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## **LESS COZY, MORE CLEAR**

PRIME Minister Netanyahu is preparing to visit the US. It should be clear to him that in light of the dangerous straits into which the Labor government has steered Israel, the policy he has promised to follow requires a thoroughgoing in-depth dialogue with President Clinton. The US administration is aware of the fact that the PLO constitution the Palestinian Covenant is based essentially, indeed nearly exclusively, on the proclaimed and oft-repeated purpose of destroying the Jewish state and usurping its territory.

Obviously no sane and self-respecting government would enter into negotiations with an organization flaunting such a barbaric idea. True, the Rabin-Peres government did not refuse to negotiate with the PLO. But Rabin did demand the abrogation or the amendment of the document.

Arafat obligingly promised this would be done; then lifted not a finger. From that day on, we have had not one sign of abhorrence of that document from Washington. Throughout the following 33 months, during which the covenant was neither abolished nor "corrected" but kept as an inspiration to the Arab nation while Arafat made a series of excuses and postponements; while slice after slice of territory was promised and indeed handed over to the autonomy by the Labor government; and while an eloquent Arafat ever more defiantly proclaimed to his people the certainty of the declaration of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Would it not have been decent and proper of an "honest broker" to warn Israel against this rushing into so obvious a trap, let alone admonishing Arafat for maintaining the unspeakable covenant? Should it not have occurred to the administration that the failure of the Palestinian Arab leadership to abolish or amend the document suggested very pointedly that its murderous purpose was so important that they were not prepared to pay even lip service to the idea of its abandonment? There is worse to follow. After waiting more than two years (and having surrendered to Arafat elements of Israel's security) prime minister Rabin issued an ultimative demand to Arafat: Either within two months of convening the elected Palestinian Council you fulfill your undertaking regarding the covenant, or we halt the negotiations. The only body entitled to make changes in the covenant, the Palestine National Council, duly met within the specified period.

It did not abolish or amend the covenant. It announced that it would amend the clauses which violated the Oslo Agreement. In effect it repeated, after nearly three years, no more than the original 1993 undertaking made by Arafat that the covenant remains in force until a "committee" decides which clauses are to be amended.

This slick declaration was at once welcomed by a Peres desperate for any sliver of "evidence" that Arafat had "changed;" then came the shocking declaration by the US State Department "confirming" Peres's enthusiastic revelation that the covenant had been amended. Would it not have been more honorable and more expedient, for the sake of Mr Clinton's own credibility at least, to tell the truth about Arafat especially in light of the accumulating evidence from the PLO leader's calculated pronouncements that the

practical plans for fulfillment of the covenant have already taken shape in his mind? THE unpalatable truth underlying the American government's policy is that the US is not and cannot be an honest broker in the conflict. On the crucial territorial issue its policy has always been just about identical with Arafat's first "phase:" Israel's withdrawal to the 1949 Armistice lines, recognized by every serious observer as a "death trap" for Israel.

American policy makers have persuaded themselves that if Israel gives the Arabs the high ground in Judea, Samaria and the Golan, the Arabs will welcome these topographical advantages by foregoing the next phase of Israel's destruction; and an attenuated Israel is expected to accept this childish prognosis. Clinton came to office in 1992 after the Rabin- Peres-Aloni government was in place. It is doubtful whether he ever took an opportunity to discover the beliefs, principles and feelings of the fierce opposition to that government an opposition representing more than half the total population of Israel and a substantial majority in the Jewish community.

He must certainly be interested in doing so now.

Netanyahu is duty-bound to forgo the traditional patterns of coziness that have characterized reports of past meetings at the White House. He must assume that it is entirely possible that the president, depending for information and assessments from a notoriously one-sided State Department, is not adequately informed; and, difficult as it may seem, he must proffer Clinton a basic review in depth of US-Israel relations. On this must rest his crucial message: that the Netanyahu government was not elected to ensure continuity with the philosophies of Peres and his colleagues; that its vision of the road to peace is quite different from theirs; that it rejects the idea that the peace process is to be seen as a succession of Israeli territorial surrenders culminating in a second Palestinian state (after Jordan).

Autonomy is what was promised. In the election campaign Netanyahu undertook to fulfill obligations but only when the Palestinians recognizably replaced their covenant and put an end to their numerous violations in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Those provisos will have to be met, and it is reasonable to expect active American support in their fulfillment, all in accordance with the high principles of American democracy.

That should make a good beginning for, perhaps, a new era in US-Israel relations.