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BEHIND THE BALLYHOO

IN THE excitement over the melodramatic Egyptian moves preceding President Mubarak's visit to the U.S., a statement reported last week to have been made by a key figure in the action has been largely overlooked – Yasser Arafat complaining about U.S. behaviour towards him. "First," he said, "they want me to make an agreement with King Hussein. And then, when I do, they don't accept it."

His statement brings to mind all the more vividly the beginning of the sequence of events that reached a climax in his agreement with Hussein. Fifteen months ago, in December 1983, Arafat was bottled up in Tripoli in north Lebanon, harassed by his enemies within the PLO, by Syria and by Israel. His political condition was desperate, his life in danger.

His Arab and other friends pushed through the United Nations a resolution calling for the rescue of Arafat and his followers as a humanitarian imperative. The Greek government volunteered for the task, but declined to send its ships as long as Israeli shelling of the area continued.

Thereupon the U.S. administration bore down on the Israeli government to stop the shelling. Out of sheer weakness Jerusalem complied.

Washington's motive was transparent. Arafat was the necessary link in any effort to get the "Reagan Plan" off the ground. The plan's precondition was that Hussein and Arafat reach agreement on the disposition of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. The Americans assumed with some logic that Arafat would in gratitude pay them for his rescue by adapting his "Palestinian" demands to the Reagan Plan, even if only by paying lip service to it. He could then authorize Hussein to negotiate in his name as well – with an Israel suitably conditioned by American pressure.

The U.S. being bound by her undertaking of 1975 not to negotiate with the PLO, the persuasion of Arafat was evidently undertaken by President Mubarak. When Arafat left Tripoli he went at once to Mubarak – who from that point captained the combined operation.

Those moves were the prelude to the various comings and goings to Cairo and Amman, and finally to the Hussein-Arafat meetings and Mubarak's pronouncements.

HOW SIGNIFICANT is the agreement between Hussein and Arafat from Israel's point of view? Not very, if at all. Even in terms of the ballyhoo surrounding it, the agreement amounts to a declaration that they have decided on what they are going to do with Judea, Samaria and Gaza if Israel is stupid enough or weak enough to surrender them. Arafat has made one "concession" which brings him into apparent accord with part of the Reagan Plan. He is prepared to go on record as no longer aiming at a completely separate "Palestinian State" and as agreeing instead to a confederative arrangement.

Israel's role would be, as in all previous Arab statements of purpose, to "withdraw from all the territories occupied in 1967"; and to this Hussein and Arafat added the other traditional demands of the Arab coalition, encapsulated in all the United Nations resolutions (since November 1948). Those resolutions prompted the remark of former foreign minister Abba Eban that if the Arabs were to propose a resolution at the UN

declaring that the earth was flat it would be passed by a two-thirds majority. They include the return of the “refugees” to their homes (in Haifa, Jaffa, Acre *et al*) and the dismantling of the Israeli presence in East Jerusalem.

Now Hussein has simply replaced the wrapping on this old package, added a new label marked “Peace Breakthrough – the Last Chance or Else . . .” and Mubarak has taken it to sell to the U.S. administration.

THE IMMEDIATE tactical plan for the joint operation excludes Israel. This is in strict conformity with the doctrine developed by the Arab states. Israel is to be forced back to the 1949 Armistice lines by diplomatic means – that is, American pressure – which Israel will not be able to withstand, being, as they believe, entirely dependent on the U.S. economically. Reagan is therefore to be asked to start the process by himself meeting at least with “non-PLO personalities approved by Arafat” – as representing the projected “Palestinian entity” – and then to press Israel to do the same.

There is nothing new in this either, except for the thin camouflage. For the last dozen years the Arabs have been trying to persuade the Americans to recognize and negotiate with the PLO.

MUBARAK could not expect Washington to fall in at once with the proposed maneuver. Much more important to him immediately is the success of his brief but intensive preliminary campaign of image-building.

He has not returned his ambassador to Tel Aviv or even promised to do so; he has not promised to execute the unfulfilled agreements under the peace treaty, or to stop its violation by anti-Israel and anti-Semitic propaganda – and yet he has got Prime Minister Peres almost visibly panting to meet him, to talk, to negotiate. Four cabinet ministers turned out at midnight to meet one of his subordinates (for purposes, as became evident, of publicity); two cabinet members were appointed to meet a subordinate’s subordinate. The process was accompanied by several ingratiating statements made by Mr. Peres. On the eve of Mubarak’s departure for Washington, Peres pleaded with him publicly:

“I want to assure President Mubarak that we are working for the same peace. I believe with all my heart that in consultation we can overcome the problems in our way.”

He said this when all the world knew that Mubarak had just played him a transparent confidence trick by pretending (through a *New York Times* interview) that he was suggesting direct negotiations with Israel when in fact, as it transpired, he was looking to negotiations, specifically without Israel, with the U.S.

Mr. Peres has made a signal contribution to Mubarak’s ploy to create a less unfavourable climate of opinion for himself in the U.S. – in Washington, in the general public and, not least, in the Jewish community – where, in particular, criticism of Egypt’s contemptuous treatment of the peace treaty was rendered much less incisive.

THIS “diplomatic” method not only denotes self-abasement, but reflects the basic flaw in the political reasoning of Mr. Peres and the school of thought he represents. They persist in addressing the Arabs as though they and Israel have common “problems”; and that because everybody wants peace, every problem has a solution. They shy away from the fact that the peace envisaged by Mubarak or Hussein or any Arab leader today is quite different from the vision we in Israel entertain.

The sophisticated “moderate” Egyptian definition of the essential condition for peace is, as explained *inter alia* by Dr. Butros Ghali, that the Jewish people must give up the idea of having an independent state. In any case, the Jews are not a nation, they are merely a religion, so they are by definition not entitled to a state. These are not secretly held convictions, but publicly articulated axioms. They are of course worded more brutally by less “moderate” Arabs.

There is everything to be said for direct negotiations provided that the Arabs are then called upon to give up their horrendous dreams, content themselves with their 22 states and accustom themselves to the idea of living at peace with their Israeli neighbours.

A further persistent fallacy of Mr. Peres’s school of thought is that the more often you utter the word “peace” and the more often you demonstrate that you are prepared to “pay” for peace, the more likely it is that peace will come. Neither history nor logic, nor elementary psychology, support this view. On the contrary – from the days of Jeremiah to Neville Chamberlain . . .

Peres and his colleagues might profit moreover from the words of a scholar and statesman they claim to respect. Henry Kissinger wrote (in *A World Restored*):

“Wherever peace – conceived as the avoidance of war – has been the primary objective of a power, or group of powers, the international system has been at the mercy of the most ruthless member of the international community. Wherever the international order has acknowledged that certain principles can not be compromised even for the sake of peace, stability based on an equilibrium of forces was at least conceivable.”