

PEACEKEEPING AND THE MIDDLE EAST

If our anxiety about the prospects for progress in disarmament continues unrelieved, we can draw some comfort from the recent movement towards peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

No one who has the interests of world security at heart can fail to be encouraged by the statesmanlike conduct of the leaders of Egypt and Israel, which produced the new interim agreement on the Sinai. We also recognize the dedication of the American Secretary of State whose tireless efforts have once again contributed towards a positive result. It is a fragile beginning to be sure. By itself, it does little to settle the underlying issues; and they must be resolved if peace and security are to come to the Middle East. But we see in the agreement grounds for hope. We see it as the first stage in a series of inter-locking negotiations and agreements which would involve all the parties to the dispute and embrace all the fundamental issues, difficult though this will be. The end would be a just settlement which would enable the destructive passions of the past to be overcome and permit all peoples in the area to live as neighbours in peace and security.

For all those concerned about United Nations peacekeeping there is another reason for drawing satisfaction from the Sinai agreement.

Peacekeeping is one of the few useful instruments that the international community has developed to help promote peaceful solutions to disputes. It is designed to assist the parties to a dispute to draw back from conflict when they recognize that this is in their best interests and to help create circumstances in which their differences can be settled by negotiation.

But all too often peacekeeping reduces the incentive of the disputants to move beyond the mere cessation of hostilities to a serious search for a political settlement. Consequently sceptics charge that United Nations peacekeeping does little more than perpetuate an uneasy status quo.

If peacekeeping is to be truly effective it must be accompanied by a parallel effort on the political level, especially by the parties most directly concerned, to convert the temporary peace that a peacekeeping force is asked to maintain into something more durable.

Since the initial cease-fire agreement in the fall of 1973, UNEF has fulfilled its task of providing a buffer between the disputants and of helping to produce a period of relative calm in which negotiations could be pursued. The parties concerned took full advantage of the peacekeeping operation: they negotiated and reached a new interim agreement. The significance of this for peacekeeping is that UNEF has not merely perpetuated the status quo; it will now go on to make the new agreement effective and to provide the basis for further steps in peacemaking. In short, UNEF is doing