

July 9, 1993

A TRAP IN THE GUISE OF COMPROMISE

THE moment Prime Minister Rabin saw the US document designed ostensibly to bridge the gap between Israel and the Arabs on the subject of Jerusalem, he announced that he was disappointed.

There is no rational reason for him to be disappointed, unless he has succeeded in performing an act of complete self-deception. When will he - and the others of his school - wake up to the fact that the US administration is not and cannot be an "honest broker" in the dispute (not only over Jerusalem, but over the whole issue of the Land of Israel)? Any bridging document, whatever its circumlocutions, will contain in the bottom line the prefixed American attitude. The Arabs have never "accepted" and never will "accept" a proposal - whatever concessions it contains - which does not concede 100 percent of their demands.

They have rejected the present document primarily because it proposes postponement of the first essential step toward robbing the Jewish people of Jerusalem. That first step is to get the government of Israel to sit down to "negotiate" the future status of Jerusalem. But nations do not engage in negotiations over their sovereign territory.

What Rabin and his colleagues have conspicuously failed to do is to state this fact, firmly, coherently and precisely. They keep on saying that "Jerusalem will remain united under Israeli sovereignty." Evidently, however, the Americans do not treat this assertion seriously, for they continue to promise the Arabs that Jerusalem will be discussed in the negotiations for the "final phase." What is lacking then is the direct statement to the Americans: No, Jerusalem will not be discussed - not now, not ever. What the Americans are trying to put across as a compromise is a transparent trap.

The Arabs are asked to refrain from present pressure (for something to which they have no right) and Israel, in return for this concession, will later concede a portion of its sovereign rights - the right not to make its sovereignty a subject for discussion with anybody. Thus far, the Americans have failed to persuade the Arabs to be patient. Should they succeed, they will then, in honor bound, be obliged to put pressure on Israel to make its concession.

The people of Israel, then, have a right to expect its government to make an explicit statement to Washington: "Do not promise the Arabs any such discussion - for there will be no such discussion, period." ON no issue is the US administration so clearly disqualified to be an arbiter between Jews and Arabs as on Jerusalem. It is on Jerusalem that US policy has been most actively hostile to the Jewish cause. It was the US administration that led the diplomatic community in adamant refusal to recognize the city as the capital of Israel (even when only the western part was in Israeli hands).

In the early days of the state, it was explained that, under the UN partition plan, the city was to be an "international" enclave. That the partition plan had in 1948 been drowned in a sea of blood by calculated pan-Arab aggression did not bother the US policy-makers. (Nor did it disturb their sleep - or indeed that of the rest of the Christian world - that not only were Jews prevented from visiting the Western Wall, but that almost

every synagogue in the Old City had been destroyed, and the historic Jewish cemetery vandalized.)

In 1967, Israel repelled a second major Arab effort to destroy it, and liberated the Old City. After that, the US attitude underwent a gradual change. It pretended - and evidently continues to pretend to this day - that western Jerusalem is designed to be "international," but that east Jerusalem has undergone a miraculous metamorphosis and become "occupied Arab territory," presumably to be given up in due time to the "Palestinian state." To emphasize its contempt for Israel's reuniting the severed parts of the city under its sovereignty, Washington has maintained two separate consulates; and the one in east Jerusalem enjoys a special status.

It is not answerable to the American ambassador to Israel, but directly to the State Department in Washington; and it serves unblushingly as an agency for the cause of Arab usurpation of the Jewish patrimony. These, briefly, are some of the credentials of the US government for the job of "honest broker." Israeli citizens could no doubt treat this notion with dismissive good humor - were it not for the grotesque fact that our government has hitherto not merely acquiesced in it, but has actually encouraged Washington to wear the habiliments of neutral arbitration. Whether the present impasse over Jerusalem - and the inevitable pressure from Washington for further Israeli concessions - will open the eyes of Rabin and his followers to the dire threat to Israel's future remains to be seen.

Jerusalem, more than any other facet of the dispute, provides the best illustration of the gigantic hoax called Arab (more recently renamed Palestinian) "national rights." The latest example of the Arab phenomenon of borrowing historic Jewish truths and calling them Arab - or now Palestinian - is the decision that "obviously" Jewish Jerusalem (which through 3,000 years and 14 dynasties was never the national capital of any other people) must be the capital of the "Palestinian state." Fortuitously, the Clinton administration has presented the Israeli government with a timely opportunity to expose the Arab bluff. A Washington spokesman recently called on "both sides" to give up their invocations to history on the subject of Jerusalem. Overlooking the hutzpa of such a call, an alert Israeli Information Office would have challenged Washington immediately to suggest which elements of Jerusalem's Jewish national history and heritage since King David - unique in the experience of nations - should be scrapped, a very complicated undertaking indeed.

Then - Jerusalem in the Arabs' national history? The researcher will discover a blank page. There is no such thing, no significant relationship whatever. Rabin's instability and jerky movement from one surrendered position to the next are being compounded by his undisciplined foreign minister.

Peres's series of independent published statements have brought him closer and closer to fulfillment of the wishes of Arafat. After Peres's visit to Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, it seems clear that Jerusalem has now been added to his agenda. With Peres on the loose, who needs honest brokers?