

The Mideast: cauldron of conflict

by Keith Krause

During the past few months, the Iran-Iraq war, American presidential election, and Iran hostage crisis have moved the Israeli-Palestinian problem out of the world spotlight. But it has not been forgotten by the men who shape policy in the U.S., Europe and the Mideast. On the contrary, there is growing concern about the role and reaction of Israel to efforts to resolve the crisis in the area.

These sentiments were expressed at a two-week conference held in England in late September. The conference, a high level closed discussion of 'The Middle-East: Arab-Israeli Relations, Oil and the Superpowers', was sponsored by the British Foreign Office. Participants included ambassadors, oil companies executives, heads of state, journalists, academics, and a U of A political science professor.

David Dewitt, a specialist in conflict resolution and the Middle East, attended the conference held at Wilton Park, a secluded 18th century manor house restored exclusively for such events. His impressions of the conference were given in an interview with the Gateway.

"People felt Israel should make a big gesture such as Egypt did and throw the West Bank back to the Arabs," said Dewitt. "There were always dissenters, but this was a majority view."

Topics discussed included the Israeli and Egyptian perspectives, trends in U.S. foreign policy, the Soviet role, Islamic revivalism, and the role of ideologies in the conflict.

Participants included government ministers from Egypt, the head of the United Nations force in the Mideast, the chancellor of Austria, Bruno Kreisky, the U.S. ambassador to the European Economic Community, and assorted ambassadors who had served in Mideast states. About 40 people were involved in the conference.

The main purpose of the conference was "to break down

myths and provide opinion leaders with accurate information," according to Dewitt. All discussions were closed, and no statements could be attributed to any representative.

Much of the discussion centered around the Israeli role in the conflicts and controversies.

"There was definitely evidence of sympathy for the position of Israel, but strong criticism of the Begin government, especially their position on the West Bank," said Dewitt.

"There was no question Israel had the right to exist, but that did not extend to the West Bank," he said. "Everyone felt a move by Israel would allow the Saudis and the Gulf states to embrace American and European support."

But, despite its attractiveness, no one "really believed

the Israelis will do this", especially with the present government, said Dewitt.

Israeli reluctance to continue negotiations on the Camp David agreements and their continued settlement of the West Bank were seen as indicators of the official government position.

The PLO was also "a major point of contention."

"Some people felt the PLO should be dealt with openly," Dewitt said.

Discussions took place in an informal setting; participants were more or less isolated from the outside world.

"Some of the most important discussions I had were while walking through the woods with two or three senior ambassadors," said Dewitt. "Much of the work was done on a private level."

Dewitt was surprised at his invitation to participate.

"People at the top usually only deal with other people at the top...I'm still not sure why I was invited."

Israel and the PLO, however, were not the only two groups to come under close scrutiny. The United States also met much opposition to its viewpoints and policies.

"There was a general concern for the lack of American leadership, both in the Mideast and the world in general," said Dewitt. "There was a definite conflict between the American view of the problem and other's views."

This concern was highlighted when the European discussed the Soviet role in the Mideast. There "was great bitterness on the part of Western Europe at being left hanging on some boycott issues."

This conflict, according to Dewitt, highlighted the British and Canadian role in the discussions.

"The British and Canadians don't sit at the Western European table and neither do they sit at the American one," Dewitt said.

The conference took place in late September at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war. When the situation heated up, some delegates were forced to leave, because they were needed by their governments.

"There's never been much love lost for the Iraqis in the Arab world," Dewitt said, "but there was general concern expressed."

The main theme of the conference, however, was how the Western nations should respond

to the Mideast situation. Many participants were concerned that the Soviet Union is under mounting pressure to obtain secure oil supplies and that "a severe clash of interests between the West and the Soviets over the Mideast" is inevitable.

"Clearly, oil was of prime importance, and there was evident concern that things did not look like they were going to get better," said Dewitt. "The multinational oil companies were very concerned about stability and conflict in the area...the private sector honestly argued their interests were not different from those of the developed states."

The debate returned, however, to the question of how to respond to or initiate moves towards peace in the area.

"An argument was made, by a very senior person, that what was needed to get peace talks back on the road was an European initiative," Dewitt said.

The European Initiative "would have to be backed by the Americans and headed by a senior European statesman."

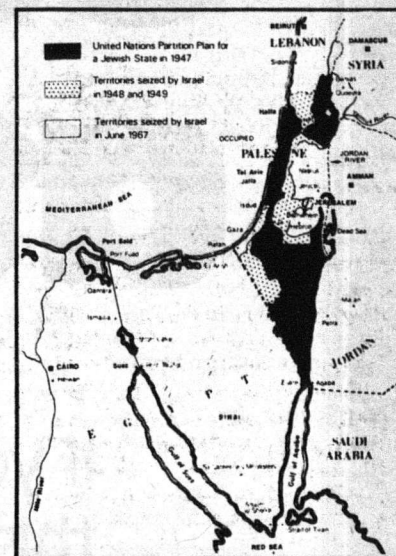
But many Europeans and Americans disagreed with this

idea, arguing it would "muddy the waters" and the Americans would never go for the plan.

In the end, the participants agreed no easy solutions are to be found.

"The Israeli argument is that you can't have peace overnight," said Dewitt.

"How can you, with one stroke of the pen, erase 30 years of fighting?"



The Ecumenical Chaplaincy presents

'A BAG LUNCH LECTURE'

Rev. Park Jay Bong

General Secretary Of The Presbyterian Church in Korea will speak on his church's leadership in opposition to the Korean Government Concerning Human Rights

12:30 PM • Thurs., Nov. 6
Heritage Room, Athabasca Hall

Everyone Welcome

Call 432-4621 for more information

Lori's
Loft

The Natural Fabric Experience in fashions from far away places.

Wide selection of hand-crafted BATIK fashion items.

Top Sale • \$16

Assorted styles in fashion colors Three Days Only

9109-112 St. (HUB Mall)
Phone 432-0672
OPEN: 10-5:30 Mon-Sat
10-9 Thurs.

We Carry

Papillon



sub
theatre



TORONTO
DANCE
THEATRE

Friday, Nov. 14
Saturday, Nov. 15
8 PM each evening



STEPPING
OUT

Tickets: \$5.50, \$7.00,
\$8.50

Available: SU Box Office
(HUB Mall), Mike's,
Attractions Ticket
Office (Eatons)

PRESENTED BY
sub theatre CKRA 96



MAGGIE &
PIERRE

starring
LINDA GRIFFITHS

Dec. 3 • Preview (1.50 off)

Dec. 4-14 • 8 PM

Tickets: 5.50, 6.50, 8.00
Reserved Seating

Tickets Available At:
HUB, Mike's, Attractions
Ticket Office (Eatons)

presented by:

sub theatre and
Stereo FM
CKRA 96

tues 4



COAL MINER'S
Daughter

Tues., Nov. 4 • 7 & 9:30 PM
COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER
1979 - USA - 122 min. Dir:
Michael Apted Cast: Sissy
Spacek, Tommy Lee
Jones, Adult

Admission: \$2 (with SU ID)
\$3 non-students

For more information call
432-4764

NOVEMBER