

Arafat Calls For Return To U.S.-Soviet Statement

In an April 1 United Press International interview which was subsequently given wide coverage in U.S. media, Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat stated that a return to the joint U.S.-Soviet statement of Oct. 1, 1977 was the necessary framework for any future Mideast peace negotiations. Said Arafat, "The Soviet-American communique of Oct. 1977 was accepted by the two superpowers, by us (PLO-ed.), by others. Why not make it the basis for peace in the area?"

Arafat will go to Romania in the coming days. Romania's President Ceaucescu has played a major role to date in mediating the Mideast dispute.

Arafat's responsible call for a return to a Geneva framework enjoys a supportive effort by Arab moderates, Saudi Arabia and Jordan to reconcile the Arab "steadfastness front," Algeria, Libya, Syria, South Yemen and the PLO, with Egypt's President Sadat in preparation for an eventual unified stand at a Geneva conference.

Among various high-ranking U.S. diplomatic and business officials, the consensus is that Arafat's recent pronouncements in support of a return to Geneva guidelines is, in fact, a direct expression of the behind-the-scenes cooperation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Both seek to settle the conflict in terms of a meaningful global accord which is backed up by economic development for all parties involved.

In the U.S. the pro-Geneva sentiment is centered principally in those Administration and State Department circles who advocate a return to a "Rogers Plan" formula for economic development as the underpinning of any Mideast peace plan.

PLO — "Point Man" for U.S.-Arab Cooperation

Arafat was very explicit in his address to the Carter Administration to cease playing games in the Mideast and get down to a peace plan that would mean dealing with Israel's, and in particular Prime Minister Menachem Begin's intransigence. Warning that a fifth Middle East war is "definitely approaching" because of U.S. support for Begin, whom he labeled a Nazi, Arafat called for the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.

According to a spokesman for the National Association for Arab Americans, Arafat is now acting as a "point man" for the Arab states of Syria and Jordan who are anxious to redirect the Mideast peace process away from the deadlocked Cairo talks and toward Geneva. Arafat's gesture is designed to signal the Carter Administration that the Palestine Liberation Organization is ready to eschew its "hardline" posture in favor of one more

conciliatory, which would mean a virtual go-ahead for Syrian and Jordanian entrance into the peace negotiations.

Sources in the U.S. State Department are also known to have put together an economic development package for the Mideast in the aftermath of a peace treaty. According to one spokesman, "although the U.S. will not move overtly at the present time, the U.S. Administration is waiting for the right moment to move into the peace process with economic development, i.e., a "Rogers Plan." In response to a question on eventual U.S.-Soviet cooperation, he said that "such cooperation is a *sine qua non* for any resolution to the conflict in the area."

Reconciliation in the Arab World

In addition to its Geneva initiative, the PLO is attempting to hasten a reconciliation between the two opposing camps in the Arab world. From all indications, this is being done in conjunction with Saudi Arabia and its "point man" in this diplomatic offensive, Jordan.

Early last week, Jordan announced that it would be sending emissaries throughout the Arab world to promote an eventual Arab summit meeting to achieve reconciliation between the Arab "steadfastness front" and Egypt. Jordan intends to set up an eventual Arab center for coordination of policy and planning. As Jordan sets the stage for bringing Egypt back into the fold as a precondition for Geneva, the PLO itself is moving in the direction of creating a "government-in-exile" which would apparently agree to "change its charter" by recognizing the state of Israel, and thus pave the way for moderates inside Israel to come to the fore, recognize the PLO and lay the groundwork for a Palestinian state. A government in exile, an idea which was hinted at last week by the French daily *Le Figaro*, would give Arafat the opportunity to clean out the terrorist elements within his own organization. Yasser Arafat's factional desire to cooperate with UN peacekeeping forces in southern Lebanon — to hasten an Israeli withdrawal and a withdrawal of Palestinian terrorist elements, too — is certainly giving the Carter Administration the green light as to its willingness to cooperate in an overall peace process.

The Saudis are now attempting to bring Egypt out of the control of the "separate peace" faction and into the Arab world once more. A leading Arab professor in the U.S. stated that "an Egypt-Syria rapprochement is imminent, underwritten by the Saudis." "Within Egypt itself," he reported, "Sadat is increasingly giving sway to the foreign policy establishment, that is the Foreign ministry which has strong pro-Geneva tendencies."