

## THOUGHTS ON MAKING PEACE

By Abraham H. Foxman

As I sat on the White House Lawn at the signing ceremony between Israel and the PLO, my mind went back to the day, 14 years ago in the same place, when Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin agreed to peace. I remember how unadulterated my reactions were then — like others who have felt the Arab conflict with Israel so deeply, that moment of peace was unmatched. The unbelievable was happening; hope for the future, nothing was impossible. More analytically, I was convinced Israel was doing the right thing and things would get better.

On Monday, at the White House, I also was happy, but not in the same way. I was filled with excitement and pain and I tried to examine my reactions.

I agree with Mr. Rabin who has focused on the point that in order to achieve peace, Israel must come to terms with its enemies. I guess the same line could have been used when Egypt made peace with Israel, but it was not. It wasn't that Anwar Sadat had not been a real enemy; while terrorism was not its thing, Egypt and Sadat had been plenty nasty, including the surprise attack on Israel's holiest day, Yom Kippur. And yet, there was no need to talk that way because people were truly convinced, surprisingly so, that Sadat had undergone a transformation. On the surface it was the drama of the visit to Jerusalem, but in fact that was the culmination, though an immense step, of four years of evidence of change. And it wasn't that people believed that Sadat had become a lover of Zion, because that was ridiculous. But it was, on the other hand, something more than the fact that a number of points of national interest had pushed him in the direction of peace. There was somehow a belief in the sincerity of the man, so that when he uttered the rhetoric of peace, as overblown as it may have been at the time, there was a strong will to believe in what he was saying.

Now let me be clear. I think what has happened in Washington

this week is momentous, offers real hope for a changed Middle East, is a product of many changed circumstances, and deserves and needs as wide support as possible. We at ADL have not only advocated American Jewish support for Israeli decisionmaking, but have analytically concluded that change can only come through Israeli strength, American support for Israel, and a reduction in options for the Arabs. So it has transpired.

Still, I can't help my reaction. Necessity has driven Arafat to this day, and all who love peace should exploit this. But there is a difference between perceiving opportunity based on necessity and believing in the sincerity of Yasir Arafat. After all, it is not that long ago that the PLO was directly involved in terrorism. More than that, Sadat was the powerful head of the largest Arab state and could clearly implement what he agreed to. Even if Arafat has the will, does he have the ability to implement it, in the face of radical Palestinians, secular and religious, in the face of Israel's much more difficult security concerns than in the Sinai?

Every time these anxieties and doubts creep up on me, however, I remind myself that the current process is predicated on the absence of trust, on the need to demonstrate that necessity can be converted to trust. Will I feel differ-

ently about Arafat two years or five years from now than I do today? That is a personal question I ask which is reflected in the interim arrangement. Arafat should know, though some will try to convince him there are other ways, that the path to further Israeli concessions lies in convincing Israel that he has become trustworthy. His incentive to behave is immense.

And so I reassure myself. My anxiety about Arafat is natural and not cynical; it should temper one's euphoria, but it should do nothing to undermine the realization that what took place on the White House lawn is no less significant, and may yet prove even more momentous, than what happened there in 1979. □

*Ceremony for the Signing  
 of the  
 Israel-Palestinian Agreement*



*September 13, 1993  
 The White House*