

November 13, 1992

MORE OF THE SAME WOULD BE SAD

A poor Jew in the shtetl once appealed to his all-knowing rebbe for help. His tiny home was so terribly overcrowded that it had become unlivable for him, his wife and his seven children. The rabbi's advice was terse: to take the family's goat into the house.

The petitioner was completely bewildered - but "the rebbe had spoken." He dutifully added the goat, in all its aspects, to the congestion. But when, after a couple of days, the agony had become unbearable, he went back to the rabbi in anguished incoherence. Once more the rabbi's advice was terse: "Take the goat out of the house" - and the goat was removed.

The next day the man, all smiles, came to thank and bless the rabbi for the wonderful advice. How comfortable, how spacious his house had become some State Department officials as a likely outcome of the conflict. It is difficult to demonstrate the accuracy of this statement; but if Mr. Clinton were to follow the example of ancient potentates, adopt a suitable disguise and mix socially with a sample of State Department officials, he would doubtless, as a decent person, be startled by what he heard.

An example? Some years ago, Professor Eugene Rostow, a former undersecretary of state, told me how startled he was, at a cocktail party during an international conference in Brussels, to hear an American diplomat describe Israel as a "passing phenomenon," and the reaction of a kind Belgian lady that she hoped that, this time, the refugees would be treated better. People often ask whether the Israeli leaders do not know all this. Don't they understand? Don't they know that the so-called peace process is seen by the Arabs - and some Americans - as a process only for surrender by Israel of territory and sovereignty? Long experience of the minds of politicians, and even of their constituents, suggests that what is needed is an in-depth psychological study.

But we do have historical examples. I was in London in September 1938 and saw and heard the crowds in the streets (who knew all about Hitler) cheering Chamberlain on his return from Munich; and three days later the jeering crowd of members in the House of Commons shouting down Churchill who was trying to tell them the bitter truth. Why go back to Chamberlain? Take Bush.

Did he know what he was doing when he coddled Saddam Hussein? But why even Bush? Why not our own Chaim Weizmann, who for nearly 30 years had had experience with Arab attitudes and behavior, and yet in 1947 announced his belief that a "territorial compromise," with the Jews getting a puny piece of indefensible territory, would bring peace? Weizmann's modern-day successors are making the same blunder about the Arabs, and every passing day emphasizes its nature and its dangers more sharply. In fairness, it must be said that a majority of the people of Israel are not deceived; and even Labor's razor-thin electoral victory was achieved only because of domestic problems. Which underlines why Rabin has certainly no mandate for his headlong, reckless policy of scuttle; and why public opposition to his policies should be hastened, coordinated and persistent.

That is why too our friends in the US should try to reach President-elect Clinton and his advisers, with a request that he should not simply adopt an automatic "continuity" but study seriously the problems common to our two countries, before he decides on a

policy.