

Under these circumstances, what hope is there for the American "shuttle diplomacy" created by Henry Kissinger? The new American Administration has given up being a mere "broker" and is now itself a party to the conflict. With President Carter in power and the arrival on the scene of the anti-Kissinger school of political thought, the United States is no longer content, in its position as "co-chairman" of the Geneva Conference, with trying to narrow the gap between the positions of the belligerents. It is now making public statements on what shape it feels the Arab-Israeli peace plans should take. The question now is whether the United States, the self-styled broker, was passing on messages in its shuttles between Israel and the Arab countries or whether, on the contrary, it was trying to sell its own plan to the parties involved.

Let us pass over the details of this plan, which, though it caused consternation in Israel because of the ambiguity of the phrase "Palestinian homeland", should be taken into consideration here only because it exists and not because of what it contains. Let us pass over its possible merits and come to the main point: the emergence of a "Carter Plan" necessarily changed the rules that had been laid down for the game. Because it dealt the cards differently, it forced a redefinition of positions. Instead of one rejection there were two and a whole mountain of reservations. Whatever the issue at hand — the Israeli-American "working document" or the curious joint Soviet-American declaration —, it was becoming clear that the reconvening of the Geneva Conference, which had been foreseen as taking place at the end of 1977, now fell into the category of pious hopes and also that the Soviet Union might return to the Middle East arena because of the vagaries of American diplomacy. Incidentally, it should not be forgotten that, in the words of President Carter's security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who has a fondness for the figure three in all its forms, Moscow has a part to play in the last of the three concentric circles that would encompass the Middle East situation.

In other words, although they are pursuing opposite ends and supporting irreconcilable camps, the two super-powers are making a joint approach, an approach that is camouflaged by their joint title of "co-chairmen" of the Geneva Conference. We may even wonder what distinguishes their positions if both of them see the solution as a Palestinian entity ("state" for the one and "homeland" for the other) and an Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories (total withdrawal for the one and "minor adjust-

ments" for the other), all within the framework of a Geneva Conference to be reconvened as soon as possible. Given these circumstances, it is easy to see why the United States, while congratulating itself on Sadat's breakthrough, was anxious about the negative repercussions of a trip that brusquely removed the initiative from the hands of the super-powers.

Even if later developments slow down the pace of events and lead to disappointments, it has been proved since Sadat's trip that the two super-powers fear an acceleration of the peace process as much as a loss of momentum. It is not intentions that are being questioned here. Not only have authoritative American circles mentioned the risk that Anwar Sadat may overplay his hand, not only have the Americans been in constant contact with Moscow (to which Philip Habib paid a fleeting visit before joining Cyrus Vance in the Middle East), they have clearly also been worried by the lethal blows the Egyptian head of state has been dealing to Soviet interests.

So the United States gave priority to slowing down the breakneck speed at which Sadat, encouraged by Israeli receptiveness, was moving. Caught up in their *a priori* theory of concentric and other circles (which has still to be tested), the Americans have been taken by surprise three times in a row in the same area. First there was Sadat's improbable trip to Jerusalem and the intense exhilaration of his recognition of Israel and of shared hopes. Then, immediately after the publication of the final communique of the "rejectionist" Tripoli "summit", there was the breaking-off of Cairo's diplomatic relations with Damascus, Baghdad, Tripoli, Aden and Algiers on the initiative of the "isolated" Anwar Sadat, who earlier had muzzled the "Voice of Palestine" radio transmissions from Cairo and expelled the PLO representatives. Finally, shortly thereafter, there was the closing of the cultural offices of the U.S.S.R. and its satellites on Egyptian territory, all to the accompaniment of veiled threats of breaking off diplomatic relations.

It was some time, however, before it was understood that Sadat's attack on the Soviet Union was aimed more at preventing Washington from bringing the Kremlin back into the arena than at warding off any real danger that Moscow might represent. The Soviet Union does, of course, support the Palestinian movement, but it would be difficult to show that it backs the most radical members of the PLO, even if some of them do claim to be Marxist-Leninists. The U.S.S.R. also supports Assad in Damascus and, even if it is to be found alongside the

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