

Camp David and Beyond: A View From the Third World

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On the heels of Andrew Young's departure from the United Nations amid much publicity concerning U.S. failure to involve the Palestinians in Middle East negotiations, heads of state and representatives from ninety-two countries and three independence movements convened at the Sixth Summit Conference of Non-Aligned Nations hosted by Dr. Fidel Castro at Havana, Cuba.

The Havana Declaration of September, 1979, adopted by the Non-Aligned Conference—perhaps the most powerful of Third World forums—censured the Camp David accords as a U.S. attempt to "obtain partial solutions that are favorable to Zionist aims and underwrite the gains of Israeli aggression at the expense of the Palestinian people." In an international environment in which the United States increasingly finds itself in the minority on the majority of world issues, Third World attitudes toward the Camp David accords—of which the Havana Declaration is but the latest evidence—merit serious consideration.

A prescient U.S. analyst has observed: "The tendency in the United States is to dismiss the uncomfortable resolutions produced by conference diplomacy as meaningless 'rhetoric'. Newspapers ignore these events and most Americans are happily unaware of the unusual degree to which the United States is isolated in international affairs."

Despite the impressive consensus shown in the United Nations and other forums, the Third World is no monolithic bloc. It is an amalgam of Arabs, Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans who put aside their ethnic, cultural, and ideological differences to combine on certain issues. Prominent among these is the Mideast issue. This cohesion can be attributed partially to a rich world/poor world conflict buttressed by common historical resentment of "white man domination." Because of this they tend to identify in general with what they perceive as national liberation movements and, in particular, with the Palestinian movement. It follows, therefore, that Third World attitudes toward any peace plan for the Middle East will be significantly influenced by its impact on the Palestinians.

Consequently, the Camp David accords—of which the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was one component—will be judged in the Third World principally by their ability to address Palestinian claims. While one accord has been consummated through the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, the other, entitled "Framework

for Peace in the Middle East," promises to remain a contentious issue. Specifically, a Third World posture toward Camp David will hinge upon an answer to this question: Can it produce a Palestinian state?

There is a widely held belief in the Third World that American policies are inimical to Third World aspirations. This raises misgivings about whether the United States is an honest broker in the Mideast conflict. It is felt that the focus of a U.S.-engineered peace treaty would slide over the centrality of the Middle East problem and concentrate on its periphery. Camp David is also seen as a U.S.-Israeli attempt to drive a wedge in Arab unity by isolating Egypt in the Middle East conflict, particularly so when Egypt was historically the spearhead of Arab nationalism.

To a great extent the Palestinian issue symbolizes Third World resurgence in the 1970's and 1980's, just as Vietnam represented its yearnings in the 1960's. In this frame of reference, the Palestinian movement is regarded as a popular movement for national liberation and Camp David as another scheme to preserve the status quo and alter facts at the expense of Palestinian statehood by treating the victims as the villains.

There are also grave doubts, compounded by American loss of face in Vietnam, Angola, and Iran, about the political insight of U.S. policymakers. They are perceived as looking at revolutionary ferment through the blurred and red-tinted lenses of U.S.-Soviet rivalry, without much comprehension of its local significance.

Camp David is seen to fit into the pattern of repeated past mistakes and self-deceptive scenarios that go against the Third World. According to some, this has provided an opening for the Soviet Union to synchronize its policies with popular grievances in the developing world. The "Framework for Peace in the Middle East" is considered, in that light, as a framework to dilute Palestinian claims and whittle down their salience.

Still emerging from the shadows of prolonged colonial tutelage, much of the Third World compares the Palestinian issue to the conflict in Southern Africa. The United States and Israel and South Africa are considered intersections of a "colonial settler triangle," nations whose lives began with the displacement of the indigenous populace. In Third World eyes this perceived bond of a shared heritage and mutual affinity for each other's "pioneering spirit" makes it unlikely that one of their number would act in a way endangering the others' interest. Additionally, there is a gradual awareness in the Third World of the limitations placed upon U.S. Middle East policies by the constraints of domestic politics. Not surprisingly, the frequent reports in U.S. media of the "crises" in

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U.S.-Israeli relations are not taken seriously.

Post-Camp David events have strengthened this perception. Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank have continued and are coupled with air and artillery attacks on Palestinian camps in Southern Lebanon (attacks that are described as terroristic in the Third World and, according to Moshe Dayan, despite public censure by the United States, had tacit American support). Also the circumstances surrounding the exit of Andrew Young and the scuttling of a Security Council resolution modestly expanding resolution 242 (which treated the Palestinians as refugees) weakened the credibility of President Carter's declared resolve to seek a comprehensive peace settlement. These events underscored the equivocal language of the accord, making it unclear what exactly is intended for the Palestinians: An independent state-forming entity? A self-governing province of Israel? A federation with Jordan?

Since the post-1967 rejuvenation of the Palestinian movement, there has been a questioning—albeit quietly—of the depth of the Arab states' commitment to the Palestinians. King Hussein's war against the Palestinians in 1970, the fate of the Palestinians in Lebanon at the hands of the Syrian army in 1976, and the failure of Arab armies to assist Palestinian camps in Lebanon militarily against Israeli bombardments have induced a deep skepticism about Arab support for the Palestinians. More damaging for the credibility of concerned Arab governments is Carter's statement of August 31, 1979: "I have never met an Arab leader that in private professed a desire for an independent Palestinian state."

Little credence, therefore, is attached to Egyptian President Sadat's claim that the objective of autonomy talks is a Palestinian state. This impression is reinforced when juxtaposed with Carter's statement of August 11, 1979, declaring his opposition to "any creation of a separate Palestinian state."

If Sadat has a credibility problem in the Third World, Begin clearly does not. When Begin insists that the intent of Camp David was not to have a Palestinian state, he is believed. He is also believed when he says that "autonomy is not sovereignty."

If the Third World is near unanimous in its endorsement of Palestinian self-determination, what is its attitude toward the countervailing Israeli claims to prevent it? The Israeli claim based on biblical entitlement never merited serious discussion. In Israel itself the spiritual head of the oriental Sephardic community, Chief Rabbi Yosef, has called for Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank in order to secure true peace.

The argument that Israel's security would be compromised by creation of an independent Palestinian homeland has been abnegated in the Third World, due primarily to Israel's demonstrated ability to hold its own against regular Arab armies in the four wars it has fought. The net result has been the expansion, not shrinkage, of Israeli territorial boundaries. A state on the West Bank and Gaza could hardly be a greater threat, many believe, than the combined armies of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan, which Israel has managed to defeat in the past. Dear though it may be to the Israeli heart, the security argument is regarded in the

developing world as a diversionary tactic to ensure that Israel's hold on the West Bank is a permanent one.

What, then, is the prescription for a viable peace in the Middle East—a peace that can ensure the overwhelming support of the majority world community, i.e., the Third World? There is ample evidence that a widely accepted settlement could be predicated upon the following:

1. creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, not in place of Israel,
2. Israeli withdrawal from territories captured in 1967 (including relinquishment of unilateral Israeli control of East Jerusalem), and
3. guaranteed inviolability of frontiers for all the states in the region (including pre-1967 Israel and a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza).

Unless the Camp David accords are broadened to consider the foregoing elements, the promise of peace may remain a shimmering mirage.

Camp David, notwithstanding the intent of its signatories and the language of the accords, may yet produce results that were not envisaged. By isolating Egypt, Carter may have inadvertently brought the Palestinian problem into sharper focus. Israel unwittingly had done the same when, in trouncing the Arabs in 1967, it rekindled the Palestinian flame. Refusal since then to deal with the PLO has only succeeded in drawing attention and adding stature to the Palestinian movement. The Young affair offers unmistakable evidence of this.

To date, the fact remains that, during all the years of strife and bloodshed, the two genuine parties to the Mideast conflict have never confronted each other directly across a table. William Raspberry, a columnist for the *Washington Post*, offers an explanation for Israel's refusal to talk to the PLO:

The major threat perceived by Israelis is, I suspect, a moral threat. That is, negotiations with the Palestinians inevitably involve the question of how the Palestinians came to be homeless in the first place, which is the question of Israel's right to exist where it exists.

Israel has tried to avoid that unanswerable question by insisting on a prenegotiation concession of its right to exist. That hasn't worked, because it can't.

In attempting to avoid the moral perspective, Israel may have lost sight of the historical perspective.

Despair and diaspora led to the creation of Israel. The net result of Hitler's attempt to eliminate the Jews was the creation of a Jewish state. Many in the Third World believe that the responsibility of initiating an Israeli-PLO dialogue with a view to reaching an equitable settlement rests more upon a fullfledged state than on a stateless representative public body.

Thus far, the combined weight of Jewish nationalism, American munificence, and Arab ineptitude may have substantially dispelled doubts about Israel's longevity. Yet, it has not decreased Israel's isolation.

Israel can show statesmanship by dealing directly with the PLO. Whatever the other consequences of such a move, it will open the doors, now closed, to Third World acceptance of Israel. [WV]