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### **Illusions and Deceptions On the Road to Camp David**

When you hear on the radio or read in the newspaper the statements of politicians, whether of the Government or of the Opposition, you often wonder whether they read the same newspaper and listen to the same radio news, and how they function at all when their memories are so weak even about their own utterances.

For two months, since Washington conveyed its “questions” to our Government, for nine months since Sadat spoke in Jerusalem, for the three years since the Brookings Institute report was published in the US, for the six years since Sadat *told Newsweek* and *Le Figaro* of his “conditions for peace”, for the nine years since the Rogers Plan was first published, both the Americans and the Egyptians, the two other parties to the Camp David talks, have made it clear, in varying degrees of politeness or discourtesy, that they are determined that Israel shall withdraw to the Armistice Lines of 1949.

Many people in Israel and in the US believe that in the American arena itself it was possible, and is still possible today, to set up an effective barrier, within the American people, against this now traditional policy of the Washington establishment, certainly against its implementation. Israel’s blunder in this field, the field of Information, is only one of the astonishing manifestations of identity between the Likud-in-power and the Alignment-power. The fact, however, remains a fact and in its light the utterances of political leaders sound divorced from reality.

Mr. Yitzhak Rabin claimed at *K’far Hamakabiah* on Saturday (19 August) that “from Israel’s point of view Egyptian readiness for a territorial compromise has not been adequately tested”. He saw no need to explain how a territorial compromise would be good for Israel’s security and its future. Let us assume that he knows. What degree of naiveté or of pretence, what depth of self-abasement are required in order to continue to hand the Arabs on a platter Israel’s readiness to surrender territory including portions of western Eretz Yisrael and how many more times do we have to listen to the unequivocal, harsh reactions of Sadat and other Arab spokesmen: “We shall not give up one centimeter of Arab territory, Arab territory is sacred, and in fact we are not prepared to discuss territory with you at all”? How many times does Mr. Rabin have to hear these utterances before it occurs to him that maybe Sadat has no intention of agreeing to a territorial compromise?

Mr. Rabin, however, is now in Opposition, and his brushing off of realities, though it does add to the public confusion, will not affect our foreign relations or the progress of the talks at Camp David. Far graver practical implications stare out of the Government’s clinging to the “peace plan”. The Prime Minister continues to claim that the plan is a good one.

There is a large gulf between this view and the view — shared by this writer — that the plan, even in its original form, is dangerous to the future of Israel. From any point of view, however, the Prime Minister must have justified to himself the plan’s boldness — the far-reaching risks it imposes on Israel, its abandonment of the past policy of the Likud, and of the political system for which the Prime Minister’s camp fought for years — by the belief that in fact the plan would

bring peace. But the plan was not accepted and from that point onward it became a trap. The Americans pounced on its main concessions and are using it as a lever to achieve further concessions on the way to the American-Arab objective. Sheer common-sense, security requirements and all the laws of rational political method, dictated withdrawal of the plan by the Government.

Sadat's reaction was not a simple rejection of the plan. It transpires that he stands fiercely by the traditional Arab formula. He reiterates this formula continually. Only a fortnight ago — eight months after the peace plan was published — the Prime Minister himself explained (to a delegation from Israel Bonds in the US) that Sadat's conditions mean the destruction of Israel.

The vital basis — and the only possible justification, for such a peace plan is the certainty that the other side — the aggressor who threatened Israel's annihilation in the past — now wants peace — peace with Israel and not (as the Prime Minister puts it) peace without Israel. It is clear that there are no grounds for such certainty.

Indeed, already in January the Prime Minister announced that if Sadat persisted in his demands, Israel would consider cancelling the surrender of Sinai and would insist on border changes. Since then it can fairly be said that Sadat has sharpened his formula. He now demands that all the Israeli settlements beyond the "green line" be dismantled.

Nevertheless, despite the collapse of any possible rational basis for the plan, in spite of the developments in the region in recent months, especially the revelation of the strengthening of the military posture of Saudi Arabia which is building an active front against us in the south (a development which emphasizes the increasingly vital importance of Israeli control of Sinai), in spite of the drastic changes in the Horn of Africa, (enhanced Soviet presence and domination of Ethiopia) which demonstrate the importance of our unhampered presence on the Red Sea coast, in spite of the worsening of all the conditions which the authors of the peace plan ignored from the outset — the Government has not abandoned the plan.

On the contrary, the trap was sprung; and the plan was changed to Israel's disadvantage. According to information conveyed already last February to a group of American Jewish leaders, Israel has agreed to go back on part of her modest demands in Sinai; and it appears that she has now agreed to retain only one airfield. None of this has been officially conveyed to the public in Israel.

What has been published, however, is most serious. It is untrue to say that no changes have been introduced into the autonomy plan: these have been introduced openly. They have the effect of turning one of its central provisions on its head, and magnifies the risks to Israel to such a degree that there is great rejoicing in the tents of the State Department and in the dwellings of all those who wish to see Israel removed completely from Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

The change was brought about by Israel's "Leeds Declaration", ratified by the Knesset three weeks ago. The original autonomy plan contained the astounding proposition that Israel recognizes that there are other claims to sovereignty. This recognition serves to "open" the

question and is in fact reinforced by the specific provision that the question will remain “open” — which means that Israel will not take up her rights, and that other claims will not be foreclosed. Now, the Leeds declaration (made by Israel as a result of prolonged American pressure) promises that at the end of five years, the question of sovereignty will no longer be left “open”, but will be “closed”. It will be placed on the table at the negotiations — and will be decided.

Immediately after this concession was announced Carter began making preparations for the three-cornered meeting. It is most reasonable to assume that it is this concession — which is regarded by Washington as a “breakthrough” — that influenced Carter to strike the iron while it was hot, and to press Israel to complete the process. Hence the great activity over the projected meeting, and the special inflated importance ascribed to it hence Carter’s willingness to risk his popularity by calling and hosting it.

This is the source of amazement at the behavior of the Government. It refrains from cancelling its own plan, agrees to changes which enhance the risks the plan contains, and knowing what agonies await the people of Israel at Camp David, does not even do anything to steel the spirit of the people to meet them.