

4 February 1983

Defending the indefensible

U.S. AMBASSADOR Samuel Lewis provided an illuminating lesson in practical diplomacy at the Haifa Rotary Club last week. His defence of U.S. policy on Lebanon was couched in soothing terms, and because Sam Lewis is well-liked, some people were perhaps reassured. In fact, his remarks rather confirmed than allayed the suspicions aroused by American policy.

“It is not U.S. policy,” said Lewis, “to steal the fruits of Israel’s victory.” The critics of that policy, however, had not said that the U.S. was “stealing” the fruits. What we said was that Washington was going to great lengths simply to deny Israel those fruits.

Now everybody knows that ever since the end of the war, Washington has been advising the Lebanese *not* to make peace with Israel, not even to establish normal relations, indeed to confine negotiations strictly to security problems in Southern Lebanon. Even there, moreover, the U.S. is trying to block those arrangements the Israeli Government regards as the minimum required for the security of the northern frontier. That minimum is based on a universal principle, and its importance Israel has learnt from bitter and bloody experience: not to let others take charge of its national security.

Washington not only aims at the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, but also demands that the security of Israel’s northern border – that is, the daily defence of the much-discussed 45 to 50 kilometre belt in Lebanon – shall be entrusted to an international force. This means not indeed “stealing the fruits of Israel’s victory” for the U.S., but the inevitable early restoration of the PLO to Southern Lebanon.

That is what happened in 1978 after the Litani Operation. The government foolishly succumbed to pressure, withdrew and left the control of the area to UNIFIL. Into the area controlled by UNIFIL, the PLO marauders soon returned. It was from “UNIFIL territory” that some of the PLO operations were carried out.

Now Israel is insisting on what can only be described as the minimal “fruits of victory”: no massive physical presence in Lebanon but the maintenance of intelligence equipment to be manned by Israeli soldiers for alerting Israel’s security establishment to signs of terrorist reorganization. This Washington opposes vigorously. Moreover it continues to work for the elimination of Major Sa’ad Haddad’s militia of Christians and Moslems – the only Lebanese force so far that has defended its hearth and home against PLO terror.

Ambassador Lewis’s government is thus resisting the only proposed measures that promise to keep Arafat’s barbarians out of Southern Lebanon. What does this mean if not that Washington has no qualms about the potential restoration of a PLO “establishment” in Lebanon? This logic may sound outrageous – but these are the facts and they are, after all, in complete harmony with our experience in the seven years before 1982 – when Washington looked on in evident indifference at the PLO (and Syrian) atrocities and roused itself only to denounce (and finally to “punish”) Israel for its efforts to contain the PLO scourge.

PRECISELY last week the cynicism of U.S. policy was dramatically illustrated by events in Beirut. There American authorities revealed reluctantly that PLO terrorists were

emerging unhindered from the area controlled by the Marines to attack IDF soldiers and were then returning unhindered to that area, into which, by agreement, the IDF are forbidden to penetrate. In their discussions on the subject with Israeli representatives, the Americans made it plain that their non-interference was deliberate. They explained it. The marines, they said, are a “peace force,” and must not be expected to fight the terrorists.

Reagan himself has reinforced these tidings. He announced on Wednesday that it is not the Marines’ job to serve as policemen in Beirut. They are there only to help the Lebanese Army maintain order.

The PLO is therefore already re-establishing itself in Beirut by consent of the American marines, who will do nothing to stop them from doing what they wish. How long will it be then before chaos and bloodshed rule again in Beirut? Are we not entitled to ask: if the marines do not propose to take action to prevent PLO infiltration in any direction, what are they doing in Beirut at all, except to serve as a sanctuary and to watch the building in “their” area of a new infrastructure for resumed PLO activity?

Would the U.S. ambassador be prepared to suggest that Washington does not know what the marines are doing (or not doing) in Beirut – and what will happen in Southern Lebanon if its proposals, its reiterated angry demands, are implemented?

IN CALLING upon Israel not to “force the pace” (in seeking what Israel regards as the only realistic guarantee of its security, and indeed of some stability for Lebanon), Mr. Lewis declared that Lebanon “is still a fragile nation, barely able to hold its head above water.” He did not hint at the reason why Lebanon is a fragile nation, and who it was that pressed and held its head beneath water.

It is surely not irrelevant to mention that Lebanon was all but smashed completely by the other Arab nations (and the PLO). It is they who pressed upon Lebanon the cankerous presence of the PLO. They “decided” to let Syria loose in Lebanon as a “peace-keeping” force. They encouraged, financed and, in collaboration with the Soviet Union, armed the PLO and watched, with an equanimity equaled only by Washington’s, the growth of the Lebanese purgatory. It is Israel alone that made possible, indeed brought about, the stirrings of recovery in Lebanon.

Ambassador Lewis, however, asks Israel to help put the clock back. Lebanon, he told the Rotarians, “is also an Arab nation that cannot sever its Arab ties.” Ties? A new expression for “noose.” Those “ties” are subjection to the demands and the deeds of the Arab states, which generated and maintained Lebanon’s agony – and the violence from its territory against Israel.

Why does the U.S. not press Riyadh and Cairo and the rest, if not to atone for their sinful share in Lebanon’s misery (it is too late for that), at least to stop using Lebanon now as a tool for their Moslem pan-Arab ambitions? Why does Washington not demand that *they* realize that after all that has happened, Lebanon cannot but strengthen the beginning of peaceful coexistence with Israel for its own good? Why does Washington take for granted every Arab attitude and position, however, outrageous, and use the Arab rationale as a reason to get Israel to forgo its rights as a sovereign nation?

FINALLY, Mr. Lewis explained that the U.S. does not wish to exploit the situation to enhance its own interests in the struggle against the Soviet Union. No rational person

who follows U.S. policy would dream of making such an accusation. For many years U.S. policy in the Middle East, and a substantial part of its overall global policy, has rather promoted the interests of the Soviet Union. American policy in Lebanon throughout is one great testimony to tragic myopia. The Soviets' Syrian vassal has been encouraged in expansionist, anti-Christian, anti-Israel purposes; protection (past and present) has been given to the PLO – the Soviets' right arm, *inter alia*, in sowing world-wide terror. The PLO also built up a large arsenal of Soviet arms in Lebanon. These are only partial indications of the realities of U.S. strategy. Do we need to mention the central, infantile notion governing that strategy: that Saudi Arabia is a bastion, even the central bastion, of Middle Eastern defence against the Soviets? The complete tale of this style of U.S. policy since the days of Kissinger would fill a hair-raising volume. Nobody would be foolish enough to suggest that the U.S. seriously expects its actions in the Middle East to enhance its national interests in the struggle against the Soviets.

In sum, the lot of an ambassador, especially a well-meaning one, is not a happy one when he is expected to justify the indefensible follies of his government.

Reader's letter, 13 February 1983

ISRAEL'S TERRITORY

To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post

Sir, – Being a pragmatic person, I have always agreed wholeheartedly with the pragmatic views held by Mr. Shmuel Katz. However, he is mistaken when he accused Henry Kissinger of introducing the salami method of shrinking Israel.

Winston Churchill was the author of this invidious process, albeit with good intentions. In 1921, Churchill proposed a division of Palestine with the Jordan River as the bisector. He proceeded to obtain an agreement between the Emir Faisal for the Hashemite Arabs, Chaim Weizmann, Vladimir Jabotinsky and Nahum Sokolow for the Jews, and himself for the projected mandatory power.

Although this was in contravention of clause 5 of the Mandate, the convention was signed before the Mandate was implemented, and the commissioners of the League of Nations reluctantly raised no formal objections since they were assured by Churchill that this was the only formula for peace between the Jews and the Arabs. Five-sixths of Palestine were cut off and handed to the Arabs in exchange for the promise of peaceful relations. This was the only partition plan agreed to by all parties and implemented. Of course, in pursuit of Greater Syria comprising all of the old Ottoman Empire, the Arabs promptly reneged on their promises.

If agreements, conventions, treaties, pacts and promises are to be capriciously nullified and disregarded, of what use is diplomacy? Those people who advocate the disregarding of previous solemn agreements are warmongers, though they declare loudly that they are for peace. For the only alternative to international agreement is war.

The west bank of the river Jordan is as much part of Israel as Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa. Those people who talk of “annexation,” “occupied territories,” “giving back,” are using Arab propaganda semantic terminology. Those who even merely advocate ceding Israeli territory in exchange for peace are doing Israel a disservice.

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