

21 June 1985

LESSONS OF HISTORY

MAKE-BELIEVE continues to be a pervasive ingredient in U.S. diplomacy. For years, relations with the Soviet Union were dominated by the illusion of détente – a refined variant of what used to be called appeasement – which led to a dramatic increase in Soviet power and to a weakened America. Even today, under Reagan, undoubted changes in tone and thrust have nevertheless, left intact in Washington, significant illusions about Soviet behaviour and purpose.

On the Middle East, Washington has not changed its guiding philosophy. Here, where there is no longer room for illusion, misrepresentation has taken its place. Its regular beneficiary has been Saudi Arabia. In order to obtain Senate approval for arms sales to Saudi Arabia, U.S. administration spokesmen have regularly portrayed that benighted kingdom in terms suggesting a progressive modern state.

A new beneficiary is Iraq's Saddam Hussein, the well-named "Butcher of Baghdad." In order to qualify him for arms supplies in his ill-conceived war with Iran, U.S. spokesmen now describe Iraq as "moderate," and its name has been erased from the "black list" of the states promoting terrorism.

LAST MONTH, an even more delightful bouquet was presented by U.S. Under-Secretary of State, Michael Armacost, to a convention of the National Association of Arab-Americans.

"The bonds of sentiment and interest that link the U.S. with the Arab nations of the Middle East," he said, "derive from our common aspirations; national independence, democracy, constitutionalism, the rule of law, free enterprise, and an attachment to religious values." No less.

Unhappily, this system of dissimulation continued to be applied with much greater potential effect in U.S. policy towards Israel. It is at the heart of Washington's current feverish effort to somehow enter into negotiations with a "Jordanian Palestinian" delegation which Israel will afterwards be pressed to accept.

Secretary of State George Shultz even gave dissimulation a historical context in two recent speeches. At Yad Vashem in Jerusalem on May 10 he said:

"After the Holocaust, the American people and decent men and women around the world made a solemn pledge – never again to fail to confront evil. Never again would we appease the aggressors. Never again would we let the Jewish people stand alone against persecution and oppression.

Two weeks earlier, he had told the AIPAC conference in Washington that the U.S. supported the creation of the State of Israel almost four decades ago because of moral conviction" and was "committed and always will be committed to helping Israel protect itself against any combination of potential aggressors."

The composite picture conveyed by these statements is wildly misleading. In World War II, both before the Germans organized the "Final Solution" and the German army was merely killing groups of Jews in Eastern Europe by conventional rifles and machine-guns; and then for most of the period of the operation of the death camps, the

U.S. government took no action, indeed declined, to rescue Jews who could have been saved.

In 1948, three years after that “never again” resolve, claimed by Mr. Shultz, the infant Jewish state, threatened by the well-armed Arab states with destruction and the elimination of its citizens, was explicitly denied arms by the U.S. – which, tongue-in-cheek, proclaimed an embargo on both sides.

Had the Soviet Union – for its own pragmatic reasons – not helped arm that heroic generation of Jews, Mr. Shultz might now have had to mourn not one Jewish national tragedy, but two.

IN 1967, once more, the U.S., this time in default of a contractual obligation, allowed Israel to stand alone against the combination of Arab aggressors.

In the Yom Kippur War, it was U.S. pressure and threats that succeeded in converting Israel’s hard-won victory over the Egyptian aggressors into a traumatic defeat in the aftermath.

It is no pleasure to recall these facts, which cast a deep shadow over relations between two peoples united by so many real bonds not only of culture and sentiment but of mutual aid in many areas.

It is, however, American spokesmen who have adopted this habit of invoking past history – not, indeed, in order to express regret at their predecessors’ inimical attitude towards vital Jewish security needs, but actually to establish a spurious claim for approbation – and for future confidence.

WHAT IS CRUCIAL is this unconcealed motive. Mr. Shultz made his statement in the context of an ongoing policy which, if consummated, would reduce Israel once more to a state of maximum vulnerability, exposing it once more to the ever-existent Arab threat of annihilation.

This has been Washington’s standard policy ever since 1969: surrender by Israel of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, all those parts of Eretz Yisrael – give a kilometer or take a kilometer – which Israel regained in 1967 in repelling the second Arab attempt on its life. Quite apart from the assault on the Jewish people’s historic rights, this is a formula for national suicide.

Incredibly, the U.S. administration, while unremittingly promoting this Arab “solution” of the conflict, assumed the pose of a neutral “honest broker.”

Washington manifestly regards it as essential for its purpose to inculcate the notion that it makes a difference to Israel if its evacuation of these territories would be followed by a Jordanian Arab sovereignty rather than a “Palestinian” Arab sovereignty. Hence, its repeated insistence (in the Reagan Plan and elsewhere) that it will not support the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

In itself, this is nonsense. If Israel were sufficiently self-destructive to hand over the heart of Western Palestine to the Arabs, nobody would then ask Reagan or Shultz for their opinion as to what form Arab sovereignty there should take. In any case, it makes no difference: Hussein and Arafat envisage the same ultimate fate for Israel.

The U.S., however, has been twisting and turning in order somehow to get Arafat to agree to accept a secondary role in the proposed negotiations with Hussein. Because Arafat insists on “Recognition Now” for the PLO as a party to the negotiations, the U.S.

is at this moment engaged in a special piece of obfuscation: to bring the PLO into the negotiations without seeming to do so.

To this end, it has reached the very pinnacle of dissimulation. Pretending that “Palestinian” delegates approved – and briefed – by Arafat are not to be regarded as PLO representatives, Washington has even proposed that such delegates could be chosen from the Palestine National Council. Without batting an eyelid, U.S. spokesmen have announced that the PNC is not the PLO.

The PNC, as it happens, *is* the PLO. It is the supreme authority of the PLO, drafting its policy and planning (PLO Constitution Article 7A). It is the body responsible for the Palestinian Covenant, whose theme is the dismantling of Israel and the dispersal of its population. It is the body to which Arafat is accountable. Not the PLO indeed.

THESE UNDIGNIFIED maneuvers by Washington tend unfortunately to divert the attention of many people, including Israelis, from the crucial fact: that the conflict derives from Arab determination to deprive the Jewish people of its only homeland; that every suggestion requiring Israeli surrender of territory is designed to reduce it as a first step, to the indefensible borders of 1949 (once described by Abba Eban as a “death trap”).

Those Israelis, notably the Labour Party leaders, who continue to pretend that somehow, somewhere, a “territorial compromise” could be found which would satisfy the Arabs and give Israel security, must surely have realized by now that even if the Arabs were to agree to accept a part of Palestine, they would certainly not sign a peace treaty, but would merely see themselves as one healthy step nearer to their final solution.

A CLEAR-EYED, clear-headed Israeli government, conscious of the hard lessons of history, facing with courage the reality of the unchanging Arab purpose, and remembering moreover, that Palestine is the Jewish Homeland, would at this juncture put an end to the diplomatic tangle by a positive statement: that Israel is prepared to negotiate, not with any hybrid Arab delegation, but directly with Jordan (and any other neighbouring state) for a peace treaty, embracing a normalization of relations in all spheres, but on the basis of the territorial status quo.

Such a policy can be presented honestly to the people of Israel – and to the world at large – as the only guarantee for its security – and as containing the only hope of ultimate peace with the territory-bloated Arab nation.