

MIDEAST

Begin may finally have gone too far

By David Mandel

HAS THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION now been sufficiently jarred by the latest round of Mideast violence to press Israel to accept a comprehensive settlement involving withdrawal from the occupied West Bank, Gaza, Sinai, Golan and now, southern Lebanon?

This is the most relevant question as the melodrama set off by Anwar Sadat's November initiative continues to unfold.

Although at the time his speeches and gestures seemed more aimed at the Israeli public, the Egyptian leader has since repeatedly stressed the U.S.'s "indispensable role" in mediating his initiative to success. Sadat was not naive enough to believe he could fully transform Israeli mass consciousness singlehandedly.

However, in his heady rush to prove himself a loyal U.S. ally, Sadat seems to have committed the same miscalculation Israeli leaders have often made: Taking American support for granted and failing to see America's wider interest in the region.

The U.S. was initially cool to Sadat's initiative, not because of its content, but because opposition by other Arabs threatened to undermine the carefully laid Kissinger-Brzezinski plans to consolidate a pro-U.S. conservative axis, meant to include Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and perhaps even PLO "moderates" as well as Egypt and Israel. Eventually reconciled to losing Syria and the Palestinians for now (Brzezinski in December: "Bye-bye PLO"), the U.S. was still content to let the pace of events slow down. A peace concluded too quickly could take people's minds off the national conflict and lead them to expect the "economic benefits of peace" that Sadat has promised before the region's economies have been restructured to insure the domination of western capital.

PLO unites Israelis.

Just before the PLO attack on the bus, which left over 30 Israeli civilians dead and set off even greater Israeli violence against civilians in Lebanon, pressure—both internal and external—was finally beginning to mount on Begin.

Debate was raging in early March over his government's settlement policy; for the first time ever, with the ruling coalition itself divided, clear public and parliamentary majorities were taking a stand against all extensions of settlement in the territories, let alone ambitious plans for massive colonization advocated by extremists. Hundreds of twelfth-graders (about to be drafted) and reserve soldiers signed petitions calling on the government to respond more favorably to the peace initiatives. Hundreds more expressed support after the petitions were printed in the press. And rumors abounded that Begin would finally face American pressure during his scheduled trip to Washington.

The terrorist attack could not have been better timed if its aim was to take the pressure off Begin. The indiscriminate attack on civilians removed much credibility from PLO claims that it remains committed to peace with the Israeli people and merely sought to derail a political settlement that threatened to leave it out. Israeli public opinion was immediately galvanized in support of any military action the government might choose to take, and even world public opinion was relatively tolerant of what it took to be a "retaliatory raid."

Occupied Lebanon.

But Israel's invasion of South Lebanon is proving to be much more than "retaliation." Most observers seem to accept at face value Chaim Herzog's claim before the UN Security Council that Israel "has no territorial designs on Lebanon" (reminiscent of Abba Eban's similar statements in June, 1967), but there are ser-



A grim Menachem Begin and Jimmy Carter meet at the White House March 21.

ious indications to the contrary.

Historically, many Israelis have quite openly set their eyes on fertile South Lebanon. The Litani River is a more "natural" border than the previous low ridge, they say, and the area includes the largest of the Jordan River's three main sources, indispensable to Israel's water supply. Should the occupation continue, it would not be surprising to see attempted Israeli settlement in the region.

Immediately with the invasion's opening, there began a loudly-orchestrated campaign in the name of a few scattered Christian villages near the border, "begging" the Israelis to stay. The campaign was actually begun last year, when Israel armed rightist Christian troops in the region and even fought alongside them against PLO forces, thus subjecting the Christian towns to battlefield status. (During the main Lebanese Civil War of 1975-1976, the south was quiet.)

Finally, Israel seems to be doing its best to foster an exodus of Palestinians and other "unfriendly" civilians from the area; it has learned something of the hazards of ruling a large and organized occupied people since 1967. A March 21 *New York Times* article puzzled over the invaders' military strategy: Why did the Israelis push northward so slowly, letting the PLO troops escape ahead of them, instead of cutting off all bridges over the Litani, thus trapping the guerillas and finishing them for good, the reporter asks?

Apparently, Israel did not want to cut off the hundreds of thousands more refugees who are fleeing the fighting, even

though this strategy risks vulnerability to continuing Palestinian guerilla action and a new "war of attrition." And now there is no electronic security fence, which was fairly effective in preventing infiltration across the old border.

Nor does Israel seem terribly concerned—as many assumed it would be—with not provoking the Syrians, who occupy the north bank of the Litani. Syria has been provoked. It must now choose between cracking down on the Palestinian forces as they retreat northwards, or risking a war with Israel if "attrition" fighting continues. Israel is confident that with Egypt neutralized it can handle any challenge from the north.

This does not mean that Israel will definitely continue to occupy South Lebanon, though it may try to extract concessions on other issues if forced to retreat. The government would like to keep the new land just as it would like to keep as much of the other occupied territory it can get away with. Those who benefit from cheap labor would certainly hope to maintain at least economic dominance.

Most of the public still believes that in the absence of peace, more territory is better than less. The faulty logic of this argument has still not sunk in, though the Israeli left is doing its best to point out that the latest terror attack came via the Mediterranean, which cannot be occupied, and that it probably could have been prevented altogether had Israel expressed a willingness to include the Palestinians in negotiations. Despite the desperate resort to this indiscriminate armed

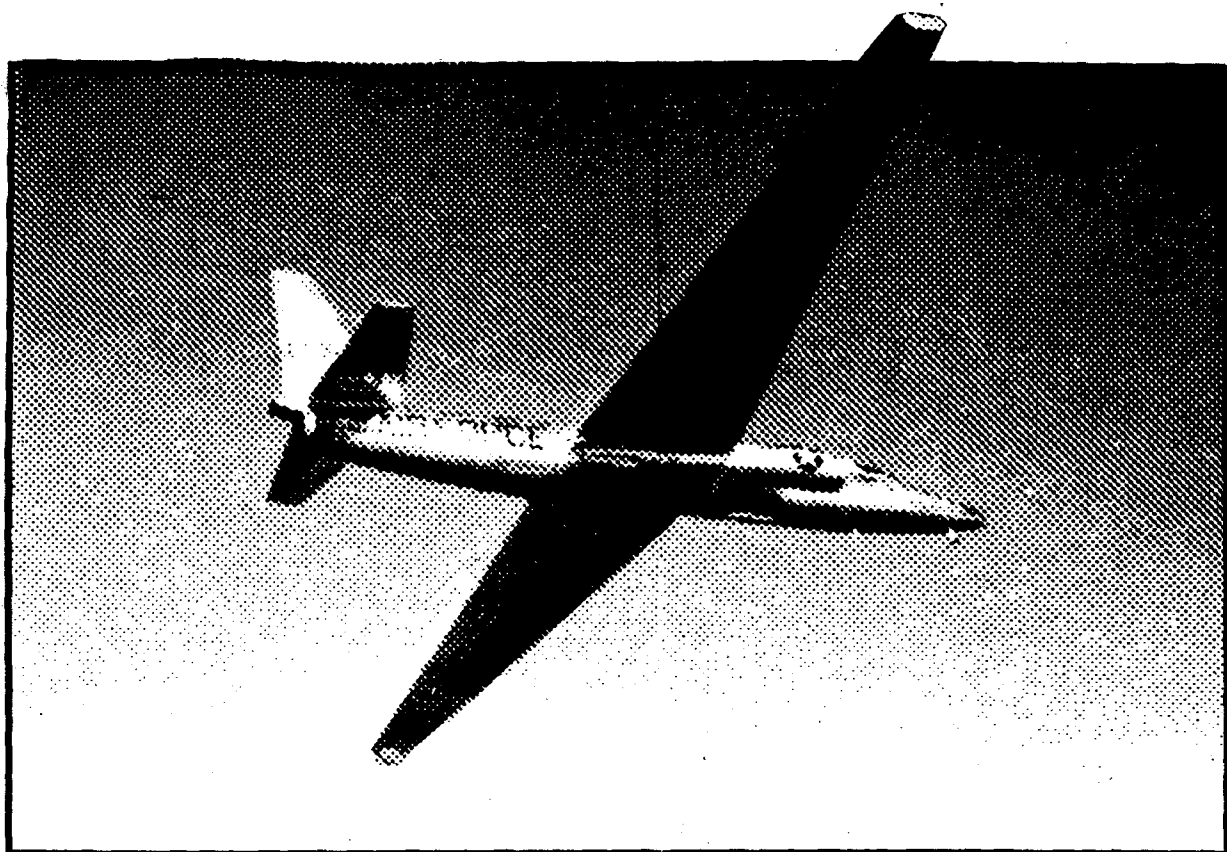
attack, even the former "rejectionist" wing of the PLO has by now accepted the political demand of Palestinian independence alongside Israel, not in place of it.

No further occupation of territory can eliminate Israeli vulnerability to small but bloody armed raids, as long as there are Palestinians willing to undertake them. Nor are expanded borders very meaningful against planes and missiles of modern warfare. Today, Israel's military prowess can guarantee another major military victory. But this cannot bring "security," just as 1967 and 1973 did not. For the means to fight continuous wars, Israel remains dependent on outside backing, and thus is still extremely vulnerable to outside pressure, potentially wielded most effectively by the U.S., its chief backer and supplier. Carter has hinted that this time he will confront Begin. Will it happen this time? Has the U.S. been sufficiently shocked out of its recent complacency to the extent that fear of full-scale war and potential superpower confrontation will outweigh the "go-slow" interests?

The answers to these questions are still unknown. But in case anyone still had doubts, it should be clear now that even hints at a separate Israeli-Egyptian deal can wreak havoc in the region. As long as the Palestinian people are denied the opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination, they have the power to disrupt any settlement attempted over their heads.

David Mandel recently returned from Israel and is living in New York City.

THE 50's AND THE 60's



"...I saw the condensation trail of a plane looking for me. I knew he had to be supersonic, but I could fly much higher than he could. That gave me a sense of security and well-being..." Francis Gary Powers

By David Moberg

AS A TRUSTING, NAIVE, REPUBLICAN junior in high school, I was shocked when grandfatherly President Eisenhower admitted—after numerous denials I had dutifully repeated—that the U-2, shot down with Francis Gary Powers aboard, was indeed a spy plane deliberately flying over the Soviet Union. Spies were Russian, weren't they? And didn't all American Presidents take the sacred George Washington cherry tree oath?

That was 1960, the start of a decade that has since been encapsulated as a powerful symbol of political and cultural rebellion, competing for personal allegiances and public dominance with that other time/culture capsule celebrating imperial America, "the fifties."

The U-2 incident is not an inappropriate start for the '60s. Other assumptions—about unbeatable American power and technology, the menace of worldwide Communism and the desirability of a secretive "national security government" superseding a public democracy—were soon to be shot down as well.

Powers was the quintessential "fifties" man, the pilot of a high altitude jet crisscrossing the world at a presumably safe distance through the marvels of American technology. He carried with him a suitable symbol of American wealth and power—a silver dollar with a special poison needle hidden inside. The poison would permit the spy to hide—later the code word would be "cover up"—as much evidence as possible. It also permitted him to avoid confronting a nasty reality. This pathological condition had been raised in the '50s to the status of national virtue.

Despite his fear of the ruthless Ruskies below, Powers passed up his chance at personal obliteration. He was never sure why. "I guess," he said, "it was just 'wait and see what happens.'"

A lot did happen. More and more official America came to resemble the U-2 incident—anti-democratic governmental secrecy, manipulation of public opinion, deceitfulness, abuse of power, faith in technological supremacy, paranoid politics, a flight from world reality. There have been so many repeats of the U-2 affair that high school juniors today are not surprised by official corruption, corporate domination of government, exploitation of people here and abroad by Amer-

ican business or systematic distortion of events in the media.

In the early '60s, enough people believed—as I did—the inflated rhetoric about America's greatness and goodness that their expectations were high. When the truth came out, their disillusionment was deep. Fueled by their outrage, they fought to change, or fled from, the expanding nightmare. Young people today may not like what they see in government, business and the military, but many are likely to respond with a shrug of the shoulders as Chicagoans do when they hear of another case of ballot box stuffing. "What else would you expect?"

The '70s have not been an innocent time, nor particularly hopeful. For both those who dreamed of an "American century" and those who dreamed of a second American revolution, these years have been difficult, confused, intractable. In the search for direction forward a battle is developing over the meaning of the two dominant images of our country since World War II—"the fifties" and "the sixties."

Much 1950s nostalgia has portrayed the decade as a fun-filled, kooky sit-com, complete with canned laughter and smiling black domestics. Even the once-hated "greasers" are now portrayed as benign. Yet there was another '50s that was "more an era of fear than fun," as historian Douglas Miller and journalist Marion Nowak remind us. At its best, American life was, in their words, "prosperous, stable, bland, religious, moral, patriotic, conservative, domestic, buttoned down." Anti-communist paranoia permeated every pore of American society; the only refuge was the newly packaged life sold by increasingly powerful giant corporations.

Millions of people—not yet too cynical or turned off—on the other hand, recall "the sixties" with fondness as a time of awakening, commitment, excitement, community and even heroism, despite attendant horrors of death and destruction. Yet there is also a rising chorus dismissing the '60s as a decade of disaster and savagery. Like Daniel Bell, an old conservative-liberal moving farther right, they see the period as a revolt against reason, a self-centered "redemption of senses from the mind," a "democratization" (bad word to Bell) of genius that undermined "elite" (good) taste, and a dream of infantile pleasures.

The conflict over the meaning of these images—decades ripped from the stream of history and judged like fashions in clothes—centers on dominant sensibilities.

Although the '50s represent the political right clothed as near-universal consensus and the '60s represent the political left, the sensibilities of these periods are not precisely political ideologies.

A sensibility defines everyday perceptions and preoccupations, perspectives and practices that become almost second nature. They are less than ideologies, for the aims embodied by either sensibility are quite vague. They are also more than ideologies, for they set a tone and disposition that not only define life's high points and celebrations but also diffuse throughout routine regimens.



1950 FUN-COATED FEAR AND THE SENSUALITY OF THE MARKET

The sensibility of the '50s reflects the cold war conservative-liberal political consensus.

In the years after World War II, the polarization of world politics provided an anti-communist rationale for expanded military production and the American assumption of the mantle of chief imperial power. Intense domestic witch-hunts crushed not only political groups on the left but also virtually any dissenting voice.

From church pulpits, university lectures, TV picture tubes and the halls of government there was a celebration of America as the marvel of the ages. America had unlimited power and wealth. Remaining problems would soon be sucked up by the better vacuum cleaner a scientist surely would invent. "Peoples' capitalism" had transcended capitalism and socialism, wiped out social classes and pro-

vided the necessary commodities for "the good life."

Politics—disputes over who gets what, when and how—had been banished in favor of moralisms of absolute right and wrong. The crusade against communism, outwardly a universally shared moral imperative, ironically created within the citadels of political power a completely amoral, unrestrained opportunism in the exercise of power unchecked by politics.

As a complement to this moralism, American life became psychologized. There was an obsession with "deviancy," "delinquency," "mental illness," and "adjustment." The social order was given, and each should find his or her place in it—housewives to the kitchen, daddies off to work, kids minding the rules at school. Any departure was evidence of immorality or "sickness."

Fun was pursued as obsessively as money, which of course was needed for fun. Yet the pursuit was equally a flight—a flight from fear, a flight from guilt at not fitting the required mold. Should doubts arise, the answer lay in "the power of positive thinking."

A bland social Christianity sanctified American institutions, blessed the Cold War and provided an "upbeat" vision of American progress. Intellectuals celebrated America, while castigating themselves for any past seduction by leftwing heresies. The wish for everything to be all right was as intense as the fear that the dream of suburbia, superhighways and TV diversion would be upset by deviants or, more sinister, by traitors.

Such a precarious consensus, overlaying deep fears, made Americans almost willing dupes for anything their corporate and government leaders told them (the reverse of their fears of being a "dupe" of the Communists).

When worries surfaced about the destructiveness of nuclear weapons or the problems of radioactive fallout, officials systematically suppressed research that questioned nuclear safety and the government launched its "atoms for peace" project to encourage everyone to "love the bomb." In the "bomb culture," political decisions—even moral decisions—were to be left to experts who had technological competence. Only they really knew and could decide what was best.

The Presidency, whose office had been growing rapidly, became increasingly a secretive government within the government, with little accountability to the people. This secret government justified every subversion of democratic principle