

## WASHINGTON DATELINE

By Trude B. Feldman

ISRAELITE'S WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT

*Visit With Joseph Sisco*

In Joseph John Sisco's view, the power of positive—but quiet—diplomacy can make valuable inroads in solving the Middle East conflict.

The Assistant Secretary of State—in a rare and exclusive interview this week—offered his conception of that diplomacy, and also touched on various other points which affect the Middle East.

He expounded on his philosophy after being asked if he agreed with reports that his recent mission to Israel was a failure.

"Even though nothing concrete was accomplished on the trip," he explained, "we explored many ideas; and the exploration is part of a close, intimate continuing dialogue which we feel is important."

Sisco displayed his passion for quiet diplomacy. He fervently believes that international negotiations must often be conducted away from the spotlight of the media. He described himself as a "constructive catalyst". He sees his role as being the one to initiate as well as to draw reactions from both sides and then to proceed according to what he uncovers, and to what, hopefully, will bring about changes in the stalemate.

"I believe we should follow an active diplomacy in pursuit of peace in the Mideast area," he remarked. "Positive results can also come from preventive diplomacy."

Sisco said the American press tends to characterize a mission or a trip of the sort he made either as a success or as a failure, and this leaves a false impression.

"There is a tendency to report foreign policy action as if it were a baseball game," he asserted. "You can't point to any particular trip as a failure or as a success. On my last trip to Israel, it was a question of chipping away in the negotiating process. We can't discuss formulas or moves in the press. There is an urgent need for private diplomacy, because the moment that serious points are batted about in the public domain, public positions tend to become more rigid."

Does he think peace in the Mideast is any closer in sight than it was 14 months ago before the ceasefire?

"Each month that passes improves the possibility because people on both sides of the issue are getting in the habit of an atmosphere of no shooting.

"Psychologically, there still exists strong feelings and vital differences on both sides, but it's important that the shooting is absent whereas it has not been absent at other periods. We are closer, yes, in the sense of operating in a climate of a ceasefire and in the context of both sides continuing to be interested in the ongoing negotiations on the interim Suez Canal agreement. The focus of my current efforts is to help achieve this. But, in terms of an overall Mideast settlement, I can't predict one in the foreseeable future. The overall goal is still an elusive one.

"This is why we're using the piece by piece jigsaw strategy. We fit a different part of the jigsaw each time. It may be slow, but we're trying to put all the pieces of the jigsaw in place in the long run."

Sisco added, however, that when one examines the positions of both sides, one finds there are areas of parallel interest, which should be emphasized.

Why is it so important to open the Suez Canal?

"It's important," he responded, "because it would constitute a 'practical test of peace'. We feel if they consummate this kind of partial settlement, and see that such an agreement can be implemented, it will increase confidence on both sides and tend to transform the atmosphere."

Sisco doesn't consider negotiations at an impasse. Both sides, in his view, continue to be interested in an interim settlement and both want the United States to play a role in the process. He indicated that the very fact that the United States continues to be involved in the Mideast is a positive factor; that this lends hope to each side and lessens the chances



JOSEPH SISCO DISCUSSES MIDEAST AND HIS TRIP TO ISRAEL IN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW AT HIS STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICE WITH TRUDE B. FELDMAN, OUR WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT.

PHOTO BY BABER

of new outbreaks. Also, that if the U.S. would stop being involved, the situation would probably deteriorate.

Sisco was only able to generalize when asked to pinpoint the stumbling block.

"Fundamentally, there still exists a good deal of mistrust on both sides, and what has to be instilled is that special yearning to live and let live with each other. That will co-exist. I do think it's developing, but it'll take time."

Responding to another question, Sisco said the State Department is neither pro-Arab nor pro-Israel. "It's pro-America," he stated. "The Middle East is a large area and we consider the interests of the U.S. in the area go beyond any one country.

"We don't want the Mideast to break out in war. We'd like to try to achieve a settlement, because in the circumstances of peace, not only is Israel's security better protected but, equally important, the ability of outside forces to exploit the turmoil there could, hopefully, be reduced in the circumstances of peace."

Sisco said the U.S. has no legal commitment to Israel, but that the close association between Israel and the U.S. and our "dedication to the security of Israel is self evident."

He stressed that there has been a constant thread through American foreign policy right from the beginning of the creation of Israel in 1948. He recalled that the U.S. has played a unique role in that creation; and that all of our presidents since Harry Truman have been committed to her well being and security. He pointed out that President Nixon—by word and deed—has continued to maintain that policy.

Sisco added that as we disengage in Vietnam, the Mideast, undoubtedly, will be the most dangerous and troublesome spot in the world, with wary eyes turned more attentively in that direction.

Sisco has certain reservations in his mind about Russia's role in the Mideast. He said the U.S.—and not Russia—is doing the negotiating in that area. "It is we who have to make any agreement there. The Russians are there in great strength and their presence has the capacity to make an agreement work or to obstruct it. But the only kind of agreement worth making is the self enforcing kind.

"I don't think the Russians are as interested in stable peace as we are in the Mideast," he said. "They are really interested only in avoiding war. To avoid war is not synonymous

with achieving peace. They can live as they are and they can exploit turmoil."

Sisco concluded by saying that after ten years of numerous visits to the Mideast, his principal impression of Israel has been constant right along.

"Israel is a very, very dynamic society, one with a lot of drive. The people have a tremendous amount of spirit, energy and motivation. What comes across is how a new generation is coming into being, the great enthusiasm among the native born... their mettle and strength..."

Joe Sisco, who is an excellent cook, and who has prepared meals in his home for Abba Eban and for King Hussein, reminisced with a chuckle that he exchanged chicken soup recipes with Golda Meir in Jerusalem. The exchange came about after he related to Israel's Prime Minister a story of how, as a child, he cut his finger; and a neighbor assured him the cure—all was hot chicken soup!

Sisco, 52, has been with the Department of State for 20 years, the last seven of which he has devoted to dealing with many of the problems of the Near East. He developed a special interest in the Mideast because of his long-time involvement in Soviet affairs as well as with the United Nations, where he also was concerned with Mideast questions.

In 1967, a year after the National Civil Service League named him one of the ten outstanding career officers in Government Service, Sisco served as U.S. representative to the Fifth Special Session of the General Assembly. High on the agenda was the Mideast crisis. Since February, 1969, he has been Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. He is unique in that he is the only career officer who, as Assistant Secretary for Mideast Affairs, has not served in the Mideast

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