

After Hassan and Peres meet, Moscow fears peace in Middle East

by Thierry Lalevée

Perhaps not as spectacular as Anwar al Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977, the summit in Ifrane, Morocco between King Hassan and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres is more dramatic in its consequences, transforming the Middle East and the world strategic map.

Above all the concrete details of the talks, the summit has had a major symbolic and psychological impact on Arab-Israeli relations. The leader of an Arab country, who is also the chairman of the League of Arab States, the chairman of its most important "Jerusalem Committee," and the acting chairman of the "Organization of Islamic Countries," has invited an Israeli prime minister for talks.

Because Peres refused to commit himself on two basic issues of the September 1982 Fez peace plan—negotiations with the PLO and withdrawal from the occupied territories—the Western press is doing its best to portray the gathering as a failure. King Hassan himself admitted "failure" on these two issues during a nationwide televised speech the evening of July 23, at the conclusion of 48 hours of talks. But nothing concrete came of this meeting because nothing concrete, in that sense, was planned.

American press coverage ominously stressed that the initiator of the last significant peace process, President Sadat, was assassinated. Most Western foreign ministries volunteered formal statements of good wishes. The event never even made the front pages in Britain.

A blow to New Yalta

Failure was wished by many countries and organizations, to be sure—and none wished it more than Moscow and the U.S. State Department.

Less than one month earlier, on June 26 and 27, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy held another of his private conferences in Stockholm with his Soviet counterpart, Vladimir Polyakov, to work out the details of the U.S.-Soviet "New Yalta" package for the Middle East. Since their first meeting in November 1985, there have never been any official statements from either government spelling out the decisions that Murphy and Polyakov have reached. Least of all have the tortured populations of the Middle East themselves been told—they only find out when they are placed under new military occupation, or herded into new camps,

or massacred.

The June 26-27 meetings were followed by moves to complete the partition of Lebanon, which was to be swallowed up in a Greater Syria, except for the portion on the Israeli border. With U.S. acquiescence, Syria prepared to occupy West Beirut and then its Christian section. U.S. Middle East policy was going to base itself on accommodation to terrorist Syria.

Under pressure from Washington, Jordan's King Hussein reviled moderate PLO head Yasser Arafat and expelled his offices. Arafat was to be replaced by Syrian-Libyan puppets and probably killed, again with U.S. acquiescence. Massacres of Palestinians would follow. Still more ominous: Washington began subjecting Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak to the Ferdinand Marcos treatment. Mubarak knew his American friends were going to overthrow him.

Then, all of a sudden, turning on the visible pivot of the Hassan-Peres meeting in Morocco, U.S. policy has swung 180 degrees and taken up the bold idea that perhaps the United States should better cooperate with America's friends, to the detriment of America's enemies! Just listen to the beautiful howls of shock and pain from Moscow and Damascus! TASS immediately, violently warned on July 23 against this "new American plot," threatening Israel with dire consequences. Syria announced a break of diplomatic relations with Morocco, and made it known that King Hassan, characterized as a "black traitor," was herewith on Abu Nidal's hit-list.

What was signed and sealed, fair and square in Stockholm, is *not* being delivered!

Both Peres and Mubarak are now calling for creation of a strong bloc of moderate countries in the region, and the U.S. White House is energetically supporting them. In Lebanon, the U.S. chargé d'affaires met with the head of the Phalange Party of President Gemayel, whom yesterday the United States had agreed to dump. There is talk of a U.S.-Gemayel-Arafat axis in Lebanon, as the Lebanese part of a new moderate Arab bloc.

Both Peres and Mubarak understand the need for regional economic development, as *EIR's* LaRouche has outlined in his successive Middle East peace proposals since 1975. Now, what is urgently required is the economic muscle of the United

States, Japan, and Western Europe behind such programs of regional development.

For the past three years, Syria thought it had built an unchallenged diplomatic and political capital, according to which Damascus was the key to the Middle East powderkeg. This advantageous position was enhanced by continuous and regular secret negotiations with Israelis of the Ariel Sharon type. Damascus held all the cards, thought Hafez el Assad—until the Ifrane meeting.

Some observers have described the summit as a “meeting of two desperate men.” But looking at the Middle East in July 1986, who would not be desperate? Hassan and Peres both knew that the entire region was, and remains, on the brink of a major catastrophe. That was the reason for the Peres “Marshall Plan” proposal in early spring. The Israeli prime minister explained the urgency of his plan by pointing out that the present state of “no war, no peace,” coupled with dwindling oil prices and social unrest, was leading the entire region from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf toward chaos.

After his proposal for an economic development program for the entire region, Peres made the logical and necessary second step: a political initiative.

The Ifrane meeting did not provide any sure recipe for curing the region's ills, but it has demonstrated the kind of diplomacy which, if followed up, can in fact cure them. Morocco and Israel may be miles apart in geographical terms, but there must be a strong sense of empathy between the two leaders, when looking at each other's economic, social, and political problems. The same can be said of Iraq, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, and Egypt. In that sense, the Hassan/Peres summit was correctly characterized by *Le Figaro* on July 24 as “above all, an act of good will, an act of faith” in the future of the region.

Months in the making

Though the summit came as a surprise to most, it has been carefully prepared over months—and was not a surprise to all. Morocco was the logical Arab country to be first to host the Israeli prime minister. Beside Morocco's special role in paving the way for Sadat's trip to Jerusalem in 1977, Morocco has played an active, though discreet, role between Israel and the Arab world since the mid-1960s. No one can forget Hassan's proposal in 1965 that Israel should be allowed to integrate itself into the Arab League and join the countries of the region. More recently, in 1984 and 1985, Morocco welcomed several delegations from the Israeli Knesset (parliament) and Israeli newspaper editors. In November 1985, Hassan made his invitation public: “I am ready to invite Peres whenever he wants, provided he has something serious to offer.”

As regional observers are stressing, the summit has had several consequences. Peres is the leader of a “national unity” government shared with the extremists of the Likud who made no bones about their opposition to the trip. He had no free hand to negotiate publicly on such features of the Fez

peace plan as full recognition of Israel, normal relations between Israel and the Arab world, negotiations with the PLO, and withdrawal from the occupied territories.

But if Peres had no such a mandate—before the meeting with Hassan—now, he is in a position to acquire such a mandate. First, the meeting established the framework in which the necessary agreements can be firmed up later. Second, Peres now has the necessary political weapons to clean the Israeli house over the next few months, whether this takes the form of early elections, a referendum, or an immediate political crisis.

Foreign Minister Shamir, head of the Likud and scheduled, under current agreements, to take over the premiership in September, did not behave as a minister should. According to the London *Times* of July 22, Shamir deliberately leaked the news of Peres's trip, hours before it was supposed to be known. He later made clear that though he had been made aware of the trip well in advance, he had not given it his “blessings.” He even refused to welcome Peres upon his return.

Arab reactions

The summit is an offer to Jordan's King Hussein, whose immediate condemnation of the gathering has underlined how much a prisoner of his pro-Syrian prime minister, Zayed Rifaai, he has become. Hussein has now to decide between a relationship with Syria's Hafez al Assad, in which the only status he might hope for is puppet of a Soviet puppet, or the path toward peace through Hassan and Peres.

Egypt's President Mubarak was one of the first to praise a summit which showed that, at last, Egypt is not isolated in dealings with Israel any longer. A long expected summit between Peres and Mubarak may be a direct result of the talks in Morocco.

Then there has been the silence from the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia. But who can believe that the House of Saud and King Fahd, in particular, was not informed of the summit beforehand? Was not one of Saudi Arabia's special envoys in Israel only a week earlier?

Last but not least are the reactions of those who are most immediately concerned with any negotiations: the West Bank Palestinians. “The meeting in Ifrane is very important. We welcome it. Hassan has always defended our right of self-determination. Why should we reject this new reason to hope?” declared Hanna Seniora, editor-in-chief of *Al-Fajr* newspaper of Jerusalem.

“A courageous and audacious step which . . . will help the Palestinian to come out of this dark hour,” declared Bethlehem Mayor Elias Frejj.

Such comments carry more weight than the meaningless gesticulations from Damascus or Tripoli. As chairman of the Arab League, King Hassan is now expected to convene an emergency Arab summit. Even the executive committee of Yasser Arafat's Al-Fatah, in its pro forma condemnation of the talks, requested such a summit.