

November 29, 2001

ON BLUNDERS AND DISTORTIONS

Not the least disturbing reaction to last week's speech by US Secretary of State Colin Powell is the welcome it has been given by the Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Powell's speech is an amazing concoction. First of all, it follows in the footsteps of the Mitchell committee, which was briefed specifically not to blame anybody for the situation created by the current violence. From the very outset then, people in Israel were killed: large numbers were suicide bombed, and some were lynched. Everybody knew who was to 'blame.' The gimmick of blaming nobody meant blaming everybody, and so half the blame for the Palestinian aggression was transferred by the Mitchell committee onto the shoulders of Israel.

Thus, the Mitchell Report is distinguished by a silly display of moral equivalence between aggression and retaliation; and all are described as 'both sides.' That was not enough, however. The committee strayed even from its loaded briefing, set itself up in judgment and laid a sanction on Israel's head: Israel must stop building or even developing settlements. Lo and behold, the sanction is precisely what the United States administrations have been demanding of Israel over the years - long before the latest round of violence. There is no escaping the conclusion that one reason for the committee's appointment was simply to promote the anti-settlement agenda.

Powell talks the same language as the committee. 'Palestinians,' he tells us, 'need security as well.' Of course they do; and the family of any Palestinian who lost his life or any Palestinian who has himself been injured in the current unrest, can blame only Arafat and his terrorist gangs. What's more, it is of no use and not moral to speak, as Powell did, of persuading (or 'prodding') both sides to observe a cease-fire.

How many cease-fires have there been? Does Powell know? Five, six, who remembers? And they have not been broken by 'both sides.' They have been broken by Arafat, who no doubt jokes about the stupid Israelis who continue to take his promises seriously.

The issue however goes much deeper, and the efforts made to achieve 'instant' solutions are ill-informed and depressingly shallow. Powell refers several times to the 'Occupation.' Sharon and even Peres should have objected immediately to his use of the Palestinian term which encapsulates one of the great lies of our time. It is, of course, the Palestinians who invented an Israeli 'occupation of Palestine lands' and have successfully promoted the lie all over the world.

AN AMERICAN secretary of state, however, should know his history better. The only unlawful occupation that has taken place in Palestine since the United Nations resolution on partition in 1947, was the occupation in 1948 of Judea and Samaria by the Kingdom of Jordan, and of the Gaza district by Egypt. These 'occupations' were the result of their

war - together with Syria - designed, and so proclaimed, to destroy the infant State of Israel at birth. That war gave birth to the Armistice Lines of 1949; Jordan promptly and illegally occupied and annexed Judea and Samaria, and even renamed itself TransJordan in order to reflect their inclusion in the Kingdom.

The Arabs living in Palestine manifestly made no move at all. No one protested at the Jordanian or Egyptian occupations, and there was no mention of any place called 'Palestinian lands.' They had then not yet been invented. A terrorist group, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) did indeed arise in 1964, but it attacked not the Jordanian occupiers, but Israel. The historical fact is that it is not the 'settlements' that have brought about Arab aggression and nearly continuous terror - they are simply part of the plan to put an end to Israel.

For this very reason, the Egyptians, Syrians and Jordanians in June 1967 again attacked Israel, then still bounded by the 1949 Armistice Lines. They proclaimed in advance, with great fanfare, that finally the Jewish State was about to disappear. They failed, and Israel, fighting a defensive war, liberated the areas occupied by Jordan and Egypt. These areas are part of the territory of the Mandate conferred on Britain in 1922, in which to 'reconstitute the Jewish National Home,' and nothing that has happened since has cancelled or diminished the consequent right of Jews to settle in these areas.

We come to a most crucial and misleading element in Powell's speech. He says that American policy would be based on Resolutions 242 and 338, 'which are rooted in the concept of land for peace.' They are not rooted in anything of the sort. Resolution 242 of July 1967 requires Israel to withdraw from 'territories,' but 'to secure and recognized boundaries.' This was not a resolution fair to Israel and evoked considerable resentment.

However, it was finally accepted.

Had the Arabs accepted this resolution there would have been negotiations as to where those borders should be. They rejected the text of the resolution and submitted a different text for 242. In their text, Israel would be required to withdraw from all the territories. At the end of the debate (at the Security Council) the Arab proposal was defeated. But ever since then a central element in their anti-Israel propaganda was that their defeated text had been accepted! It was the Arabs who made up the fiction that Resolution 242 (and 338, which came later) are 'rooted in the concept of land for peace.'

It is most unfortunate that an American statesman should help popularize distortions of a United Nations decision which only serves to strengthen the determination of Israel's enemies.

As for the approval by Sharon and Peres of Powell's speech - it is a shocking and dangerous blunder for which, if not comprehensively corrected immediately, Israel will pay a heavy price.