

Sadat's visit to Israel: a turning point

By ROBERT FRIEDMANN

Although the Sadat visit to Israel succeeded in surprising the know-all media, including its various "expert" commentators—who all had to pass a crash course on the Middle East last week—the visit also managed to surprise politicians and statesmen, not to mention social (political) scientists.

If those interested in voting behavior were shocked by the results of the

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May elections in Israel, so are international relations experts these days when it is proven, once again, that the "unexpected" does happen. Until Sadat actually set foot at Ben-Gurion airport nobody took his "threat" to visit Israel seriously. It will be beneficial, therefore, to attempt to arrange the latest developments in some meaningful order.

Reports on the balance of power in the Middle East by A. Cordesman in the October issue of *Armed Forces Journal* suggest that Israel enjoys, in the final analysis, the upper hand. Whether this is true or not, it is too superficial in describing the "real" aspects of the balance of powers in the area.

The Israeli military might was not able to impose negotiations for any sort of peace or tranquility settlements or even to deter Arabs from waging wars. It did successfully manage to defeat any attempts to destroy the country.

The Arabs can wage wars (and they did so in the past) even when they are certain they cannot win them. For them, winning is defined differently

than for Israel: They can (and used to) define limited objectives which will strategically justify the ideological war against Israel.

Such objectives can (and did) focus on:

- inflicting as many casualties as they could to an Israel particularly sensitive to this point;
- inflicting severe damage to the Israeli economy, paralyzing her market by forcing her to concentrate all her efforts for defense;
- limited conquer of land;
- achieving political gains by using the oil weapon; and
- damaging Israeli morale by frustrating her population with a never-ending war.

Therefore, it is clear that there is no political meaning to Israeli military might and this is why in the past political approval was never given to Israel military victories.

The Israeli military forces are trained for one purpose: to deal a decisive blow against an actively hostile party, taking into consideration that Israel cannot allow herself to lose even *one* war. It is a common axiom

(though paradoxical) in Israel that she has nothing to gain from another war even if the belief in a clear victory is always reassured. At this stage every precaution is taken to prevent another war.

This paradox is understood better by most Israelis than by various expert analysts. One has only to remember that had the Arabs not started the Six Days War there would not be any disputed territories. Of course, for some Arab countries and particularly for the P.L.O. all territory under Israeli sovereignty is disputable.

How can another war be prevented in the Middle East? The current American view prefers a comprehensive settlement of the conflict, in contrast to previous administrations that pushed for step-by-step or partial settlements.

The semantics may be different but the real question remains as to *what* is there—and *who* is there—to negotiate about anything? (Accepting the assumption that negotiations will take place guaranteeing the non-destructive

tion or elimination of one of the parties.)

In a peace proposal offered by *Time* magazine, it is assumed that all parties desire peace. If this is true, why the need for international guarantees? And if agreements will be violated, should complaints be directed to *Time's* editorial office?

There is an overwhelming consensus in Israel that a P.L.O. state in the West Bank is the first step toward the destruction of Israel (as well as the overthrow of moderate King Hussein from Jordan). Israel cannot and should not allow herself a bottleneck stretching eight miles from the Mediterranean to the West Bank. Even from downtown St. Paul to downtown Minneapolis the distance is greater (and thankfully no disputes of significance take place).

What will happen in Geneva if a peace conference had reconvened without Sadat's visit? If procedural matters were ironed out it would have failed because of substantive dissensual matters. President Sadat of

Israel to 12

Israel from 7

Egypt seems to have understood this point ergo the historic trip to Israel and breakdown of psychological barriers ("the 70 percent of the conflict").

American pressure for an overall settlement caused Egypt to decline from its top leadership position in the Arab world by encouraging extremists like Syria and the P.L.O. This furthered any chances for a not too distant settlement and when realizing there are limits to U.S. pressure on Israel, Sadat felt a junior partner to unending negotiations.

Sadat seems to be tired of carrying the burden of Arab nationalism on Egyptian shoulders and he is now more amenable to negotiate with Israel. Neither in his address to the Knesset nor to the Egyptian Assembly did he mention or refer to the P.L.O. Israel has much to offer Egypt and other Arab countries (to exclude sacrificing herself, of course) if they desire true and meaningful negotiations leading to peace.

Some Middle East experts believe that in the hostile Arab World there is a segment that not only desires but is ready for some sort of settlement with

Israel. The fact that such a settlement may be a basis for renewed hostilities should not discourage reaching it since a peace-like momentum may emerge where all parties will have vested interest in preserving the newly-acquired status quo.

Sadat's visit to Israel, his speech to the Egyptian Assembly and subsequent Arab reaction proved at least two points. One, that Israel was, and is, just in fearing Arab intentions. If Syria and the P.L.O. truly want peace with Israel (which they don't despite repetitious declarations about Geneva) why should they reject Sadat's move?

Two, in order to get married, sign a contract or a peace treaty, the agreement of both sides is needed. In order to start war, the decision of one party is sufficient. Sadat, and some other Arab countries, are now in that position.

Israel always wanted peace and now, if the Arabs will agree to it, peace will come about. All the major moves in the area depend on the Arabs; this is why the current prospects for peace as well as the dangers of war are not so strange bedfellows. It is very disappointing to see the USSR siding with Arab regimes who reject peace.

Sadat received much praise for his move, taking for granted, of course, that hardliner Prime Minister Menahem Begin is a naturally receptive host. Peace is a matter of agreement between two sides. (which seemed to somewhat irritate American go-betweens if not frighten them altogether that they may be left out of the

negotiation processes. It may not be a joke to say that even if the parties arrive at some settlement by face-to-face negotiations—and Sadat's invitation of all parties in the Middle East, including Israel and excluding the P.L.O., to Cairo is a step in that direction—the Americans would still like to see a reconvening of the Geneva Conference. President Carter's Nov. 30 statement on the Middle East somewhat belatedly supported Sadat's diplomacy.) I nominate Sadat and Begin for Men-of-the-Year if not for the Nobel Peace prize.

It is now up to all involved parties to demonstrate genuine substantive efforts to continue the peace momentum.