

'For justice in Palestine' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (3 December 1974)

Caption: On 3 December 1974, German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung describes stormy Arab-Israeli relations and analyses European Policy on the Middle East.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. EICK, Jürgen; WELTER, Erich; FACK, Fritz Ullrich; DESCHAMPS, Bruno; FEST, Joachim; REIßMÜLLER, Johann Georg. 03.12.1974, n° 280. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Um Gerechtigkeit in Palästina", auteur:Vocke, Harald , p. 10.

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The common Middle East policy of the Nine in Europe

By Harald Vocke

There are some Arab politicians who think that the decisions taken by the Arab Heads of State in Rabat and the Palestine Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly created propitious conditions for further Middle East peace talks. They consider that the Rabat Conference gave Israel's Arab neighbours and the Palestinians the authority to negotiate with the Jewish State on a peace settlement. It was unmistakable, they noted, that there had been a fundamental change of heart since the Khartoum Conference, which, in August 1967, had forbidden the Arabs to have any negotiations with Israel whatsoever. The UN General Assembly had now done no more than make a retrospective correction to the injustice meted out to the Palestinians over a quarter of a century by recognising their rights.

The picture being painted by Israeli diplomats contrasts with this assessment. They claim that Syria is preparing an attack on Israel with Soviet help. Although Egypt is apparently not yet prepared to undertake fresh military adventures, Syria wants to push the Egyptians into a new war, too. The decision taken by the Arab Heads of State in Rabat, that, henceforth, the 'Palestine Liberation Organisation' should alone represent the rights of the Palestinian Arabs in the Arab territories occupied by Israel, had temporarily destroyed the hope of negotiations about the future of the West Bank. For Israel could not be prepared to talk to terrorists and murderers. And now the UN General Assembly has also succumbed to the blackmail threats of the Arab oil-exporting countries with its Palestine Resolution.

Jerusalem

In spite of these differences, both Arab and Israeli diplomats are of the opinion that both sides consider more peace contacts to be possible and useful. Syria, and recently also Egypt, are urging the rapid resumption of the Geneva Conference on the Middle East. In principle, Israel, too, is prepared to conduct further negotiations with its Arab neighbours. But what form could a just and permanent solution of the Palestine conflict take? Since the Federal Republic has been a voting member of the United Nations, Bonn can hardly restrict itself to the non-committal position that it is in favour of a just peace and the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 on the Middle East.

At the heart of the conflict is the dispute over Jerusalem. Immediately after the June 1967 War, Israel adopted a parliamentary resolution to annex East Jerusalem. Since then, it has not only been ignoring the UN demand that it repeal this annexation and not change the status of the sector of the city captured in the June War, it has invested billions in more closely integrating East Jerusalem into its own State.

At the United Nations, the nine Member States of the European Community took the stance that Israel must end the military occupation of the Arab territories taken in the June 1967 War. In the opinion of the Nine, this should also include Israeli withdrawal from East Jerusalem. As they are well aware of the explosive power of the Jerusalem question, it is natural that some West European diplomats are hesitant actually to express this view in public.

For the Israelis, Jerusalem is of great importance. However, the wishes and feelings of the Arab and Islamic peoples are also part of the political reality of the Palestine conflict. The Muslims lay claim to the unrestricted sovereignty of an Arab State over the holy sites of Islam in East Jerusalem. Israel wants to maintain supremacy over the whole of Jerusalem. Many Arabs, and most non-Arab Muslims, however, demand a restoration of the former division of Jerusalem into two parts, an Arab city and an Israeli city.

Yasser Arafat, the head of the 'Palestine Liberation Organisation', demands more. The State of Palestine that Arafat dreamt of, one which would offer equal rights and a common homeland to Arabs and Jews alike, could only come into being on the ruins of the Israeli State. The new UN Resolution on Palestine also goes far beyond the demand of the nine Member States of the European Community for a withdrawal by Israel

from the Arab territories occupied in 1967. For this resolution refers unreservedly to a right of the Palestine Arabs to return to their 'former homes' and their previous property. However, it does not deal with the rights of the Jews living in Israel.

The Europeans, too, recognise the fundamental right of the Palestinian Arabs to a homeland. However, in their opinion, and in accordance with previous United Nations resolutions, Israel should be given the choice of allowing the Palestinians to return to their homes or paying them compensation for their property occupied by Jewish settlers. The nine Member States of the European Community think that it is currently impossible to achieve peaceful cohabitation of the Israelis and the Palestinian Arabs, who are at present scattered across several Arab countries, in a single State. In the view of the Europeans, the Arabs and the Israelis should first become accustomed to living peacefully together in two state systems separated from each other, and this situation should be protected by a strong international peacekeeping force.

The Security Council Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 on the Middle East already provided for the setting up of a demilitarised zone with a view to guaranteeing peace in the Middle East. In the opinion of the Nine, after the withdrawal of the Israelis to the pre-June War Israeli-Arab borders, the security of these borders should be guaranteed by the world powers, the Western Europeans and, possibly, also other states. A peacekeeping force should be stationed along the borders. This would probably be necessary for many years. The decision on a withdrawal of the peacekeeping force from the borders to be protected must be the responsibility of the Security Council alone and not of the UN Secretary General.

This would result in the prevention, in future, of tragic wrong decisions, such as those taken by the former UN Secretary-General, U Thant, who, in 1967, at a time of extreme tension, had UN troops withdrawn from the border between Egypt and Israel. The new Arab State to be set up within the borders of the former British mandated territory of Palestine should consist of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Once this Arab State in Palestine and Israel had coexisted for some time and tolerated each other as neighbours, a gradual reconciliation or even a process to merge the two state systems would be conceivable.

The middle way

The European diplomats in the Middle East are well aware that there are many militant Palestinian Arabs who wish to destroy the Jewish State and establish an Arab State in the entire territory of Palestine. The authors of the Palestine Resolution tabled by the Europeans are also aware of demands being made by Israeli politicians that are aimed at the annexation of further Arab territories, such as the project discussed by the Israeli Government shortly before the October War to cover the Sinai Peninsula with a network of Jewish settlements and to build a large Jewish city to the south of the Gaza Strip. It is their view that the common European Middle East policy should steer a neutral middle course between the demands of the Arab extremists and the Israeli extremists.

The Middle East policy of the Nine, were it to be consistently pursued, might make a contribution to the defusing of the Palestine conflict. However, the Europeans should not lay themselves open to the suspicion that they did not dare to oppose Arab demands that go too far. The abstention of the Nine on the Palestine Resolution of the UN General Assembly was perhaps the easy way out, but it was not a good decision. It would have therefore been appropriate for the nine Member States of the EC to give some clarification of the demand that the Palestinian Arabs must return to their old homes and their property, which is set out in this Resolution, and also to make some reference to the rights that the Israeli people enjoy today in Palestine.