

1 March 1985

ON THE ROAD TO PURIM

DEFENCE MINISTER Yitzhak Rabin made a statement of great educative significance last week. According to *Ma'ariv* (February 22, 1985) he explained that firm measures against Shi'ite terrorism were delayed because Israel will have to live with the Shi'ites across the northern border also after the withdrawal from Lebanon.

Consequently, it had been thought undesirable to take action which would leave a bitter aftertaste. The Shi'ites, however, Mr. Rabin declared, "did not understand our intention. There is therefore no escape from the need to bring things home to them by other means."

Mr. Rabin may well be right: the Shi'ites assumed that Israeli passivity in the face of daily murderous attacks was a sign of weakness. Encapsulated in the sequence of events, however, was another "misunderstanding" – and Israeli one. The Israeli authorities assumed that the Shi'ites would not hamper the withdrawal, that they had the same objective as the Israelis – a peaceable conclusion to the Lebanese episode – and that they looked forward to "living with" the Israelis across the border. In short, a completely mistaken notion of the workings of the minds of the militant Shi'ites.

Rabin was evidently not aware that his brief statement contained in fact a lesson in history. Reflected in it is the whole story of Israel's relations with the Arabs – Shi'ites, Sunnis, Transjordanians, Syrians, Egyptians. It is the story of groundless "assumptions."

IN THE SUMMER of 1947 Chaim Weizmann told the UN Committee on Palestine that he believed that by giving up a part of Western Palestine the Jewish people would reach an accommodation with the Arabs.

Even from the knowledge he had then of the Arab attitude he had no right to believe any such thing. His error was indeed soon exposed by the Arabs. Never did any Arab, Palestinian or other, utter a single word to suggest that they were interested in this "territorial compromise" (which left Israel within grotesque borders, excluding – *inter alia* – Jaffa, Western Galilee – and Jerusalem which was to be "internationalized"). Indeed they proclaimed, in uninhibited, even bloodthirsty terms, their intention to destroy the infant state at birth.

Failing in that attempt in 1948, they continued to assert that they were not abandoning their purpose. It did not help: the Israeli leaders dusted themselves off and continued to demonstrate their "assumption" that the Arabs did not mean what they said and could be expected to "live with" a Jewish state.

This assumption was psychologically understandable. Who likes to feel surrounded by enemies that are implacably committed to one's destruction?

The Arabs were not interested. They were not thinking the same thoughts as the Israeli leaders. As they had made clear time and again a Jewish State within the Arab world is anathema, an impossibility, an assault on Islamic doctrine. The only question on their minds was: what would be the most effective way of getting rid of Israel.

IN 1967 they tried war once more. They did not even clothe their purpose in euphemism. For three weeks the whole world heard (and saw on television) the exhilarant masses on

the streets of the Arab capitals celebrating in anticipation of the imminent crushing of Israel, promised by their leaders.

They lost the Six Day War – and remained volubly true to their purpose. The Israeli leaders clung loyally to their assumption. They continued so to cling after the loss of Sinai, on which the Egyptians would not concede even “one grain of sand”; and so into the next phase of the Arab design: to achieve Israeli withdrawal from Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

Meantime, Hussein (and his colleagues) had learned over the years that the very hint that they might be prepared to “negotiate” was enough to cause a flurry of excitement and anticipation in the Israeli doves (and a rise in their own stock in the West).

The present flurry is another example of this. The players this time, apart from Hussein, are Mubarak and Arafat. Mubarak, who is about to visit the U.S. in search of aid, believes – correctly – that his image needs refurbishing in view of his violations of the treaty with Israel.

Characteristically he does not even hint at the slightest change in his attitude or policy. He remains in breach of the peace treaty he signed. But he knows his Israeli customers. He simply organizes a “peace offensive.” He arranges Arafat’s conversation with Hussein. The two concoct a document which, when analysed, announces the same demands on Israel as they have always demanded.

“All” the UN resolutions which they invoke, added together, call for a total withdrawal of Israel to the 1949 Armistice lines, including the surrender of Jerusalem, a restoration of the refugees to Israel, self-determination for the Palestinians. Whereupon Hussein and Mubarak solemnly proclaim that “at last” there is a movement towards peace.

At this point Mubarak himself becomes communicative. He sends messages to Peres, he sends messengers to Peres, even, in the dead of night, unto Jerusalem. The Israeli leaders, brimming over with gratification, play along. They could at least postpone the spectacle for one week: it would fit in beautifully to the *Purim* festivities.

IF THE GOVERNMENT had a sane, dignified, sophisticated policy, its reaction to Mubarak’s “peace offensive” would be simple.

No substantive talks with Egypt will take place until she returns her ambassador, and effectively honours the peace treaty in all its parts.

Moreover – such talks are impossible unless Egypt retracts the policy statements she has made since the peace treaty was signed, specifically the detailed plan put forward in Kuwait in 1982 by Mr. Maguid (now foreign minister) envisaging in effect the dismantlement of the State of Israel.

MUBARAK’S IMMEDIATE objective is so transparent (and in truth is so recognized by all but Israel’s “left” lunatic fringe) that its exposure would provide a rare opportunity to lay bare the realities of the Arab-Jewish relationship.

Insofar as Israel is interested – as she is interested – in public opinion abroad (including Jewish opinion), it is still not too late to correct the perceptions of the “conflict” implanted by the Arabs – helped on by Israeli apologetics – so widely throughout the world.

Indeed this is a particularly opportune moment. Several factors in Arab propaganda successes have shrunk considerably. Western statesmen no longer shiver so visibly in their boots at the thought of Arab oil-power; the PLO empire of terror has evaporated, and the awe at its power for evil has been substantially muted.

Perhaps even the sudden awareness of the real tragedies of the age – the slow doom of millions of unoffending human beings in Africa – has helped put the always spurious “Palestinian problem” in less mythical perspective.

Moreover at least some of the pipe-dreams of American policy-makers about Saudi Arabian virtues and influence have been shattered. In fact the air is now potentially much more receptive for a forward Israeli information “offensive” to make clear the essential verities about the conflict.

AT ITS HEART lies indeed the real Palestinian problem, whose correct and demonstrable definition is the failure hitherto of the Arab nation to deprive the Jewish people of its homeland, geographically a mere notch in the area the Arabs have been brought to believe belongs entirely to themselves.

Their religion will not suffer any non-Moslem sovereignty in this area and will, at most, tolerate temporary accommodations, such as the Armistice agreements of 1949 and the Peace Treaty of 1979, if such accommodations are unavoidable or if they contribute to subsequent subjugation of the infidel intruder. For such agreements the Arabic language has a special word, *salaam*, which, unlike *shalom*, does not mean peace. (Peace, in the sense understood in the West, is called *sulh*.)

Every step taken by the Arab political leaders is calculated (and indeed monitored) by the Moslem religious authority) in relation to that ultimate purpose.

Only when that purpose begins to be seen as unattainable – either by war, or by diplomatic ploys, or by internal subversion in Israel – can one expect the Arabs to begin thinking of real peace.

See Letter to the Editor on the following page

Readers Letters – 8 March 1985

NEED FOR HOPE

To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post

Sir, – The columns of *The Jerusalem Post* are open to all voices, Shmuel Katz's included. Your readers respect your comprehensive journalism. But Katz's smugness and arrogance grow tiresome.

He seems to suggest in his diatribes that all ye who enter here abandon hope. I submit that hope must rise eternal in the human breast. What else is there? Only despair? The voiceless decent billions of peoples (Arabs, Jews, Israelis, all the races and nationalities, the religious and the non-religious) all of us desperately need thoughtful voices of hope.

Unquestionably, Katz has formidable debater's skills. But almost gleefully, with Talmudic assurance, and an instinct for the jugular, his is a voice of despair. He doesn't advise awareness and caution; he trumpets doomsday. He would serve Israel's and Jewry's cause better with a touch of humility and some awareness of and sensitivity for the crying need of mankind to hope in order to live.

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