

Carter In The Mideast: Weak In Policy Direction

Jimmy Carter's swing through Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt this week did not provide lucid guidelines as to the future direction of U.S. Mideast policy. Carter left in his wake a series of ambiguities that hopefully will be clarified only when U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance participates in three-way talks with the Egyptian and Israeli governments in Jerusalem Jan. 15.

The most revealing moment in the trip was a "whistle-stop" meeting in Ismailia, Egypt, with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Worried by the refusal of Israeli officials up to this point to publicly recognize Palestinian Arabs national interest, Sadat and other Egyptian officials had hoped to obtain from Carter a pledge of U.S. support for the Palestinians' right to self-determination. This combination of hope and worry had been heightened by Carter's own sudden expressed opposition last week to an independent Palestinian Arab state and his unequivocal endorsement of Israeli Prime Minister Begin's controversial plan for Palestinian Arab "self-rule" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip territories.

In Ismailia, however, Carter stuck to a solidly "middle" position, reiterating American support for "the legitimate rights of the Palestinians" that had been stated in the October 1 U.S.-Soviet joint statement on the Mideast, but limiting the U.S. position on the self-determination question to the Palestinians' "participating in the determination of the future."

Reacting mainly out of fear of not getting solid U.S. support, Sadat on Jan. 4 attacked the Palestine Liberation Organization as "irresponsible" and stated his preference that Jordan's King Hussein represent the Palestinians

But elsewhere Carter's statement was poorly received. A PLO spokesman in Beirut charged that "the American president seems to be unaware of what he really wants. It does not become a superpower to be unable to formulate a policy on a specific issue. It is high time for the Carter Administration to make up its mind and tell us what it really envisages for the Palestinian people."

Similar strains were evident in Saudi Arabia. Less than an hour after Carter left Riyadh, Saudi Prince Fahd told interviewers that he "can not claim that there was total agreement" between the two countries. Coupled with press reports that the Saudi ruling family had demanded U.S. action to defend the dollar, the Saudi Arab News editorialized, "Our diplomatic patience is not inexhaustible...Friendship is not a two way street; sooner or later the U.S. will have to deliver."

Observers in Riyadh reported that the Saudis were particularly irked over leaks by a top unnamed "U.S. official" that the two countries' positions were convergent on the Palestinian issue. In reality, the Saudis remained adamant about the need for an independent Palestinian homeland in the West Bank and Gaza that would include that participation of at least the moderate-centrist faction of the PLO centered around PLO chairman Yasser Arafat.

According to French press accounts, Carter's positions had received "violent opposition" from King Hussein during their Dec. 31-Jan. 1 tete-a-tete in Teheran. The King was reportedly dead-set against joining the Egypt-Israel peace talks *until* broader concessions had come from Israel; Carter reportedly pressured the King to jump on board the talks irrespective of any new Israeli moves.

Europe's Programmatic Input Keeps Mideast Peace On Track

The failure of the recent Sadat-Begin Ismailia meetings to achieve at least preliminary agreements toward a Middle East settlement did not wreck the overall negotiation process primarily because the leading nations of Europe have intervened in the situation to keep that process going. While the Europeans have developed a political credibility with both Arabs and Israelis, the primary content of the European intervention has been an effort to give Middle East peace negotiations an economic basis in programs for Middle

East regional development.

The key to this thrust has been the effort to create a new banking center in the small nation of Luxembourg which could serve as the nucleus of a new gold-backed international monetary system. That system would be the international premise for cooperative national and regional co-development agreements between Arabs and Israelis. Recent reports from banking circles in Western Europe have confirmed that France and West Germany are coordinating their work toward such a "Luxembourg