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Clouding the Issue

The Camp David agreement is the charter for the impending negotiations on the autonomy proposed for “the West Bank” and Gaza. It is a public document signed in Washington on September 17, 1978 by Premier Begin, President Sadat and, as witness, President Carter. Drawn up and signed in the English language, it includes clauses which provide for further negotiations. It also contains clauses which, by accident or design, are open to more than one construction. On the whole, however, the document is drafted in adequately clear language, and on the essential central issues there is neither provision for further negotiation nor room for doubt.

It is on these central issues that the campaign is in progress in Israel to befuddle the people, to bulldoze them into believing that what was signed at Camp David does not mean what it says, and what was written is not there; that in fact, in the negotiations about to begin, the Israeli spokesmen will be unfettered by commitment on any substantive issue.

Many persons, ministerial and others, and many bodies, like the National Religious Party or the Committee of Directors-General headed by Dr. Ben-Elissar, have vied with each other in this irresponsible pretence.

A characteristic example, however, is the remark of Deputy-Premier Yigael Yadin, who proposed that Israel’s case at the negotiating table should be based on the original autonomy plan the Prime Minister announced in December 1977.

No doubt Israel’s proposals may reasonably include those clauses from the original plan that were not covered by the Camp David agreement.

Indeed, the Prime Minister himself has offered them to the ministerial committee framing Israel’s platform for the negotiations. He still holds, for example, that 18 is the age at which the Arab residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza should be eligible to vote in the elections for the autonomy council, and that the seat of the council should be in Bethlehem. He is also still firmly of the opinion that the council should elect its own chairman.

But the central, the crucial elements of the autonomy as proposed originally by Mr. Begin, died at Camp David; they are buried there and their remains are immune even to the archaeological skills of Professor Yadin. Maybe Israel’s leaders believe it is their right to hoodwink their own people; but insulting the intelligence of the Americans and the Egyptians is an altogether unnecessary addition to Israel’s heavy diplomatic burden.

The Prime Minister’s original peace plan opened the doors and paved the way to the far-reaching and disastrous concessions at Camp David.

This was the great achievement of President Carter in the months that preceded Camp David (when point-by-point Israeli surrenders made it possible to persuade Sadat to come to Camp David). At Camp David itself, the remaining obstacles on the road to the common objective —

squeezing Israel back into the pre-1967 lines — were removed. Indeed it is the differences between the original plan and the Camp David agreement which illustrate the extent of Israel's plight, and the brazenness of those who are now actively trying to sweep the truth under the carpet.

Under the original autonomy proposal, the supreme authority in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, remained vested in the Israeli Military Government; and the Military Government was to be the source of authority for the autonomy council to be elected. Only the civil machinery of the Military Government was to be dismantled. Thus all matters and prerogatives not covered by the specific departments of the Autonomy — *such as the control of state lands and of water resources* — remained within the authority of the Military Government. Under that plan Israel could legitimately even put an end to the autonomy regime. For these very reasons the Carter Administration, from the moment the plan was unveiled, urged the replacement of the military administration.

The Camp David agreement abolishes the authority of the Military Government. Moreover, it takes out of Israel's hands the authority to establish the autonomy. It is no longer to be an autonomy "granted" by Israel. Israel, with her own hands, gave Egypt and Jordan equal authority in establishing the autonomy. The Camp David agreement says:

"Egypt, Israel and Jordan will agree on the modalities of establishing the elected self-governing authority in the West Bank and Gaza... The parties will negotiate an agreement which will define the powers and responsibilities of the self-governing authority to be exercised in the West Bank and Gaza".

Whatever those powers and responsibilities may be, the Camp David agreement ensures that no Israeli governmental authority shall remain in the area. It lays down that "the Israeli military government and its civilian government will be withdrawn as soon as a self-governing authority has been freely elected by the inhabitants of these areas". It seems incredible that Government apologists are trying to inject into the phrase "will be withdrawn" the meaning that the Military Government will only be moving house and will continue to "run the West Bank" from some new address within the Green Line. This is a desperate clutching at the wind.

The Camp David agreement lays down explicitly that the Arab self-governing authority will "replace the existing military government". Do the Israeli spokesmen at the negotiations (headed by Interior Minister Burg) seriously intend telling the Americans and the Egyptians, with a straight face, that these formulations — to which the Prime Minister solemnly set his signature — do not mean what they say, and the full autonomy for the inhabitants of the "West Bank" as promised by Israel in the agreement really means that Israel will continue to exercise her over-all authority in the area?

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Equally unequivocal is the change achieved by the US and by Egypt on the subject of the internal security of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. The original peace plan was explicit on the subject:

“Security and public order in the area of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza district,” it said, “will be the responsibility of the Israeli authorities”. From the Camp David agreement it is equally clear that internal security and public order will *not* be the responsibility of the Israeli authorities. It says (in Clause 1(b)):

“The agreement (between Egypt, Israel and Jordan on the powers and responsibilities of the self-governing authority) will also include arrangements for assuring internal and external security and public order. A strong local police force will be established, which may include Jordanian citizens”.

Moreover, the document clarifies this further (in Clause 1):

“All necessary measures will be taken and provisions made to assure the security of Israel and its neighbours during the transitional period and beyond. To assist in providing such security, a strong local police force will be constituted by the self-governing authority. It will be composed of inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza”.

The Israeli part in these arrangements is not left undefined. “The police” Clause 2 continues: “will maintain continuing liaison on internal security matters with the designated Israeli, Jordanian and Egyptian officers”.

But ministers and other spokesmen continue to go round the country cheerfully proclaiming that of course Israel will continue to be responsible for internal security. The Minister of Agriculture even adds that “it is inconceivable that the IDF shall not be free to go into the Casba at Nablus in order to deal with terrorists”.

Inconceivable? What has been done to Israel in the Camp David agreement is indeed inconceivable. Mr. Sharon had better digest the fact that if the autonomy plan is implemented in accordance with the Camp David agreement, the IDF will not be allowed to go into the Casba at Nablus unless it gets permission from the autonomy authorities. He is no doubt right in believing that Israel may be compelled to send in the IDF; only now such an entry will be greeted throughout the world with an even louder howl of protest than is raised at Israel’s essential incursions into Lebanon. For Israel will then, after all, also be breaking a solemn agreement...

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Is the public aware of the full proportions of the surrender at Camp David?

It was no less moral than political. Every concession to the Arabs is spelt out in the agreement. All the elements which are supposed to be “good for Israel” exist only in the speeches of government spokesmen; they do not appear in the agreement. All the safeguards (however temporary, however fragile) for Israel’s governmental role, or even for the assurance of Jewish rights in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, that were contained in the original autonomy plan, were eliminated, erased. Nothing is left of them in the Camp David agreement. For example, the right of Jews to live there.

In the Camp David agreement there is not one word of Zionist or Jewish inspiration. In this historic document there is not one word about the affinity of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael, about its historic connection, about its political and moral right. There is not even a hint that the war to which these agreements are supposed to put an end was a war for the openly declared Arab purpose of eliminating Israel from the map. On the contrary, any reader over the age of ten will recognize that the document is permeated with the phraseology of Arab propaganda. Its whole thrust is for the transfer of the “West Bank” to Arab hands.

The very purpose of the now impending negotiations is described in terms of Arab propaganda: “The resolution of the Palestine problem in all its aspects” (with the obvious corollary that this is the cause of the dispute). The agreement takes it for granted that there shall be a peaceful and orderly “transfer of authority”; and that towards that transfer the autonomy represents “transitional arrangements” (for a period not exceeding five years). During those five years, not Israel but the Arabs will be the rulers of the area.

Then, as it approaches the handling of the period after the autonomy, the Camp David agreement has veritably no eyes for anything but the “Palestinians,” their future and their rights. There will be negotiations on the final status of the area.

“Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the representatives of the inhabitants of the West Bank” will take part. The agreement reached (in direct quotation from Arab formulations of their demands) must “recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements”. When, moreover, agreement has been reached, it will be submitted once more to a vote by the representatives of the Arab inhabitants. The Zionist Prime Minister of Israel thus recognized the superior claim of the Arabs to decide the fate of Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

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The continued talk about the perpetuation of Israeli control, including the control of internal security under the autonomy plan, and the brave words about Israel’s ultimate insistence on her rights to sovereignty over Judea, Samaria and Gaza are no more than a snare and a delusion.

They only add to the dimensions of future shock.

If the nation’s leaders are really serious about trying to prevent the grim developments that flow from the agreement signed by the Prime Minister eight months ago — they can still do so. But then, as a first step, they must stop their deceptions of the public. They would then have to rouse the people to the gravity of the plight from which Israel must rescue herself.