



end, Cyrus Vance turned from mediating between Israel and the Arab states to mediating among the Arabs themselves. After having played the false broker, the senior American diplomat now found himself acting as a go-between, his purpose being to bring other Arabs to Cairo and, in collusion with a willing Saudi Arabia, to start off by bringing King Hussein of Jordan into the mainstream of events generated by the Sadat trip.

It was precisely this role that Begin and Sadat had chosen for Washington, and it will be recalled that, after paying tribute to President Carter's efforts, both of them admitted in front of the television cameras the importance of the role the United States would play from then on. Some people were taken in - what had been said meant that henceforward, Jerusalem and Cairo could dispense with the services of just anyone but that they needed the United States to ensure the participation of other Arab nations in their negotiations. It was this situation, apparently irreversible, that became a stumbling-block for the all-powerful Americans, and therefore for the Russians too.

Intermediaries

Until Sadat's trip, the American intermediaries had carried the message, passing it on as they saw fit and paying due regard to their own interests. Nothing would ever be the same after November 19, 1977. Those 30 hours that Sadat spent in Israel cancelled out 30 years of hostility, made the intermediate level of negotiations superfluous and placed any future intermediary in the uncomfortable position of being the last to be informed of any expected developments. Thus Cyrus Vance, coming to the rescue of the Cairo conference, knew only as much about the Sadat-Begin talks as they wanted him to know. In view of the difference in the interests of the parties involved and of the intermediary, which wanted to assume its position of world leader at any cost (I am not making a value judgment here), it is easy to see why two skilled politicians such as the Egyptian President and the Israeli Premier did not show their hands. They said just enough to make sure that the American safety net was in position. It is symptomatic of this state of affairs that President Carter, at his December 15 press conference, said he did not know what Menachem Begin had to tell him the next day about the basic points of a possible peace.

The central issue since the Sadat visit has been what the ultimate result of the November 19 initiative will be. It has already led to Egypt's *de facto* recognition of Israel, and the end of the war between the two countries may well be said to be implied

by President Sadat's promise that no woman would ever again have to weep for her son, husband or father. These facts all point indisputably to one goal: bilateralism. But officially this is quite out of the question - at least in the sense that such an "extreme measure" is not inevitable. President Sadat has said often enough that he will negotiate with Israel alone if Israel alone accepts his invitation. However, he has always made a point of adding that, although it is a peace between only two countries that he will be negotiating, it is still a general peace, even though he has no such mandate.

To Israel, any peace is a good one, especially if, in the first instance, it is simply an Israeli-Egyptian one. For all that, Menachem Begin himself, when talking of peace between Israel and the Arab states, did say that he would sign peace *treaties*. Should this be taken to mean that the peace treaty to be signed by Israel and Egypt will be used as a model for others and that, in this sense, it will be general in scope? Or should it be taken to mean that the said "general peace" will be a series of bilateral treaties? In that case, the next treaty could be between Israel and Jordan if the Palestinian obstacle has been removed - an obstacle made all the more formidable by the radicalization recorded at the Tripoli "summit".

However, that stage has not yet been reached. There will be many other instances in which American diplomacy will realize that it is not all-powerful and will have to adjust to the situation. The fundamental error is to use theory as the basis for understanding and controlling the realities of life. The most effective policy - one that is based on foresight - is arrived at intuitively through a thorough knowledge of the facts. Theory comes into play at a later stage.

The events that are taking place in this region sacred to three religions have a direct effect on the whole of the Red Sea, the famous "Arab Lake" that is closed to Russian influence - which once again disproves the theory of the "third circle", where one super-power reserves a seat for another.

The frantic catching-up process that American diplomacy embarked on in December is welcome on condition that it is understood that there is no good or bad peace plan - the only good peace treaty is one that starts by making a new war impossible. It is only afterwards, when confidence is inspired by reality, that both sides can risk making concessions that were formerly considered unthinkable. It is in this sense that President Sadat's unprecedented visit was exemplary. Whatever the cost, the forces it generated must be irreversibly channelled in a positive direction.

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