

January 24, 1992

CAMP DAVID'S CHOKE HOLD

AT the cabinet meeting last Sunday, Health Minister Ehud Olmert declared, according to Ma'ariv, that the autonomy plan and the Camp David Accords are "basic principles." In the Knesset debate in September 1978, Olmert had voted against Camp David; at some stage, therefore, that agreement - dangerous and unacceptable in 1978 - metamorphosed in his head into something so good that it is now "basic principles." This is a serious change of mind, but the public has never been let into the secret, or the moment, of Olmert's conversion. He is not alone in this reticence. Last Monday, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir - who abstained in 1978 - declared pontifically that autonomy for the Palestinians will not harm Jewish settlement in the territories, nor Jewish security there.

He said, further: "We are committed to the autonomy proposal under the Camp David Agreements" (The Jerusalem Post, January 21). Both statements are open to question. Government spokesmen have proclaimed time and again that Israel is "committed" to Camp David.

With whom does Israel have this agreement? It cannot be with the Palestinian Arabs. They never agreed to be parties to that agreement. The Jordanians? They also did not sign.

The Egyptians did sign, but this part of the agreement, relating to Judea, Samaria and Gaza, does not affect them. They were given Sinai - down to the last grain of sand - and they have demonstratively declined to take part in the present negotiations. The Americans? They signed at Camp David as witnesses, and for years have behaved consistently as though the agreement did not exist.

Only three weeks ago, they dramatically manifested their dissociation by joining in a UN Security Council decision - outrageous in itself - in which Judea, Samaria and Gaza are described as "Palestinian territories." In any event, even if a valid commitment existed 13 years ago, Israel could unhesitatingly invoke the internationally-accepted "escape" clause, so often used against Israeli interests by the US Administration, of *rebus sic stantibus*, i.e., circumstances have changed. And changed they have indeed - not least by the presence in Judea, Samaria and Gaza of some 120,000 Jews who were not there in 1978. Whatever suggestions our government may have for an accommodation with the Arabs, it could easily have freed itself from the noose of the Camp David Agreement.

If the terms of that agreement are to be applied (as Shamir, Olmert et al. tell us), then Israel has already made far-reaching concessions. It has agreed that as soon as a "self-governing authority" has been set up by the residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, that authority will "replace" the existing military government and its civilian administration. Then the next major concession: When the "powers and responsibilities" of the Arab "self-governing authority in the West Bank and Gaza" have been defined, then a withdrawal of Israeli armed forces will take place and there will be a redeployment of the remaining Israeli forces into specified security locations.

There is more to illuminate Shamir's promise of security: "A strong local [that is, Arab] police force will be established which may include Jordanian citizens," and even in border patrols there will be Jordanians participating with Israelis. WITH the bulk of the Israeli army out of the way, and its remnants tied to "specific locations," the Arab

self-governing authority will begin to function. After three years, during which they will have gained adequate experience in government, negotiations will begin to determine the "final status" of the territory as well as the "just requirements" of the Palestinians arising from the "legitimate rights of the Palestinian people." There is much more in the same spirit.

Significantly - in the clause providing for negotiation between Israel and Jordan for a peace treaty, they will be joined by "the elected representatives of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza." Thus Israel has agreed, in advance of all negotiations, that the Arabs of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, shall constitute a separate entity, empowered, on manifestly equal terms with the sovereign Jordan and sovereign Israel, to negotiate peace terms. The original sin in Begin's autonomy proposal was the declaration that the question of sovereignty would remain "open" - a breathtaking abnegation of the Jewish nation's right, and its belief in its right, to the heartland of the Jewish national home. (Even Lord Balfour surely turned in his grave at the report.)

The Camp David Agreement that followed was thus a structure which at every stage filled the vacuum with proposed elements of Arab sovereignty. The Arabs are now prepared to negotiate because of that certainty. Their earlier refusals were an expression of their historic insistence that they must be given "everything at once." That was why they rejected the partition scheme of 1937, and the partition plan of 1947.

They launched war in 1947 and once more in 1967 in the belief that tiny Israel would be engulfed overnight and its people slaughtered or dispersed. The Camp David "agreement" held out to the Arabs the definite promise of achievement, (meantime of the lesser aim, only the "West Bank"), but only after five years. Hence their rejection in 1978.

Now they have rethought their position, with uninhibited encouragement from Washington and a hasty Israeli government. They are not bound by the Israeli agenda or timetable. They will not wait five years, nor even three.

Once their self-governing authority is in place and functioning, they will choose their own moment for declaring the sovereignty thrown away by Israel in 1978. That, at any rate, is how they view the future. If Shamir really believes that there is "no room" for a 23rd Arab state, in Western Eretz Yisrael, and that it is his duty to prevent its rise, he must stop working in the opposite direction.

If autonomy for the West Palestinian branch of the great Arab nation is a feasible proposition, it can make sense for Israel only if it is granted by, and under the auspices of, Israeli sovereignty from the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea.