

Hot debate at SMU

Camp David to bring peace?

by Roger Metcalfe

"The Camp David Agreement cannot bring peace to the Middle East because it doesn't recognize the Palestinian right to a sovereign state", according to Dr. Ismail Zayid, a Dalhousie Professor of Medicine. Zayid was speaking last Wednesday night in a debate on the Camp David accords at St. Mary's University.

In debate with Dr. Zayid was Nick Simmonds, the director of Public Relations for the Canada-Israel Committee. Simmonds argued that the Camp David accords have a good chance of holding up, if Israel and the United States could wean away the 'Moderate' Arab states from support for the Palestinians.

The debate, attended by about 125 people, was lively and often bitter, with significant numbers of the audience supporting each position. It was sponsored by the local United Nations Association, and the International Education Centre, S.M.U.

Israel optimistic

Simmonds began the debate by admitting that Israel only had to give up a little in order to achieve the agreement with Egypt. He also implied that Egypt had played Israel's game by agreeing to meet face-to-face and sign a separate treaty, without the other Arab states.

Simmonds' view coincides with informed press analysis of the Camp David Agreement, which argue that Egypt's unilateral treaty with Israel neutralizes Israel's strongest foe and allows Israel to hang much tougher against the other Arab states, whose territories it occupies.

Simmonds went on to express pleasure that the Palestinian Liberation Organization -whom the Palestinians have chosen as their sole representatives—was left out of any future negotiations promised by the Camp David accords. Echoing the agreement reached at Camp David that Israel and Egypt will attempt to select 'representatives' for the Palestinians, Simmonds suggested that the "P.L.O. should not represent the Palestinians".

He added that 'autonomy' had been promised in the Camp David Agreement to the 'West Bank inhabitants' but admitted that the 'autonomy' was open to negotiations after five years. This echoes Menachem Begin's (Prime Minister of Israel) position that Israel will continue to assert its claim to sovereignty over the entire West Bank even after the five years are up. Simmonds was clear in stating that 'autonomy' could never mean a sovereign state for the Palestinians.

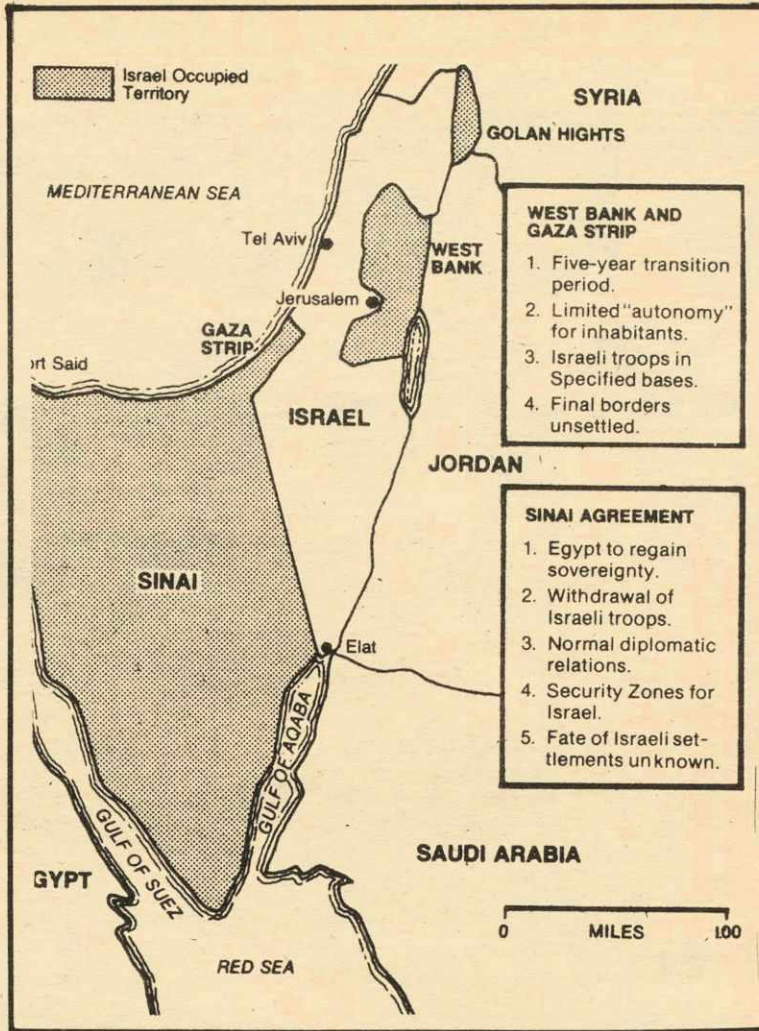
He concluded by expressing optimism for the Camp David accords, and suggested that the agreements with Egypt had a good chance of holding up, despite opposition in the Arab World.

Palestinians Opposed

Dr. Zayid introduced his presentation by asking: Why is there a conflict in the Middle East in the first place? His answer, which was the bulk of his talk, dealt on the history of the uprooting of the Palestinians from their homeland.

He pointed out that the Palestinians had been the only consistent inhabitants of Palestine for the past 40 centuries. They were the overwhelming majority inhabitants of Palestine in 1917, when their country was promised by Britain to the European Zionist Movement. The Palestinians lost their homeland in 1947-8, when Zionist armies forced over 700,000 inhabitants into refugee camps in neighbouring Arab countries.

"The removal of the Palestinians from their homeland by Zionism, and their struggle to regain it, is the crux of the



Middle East question," he added. "There can be no peace without a just settlement of the Palestinian question." First and foremost, Dr. Zayid argued, this means the right of the Palestinians to create their own state. The denial of this right was one of the many concessions demanded and received by Israel during the Camp David negotiations.

West Bank Palestinians

In the question period that followed, most of the questions challenged both Zayid and Simmonds on their version of the history of Palestine and Israel, or on the viability of the Camp David accords.

In answering one question, Zayid pointed out that the Camp David accords mentioned only the Palestinians on the West Bank. "What

about the 2½ million Palestinians living outside Palestine? They have been homeless for a generation. Are they to be denied the right to return to their homeland?"

Simmonds responded by arguing that only the Palestinians living on the West Bank should be included in any settlement, the rest having forfeited their right by having moved away. Dr. Zayid angrily replied that on one hand, Jews from anywhere in the world are given automatic citizenship in Israel the day they arrive there, while on the other hand, Palestinians are either forced out of their homeland, or denied the right to return there. "Why should the Palestinians be forced to pay for the atrocities the Europeans inflicted upon the Jews?"

Responding to another question, Simmonds predicted the quick unfreezing of relations between Israel and Egypt following the signing of a peace treaty. He offered the view that the Israelis had shown good faith in negotiating at Camp David, and it was now up to the Arabs, and specifically the Palestinians, to reciprocate.

In disagreeing, Dr. Zayid reiterated his earlier statement that the Camp David accords were only continuing the unjustness of the Palestinian problem. "But we will not go away. Any proposed settlement which attempts to sidestep the Palestinian right to their homeland can only be the basis for future conflict."

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