

The War Through Arab Eyes

A publication called *OCTOBER WAR: AN ARAB VIEW* in the *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Volume 3 No. 2. Published in Beirut.

An insight into the immediate impact of the October war on Arab writers is given in the *Journal of Palestinian Studies* belonging to the Institute for Palestine Studies and Kuwait University (the latter probably contributing more money than academic credibility).

The general impression the articles convey is of a measured mood of victory. The military aspects are analysed by Riad Ashkar who, in spite of his conclusion, is rather apologetic. Explaining the final result of the war, he claims that Egypt's aim was not to reoccupy Sinai but to take control of the East Bank of the Canal and to bring about an urgent diplomatic activity. This result could be achieved, on the same lines of logic, by a new war of attrition which involves fewer risks of the Israelis crossing the Canal.

Indeed, the writer himself admits: *"It remains very doubtful in the case of the October war that these Arabs could have achieved what they did if the Israelis had been fully mobilised and had fired the first shot of the war"*.

According to Ashkar, the Syrians had even more limited ambitions and they took into consideration the possibility of a need to withdraw from the pre-war ceasefire line as they in fact did. All the same, this and other articles have the aura of at least a psychological victory.

This "victory" produces two types of reaction. Edward Said, a professor of English at Columbia University, displaying mastery of language and vague moderation, writes: *"We must give up, once and for all, the idea that we shall have a Middle East, as if Zionism had never happened. The Israeli Jew is there in the Middle East and we cannot, and I might even say that we must not pretend that he will not be there tomorrow, after the struggle"*

is over". He continues: *"It is not for me to say what the right of the Israeli Jew is or should be, but that he is, that he exists with obviously special attachment to the land is something we must face."*

The other reaction is expressed thus: *"Behind the Arab-Israeli conflict lies a major concern; the Arab need for self-fulfilment in the context of a conflict of destiny with Zionist-Israeli presence. The Palestine problem is merely the visible and incandescent face".*

This was written by former Syrian Prime Minister Salah al-Din al-Bitar. The meaning of Bitar's assertion is that even if an immediate solution to the Palestinian problem was achieved, this will not constitute the end of the state of belligerency between Israel and the Arab States. Hence, any agreement resulting from present diplomatic efforts will be short-lived since it does not solve the basic conflict.

There is no deviation in this issue from the "traditional" line of a *"free, democratic, secular Palestine"* even for practical short-term purposes as the PLO "working paper" is assumed to contain. But then, not surprisingly, Jordan is not mentioned even once in an article by an American, not even by those writers who refer to the military aspects of the war.