has an existence independent of such duplicity. A truly satisfactory explanation can be found only through a deep

excursion into Arab history and sentiment, and is worth a full thesis on its own. But light can be shed on the mystery if a number of major points are understood. Israel was created at a time when the Arab peoples were engaged in a head on struggle with European imperialism, and when the goal of independence was within reach for all other Arab countries. The Arabs had no more knowledge and understanding of the tragedies that repeatedly befell the Jews and which inspired the notion of a Jewish nation reconstituted in its ancient homeland, than the Jews had of the Arab historical experience. Viewed through their eyes, the establishment of a "European style" entity in the heart of the Arab world was a direct affront to the rising tide of Arab nationalism, to Islam and to anti-colonialism.

From that time on, the Palestinian cause became the emotional standard bearer of all these sentiments and the struggle for one was the struggle for all; to support the cause of the Palestinians was to support the cause of the Arabs. In this sense, the considerations were essentially of a political nature (in its wider meaning), a point that was never grasped by those who argued that if the Arabs were truly concerned with the humanitarian well being of the Palestinians they would resettle them in the lands to which they dispersed.

That epoch has now more or less passed, and the Arabs have since regained a sense of pride and dignity through various battles and accomplishments in their numerous sovereign states. The achievement of Arab independence and self-respect is no longer contingent on the removal of a Jewish state of Israel and its replacement with an Arab state of Palestine. But partly through historical attachment and partly through the exploitation of its emotional symbolism by the intrigues of inter-Arab rivalries, manifest dedication to the Palestinian cause is still a moral and political imperative. The ethos of the Palestinian cause is so central to Arab mythology that almost no move can claim sanctification unless it is wrapped in anti-Zionist

clothes; and just about any deed, however heinous, can be justified as long as it purports to be in furtherance of the anti-Israel crusade. The devotion is to the "cause" rather than to the people in whose name it supposedly is being furthered. Any Arab leader who appreciably deviates from this course is not likely to last for long.

The Palestinian "diaspora" that has developed since 1948 has added another, more tangible dimension. Like the Jews before them, many Palestinians felt driven into seeking alternative forms of compensation for the inherent instability of their condition. The prospects and comparative security obtainable through a formal training spurred many Palestinian families to place the highest value on education. With a mobile qualification, young Palestinians could leave the refugee camps behind them and participate in the world outside. Nearly three decades later, of all Middle Eastern peoples, only the Lebanese and the Palestinians can boast a proportion of university graduates comparable with Israel's.

A natural outlet for their various skills was offered by the newly rich oil states which suffered from a paucity of developed native talent. Palestinian expatriates soon occupied important positions in society, in government, in business, trade and the liberal professions. They became bankers, merchants, teachers, lawyers, technicians, administrators and journalists. There are an estimated quarter million working in Kuwait, upwards of 100,000 are employed in the Gulf states, and tens of thousands in each of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq and Libya.

Some hundreds of thousands are scattered around Lebanon, and in Jordan they form close to a majority of the population. The influence and direct pressure they are able to exert by virtue of occupying these key positions are compounded by the organisational cohesion provided through the various agencies and institutions of the PLO. On top of this, the bravado of the children of camp refugees has inspired much of the rest of Arab youth. They have thus become

a formidable political force within the Arab world which is a second reason why they can be ignored by Arab leaders only at great risk to their regimes.

the self-delusions of the Palestinians

But where has all this got them? Their forgotten plight was reversed with a vengeance as they regularly captured the world's headlines with their spectacular exploits (a contest in which they and the Israelis excel over all others). They have succeeded in making life uncomfortable for an isolated Israel. The PLO has been accepted by the Arab states as the "sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinians", and it has taken its place in a series of UN agencies. They have spent a lot of money, taken scores of lives, engaged in a host of diplomatic and other activities but not one inch of occupied Palestinian land has been liberated. The Palestinians are the victims of their own self-delusions no less than the Israelis are of theirs. If success is measured in terms of the setbacks for the enemy, both sides have done remarkably well. If, however, it is measured in terms of positive achievements, neither side is closer to its defined targets than they were on 4 June 1967—and it is the Palestinians who are the real losers. For all their problems, the Israelis do at least have their own state; the Palestinians do not. If they really want to gain one, they too will have to come to terms with harsh realities that they have kept buried beneath their slogans and rhetoric.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways by which the Palestinians might hope to forcefully oust the Israelis from the Palestinian territories captured in the June war (setting aside the question of Israel proper). One is that the Arab states combine to inflict a decisive military defeat on Israel and are then able to impose the terms of a settlement favourable to the Palestinians. The other is that the Palestinians themselves embark on all out guerrilla warfare from the neighbouring Arab states and exact such heavy casualties that Israel deems it too costly to hold the territories any longer.

As the embittered Palestinians have themselves come to realise, although occasionally they revert to the old illusion, their Arab brothers are not going to do the job for them. The elimination of Israel, which remains the official goal of the Palestinian National Covenant, no longer figures, even verbally, in Egypt's reasoning, and probably never really did so in Jordan's. Syria's belated acquiescence in Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967, and her ready acceptance of SCR 338 of October 1973, are among other indications that she too has come to adopt a similar profile.

Both Egypt and Syria are determined to win back their own territories, and that was the reason they went to war in 1973. The Palestinians' role in this war was insignificant; their importance as a military factor was minimal compared to the huge armies and modern weapons deployed by the three major combatants. The battle was essentially one between independent nation states over sovereign territory, and not about the "restoration of Palestinian rights", however it was dressed up for propaganda purposes. For all the Arab cant of "brotherhood solidarity", what Arab nation would waste time or resources to indulge the Palestinians' most grandiose visions? Moreover, the Arab states are unlikely to readily embark on a military venture even for the more limited objective of liberating the West Bank. Not only would they have to overcome their own profound divisions to attain a degree of unity and co-ordination which they managed for only a brief period preceding the October war, but Egypt, Syria and Jordan (and Lebanon) all consider that they have made great sacrifices on behalf of the Palestinians who, they feel, have shown anything but gratitude in return. Indeed far from feeling gratitude, most Palestinians have long felt a deep sense of betrayal. The stand of the PLO, as laid down in the National Covenant, is that Arab solidarity with its cause is not a favour to be asked of the Arab states, but a total obligation which they are duty bound to discharge. Article 15 reads: "Absolute responsibility (for the liberation of Palestine) falls upon the

Arab nation—peoples and governments—with the Arab people of Palestine in the vanguard. Accordingly, the Arab nation must mobilize all its military, human, moral and spiritual capabilities to participate actively with the Palestinian people in the liberation of Palestine. It must, particularly in the phase of the armed Palestinian revolution, offer and furnish the Palestinian people with all possible help, and material and human support, and make available to them the means and opportunities that will enable them to carry out their leading role in the armed revolution, until they liberate their homeland."

These imperatives have caused considerable resentment outside Palestinian circles, and have led many other Arabs to charge the PLO with unbridled arrogance. The front line states have already foregone parts of their own territories and would risk still more, together with the survival of their regimes, were they again to challenge the formidable military capability of Israel. A gamble of that order they might eventually be prepared to take in their own national interests, but then the purpose of any such offensive would be limited to recapturing their lost possessions. Even if one were to suppose that their objective in any future battle were the elimination of Israel, and even if they were successful in this endeavour, it may well be that they would then try to carve the spoils up between themselves than magnanimously hand the land on a plate to the "ungrateful" and fiercely independent Palestinians. But this assumption is anyway too far-fetched to be taken seriously in the present age.

Modern day demands require the Arab governments to devote ever increasing resources to the development of their own economies; and the accumulation of wealth and costly capital projects put more at stake than just pride and dignity. Powerful vested interests, which helped keep Lebanon aloof from four wars, will increasingly make themselves felt in all confrontation states.

An aliveness to these considerations led some Palestinian organisations—and

notably the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—to call for the revolutionary overthrow of all Arab regimes before embarking on the final battle with Israel, whereas others (and most importantly Al Fatah) call for the burying of all internal differences until Palestine has been "liberated". It should be plain by now that this latter strategy is foredoomed; but so too is the former. Many Arab regimes have indeed been overthrown during the last three decades, and on almost every occasion it was done in the name of the "revolutionary Arab masses". More of the same will lead only to more of the same. This leaves guerrilla warfare as the only other option. The "Vietnamisation" of the conflict is conceivable only if one or other of the neighbouring Arab states is prepared to be "Hanoi". At one time this role was imposed on Jordan from where the fedayeen freely struck at Israel and received the kudos for these raids, while the established government had to suffer the odium of Israeli retaliation. The point here, which has general application, is that there was no way the Palestinian organisations could win. As long as they were weak or under the thumb of the host regime, the government in question was quite prepared to use them to its own political advantage. But once their successes were seen to pass a certain limit, the power that accrued to them posed a direct threat to the authority of the government and led to a showdown. In Jordan they got crushed and the organisations were expelled. In Lebanon, with an extremely weak central army, they threatened a finely balanced stability which was forever on the verge of civil war. Their activities coupled with Israeli retaliation were enough to undermine the entire edifice and provoke the independent militias into a brutal response.

the Lebanese debacle

The PLO never grasped the true significance of its defeat in Jordan, and now the events in Lebanon might prove to be an even more devastating blow. There are three main reasons for this as follows.

One is that when they were forced to leave Jordan there was somewhere else for them to go to resume their military operations. If the outcome of the civil war in Lebanon restricts this freedom, there will be no other front line theatre left from which they could operate. Clearly they cannot return to Jordan, and for all their rhetoric both Egypt and Syria have always kept them on a tight rein, controlling their movements and activities to ensure that they do not clash with the interests of the state.

A second reason is that the military showdown with Syria in Lebanon shattered their alliance with the one Arab regime which was consistently the PLO's most outspoken champion, and with whom it had been seriously working to set up a joint political and military leadership. However close any future relationship between Syria and the PLO might appear to be, the point has been forcefully demonstrated that no Arab state can be relied upon to put the Palestinian cause before its own—and that these causes are definitely not considered to be identical by the people who actually make the decisions.

Finally, Beirut has long served as the political capital of the PLO and other Palestinian institutions. Because of its *laissez faire* structure, it was the only city in the Arab world which would allow them the unrestricted right to operate freely, as well as being able to provide a sophisticated network of services and communications. Nowhere else, for example, could they publish uncensored material praising or condemning whomsoever they liked. Now all this is at risk, and if they lose these freedoms it could do them more long term harm than all their military defeats put together.

Arabs versus Palestinians

For as long as the Palestinians are looked upon as potential revolutionaries (which will be for as long as their stateless condition warrants it) they will be regarded as a threat to the *raison d'état* of those Arab countries they inhabit. At a time

when stability is craved for by Arab rulers so that economic development may continue apace and rising expectations not be disappointed, their political interests will conflict ever more sharply with those of the "roving" Palestinians who will have to endure the consequences.

The Palestinians are not strangers to an inferior status in the Arab world. Writing of his childhood experiences in Lebanon in the 1950s, Fawaz Turki, the Palestinian author of *The Disinherited*, vividly described how he was made to feel an alien and a burden among his so called "Arab brothers". However, the mocking and intimidation which were the lot of him and his fellow refugees have recently given way to more flagrant forms of discrimination: in a number of oil producing states, the movements of Palestinians who live and work there are severely restricted near "sensitive" areas; no Palestinian is allowed, for example, within the vicinity of the Ras Tanura oil complex in Saudi Arabia. The recent political moves made by the Emir of Kuwait to tighten internal "security" stem from similar considerations; with the disintegration of Lebanon, the importance of Kuwait as a Palestinian base has been increasing. Apart from in Jordan, citizenship—and therefore the rights that go with it—are mostly denied Palestinians even when the Arab state in question is the country of their birth. Significantly, they encounter more restrictions of this type in Arab than in western countries.

The PLO itself has been financed largely by the oil rich sheikhdoms who were no doubt at least partly motivated by the immunity from attack they hoped this would bring them. The early hijackings, kidnappings and bombings against Israeli and western targets actually seemed to improve their political standing as they bathed in the reflected glory of these escapades. Then the gunmen altered their sights and started taking over Arab airliners, assassinating Arab statesmen, seizing Arab embassies and bombing Arab targets. The circle was completed when a Palestinian group stormed the

OPEC meeting in Vienna in December 1975 and abducted all the Arab oil ministers including Saudi Arabia's own Sheikh Yamani who, after being flown half way round the world, was lucky to escape with his life.

For all these reasons, the Arab regimes have now acquired a strong vested interest in curtailing the independence of Palestinian guerrilla organisations, and will become increasingly suspicious of the movements of individual Palestinians, fairly or not. In common with the experience of the Jews prior to 1948, the Palestinians' position in the Arab world and in the world at large, will only be normalised once they acquire a state of their own, whether or not the majority choose to live there. In time the Palestinian leadership will be forced, by internal Palestinian pressure, to lower its sights and campaign for an attainable objective, namely a state in part of the land. For comparable reasons, this is what happened to the earlier Zionists. Until they accept these realities, not least of which is that they are more dependent on the Arab regimes than *vice versa*, their condition will continue to deteriorate. A West Bank and Gaza state will not of itself solve the refugee problem, but it will solve the political problem and it is that which is the "heart" of the conflict. A good proportion of the refugees will probably have to be settled elsewhere (many may want to especially if generous compensation is offered) as has been the fate of millions of refugees over the last three decades. But the refugee problem will not be tackled successfully until the political problem has first been resolved. Ultimately, if there is to be peace, a West Bank state will be formed. But the time factor involved and the amount of misery and suffering which will occur meanwhile, are at least partly dependent on the stance of the PLO.

the call for a "democratic, secular state"

While a welcome departure from the PLO's earlier objective, under Ahmed Shukairy, of "driving the Jews into the sea", this new proclaimed goal of a

"democratic, secular state" of Palestine is no more credible than it is relevant. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, insofar as it was originally devised as a tactical device to improve the propaganda image of the PLO, it has proved successful. However, all attempts to give substance to the slogan have failed partly because some groups within the PLO have grave doubts about the implications of the concept, and partly because the various factions subscribe to different and often contradictory interpretations of democracy. The most "radical" of them, in calling for a "people's democracy" explicitly reject the notion of "one person, one vote", which is quite within the spirit of the age when even the most autocratic regimes describe themselves as democratic. Consequently, the PLO consensus is confined largely to the value of the slogan.

Secondly, the PLO has emphasised time and again that this new state will be Arab in character and an organic part of the wider Arab homeland. Regardless of its public protestations in the West, the term "Palestinian" is thus understood by the PLO to be essentially ethnic. In contrast, Jews are denied any national rights within this scheme which, accordingly, should never be confused with the even more unpopular proposal for a bi-national state. The PLO is prepared to extend only religious and cultural rights to the Jews who remain. In this and in many respects, the PLO's proclaimed goal is the mere counterpart of the equally chauvinistic "Greater Israel Movement".

If Zionism as a nationalist ideology is equatable with racism then so too is the PLO's ethno-nationalism (as indeed are all ethno-nationalisms). Any doubt in the Palestinian case is dispelled by Article 4 of the Palestinian National Covenant which states: "The Palestinian identity is a genuine, essential and inherent characteristic, it is transmitted from parents to children". The Palestinian "Law of Return" would apply only to Palestinians, who are defined in Article 5: "The Palestinians are those Arab nationals who, until 1947, normally resided in

Palestine regardless of whether they were evicted from it or have stayed there. Any one born, after that date, of a Palestinian father—whether inside Palestine or outside it—is also a Palestinian". In contrast, the law of Israel traces Jewish descent through the mother.

This type of "racism" is not, as is sometimes claimed, uncommon in the Middle East as the Palestinians know only too well to their detriment. In Kuwait, for example, where they account for at least a quarter of the inhabitants, they are denied the rights of the legally defined indigines as David Hirst reported in the *Guardian* on 25 February 1976: "While it denies citizenship to an Egyptian or a Palestinian of great professional value or proven loyalty, the Government is only too ready to grant it to an illiterate bedou brought in from the deserts of Syria or Saudi Arabia, whose only qualification is that he belongs in some way to the old Kuwaiti tribal system". (Perhaps the United Nations would like to consider the proposition "Kuwaitism = racism"?)

Thirdly, the Arab call for "secularisation" is highly suspicious to put it mildly as in most Arab countries, including the most "radical", Islam is granted a special constitutional status. Furthermore, there is very little support for secular notions among the largely devout Palestinian Arabs of the West Bank, Gaza and elsewhere. There really is something quite perverse about a score of undemocratic, non-secular Arab states demanding the creation in their midst of a democratic, secular (non-Arab?) state. Of all likely candidates, that Israel should be singled out as the Middle Eastern state most in need of such a transformation casts serious doubt on the genuineness of its advocates.

Apart from its propaganda value, the effect of adhering to this slogan has been that the PLO has come to deceive itself into believing that it actually has a meaningful and feasible policy. Even if it were given freedom to implement it tomorrow, it would be unable to do so merely because its inherent contradictions would

render it a practical impossibility. What its true role has been is that it has enabled the Palestinians to evade the reality which is Israel and the existence of a Jewish nationhood which is embodied by it. The alternative to their own state offered by the PLO to those Israelis who might be permitted to remain after the "liberation", is that they become Palestinians of Jewish faith. The type of future which would then be open to them was depicted by the PLO leader, Yasir Arafat, in an interview with the *Economist* of 12 April 1975: "We have in the Lebanese experience a significant example that is close to the multi-religious state we are trying to achieve". Not long afterwards, Lebanon descended into the barbarous self-destruction that left 60,000 dead and caused immeasurable grief to countless numbers of survivors. It is hardly surprising that Israelis intend to remain Israelis.

Arafat's statement, coming when it did, is further evidence of the PLO's inability to anticipate even unremarkable events. Unless the Palestinians also undertake a fundamental reappraisal of the way they have interpreted recent happenings and start to expurgate their abundant myths, they will stand hand in hand with the Israelis as a joint monument to human folly.

the right to self-determination

Foremost among the common self-deceptions is their mutual refusal to recognise and accept the claim to national self-determination of the other. The arguments in favour of these claims, and in support of a solution which would include a Palestinian Arab state alongside an Israeli Jewish state, have been elaborated elsewhere (see, for example, the writer's Young Fabian Pamphlet, *Middle East conflict: a tale of two peoples*, January 1973). Suffice to say here that over the last three decades both sides have assembled a formidable array of experts on the legitimacy of their own claim, and on the illegitimacy of the claim to nationhood of the other. This latter achievement clearly sprung from

the negative motive to demonstrate as non-existent a phenomenon which is regarded as undesirable. Imagine what their respective views might have been had each achieved statehood in different parts of the world with no territorial conflict between them. Rather than propagating religious, racial and historical myths of the other, the natural relationship of two such small peoples, each with a chronicle of suffering, surely would have been one of mutual cooperation and support. Furthermore, inasmuch as the respective national identities were forged and strengthened through adversity in the first place, the repeated denials and the attempted eliminations of these identities only add to their potency, and are thus self-defeating in the end. This is one of the longer term lessons of Lebanon.

The deeply ingrained ideological resistance to the other's national existence leads to fatuous results and creates wholly unnecessary obstacles. Thus the Israeli government's official stand is that it is prepared to hand over the West Bank to King Hussein, but, quite absurdly, it cannot conceive of delivering it to the Palestinians themselves. Non-nations do not have the right to national self-determination.

By the same measure, to the PLO Israel does not possess even the abstract right to exist. However, in sticking to its official aim of eradicating Israel, it is today well out of step with the Palestinians of the West Bank. The majority are indigenous to the territory and both they, and their co-inhabitants of refugee status, are sick and tired of being caught in the cross fire. Like the Israelis, they have known nothing but insecurity for the past three decades, and are suffering their own creeping isolation within the Arab world. There now is a strong yearning for stability within the context of independence. There also is a real excitement about the prospect of having a state of their own called Palestine and, for the first time ever, of enjoying the trappings which come with statehood. They have no interest in prejudicing its life at birth by recklessly provoking their far mightier neighbour. Moreover, having lived and

worked close to Israelis for nearly a full decade, irrational fears and blind hatred no longer dominate their attitudes, and first hand knowledge of the many sided reality of Israel has transformed their understanding of the realistic options. Prior to the 1967 war, there was hardly a Palestinian who did not believe that the "artificial entity" of Israel would cease to exist as soon as the Arabs launched a united onslaught. It was not just that they longed for Israel to perish, but that they fatalistically believed in its inevitability. Consequently, they had no cause even to contemplate an alternative to their problems other than the elimination of the Jewish state. Mendacious Arab propaganda and the Palestinians' total ignorance of Israel were jointly responsible for this blind faith, an illusion which was thoroughly shattered by the lightning result of the Six Day war, the immediate trauma of Israeli occupation, and the relatively free movement to and fro over the old "green line" and over the "open bridges" with Jordan which enabled large numbers of Arabs to come and experience Israel and Israelis in the flesh for the first time. Thus it was not until 1967 that the Palestinians learnt the true outcome of the war of 19 years earlier.

These events drastically altered the West Bank perception of the reality and nature of Israel. Its inhabitants were soon forced to explore alternative solutions which took account of Israel's permanence without compromising the Palestinian minimum aspiration to national sovereignty. For this reason among others, to maintain that for Israel to relinquish her control over the West Bank would be tantamount to a return to the pre-1967 situation, is to argue from an antiquated perspective.



6. the way out of the impasse

In essence, the problem now is this: Israel badly needs a peace settlement, and soon. So too do the Palestinians. Egypt holds the "key to peace", but cannot and will not negotiate a final agreement while the Palestinians are stateless. The only acceptable alternative to that state being formed on the territory of the state of Israel proper, is for it to be on the West Bank (and probably to ultimately include Gaza as well). Therefore, withdrawal from the West Bank, which is inevitable sooner or later anyway, and happens also to be in Israel's domestic interest, is the pre-condition to obtaining the "key to peace". But such withdrawal is incapable of being successfully negotiated, and so there is deadlock. This is the impasse.

The deadlock is, however, more apparent than real because it rests upon a fallacious assumption, namely that Israel needs to negotiate with anyone over the deployment of her own military and civilian personnel. Once she comes to fully accept the inevitability (and desirability) of relinquishing her control over the West Bank and adopts it as policy, there are more ways than one of setting about its implementation.

Were Israel to enter negotiations with this end in view, she would naturally do so with her own vision of the new borders. She would without doubt aim to retain at least all of Jerusalem, as well as the Latrun area overlooking the new (post-1967) Tel Aviv to Jerusalem highway, and possibly also the Kalkilya bulge. This position would probably be her immutable sticking point, and she would be unlikely to compromise any further, however severe the pressures. Israel's maximum territorial concessions will almost definitely fall short of the minimum acceptable to the Arabs; (notably over Jerusalem); Israel would again be branded as the intransigent party and nobody would actually benefit. However, the pitfalls endemic to a protracted negotiating process, and the enmity they will stimulate, are all avoidable because negotiations over the West Bank are unnecessary. Apart from the fact that agreement will not be forthcoming in any

case (even assuming a credible negotiating partner could be found). Israel has no need to seek approval in advance, since she is free to decide on the new borders independently and able to secure them unilaterally without having to compromise on (or to justify to her enemies) her genuine security requirements or her vital national interests. Once she has determined her minimal conception of the new borders, then—after making certain essential preliminary arrangements discussed below—Israel should withdraw from the rest of the West Bank. This is the way out of the impasse.

Israel cannot hope to counterbalance the growing economic strength of the Arabs, and Israeli strategy will continue to fail as long as it tries to tackle the problem along these lines. Israel is constantly being forced, if only for reasons of morale, to delude herself into believing that with time the balance of economic and political power will swing back in her favour. Israel's only course is to seek to dissipate the apparition of Arab unity which endures only in its blanket hostility towards her. The other political blocs can only be called upon to lend solid support to damnations of Israel while the fiction is sustained, which will be for as long as the Arabs manage, or feel obliged, to disguise their deep differences towards a final settlement. Israel's future cannot be secured unless she removes the one obstacle that is preventing these profound divisions from breaking the surface, and which would lead in time to a pattern of more natural relationships among all the peoples of the Middle East. That obstacle today is her continuing occupation of the West Bank—the current and immediate focus of Palestinian national aspirations, and also the cement which has forced the disparate anti-Israel alliance to remain artificially intact.

the fear of withdrawal

In relinquishing control over the West Bank, Israel would have one major fear and one major aim. The fear would be that the vacated area would be used as a

launching pad for Israel's destruction. The aim would be a bilateral agreement with Egypt which would truly neutralise her role in the conflict. If that were achieved, the Middle East conflict as we have known it for the past 30 years would be at an end. At the worst, there might be regional tensions and localised guerrilla warfare, but the threat to Israel's physical existence would have been removed, and so too would the danger of a world wide conflagration with all its political, economic and military ramifications.

To deal with the fear first. Mention was made earlier of why there would be strong indigenous resistance to the West Bank being used as a belligerent base following independence. The current support extended to the PLO by its inhabitants is of a broad political nature in the face of Israeli occupation. It does not represent a blanket approval of the PLO's declared goals or of its methods. Consequently, such support is likely to diminish with Israeli withdrawal. The West Bankers have their own views and interests, and they will not allow themselves to be rode rough shod over by the dictatorial edicts of returning exiles. There is widespread support for peaceful co-existence.

a demilitarised west bank

To put even the gravest complexion on it, what threat would a fledgling Palestinian state which would need a few decades to catch up militarily, economically and socially pose alone to Israel? Although the idea that it would pose a serious threat might seem extremely far fetched several thousand miles from the scene, nevertheless the thought of such a possibility understandably has quite a different impact on a people who have faced the threat of destruction before—and seen it carried out. Cast iron guarantees there can never be, but in the light of the long proclaimed goals of the PLO, Israel would be entitled to demand stronger assurances of the military standing of the West Bank before enacting her withdrawal. Indeed, she would no doubt

makes such assurances a prior condition.

A demilitarised West Bank is an impossible product of open negotiations as it is inconceivable for the PLO to agree to such a condition, or for any credible Arab negotiator to be seen to agree. But it is an entirely practical proposition as the territory is land locked and shares common borders with Jordan and Israel only. Jordan's fears of its military potential are no less than Israel's. Indeed there is good reason to believe that, if at all, PLO guns would turn eastwards before westwards. Once Israel withdraws the area would, *ipso facto*, be non-militarised but beforehand quiet diplomacy should secure a US/Soviet commitment (or minimally a US guarantee) to jointly underwrite its continued non-militarisation which would be publicly announced after the event. Jordan would attach herself to this pact (perhaps secretly at first) and it would be further strengthened if the nations of Western Europe identified themselves with it too. In time, other Arab states might also wish to be associated, in particular Saudi Arabia because of the stability it would add to the region. More than this is unattainable but what is attainable can be achieved only in this way.

Israel, as a party to the pact, would naturally reserve the right to reoccupy the area if, but only if, another belligerent state broke ranks and threatened imminent invasion of it. Two questions are raised here: one is what state is likely to take such action? The other is what has prevented it from doing so until now?

The importance and relevance of this latter question is that, other than during periods of turmoil, the Israeli presence since 1967 has been more one of administration by a foreign authority than of a bludgeoning military occupation. The emphasis has focused on as low a profile as possible, and certainly in normal circumstances one could travel the lengths and breadths of the territory and rarely come across material evidence of military rule. Israeli tanks, missiles, aircraft and other instruments of heavy warfare are naturally permanently poised to enter the West Bank in the event of other states

preparing to invade the area; but in the main they are not located there. The deterrent to potentially belligerent Arab states that has been provided by this threat of an Israeli pre-emptive re-invasion of the West Bank, and which has been effective thus far, will not disappear with a formal withdrawal. In fact, it may well be strengthened because the newly independent Palestinians would themselves be strongly motivated to resist outside military intervention once Israeli rule has ended.

non-intervention by Hussein

In short, the prospect of foreign military involvement after the formal Israeli withdrawal would be no greater than it is now. As regards the position of Jordan, the only other neighbouring state, the government would no doubt strive for a special relationship with the Palestinians of the region, but it is not as certain as is sometimes assumed that Hussein is just waiting for the chance to walk in and take over. Of all the countries in the world, including the other member states of the Arab league, only Britain and Pakistan ever recognised as legal King Abdullah's unilateral annexation of the West Bank in 1950. Abdullah was assassinated the following year (by a Palestinian), and several attempts were made to topple Hussein in the years up to 1967. For most of the period under Jordanian rule, political parties were banned, violent clashes were common, and order was preserved through the frequent use of troops and the imposition of martial law, curfews and military courts. Hussein's domestic position and his standing in the Arab world have never been as secure since his disentanglement from the volatile West Bank and the consolidation of his hold in Transjordan. He really might prefer to keep it that way.

The one thing that might cause Hussein actively to press for sovereignty over the West Bank is if Israel continues to insist that his rule is the only acceptable alternative to Israeli rule. This would be a grave error on Israel's part for several reasons. Firstly, Hussein would then be

far less likely to agree to the demilitarisation of the area—unless Israel agreed to the impossible condition of demilitarising an equivalent area of her own sovereign territory. (Regarding order on the West Bank, this could be better maintained by an indigenous police force than by the provocative presence of troops of another, and not very popular regime.) Secondly, without self-government in a state of their own the minimum Palestinian aspirations would not be, and would be seen not to be, fulfilled. Without the responsibility of government the Palestinians would be more inclined to encourage renewed raids into Israel. Sooner or later they would kick out Hussein anyway, so at best Jordanian rule is only a short term alternative. Thirdly, Israeli claims to have absolved herself from responsibility for the Palestinians would ring too hollow. Pressure from the still stateless PLO on the Egyptian government would be as intense as ever, and Egypt would be unable to negotiate a separate settlement. Instead, the pressure would mount up on Israel to give up Jerusalem and other retained areas. Finally, a take over by Hussein would lessen the immediate dependence of a West Bank state on Israel—an important advantage which is discussed below. To minimise the chance of error, a private commitment from Jordan that she would not intervene should be formally obtained in advance through US government auspices.

no option for Syria

This would leave Syria as the only other plausible transgressor. Even if it were assumed that she had an interest in taking on the West Bankers (and that the destruction of Israel was still a serious Syrian policy objective), she would be faced with all the deterrents enumerated earlier. On top of these, there is no direct territorial link, and therefore any attempt at intervention would entail invading through Jordanian territory. The current alliance of convenience between President Assad and King Hussein could not survive any real tension, and the formidable resistance of Jordan would surely be supported by manoeuvres of the American Sixth

Fleet in the Mediterranean, and it is unlikely that the Soviets would sanction further "deviationism" from their once reliable ally either. When Syrian tanks last entered Jordanian territory during the civil war of 1971, they were convincingly rebuffed by the combined pressures of Jordan, America and Israel, and probably also by the Soviet Union which already then was keen to avoid a super power confrontation.

A Syrian attempt at intervention would also meet with fervent opposition from Egypt which has always been strongly distrustful of Syrian ambitions; from Saudi Arabia which has little love for any Ba'athist regime and has the power of financial sanction; from neighbouring Iraq which recently denounced Damascus's version of Ba'athism as a cover-up for a "military dictatorship", and whose intense hatred for the Syrian regime has frequently made itself felt through military brinkmanship; and from the PLO who will take many years to forgive Syrian "treachery" in Lebanon. None of the issues which led to the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war has been resolved, and the new governmental authority will need to tread warily to avoid rekindling the rivalry between the opposing factions. Syrian entanglement cannot now be easily reversed and her attentions will be pinned down there for a long time to come. It will be well into the future before she will be in a position to consider undertaking another risky adventure. Furthermore, a belligerent Syria, which has been prepared to cross military swords with Israel in the past only with the active support of Egypt, will have good reason to fear the permanent freezing of the current *status quo* in the sparsely populated Golan region once Israel and Egypt have arrived at a bilateral agreement. This will give her a strong incentive to participate in the peace moves herself.

the neutrality of Lebanon

It is still too soon to make definitive judgements on the political and strategic consequences of the recent events in

Lebanon, but there are certain pertinent indicators. The well armed, tightly knit Maronite Christians have long had an uneasy relationship with the rest of the Arab world, and have always displayed a strong reluctance to get embroiled in the Palestine conflict. The outbreak of civil war aggravated the perceived threat to their separate identity and this, coupled with their accumulated hatred of the Palestinians, has probably alienated them from the "Arab cause" to the point of no return. The Syrian occupation force, now in the guise of the Arab League peace keeping force, has already proved to be an undependable ally to the Maronites who, having once broken the psychological barrier of openly finding common cause with Israel, will now probably look increasingly to the Jewish state as the main guarantor of their own independent survival. With a powerful Maronite enclave in the midst of the country, the likelihood is that in the event of another Arab/Israeli war there will be no change in the traditional passive neutrality of Lebanon, despite Syrian influence. But whatever the future of Lebanon, it will not alter the considerations concerning the manifold importance and the inevitability sooner or later of an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, and so the Lebanese situation should not be used as an excuse for further procrastination.

the extensiveness of withdrawal

While certain matters such as demilitarisation can be carefully planned in advance of Israeli withdrawal, the particular circumstances of West Bank society would lead to other repercussions flowing of their own volition. As with most developing societies, there have long been deep rivalries within the Palestinian world, and especially within the PLO itself, which have been artificially stifled because of the unnatural circumstances of the Palestinian people. Their release, a necessary and integral part of the dynamics of change, will occur only with territorial sovereignty, much as the Zionist movement experienced a fierce internecine struggle following British withdrawal in 1948. A political vacuum

is not necessarily a bad thing, particularly if the area is militarily sealed. In this case the advantage to Israel would be that any initial criticism from Arab quarters that the evacuation was not total would be outweighed and in time overpowered by competing Palestinian factions, supported by their respective patrons in the Arab world and beyond, vying to gain control of the political void; no doubt Israel herself would not remain completely aloof. As the minority groups seek to prevent the pro-Fatah majority group from automatically taking over total control of the reins of government, all other considerations would be relegated in importance. With the PLO's sudden and total immersion in Palestinian politics at the expense of its influence in Arab politics, a still willing Egypt would be freed to negotiate her own settlement with Israel.

These would be the likely effects only if the area evacuated was large enough to support an independent Palestinian entity so that there was an irresistible incentive to participate in the power struggle, and so that Egypt could reasonably claim that the Palestinian problem was now primarily the Palestinians' problem. In other words, the pull back would have to be sufficiently extensive for it to be credibly described as a "withdrawal from the West Bank", and would thus need to include all the major population centres—the Hebron area in the south as well as the Nablus area in the north. It would, however, be entirely unrealistic to expect Jerusalem not to be excepted. Indeed, this is one of the main reasons why a negotiated withdrawal is out of the question. The emotional symbolism and historical significance of Jerusalem to the Jews are too deeply ingrained, and too much blood was sacrificed in its capture, for Israel to consider relinquishing sovereignty over any part of her capital city. It is the one issue on which there is virtual unanimity within the country. On the other hand, no credible Arab negotiator will be any the more ready to formally sign away 1400 years of Moslem rule. The necessary compromise on this delicate question will ultimately be attainable only after the

establishment of normal peaceful relations between two independent states. If it is dealt with in reverse order there will be no progress.

Israel's original goals

As regards the rest of the West Bank, when Israeli troops first entered the territory in June 1967 her leaders repeatedly stressed that the occupation would be temporary, and they intended it to have the effect of permanently changing the Palestinians' perception of Israel and the Israelis. The aim was to create a network of lasting bonds involving a high degree of interdependence which would be to their common benefit and which would breed a West Bank interest in retaining mutual links after the occupation had ended. In the main, Israel has achieved what she set out to do (although she seems now to have forgotten what that was.) While the inhabitants of the region may have no greater love for the Jewish state, their direct knowledge of it has served to dispel much of the bigotry and most of the myths. As regards the structural relationship, the West Bank is today almost totally dependent on Israel. This situation has potential advantages for Israel but ones which can only be materialised by withdrawing. The spontaneous repercussions that would follow from this move would drive the new Palestinian government into seeking to negotiate cooperative arrangements with the Israeli government.

Palestinian/Israeli negotiations

The immediate task of any new government on the West Bank would be quite unenviable because of the peculiar handicaps of a West Bank state. Firstly, the territory is completely land locked. There is no access to the Mediterranean except through Israel, nor to any sea way other than through neighbouring territory. Passage by air would be possible only with Israeli or Jordanian aid and assistance. In other words, in the absence of a peaceful relationship with at least one

of her two immediate neighbours, a Palestinian state would be completely isolated. This is one powerful reason why the new government might feel compelled to seek urgent discussions with the Israeli government. Similar considerations would put Israel in an advantageous position to do a deal with PLO politicians striving desperately to gain entry into the cloistered territory from Lebanon and elsewhere. In view of its history of enmity with Jordan, the PLO can hardly bank on Hussein allowing its leaders unconditional passage through his country.

Secondly, there would be an enormous influx problem. There are approximately one quarter of a million 1967 refugees on the East Bank to whom Israel denied permission to return to the West Bank. Many of these would now claim that immediate right. No Palestinian government could ignore their demands and hope to survive for long. Furthermore, there are some 350,000 1948 refugees also on the East Bank, and another 350,000 from 1948 in Lebanon and Syria. A good proportion of these would also claim their rights as citizens of the Palestinian state, and the new government would somehow have to convince them to accept a phased entry over a number of years. The Palestinian government's only hope of coping with these sorts of problems, alongside the challenges of rival groups, would be with at least the passive assistance of Israel as the Israeli government could undermine the stability of the Palestinian government with very little effort. Since West Bank industry is too undeveloped as yet to absorb even a fraction of these potential recruits to the labour force, even a limited influx would inflate the lists of the jobless and would create an acute housing shortage.

These formidable but surmountable problems would give way to havoc if Israel kept her border closed for an extended period. Immediately following her withdrawal, Israel might close the new border, ostensibly for security reasons, but announce her readiness to negotiate open borders and the resumption of free trade without delay. About

65,000 Arabs from the West Bank work in Israel daily, and their wages comprise a considerable proportion of total West Bank income. Prolonged closure of the border would wipe out that income and its source, and add those numbers to the ranks of the unemployed. It would also seriously disrupt the West Bank infrastructure and totally distort the West Bank economy which, over this last decade, has been effectively integrated into the Israeli economy. Well over half the West Bank's national income derives from work and trade with Israel. Israel would be able to cushion the rupture more easily as the West Bank is the dependent sector. For example, the area workers comprise not more than 5 per cent of the total working force in Israel, and could be replaced without severe difficulty in these times of uncertain employment. Any West Bank government would be unlikely to survive the additional burdens arising from a sustained closure of the border, and as survival would be its foremost priority this is a further immediate reason why it would feel compelled to seek urgent discussions with Israel.

The temporary Palestinian administration (which initially might or might not include the Beirut based PLO leaders) would probably feel the need to protect its military vulnerability by calling in UN troops to guard its borders with both neighbours. There is no good reason why such a request should not be heeded to and implemented without delay, although it would be essential that the UN does not act to keep the parties apart as the key to peaceful relations is to bring them together and for the borders to remain open. Neither is there any good reason why Israeli Jews should not be permitted to stay and live in peace in a Palestinian state, as nearly half a million Palestinian Arabs live as citizens of Israel.

7. towards peace in the middle east

As with demilitarisation, the groundwork for a bilateral agreement between Israel and Egypt could be prepared in advance.

Egypt would make her participation in such discussions dependent on an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, and Israel would make her intended withdrawal dependent on there being firm assurances of subsequent peace negotiations with Egypt. Once the mutual commitments were obtained in principle, not only could there be prior agreement on the location, timing and agenda of the talks, but even the shape of their final outcome could be arrived at beforehand through direct but secret negotiations in, say, Washington or London. Indeed, the British Labour government is well placed to play an important role in this entire project.

The substance of such an agreement would be likely to involve the demilitarisation of Sinai under joint, and perhaps international, supervision following the return of the desert to Egypt; a "leasing" of Sharm el-Sheikh, together with a coastal corridor from Eilat, to Israeli civilian control on the understanding that it formally reverts to Egyptian sovereignty; no change in the present status of Gaza pending discussions over its future with a stable West Bank government; a formal peace treaty leading to a "normalisation" of relations over time, beginning perhaps with sporting and cultural exchanges and possibly tourism, and involving a renunciation of all forms of belligerency including verbal attacks at international forums. The arrangements might also include mutual reductions in armaments expenditure.

Agreement on the establishment of trading links and joint industrial projects should be accorded a high priority as a means of promoting the "institutionalisation" of peace. The collaboration of the Saudi Arabian government would be necessary to ensure, amongst other things, the ending of the Arab economic boycott of Israel as a further *quid pro quo*. With enough imagination and courage on all sides, the seemingly perennial conflict could rapidly give way

to an era of prosperity which would benefit all the peoples of the Middle East.

the diplomatic campaign and Soviet involvement

Following Israel's announcement that she has withdrawn from the West Bank (a move which would have the incidental but important benefit of not requiring the Israeli government to formally renounce in advance its official opposition to a Palestinian state), the Americans and the Western Europeans amongst others would need to declare their strong support of Israel's action and reiterate their total commitment to her survival and welfare. The diplomatic campaign of Israel and her allies would obviously present the withdrawal as a major gesture to Israel's Arab neighbours, demonstrating the considerable risk she is prepared to run in exchange for peace. (Whereas, in fact, the long term risk is much lower than any alternative action—particularly none.) Israel would stress her willingness to talk about all outstanding issues including Jerusalem, Gaza and compensation for the 1948 refugees which, as a matter of fact, would be a reiteration of her long standing official policy. These issues she would be prepared to discuss with whatever authority manages to establish itself on the West Bank, as she would welcome negotiations with any other properly constituted government with whom she has outstanding differences. This would of course include negotiations with Syria over Golan as well as with Egypt over Sinai.

The Soviet Union, which has her own interests in the area and which has gained nothing from the volatility of recent years, should be involved from an early stage, and should be prevailed upon to include in her own declaration: a welcome of the initiative, for which she assuredly will claim the credit (which just about every party can and probably will do; indeed none will be required to lose face); a commitment to the survival of all states in the area including both the new "Palestine" and the state of Israel, which should be specified by name

(this has in fact always been her official policy, indeed she was the first country to extend *de jure* recognition to Israel in 1948); her participation along with America and other powers in guaranteeing the non-militarisation of the evacuated area; and her readiness to re-establish diplomatic relations with Israel. One major incentive for Soviet involvement is that the essentials of the whole operation could be enacted even without her cooperation. Similar pronouncements of intent should be made by the other communist states during the course of the next few days, and those African and Asian states which originally severed relations with Israel with reluctance should take the initiative in re-establishing them as a prelude of things to come.

President Sadat of Egypt could equally claim as much credit as he likes in welcoming the move and, in proclaiming that Israel has at last demonstrated her peaceful intentions in the face of Arab strength *et cetera*, he should then go on to announce his readiness to sit and discuss a full and final settlement. Since the details would have already been settled, the formal proceedings could be completed before the "wreckers" on both sides have enough time to recover their wits and set about sabotaging a peaceful outcome.

the feasibility of the action

Can the Israeli government do it? This depends almost entirely on whether the Israeli leadership can be persuaded of its all round advantages, especially when compared with the alternatives. Certainly the spirit embodied in this proposal is anything but alien to the Israeli ethos or experience. On the contrary, it is quite appropriate to a people who are noted for their characteristic flair of pulling off the daring, the dramatic and the unexpected. When General Dayan wanted to "open" the bridges between the West and East Banks, he fully appreciated that no shuttle diplomacy, no Geneva, and no negotiations could have led to agreement. Israel had to act unilaterally,

even without the promise of a *quid pro quo*, and so she did. Neither Hussein, the West Bankers nor anyone else was asked to concede anything, to sign anything or to publicly agree to anything. They were simply placed in a situation where they just had to respond to a new and sudden reality; and they responded as they were bound to. A new and momentous condition was thus created to mutual advantage.

As far as the mood in the country is concerned, it is very easy to be misled by superficial opinion polls into thinking that most Israelis are adamant that under no circumstances should Israel relinquish control over the West Bank. Certainly it is the case that a given proportion of the population is immovably set against any compromise over this territory. However, it is no less true that an equally resolute section of the population favours almost any concession if its reward were a genuine peace. As is so often the case, it is the people in that grey area in between who hold the balance, and it is they who are the most susceptible to an act of decisive leadership. Initially, they might well have their doubts and suspicions, but as the favourable repercussions soon became evident the bulk of the population would come round to endorsing this course of action.

A case in point was the decision, in November 1974, to allow drastic increases in the prices of basic commodities—of up to 100 per cent in some instances. At first there were riots and protests, but before the week was out the opinion polls, which would have shown overwhelming opposition a few days earlier, registered retrospective approval. They did so because, despite the personal hardships, the severity of the measures and the thoroughness with which they were enacted restored faith (for a while) in a decisive leadership which appeared to know what it was doing. For a time, the people of Israel regained a sense of future which they were not to experience again until the Entebbe raid in July 1976. Shortly before the raid, a reluctant Israeli government

announced its readiness to negotiate with the hijackers, a decision which, according to opinion polls, was approved by a clear majority of the population. Yet several days later the entire population rejoiced in the success of the rescue operation, even though they were not consulted on the specific action of achieving the obviously desired goal, and despite the fatal loss of some of the hostages and a leading member of the rescue team. Public expressions of opinion through opinion polls or similar methods can often be extremely unreliable guides to the popularity of future action, especially in times of perceived threat when fear and uncertainty play such a leading role. In such circumstances, it is usually the decisiveness of the leadership and the evident success of the operation which really count.

In the coming general election sometime in 1977, the Israeli Labour party should be prepared to go to the country on a platform which places a peace settlement as the highest priority, and it should ask for a clear mandate to do all that is necessary to achieve that goal without prejudicing the integrity of the state. The National Religious Party would need to be left out of the new government which could include instead "dovish" parties similar to the composition of Rabin's first cabinet. Immediately prior to the implementation of the plan, the government might have to apply the emergency powers available to it for a short period until the benefits become manifest. If so, the fiercely democratic nature of Israeli society would ensure that these powers were operative for the minimum time necessary.

conclusion: the only path to mutual "normalisation"

The common shortcomings of most proposals for "peace" in the Middle East, are that they normally require either the surrender of the entire *raison d'être* of one of the parties (which is in any case unattainable,) or they advocate what should be properly described as a "non-war" solution. The problem with the

proposals of this latter type is that, at best, they deal only with certain of the most severe symptoms while freezing the determinants. No measure can hope to transform a situation which is riddled with hostility into one that is capable of leading to peaceful relations, unless it tackles the wider abnormalities attached to both the Israeli and the Palestinian conditions. Each of these conditions is a product of the enmity between the two peoples, and the only hope either has of improving its standing in the world is through the patronage of the other.

Thus, however popular their cause might appear to be now or in the future, the Palestinian circumstance will only ever be "normalised", both internally and externally, when the Palestinians take their place in international society on an equal footing with all other peoples of the world. For this they require their own nation state, and that they can achieve only with the cooperation of Israel.

Equally, a fund of goodwill still exists for Israel in many quarters, but it will go on fading in time as her isolation becomes more firmly entrenched. By being confronted with a new situation which obliges it to seek out and openly negotiate with the Israeli government, the young Palestinian government will be, ironically, the pioneering force behind Israel's re-integration into the international community. These are vital ingredients for the establishment of a proper peace, but ones which are most often neglected. Once the basic structural relationship is put right, even the strongest emotional attitudes can die down in the course of time as witness French-German relations in recent years or, even more appropriately, Israeli-German relations.

The list of benefits that Israel could offer "Palestine" is endless and, if tendered with magnanimity, could virtually ensure amicable relations between the two states from the outset. A *de facto* peace will be established early, and its momentum will inevitably lead

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