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No End to the ‘Salami Process’

When Harold Saunders, Assistant Secretary of State, and Professor William Quandt, assistant to Professor Brzezinski at the National Security Council, make public statements, they should be accorded the utmost attention. They are key figures in the generation, formulation and application of US policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

With Alfred Atherton they possess probably more influence in this sphere than any other group of public servants in Washington. They are representative of the body of experts, usually Arabists, who long ago formulated the doctrine governing that policy. The Rogers Plan of 1969, later the Brookings Report, are the codified expression of their school’s determination to reduce Israel to its “natural” proportions — in the belief, of course, that this is good for the US.

There is a long tradition in the State Department of opposition to Zionism and of efforts to thwart its purpose. It was the State Department that in 1947 counterworked President Truman’s support for the UN partition plan (because it provided for a Jewish state). In March, 1948, it succeeded in achieving a reversal of that support and its replacement by a plan for “trusteeship” which, if implemented would have postponed Jewish independence indefinitely. It was the State Department that ensured the enforcement of an arms embargo, which might have been lethal to the newly-born-and-already-battered Israel if the Soviet Union had not come to its aid.

The story is a long one. Presidents, with their ideas and sympathies and foibles come and go. So also secretaries of state. But the spirit of the makers of policy in the State Department has not changed. With increased subservience to Arab demands it has only become more intense, more urgent.

Today, it is difficult to say to what dimensions the State Department would really like to see Israel reduced. Even before 1967, schemes were mooted in Washington for Israel to surrender parts of its territory, within the indefensible Armistice Lines of 1949. After 1967, when the second attempt by the Arab states to destroy Israel had failed, the State Department doctrine required a return to those lines.

Up to last year, this idea was rejected by successive Israeli Governments with undisguised horror at its implications. Mrs. Golda Meir, prime minister in 1969, when confronted with the Rogers Plan, said that accepting it would be equivalent to treason. In December, 1977, with the spontaneous proposal by Israel to hand over Sinai *in toto* to Egypt, and the “opening” of the question of sovereignty over Judea, Samaria and Gaza, new hope was born in the old hands at the State Department.

The signing of the agreements at Camp David was their moment of triumph. Every line in the agreements bears their hallmark. Every paragraph bears the evidence of Israeli submission to their requirements.

Pitiful are the pretences of our Government spokesmen that they had not reversed themselves even on those minimal safeguards and Israeli rights for which they had previously stood out, that there had not been a surrender, point after point, to Arab and American demands.

When, therefore, Saunders and Quandt, at present the authentic spokesmen for the US Administration, make statements on the Camp David agreements, on their implications, on the prospects of further agreements and, inevitably, Israeli concessions, their experience and ours should tell us that what they are saying today may well tomorrow be brought to the Knesset as a further “necessary risk for the sake of peace”.

They are now engaged in a campaign to persuade the Arab states to subscribe to the Camp David agreements and to ensure the opening of negotiations between Israel and Jordan for filling in the framework for Judea, Samaria and Gaza. In doing so they are making plain what the Camp David agreements have won for the Arabs (in addition to the total surrender of Sinai to Egypt). To underline those achievements they are disseminating throughout the Arab countries the main differences between the Camp David “framework” agreement and the original Israeli “peace plan” — that is the extent and the detail of Israeli submission to American “corrections”.

Many of the proclaimed supporters of the agreements in Israel, euphoric over the promise of peace with Egypt, have refrained from studying, perhaps even from reading, their texts. Some of them, impressed by the Prime Minister’s assurance of the good prospects for Israeli sovereignty over Judea, Samaria and Gaza (for which there is no warrant in the agreement unless the Arabs hand sovereignty to Israel on a platter), tend to dismiss American statements as mere “interpretations”.

They are likely to be encouraged by comments such as those of Wolf Blitzer from Washington who, reporting (in *The Jerusalem Post* of October 15) on an interview given by Mr. Saunders to Arab media, wrote that he had “presented the Camp David ‘framework’ agreements in the most favourable light to the Arab side — understandably, given the intended audience”. This suggestion of exaggeration or beautification of the text is unwarranted.

Saunders said: “We felt that establishing self-government for that one third of the Palestinian people (on the West Bank and Gaza Strip) in the land which they would like to see established as their homeland would be a remarkable start if we could achieve this in the next several months”.

What does the Camp David ‘framework’ agreement say?

“In order to ensure a peaceful and orderly transfer of authority, and taking into account the security concerns of all the parties, there should be transitional arrangements for the West Bank and Gaza for a period not exceeding five years. In order to provide full autonomy to the inhabitants under these arrangements, *the Israeli Military Government and its civilian administration will be withdrawn as soon as a self-governing authority has been freely elected by the inhabitants of these areas to replace the existing military government...*” (Emphasis added).

Moreover, according to the same report from Washington, Saunders pointed out with unexceptionable precision that the original peace plan had provided for the perpetuation of the military administration while only the civilian administration would be withdrawn, so that the Arab autonomy council would be subject to (and removable by) the Israeli authorities. The Camp David agreement puts an end to the Israeli military administration.

Saunders also explained the simple fact that while in the original peace plan internal security was to remain the concern of the Israeli authorities, under the Camp David agreement this, too, would no longer be the case. “Now,” Saunders said, “there would be a strong Palestinian police force responsible to the Palestinian governing body”.

Indeed, an examination of all the American reports on the published texts and factual content of the Camp David agreements do not reveal any significant distortion or exaggeration by Saunders. The only efforts at obfuscation have come, regrettably, from the Israeli side.

As our government is prepared, even anxious, to open negotiations with Jordan in order to hasten the institution of the full autonomy, and to set in train the process which will end in the discussion among Israel, Jordan, Egypt and the Arabs of Judea, Samaria and Gaza as to who is to acquire sovereignty, and the submission of their agreement to the veto of the elected representatives of the Arab inhabitants — why does Jordan hesitate?

Jordan is playing the hard bargainer. Hussein wants first to be assured not only that there will be no further Jewish settlements in the area, but that the 70-odd existing ones will be removed. He wants to be assured that East Jerusalem will be taken away from Israel and given to the Arabs. On Jerusalem, the Washington chorus is assuring him (and the Arabs in general) that the US is on his side. As for the settlements, Saunders has treated us to a revealing lesson on Washington’s methods in the negotiations (so self-evident, yet so obscured from the gaze of the Israeli negotiators).

“The art in this process,” he said “is to put the issues in sequence, so that one decision leads to another... An example of how this works is found in the decision by the Israeli Government to remove the settlers from Sinai. A few weeks ago that decision by the Israeli Government would not have been possible. But when the issue became the last remaining issue between Israel and the peace agreement with Egypt, then the Israeli people made the judgment that that issue should be resolved. I think it’s possible in dealing with the many complicated issues that concern the Palestinians to see a similar sequence of issues that could be resolved...”.

With most of the salami already promised, what the Arabs have to learn, as Egypt has already learned, is that if they will only let the State Department continue to do the slicing, it will not be long before it is all theirs. This is the message Saunders and his colleagues bring to the Arab states.