

June 11, 1993

A COMIC INCIDENT, A CAUTIONARY TALE

WHOEVER heard of an organized pilgrimage by Moslems to Jerusalem? Whether the Old City was under Jordanian Moslem occupation, or under a British Christian government, or ruled by Ottoman Moslems, no such event ever took place. There is indeed no warrant for such a pilgrimage in Moslem religious ritual. Mecca is the Holy City of Islam, and every devout believer tries to make that pilgrimage at least once in his life.

Every year, the organized haj brings hundreds of thousands to Mecca. The visit to Jerusalem last week by 182 Libyans was a public relations gimmick contrived by President Gaddafi, with the unwitting cooperation of a few innocent Israeli babes-in-the-wood, to smuggle into Israel some honest-to-goodness poisonous propaganda which would receive worldwide media coverage. It was planned as a kind of Sermon on the Temple Mount, declaring Palestine a Moslem land "from time immemorial," Jerusalem its capital, and the Jews usurpers who should be thrown out in a jihad by the world's Moslems.

The "pilgrimage," it was revealed, was planned in February; and none of the analytical minds in the Israeli government had asked what could possibly be the motive of their arch-organizer of international terrorism, and arch-enemy of the Jewish State, in getting these emissaries into Israel. They decided that Gaddafi was obviously a reformed character - a sudden hozer b'tshuva. Now Gaddafi is still splitting his sides at the picture of these silly Israelis, forced to swallow the insults and threats of his envoy - the envoy whom a day earlier they had fawned upon and flattered.

This comic incident, however, contains a cautionary tale of the first order. The assertions made by spokesman Dau Tajouri, who "happens to be" a most articulate official of the Libyan Government Press Office, are no more than a reflection of the outlook of all - repeat once more, all - the leaders of the Moslem states with whom the Israeli government is negotiating. The broad tactical principle by which they are operating was laid down, oddly enough, by "moderate" Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba.

Israel then - it was 1965 - did not "occupy" Judea, Samaria, Gaza and the Golan Heights, but Bourguiba warned the Arab states that their dream of "throwing the Jews into the sea" was unrealistic. He proposed a new strategy. As a first step they should offer Israel peace if it would withdraw - from Jaffa, Lod, Ramle et al., to the 1947 partition lines (which the Arabs had demolished by their 1948 aggression).

If Israel refused to accept an offer based on what had been a UN proposal, the Arabs could launch a war which would have international approval and support. But Israel might agree. In that case, wrote Bourguiba to President Nasser of Egypt, "the refugees [nobody had then heard of a Palestinian nation] would return to their places, part of the occupied area would disappear, and the tide would turn in favor of the Arabs toward an absolute solution." (Reported in Ma'ariv, April 30, 1965.)

His advice was not taken. Nasser, with Soviet support, launched the Six Day War. The Arabs were defeated and so, instead of a "first step" toward the 1949 Armistice Lines, the "first step" would have to be to erase by diplomatic means the consequences of the 1967 war.

Hence the popular refrain "Israel must withdraw from the territories it captured in 1967 [including Jerusalem]." THE Arabs' aim has not changed. They only have adopted anodyne semantics and Western propaganda systems. They willingly, nay avidly, talk of the "peace process," which they among themselves see as a much longer process leading, in the third phase, to Israel's final defeat.

The Israeli defeatists who claim that the Arabs have realized they cannot now win in a war against Israel, are right. That is why the Arabs demand that Israel withdraw into territorial conditions in which they believe they will be able to win. The sins of our government are fourfold.

Overarching its whole policy is its refusal to face the fact of the Arabs' absolute hostility to Jewish national existence and status. Second: dangerous as was the Camp David Agreement in 1978, and culpable as was the Shamir government in reviving it, the Rabin government is "improving" on it at every stage of its negotiations. It is seemingly unaware, or pretends to be unaware, that it is approaching the point at which the concessions it is heaping on the Arabs will make it possible for Yasser Arafat to declare unilaterally that a Palestinian state has to come into existence (however wobbly that state may be) and to call for international recognition.

Third, Rabin's people not only adopted the blunder of the Shamir government in according the status of "honest broker" to the US government (whose declared policy has since 1967 favored Israel's withdrawal to the 1949 Armistice Lines - or thereabouts), but have now begun pressing Washington to play a "more active role" in the negotiations. Fourth, they are unabashedly trying to cow the opponents of their policy into submission - by assuring them that the game is lost. Peres proclaims that a peace treaty with Jordan is ready, waiting only for "a pen." As it happens, the Jordanians are not impressed.

Denials from Amman include Hussein's statement that Jordan will not sign a separate peace treaty. Then Minister Moshe Shahal tries to intimidate the citizens on the Golan. He claims that there is an agreement with Assad: the Golan is to be surrendered to Syria, but for 15 years the Americans will keep troops on the Hermon and on the eastern defensive tets.

They, the residents, are to be granted a reprieve. They will be allowed to stay on the Golan for 15 years. After that - out! Shahal's claim is not true.

What he told the Golanites is a proposal by the Israeli government. Assad has not agreed. But the threat is there.

Rabin himself comes next. He cannot tolerate the opposition of the people whom, it now seems clear, he is prepared to drive from their homes; so he assumes that they, the residents, have not a hope of winning. That is the word and the tone of a prime minister to his people.

Of course all is not lost. All the polls have shown that a majority of the people are opposed to the territorial concessions the government is contemplating; and it should be pressed to keep its promise to hold new elections for the Knesset. It is the opposition's chance to defeat the present government in those elections.

Moreover, to carry out any change on the Golan, Rabin must carry through the

Knesset a law canceling Israeli sovereignty! What is needed immediately is therefore a speedy unification of the opposition, and a political plan.