



*On November 21, 1977, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat were all smiles at their joint press conference in Jerusalem. Sadat's sudden visit to Israel had touched off a wave of hope that peace would at last come to the Middle East. Negotiations have since bogged down and confident smiles are once again rare.*

diehard Baghdad regime, it was perhaps thanks to the Soviet Union that Syria did not fall into line immediately with the rejectionists, who refused *any* negotiated solution, while President Hafez Assad opposed only the direct talks set up by Cairo.

Consequently, since it has become standard procedure for Washington and Moscow to co-operate, they can oppose each other with complete cordiality, negotiating as they go along not only the Middle East situation but also all other current bilateral matters. In this context, it is easy to understand why, if ground is lost on a matter of capital importance (for example, if the initiative on the Middle East slips from their grasp), there is a risk that the whole process of horse-trading that goes on between the super-powers will be disrupted. This reveals if not the existence of complementary interests, at any rate "collusion" or a convergence of interests that are nonetheless substantially different!

After trying in vain to demonstrate that Geneva was the only path to salvation, and after having themselves believed for a

long time that even the resounding success of the Sadat visit could pave the way to Geneva, the American leaders have resigned themselves to jumping on the bandwagon. However, this dramatic diplomatic *volte-face* did not mean that the United States had also resigned itself to travelling at the same speed. It made plain its intention of taking over the reins and, following Sadat's invitation to the pre-Geneva conference in Cairo, President Carter proposed a possible date (which was flexible) for a meeting to be convened by someone else. Egypt accepted with alacrity. There followed an opening session of low-level delegates, which brought together only Israel and Egypt in the presence of a representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and of the United States. In the meantime, Cyrus Vance had returned to the Middle East, where he remained during the conference but not for the purpose of taking part. As soon as Cairo had pushed Geneva into the background, it became the purpose of the United States to ensure that the Cairo conference was a success. To this