Excerpts from Q & A

Q: Do you believe that there has been strong domestic opposition to Netanyahu's economic program?

A: Yes. Netanyahu's economic objective is, basically, to tear the economy completely apart and restructure it all over again. It is an even larger version of Soviet perestroika, and he believes that this is the only way for Israel to enter the future. He wants to reconstruct Israel's economy on a capitalist, privatistic basis, and then project that dynamic Israel out onto the global economy. Thereby, Israel will become stronger.

Q: What has been the reaction of Egypt and Jordan to Netanyahu?

A: It seems that until now they seem to be taking a "wait and see" attitude. Obviously, judging from the result of the meeting in Cairo, the Egyptians are perhaps starting to get a little worried. The room to maneuver for a country like Egypt is really very small, at least so long as it remains dependent on American economic aid. It is difficult for them to come out in opposition at the present time because there is no means by which to do so unless those states begins to reassess their own paradigm about how to relate to the United States or to take a different posture.

As far as Jordan is concerned, Jordan is an Israeli ally. I think that Jordan's role is actually the opposite than that of Egypt's. The two might come into conflict with each other. I think it remains to be seen whether or not Egypt adopts a very dynamic attitude toward this man and a confrontational one toward his program. If so, then there may be a chance. But if it just adopts a "wait and see" attitude, then it will be a disaster.

Q: How would you describe Netanyahu's future policy toward Egypt? How far can he go?

A: Toward the end of Peres's term there were murmurs that when Egypt brought up the problem of the Non-Profileration Treaty a little bit too strongly for Israel's taste, Peres had hinted at the idea that perhaps Egypt could be punished. Netanyahu would probably take that stance to a further extreme. I think that Netanyahu would use hardball tactics against Egypt if he thought he could get away with it. There probably is no reason why he could not get away with it, at least as far as the United States is concerned.

Q: How do you see Netanyahu's religious beliefs working in his overall perception?

A: Netanyahu is secularist but he is also, obviously, a greater Israelist. There is an issue that was brought up by one Israeli writer that bears heavily on this. Netanyahu, on the outside, is an American, with the perfect English, the telegenic appearance, and the like. But on the inside, Netanyahu is what he calls "Judean." According to this writer, there are two categories of Israelis: "Israelis" and "Judeans." It is a tribalistic kind of construction, and Netanyahu, on the inside, is essentially tribalistic in his thinking.

Q: What role should the Europeans play? Should there be a higher level of European involvement?

A: Personally I think there should be, since the main player, the United States, is not really impartial. What we need are more impartial players to balance that out and to provide some additional perspective. I think it was a positive indication that France was included in the negotiations over the understanding in southern Lebanon. That was a very important addition to the negotiating environment. I think it would be highly beneficial if this trend of European involvement could be reinforced.

Q: When Arab states say: "We are for the peace process," is it not so much because they believe in it or in its success as much as it is for fear they will not have an answer to the Palestinian question?

A: The idea that the United States is going to help balance off Israel is no longer realistic. Actually, the trend is that the United States is going to become more support ive of Israel, not less, and it is not going to pressure Israel, no matter what. Thus, this Arab strategy of look ing to the U.S. is going to lead to a disaster unless the Arabs start at least contemplating how else this problem might be dealt with on a structural, subtle level. I think this current *status quo* option is not really an option. It is, instead, intolerable and its continuance is going to give Netanyahu exactly the maneuvering room he needs to carry out his program.

Q: Within the framework of international forces, the present situation seems so favorable to Netanyahu: disarray in the Arab world, the situation of the Palestinians, the position of the United States. The bottom line is that contemporary history is on Netanyahu's side. What do you have as policy prescriptions for dealing with the situation?

A: The United States, theoretically, should develop its own independent policy based on its own national interests. Obviously, that is not going to happen. That is already out of the question. We have to forget about it and put it out of our minds. We must take the identity of the U.S. position with Israel's and the political support for that position as a given and proceed from there. It is absolutely necessary to abandon that old paradigm because it is gone. It no longer reflects reality and to cling to it is similar to "fighting the lost war."

The United States is not going to change unless it has an incentive to change, or unless there are negative consequences for not changing. These incentives must come from the region itself; they must be reflected in the policies – the positions on important matters concerning their future. So far, the Arabs have not provided any incentives for the United States to do anything other that what it is doing now. The U.S. partiality toward Israel can be expected to increase in direct proportion to the Arabs' political dependence on Israel. The initial strategizing should be done with the goal of loosening that dependence and developing independent political stances toward the Arab-Israeli question.

Q: What about the internal Israel divide on what policy shoud be taken toward the Palestinians? After all, Peres only lost by less than a single percentage point; half the Israeli population supports Oslo and the peace process.

A: That is very true, but then we must ask, what really is Oslo? Even if half the Israeli population supports Oslo, it does not mean that half the Israeli population supports a Palestinian state. It certainly does not mean that half the Israeli population supports a withdrawal from the Golan Heights. If they did, there might be a chance, but they do not.

Oslo and the peace process as a whole cannot be the source of the Palestinian legitimacy. It must be the international consensus, which derives from international law. As we all know, Oslo was concluded outside the bounds of international legality.

Q: What about a second intifada, *on the part of the Palestinians on the inside? Something like that might even spread to Jordan.*

A: I think you are right, but it is equally important to be sure that before the Palestinians take any specific action, they must first re-construct their national institutions. Right now, there is no single institution representing all the Palestinians, inside and outside alike.

The only way the Palestinians will survive as a people is to have all Palestinians, regardless of where they live, under a single political umbrella. Otherwise, the Palestinians will be the next Armenians. The label "Palestinian" will gradually become only a designation signifying a geographical point of origin and it will lose its political significance over time as it loses its practical, everyday operational content. That is exactly what Israel wants, under Netanyahu or anyone else.

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