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## CAMP DAVID REVISITED

THE MOST glaring myth disseminated about the content and thrust of the Camp David agreement on Judea, Samaria and Gaza was that its projected autonomy regime was intended as the solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Likud spokesmen in particular have persisted in this pretence.

The object of the agreement – set out clearly in its text – was quite different. Autonomy was to be no more than a five-year “transitional arrangement.” Its decisive purpose was “to determine the final status of the West Bank and Gaza.”

To this end, negotiations would be held already after the third year of autonomy. The parties to the negotiations were to be Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Arab inhabitants of the areas.

THE TRANSITIONAL period of autonomy would open with the election, by the inhabitants of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, of the “self-governing authority (administrative council).” It would at once replace the existing Israeli military government; and, with one exception, take over the departments of government of the area: health, education, finance, public works, and so on. The exception was to be “security” – which would remain a responsibility of the Israeli government for the duration of the autonomy regime; also, a reduced Israeli military force would remain “in specified locations” – for the duration of the autonomy.

The Camp David agreement thus envisaged a five-year training period in self-government for the Arabs of Judea, Samaria and Gaza – projecting an image of a “government-on-the-way.”

The agreement actually spelt it out: the transitional arrangements were designed “to ensure a peaceful and orderly *transfer of authority*.”

The negotiations to determine the “final status” of the area were to serve as the instrument for that “transfer of authority.” Indeed, after five years of Arab self-government, most of the authority would already have been transferred.

If, then, in those negotiations, the Israeli spokesmen were to tell the Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian Arab delegates that Israel now “claimed” sovereignty over Judea, Samaria and Gaza, they could rationally assume that he was joking.

Up to this point in the agreement, no conclusive peace talks were scheduled. Only after agreement was reached – that is, in the circumstances, after Israel agreed to relinquish what was left of its hold on the territories – would Jordan be expected to talk peace. This is meticulously prescribed in the agreement.

THE CAMP DAVID agreement may indeed be said to have been born in sin. The only characters emerging politically unblemished from the negotiations were the Egyptians. They remained true to their aims. They were primarily interested in re-acquiring Sinai; and they almost certainly never expected the agreement on Palestine to be consummated.

Yet they took care to ensure that nothing in that agreement should weaken the long-range Arab vision of an Israel dismantled.

The Americans for their part pretended that they were serving as neutral “honest brokers,” when they were nothing of the sort.

Embedded in American policy was a traditional denial of Israel’s rights in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. That had been their guideline since 1967 and it directed the thrust of their pressures on the Israeli government – always in harmony with Egyptian demands – before and during the Camp David negotiations.

The Likud government’s signature on the agreement was not only a flagrant violation of ideological principle (Shimon Peres, then opposition leader, pertinently congratulated them on having “freed themselves of their undertakings, accepted principles, ideology”). It was a denial of the logical elements of their political formulations.

At Camp David, the Likud government went far beyond the surrender of Jewish rights implicit in Zionist agreement to the original plan for the partition of Eretz Yisrael.

When Chaim Weizmann in 1947 expressed a willingness to accept partition, he placed on record that this was a sacrifice of Jewish rights.

In the Camp David agreement, there is no indication that the Jewish people have any rights – only some “security concerns.”

“Rights” are attributed alone to a “Palestinian people” which neither the Likud nor any preceding government had recognized as a separate entity; and at Camp David, Judea, Samaria and Gaza were accorded the Arab political nomenclature of “West Bank,” designed to obscure their Jewish relationship.

Above all, of course, the agreement signified the government’s renunciation *in fact* of sovereignty over the heart of the Jewish homeland.

The Labour opposition in the Knesset at the time was no more faithful to its principles. It jettisoned overnight the concept of Israel’s security on all fronts. In office Labour has boiled down to an irreducible minimum what it sees as Israel’s security requirements in case of peace.

It has mobilized much human toil and invested millions of dollars in establishing those requirements in Sinai: the town of Yamit and the cluster of villages at the Israeli end of the historic invasion route from Egypt, three powerful airfields and the most sophisticated naval base at Sharm e-Sheikh – all contained in a narrow but crucial strip of territory.

As for Western Eretz Yisrael, the territory covered by the autonomy plan and its consequent “final status” ruled out any possibility of “territorial compromise” which constituted the heart of Labour’s security concept.

The Labour leaders did indeed dissect the agreement; they did point out its mortal dangers. Then – with a handful of honourable exceptions – they voted in its favour.

THE CAMP DAVID agreement on the “West Bank” was inevitably still-born. Jordan – whom nobody had consulted – kept its distance; the Palestinian Arabs ignored it. Nor did the Egyptians try to persuade them.

With the historic achievement of Sinai regained, they no longer needed to show interest in a five-year delay in the pursuit of their unchanging aim: Israel’s total capitulation.

Now the coalition designed to achieve that purpose is being reformed – with Egypt (at its head), Jordan, Iraq and, unabashedly thrust into the forefront, the PLO,

which is, after all, as some people appear to have forgotten, the Arab nation's standard bearer of the idea of Israel's ultimate annihilation.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's present initiative is the first step in a new campaign. Compounding the Egyptian violations of the peace treaty their proposals for "negotiations" – but with the Americans and with Arafat as a sponsor – bears no relation even to what they agreed upon at Camp David.

The proposal manifestly provides the Israeli government with the appropriate background for a long-overdue decision: to denounce the Camp David agreement unequivocally.

It should now, and can with all international legitimacy, turn its back on the dangerous blunders inherent in the Camp David agreement.

The leaders of the Likud, for their part, should now in the new phase of the conflict that appears to be opening, state anew, with all clarity and firmness, precisely the right of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael.

A GREATER responsibility faces the leaders of the Labour Party. The time has surely come for them to reassess their position, to free themselves of the frozen formulas their school has exalted for two generations, to face the implications of the Jewish experience at least since 1947, to read coolly the signals coming from the Arabs in 1985.

The years the locusts have eaten cannot be retrieved; but the nation's leaders can surely be expected to face the realities as they confront Israel today.