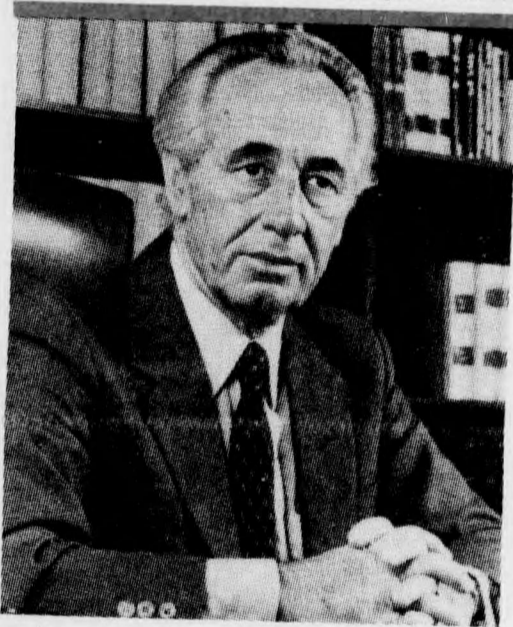


Q. There has been a great deal of speculation in Israel regarding the effects of a negotiated settlement that would see Israel giving up part of the West Bank. In the aforementioned article by Thomas Friedman he reported how a hint of movement in the peace process prompted an article in a West Bank settlers' paper threatening civil war. How real is the threat of something like civil war breaking out, in light of the violence when Yammit, a settlement in the Sinai was disbanded as part of the Camp David accords.

A. There was a situation in Sinai when the extreme right wing in Israel tried to subvert the authority of the elected government and they were soundly defeated. Obviously the West Bank is more emotional and causing more concern so I would expect more opposition to conciliatory policy, but I think when we come to that point there will be a very solid majority behind the government for two simple reasons. One, there is always the belief in Israel that the authority of the government should prevail. Two, my experience is once you start peace talks between Israel and the Arabs, Israeli attitudes are softening, not hardening. This was the case regarding Sinai. They said that before Sadat came to Jerusalem people in the street were not in favor of giving back parts of Sinai. Then Sadat came and all this changed. The same would apply to the West Bank. The third element is that . . . well, it is true that some of these people are religious zealots and maybe you can't use reason with religious zealots, but I still believe that the democratic institutions of Israel are so strong that nothing like the threat of civil war will disrupt the peace initiative. There will be a solid majority against these people. They are isolated on some settlements on the West Bank and some other places and if



Far left: Professor Olmert. Some key players in the Middle East conflict: Above: Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, scheduled to turn over power to Yitzhak Shamir in October. Below: Jordan's King Hussein, who last week announced he would no longer negotiate with the PLO over Israel. Right: Current Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak with predecessor, the late Anwar Sadat. Far right: Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the divided PLO.



they really entertain hopes of disobeying the government they should forget them, because it won't work.

Q. What about the increase in popularity of the right-wing in Israel? Is that being overplayed in the media?

A. I think that all of the polls indicate that the right wing is losing power. What is happening is a typical misunderstanding of Israeli politics. It is true that the extreme right wing is gaining power, but at the expense of the more moderate right wing, the Likud. Altogether the right wing, from moderates to extremists, is losing power.

Q. You mentioned the advances Prime Minister Peres has made in the area of foreign policy. Recently Spain and Israel established relations. Spain has close ties with many Arab countries. Do you see this advancing the peace process?

A. I think more and more countries are coming to realize that if they want any say in the Middle East they have to talk to both sides of the conflict. If you want to affect the process how can you talk only to the Arabs or the Jews? More and more nations realize that it is time to formalize or normalize relations with Israel. The fact that Arab oil is getting weaker, and the disunity in the Arab world, has brought countries to the conclusion that you can talk to the Israelis without necessarily causing trouble with the Arabs, and at any rate without talking to the Israelis you can't have any say in the Middle East.

Q. Along those lines, do you see an eventual resumption of ties between Israel and the Soviet Union?

A. I hope so very much. I think that if Mr. Gorbachov is indeed sophisticated and as open minded as people would like us to believe he must realize that breaking ties with Israel was complete nonsense and he must reverse that quickly if he wants to have any say for the Soviet Union in any peace talks. The Israeli government has made advances toward the Soviet Union by declaring for the first time that they would be ready to have an international conference on the Middle East with the USSR, providing they have relations with Israel. We are still waiting for a reply. We would like the USSR to let Jews leave the Soviet Union freely and emigrate to wherever they like. We have told them that once they re-establish relations they would be regarded as honest brokers. The Soviets are making overtures to Israel but they are doing it typically clumsily and slowly. We have seen increased contacts between Israel and Poland, Israel and Hungary have played against each other in soccer, Polish theatre has come to Israel, and so on. Where it leads us to I don't know. We shall have to wait and see.

Q. The Lebanon War of 1982 had an adverse effect on the PLO in that they have begun to concentrate more on Palestinians in the West Bank rather than focusing on Arabs in the Gulf countries and other Arab regions. What are the results of this shift in strategy?

A. The Lebanon War of 1982 had an adverse effect on the PLO first and foremost because it exposed some of the more fundamental weaknesses of the PLO as an organization. The fact of the matter is, and the Palestinians would not like to admit it, but despite all of the support they have in the Arab world and other parts of the world they were completely isolated and nobody came to their help. It so happens that whenever they are under pressure their so-called friends desert them because people realize that they may have, after all, more important interests than advocating the case of the PLO. Also, the Palestinian War of 1982 exposed the divisions within the PLO and today the PLO is absolutely split right down the middle and unable to come to any coherent decision about any outstanding issue, and therefore the organization is paralyzed and consequently depends on the patronage of Arab countries even more than ever before. And, as usual in the Arab world, this patronage is divided between various countries with various conflicting interests and the result is that Yasser Arafat is still pretending to be a political big shot but we all know that he can't come to any agreement with the militant and radical factions of his organizations. The result is that the PLO is losing a great of its political credibility and stature.

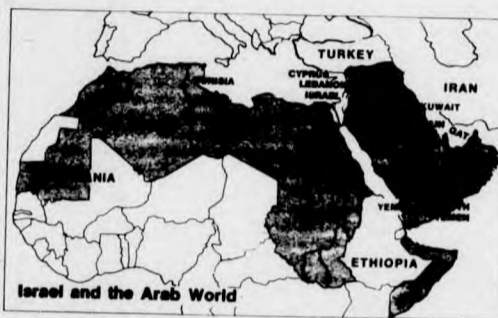
Q. What about among Palestinians on the West Bank?

A. I think he is losing there as well and King Hussein is gaining ground because Hussein seems to be the only realistic hope for these people in the immediate future. It is not a question of whether people don't like King Hussein or they do like the PLO, but politically speaking, if there is to be any dialogue about the West

Bank, and quickly, it could only be between Israel and Jordan and those who want to have a dialogue. The PLO does not want to have a dialogue.

Q. A Palestinian writer, Rashid Khalidi, wrote that since the Palestinian National Council convened in Amman in 1984, that symbolized the end of the reign of consensus and unanimity in the PLO. Would you agree?

A. Yes, but it is exactly for this reason that Yasser Arafat is not taking decisive action against the militant factions. He still hopes to see them back in the fold because what will happen one day if Arafat decides that peace is better than terrorism and violence, and comes to his senses and recognizes Israel? That would split the PLO right down the middle and how would the PLO say in that case they are the only Palestinian representatives while there are two, three, or four PLOs. Yasser Arafat is still very obsessed with this fear so it is absolutely what Rashid Khalidi says. Yes, the PLO is divided, but not to the point where they pursue totally separate policies. It's still under one general umbrella.



happen and it doesn't happen, and sometimes it happens when you are not ready for it. It is 1986. It is about time to start a dialogue about peace. We are losing time unnecessarily, and perhaps by creating new political facts in the Middle East, we can in advance reduce some of the implications of this instability which professor Khalidi rightly points to.

Q. Do you see a point whereby Arafat will agree to a joint Palestinian-Jordanian negotiation with Israel?

A. Yes, he agreed, but he gave the people of his delegation orders not to accept the idea that there should be a peaceful solution to the problem, and therefore when they met the British Prime Minister Mrs. Thatcher, and the British government wanted them to issue exactly this statement, that whatever is the PLO's position it still supports a peaceful solution, Yasser Arafat ordered his people not to do so. So what is the point in having a delegation like this? Either we talk peace or we don't talk at all.

Q. A lot of the PLO's difficulties have to do with Syria. How would the massacres at the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon at the hands of Moslem Arabs aligned with Syria in 1985 affect people who are trying to arrive at a political alignment within the Palestinian movement?

A. Many more Palestinians were killed by their brothers and by other Arabs than by Israel throughout the history of the Arab/Israeli conflict and the same applies to Lebanon since 1982. There is no question that Syria is behind a lot of the troubles. The Syrians do not want to see any peaceful solution to the Arab/Israeli conflict. They really believe that time is on the side of the Arabs. They believe that militarily speaking the Arabs will be able to defeat Israel and moreover they believe that Palestine is part of Greater Syria. Therefore they claim to have the right to represent the Palestinians even more than the PLO does. Hafez Assad of Syria is able to present Arafat as a traitor if he even considers talks with Hussein, not Israel. Because, the Syrians say they are in the forefront of the Arab struggle against Israel. They do not see it as a Palestinian struggle, rather a pan-Arab struggle which is led by Syria.

Q. Where does this leave the peace process considering Hussein recently travelled to meet

Assad to patch up differences between Jordan and Syria?

A. Hussein is very much concerned about Assad. That is why he wants to meet Assad and try and convince him to join the peace process. He will fail to do so. Then he has to make up his mind whether he takes the risk and gets into talks or doesn't go into talks out of fear and loses the West Bank once and for all. I can assure you one thing. If there are going to be peace talks between Israel and Jordan and these peace talks are serious and constructive, the Syrians will be under a great danger if they want to subvert it by war, because that could trigger off a complete war in the Middle East which would lead to a Syrian defeat.

Q. Rashid Khalidi also mentioned in his article the possibility of great change in the Arab world over the next couple of years. What do you foresee happening?

A. The Arab world is always unstable, but building on that is like building on shifting sands because then you don't do anything. You can always expect troubles in the Arab world. That should not deter Israel from pursuing the peace option, however. The Iran/Iraq war is causing great strife, which is not necessarily understood in the West. The decline of oil prices could aggravate the economic situation all over the Middle East to the extent of riots, civil disorders, and so forth. Fundamentalism in Egypt, Kuwait, even Jordan and other Arab countries is very strong. Terrorists are having their say as well; we see Khadafy, we see the PLO. And so, all of this contributes to more instability. But I wouldn't put too much on that. Sometimes we are so sure a lot is going to

Q. Syria appears to be getting into the same position in Lebanon that Israel was in during 1982. They thought they could control the agreement, but obviously their peace process is not working either.

A. The Israelis made several mistakes in Lebanon, but at least they had the wisdom to learn from their mistakes. The Syrians don't want to leave Lebanon. They have never formally recognized the independence of Lebanon. Therefore when one addresses the problems of Syria in Lebanon, one has to bear in mind that Syria is very much committed to the idea that Lebanon is part of Greater Syria. Therefore their readiness to pay a higher price for their stay in Lebanon is greater than the readiness of Israel to achieve certain political gains.

Q. What do you foresee happening in Lebanon?

A. I see a situation where you still have the facade of a central state and government, but in fact Lebanon has been divided for quite some time. Unless there is a determined Syrian effort to force the issue upon the various sides, which could trigger off a complete civil war. If that happens the Christians would lose whatever they still have and it remains to be seen whether the Shiites or others take over. But I don't think that the Syrians would force the issue immediately because their source of strength in Lebanon is that they can play one side off against the other. They don't want to bring it to a complete decision.

Q. Are we going to see any negotiations in the near future between Jordan and Israel?

A. I personally pray to see this happening although there are some Israelis who do not want to see this come about. My gut feeling is that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, but the tunnel is so long and so fraught with so many difficulties. So the safest prediction to make is yes . . . but, to keep an option open after all.