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A 'SPECIAL' RESOLUTION

WHAT drives an American president to such relentlessness in his demand that Jews should not live in Judea and Samaria? What does he believe gives him the right to make such a demand at all? Is the land of Israel part of what we call in Yiddish *di bobbe's yerushe* - the heritage of his grandmother? Mr Bush is not the first US president to make it his business to arrogate this privilege to himself. Only, his policy has been the most obsessive and, with the evidently eager collaboration of his secretary of state, the most brutal. Essential to this policy has been the widespread dissemination, over the years, of the fantastic belief that the Arabs (who unabashedly look forward to the disappearance of the Jewish state) are, somehow, the real owners of this country.

A striking example is encapsulated in the "platform" adopted this week at the Republican convention in Houston, Texas. In a single subtle sentence dealing with Jerusalem, it says: "No genuine peace would deny Jews the right to live everywhere in this special city." How far do we have to seek in order to understand from this that the right of Jews to live in their capital city has yet to be "granted" in a peace treaty? This is not new, it conforms to traditional American policies since 1967 - that Jerusalem is "occupied territory." But Jerusalem, by even the most bigoted criteria, is not "occupied territory." It was "occupied territory" after 1948, occupied by Jordan with aggressive force of arms, until it was liberated by Israel in 1967, when Jordan (in coalition with the other Arab states) tried to occupy the rest of Israel. Jerusalem is Jewish territory, an integral part even of formal Israeli sovereignty.

The implications of the Republican resolution however go deeper. Its special wording makes clear that the Jews' right is recognized at all because Jerusalem is a "special" city. Of course Jerusalem is a special city.

It has been special to the Jewish nation and the Jewish religion for over 3,000 years. (It is central to the story of Jesus Christ, who was a member of the Jewish nation and religion.) Jerusalem's name occurs more than 600 times in the Bible (never once in the Koran).

As for the right of Jews to live in it, however, Jerusalem is not "special" at all. Jews have a right to live everywhere in the land of Israel. Israeli governments may wisely promote the spread of the Jewish population for legitimate political, security, economic or environmental reasons; or they may perversely and shortsightedly refrain from that investment.

But the right of every Jew to live where he pleases in Eretz Yisrael is as absolute and inviolable as the right of an American to live in Boston or Wichita, in Bethesda, Maryland or Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

THE US administration's campaign to put an end to Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria is not an evanescent whim. It is an essential preliminary designed to lead to Israel's relinquishment of the lands.

So far, Mr Bush has achieved a victory that eluded all his predecessors. In return for the loan guarantees, Mr Rabin has already inaugurated as broad a freeze on government building in Judea, Samaria and Gaza as is legally possible at this moment. Moreover - to

Mr Bush's delight - he has expressed regret that he could not now turn the screw harder on his fellow Jews; and Bush has Rabin's promise that the freeze will become universal as soon as the present buildings in progress are completed.

What he could not promise was to prevent private building, but his subordinate ministers have made it clear that plans for private building will receive no encouragement from them. President Bush has achieved, with Rabin's help, as much as could be expected at this time to improve his tarnished image as a foreign policy wizard. To be fair to him, this is not his only objective; and he does not intend to rest there.

His next relevant step (if he is re-elected, or maybe earlier) must be to press Rabin to round out his complaisance. The Arabs do not agree to Israel's retaining any territory in Eretz Yisrael, and Mr Bush means to further their interests. Consequently, as was recently pointed out by a perspicacious American observer, Frank Gaffney (a former senior Pentagon official), Mr Rabin will soon be facing a problem: "Feeding the tiger does not curb his appetite; it simply tells him where to come for more food." These considerations have not, it seems, disturbed the air of euphoria brought back by Mr Rabin and which has infected most of the Hebrew media.

Indeed, it recalls to mind irresistibly Sholem Aleichem's story of Mottle the nine-year-old son of Paicy the cantor. The day after his father died - Mottle tells us - was just about the happiest of his life. Everybody was now so kind to him, everybody so willing to overlook his customary pranks.

And so he exclaims joyfully: "Hooray, I'm an orphan!" Yet it is hard to believe that Premier Rabin does not understand that the warmth of his reception in America, and the compliments heaped on him for having opened a "new era" in place of the bad Shamir days, were due not to his winning personality but to his ready falling-in with most of Bush's wishes. Does he not realize that if Yitzhak Shamir had come to Bush offering frozen settlements he would have enjoyed the same kind of warmth? Does he not recall, as we all recall, the adulation heaped on Shamir for agreeing, while Scuds were falling on Tel Aviv, not to exercise Israel's right and duty to fight back at Saddam Hussein? And how magically the warmth froze as soon as the Gulf war ended, and Bush felt free to boast that American pilots had risked their lives for Israel? Matters of pure policy apart, the ugliest manifestation of the new government's ascent to Power is the admittedly expected uncivilized behavior of the Dedi Zuckers and the Shulamit Alonis, and the less predictable outbursts of the prime minister himself. It seems that all three harbor a visceral hatred toward fellow Jews who dare to have their own opinions and beliefs.

They treat "settlers," in particular, with racist-style venom, as a kind of "lesser breed." The opposition should hasten to recognize this evil as added grounds for working hard to bring about the defeat of this government.