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ISRAELIS AS 'SCHUTZJUDEN' - BY CHOICE

AMONG the most chilling phenomena in Jewish history of the Diaspora was that of Schutzjuden, protected Jews.

A local ruler, or an Elector in Germany of the Holy Roman Empire, took under his wing the community of Jews living in his domain, or Jews asking to be allowed to enter it. They were utterly defenseless. At a price (in special taxes, or by some other means) he would "guarantee" their security against antisemitic attack.

Hallmark of a degrading existence, this dependence was one of the elements, spiritual no less than physical, that Zionism arose to eradicate. The shame of Schutzjuden - in whatever guise - was ultimately eradicated by the new tradition of Jewish self-defense, born early in the century in pogrom-ridden tsarist Russia. At the same time, the early Zionist pioneers in Palestine naturally created their own "Hashomer" (Watchman) organization.

Then, a renewed fully military tradition, dormant for 1,800 years, was created in the Jewish Regiments which took part in the liberation of Palestine from the Turks in World War I. Later it took another form in the armed resistance to repressive British Mandatory rule in Palestine; and it flowered in the army of sovereign Israel - widely regarded as one of the best, if not the best, in the world. Now in 1993, suddenly (for the scheme was manifestly concocted only last year between Prime Minister Rabin and President Bush in return for the US loan guarantees), the government of independent sovereign Israel includes in its plans the revival of the status of Schutzjuden.

Under this plan Jews in Israel would be "protected" - by soldiers of a foreign power. The logic is grotesque. It means: Schutzjuden not by the compulsion of tragic historical circumstances, but Schutzjuden by choice.

A state of dependence is forced by their own government on a community of naturally proud, stalwart and notably self-reliant Jews. No less chilling than the moral and spiritual debasement in the Rabin-Peres government's project of "peace with Syria" is its manifestation of an evident breakdown of will, and of a train of thought which cannot stand up to an examination in elementary logic. The idea is that the Syrians will honor a contractual peace with Israel if Israel gives up the Golan Heights.

"Otherwise," it is hinted, they will make war. Seen as a purely military issue, this simply does not make sense. The strategic stance of Syria, as it faces the Golan, is starkly inferior to that of Israel.

Indeed the Golan is the most effective natural deterrent of aggression that Israel possesses. That is why Syria has strictly observed the territorial terms of the so-called "Separation of Forces" agreement reached after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, which left the Israeli army in striking distance of Damascus itself. Yet the Israeli government, in effect, announces to the world that it is so afraid of the threat of war that it is prepared to sacrifice its high level of security in the north, to hand over to Syria - specifically to a bloodthirsty dictator and whatever successors he may have - the very key to that security.

Indeed, to the mercies of the Syrians. For when they, with the strategic gem of Golan in their hands, decide - as they have openly repeatedly proclaimed their intention to

decide - that the time has come for the "final assault" on an attenuated Israel, they will not hesitate to order the American "guaranteed" troops to clear out within 24 hours. Alternatively, if the American troops make a fighting move, the Syrians will inflict casualties on them in numbers adequate to inflame the American people against the presence of their troops in the trouble spot.

Or, Israel will be pressed to make further concessions in order to prevent American casualties. THE outcry for withdrawal in the US will have strong justification, and it will be heard on all sides, no less from friends of Israel than from hostile elements. On all sides, as surely as night follows day, it will be said: "If these Israelis, who were perfectly capable of defending themselves, were so stupid as to give up their territory to Arabs who for two generations have threatened - and thrice have tried - to annihilate them, why should American boys have to risk their lives to defend them?" More knowledgeable Americans will add that the Israeli government agreed to give up on the Golan Heights in return for the promise of American loan guarantees - guarantees or even the loan itself that they could have raised in the next five years from their internal Israeli sources - if at a higher rate of interest, but without political strings.

Must American boys now risk their lives to protect Israelis from the consequences of their government's folly? Americans with a good memory, moreover, will recall that it was ever a proud boast of the Israelis, a boast hitherto honorably fulfilled, that they do not on any account want foreign soldiers to fight for them. No, the "guarantees," if they are ever given, will be blown away (as they were, be it remembered, in Sinai in 1967) like chaff in the wind. The notion of Jews that have to be protected by Americans takes on a special significance in the light of the strange affection of the American establishment for Syria.

It is difficult to find a reason in pragmatism for the kind attentions lavished on the Syrian dictator. Politically, Syria has nothing special to offer; nor economically - it is a poor state and does not possess the magic of oil. It surely has no ideological charms and, indeed, continues to grace Washington's own list of terror-promoting states.

Yet for years, certainly since the days of president Carter, Syria has been pampered and coddled. Its interests, however illegitimate, have been protected, its crimes have been brushed under the carpet. Assad was the first foreign statesman president Carter found it necessary to meet in 1977.

He told Carter at that meeting that Israel must withdraw from "all of the territories," etc., and added that Israel would also have to allow all the refugees back to Jaffa, Gaza and Lod. On his return to the US, Carter announced that Assad was "a moderate." The love affair has continued. During the Gulf war, in which Syria officially joined the coalition against Iraq and lifted not a single fighting finger, it was rewarded by \$2 billion of largesse (which it promptly spent on arms).

And when it purchased Scud missiles from North Korea, Washington issued a stern warning to Israel - the prospective target of the missiles - not to impede the progress of the vessel carrying them to their Syrian destination.