

28 February 1986

### **RAS BURKA MOTIVE**

“IT WILL BE four weeks this weekend,” said an article in the *Jerusalem Post*, “since seven Israeli vacationers – three adults and four children – were gunned down in cold blood by a hate-crazed Egyptian soldier at Ras Burka in Sinai.

“Egypt’s initial reaction articulated by President Mubarak himself,” it went on, “was that this was a ‘small matter.’ And the promised investigation of the tragedy, if this is being conducted at all, has yet to produce results that might constitute some reassessment of this early reaction.

The date was October 30, 1985; and four weeks then seemed to the writer, David Bernstein, to be an inordinately long time. Sixteen more weeks have since passed. The Ras Burka crime is five months behind us. There has been no known “investigation of the tragedy.” The man who fired the shots was indeed tried and sentenced, but even the proceedings at his trial have not been made known to Israel. Of greater significance is the absence of any suggestion of action against the comrades of that soldier-gunman, who stood by, with their guns at the ready, to prevent aid from reaching the five still-living victims as they bled slowly to death.

AS THOUGH in reflex to the slowly dying motion of the crime itself, public reaction in Israel, erupting first in horror, then dissolved in anger, is now no longer heard. The families of the dead bear their agony in silence; the pain of the rest of us finds no articulation in the media; and the members of the government, if after five months they recall the event at all, evidently sigh in relief. They have succeeded in sweeping Ras Burka out of sight. The Egyptians must not be angered.

*The Post* article described the government’s self-imposed silence on the affair as “neither understandable nor acceptable.”

Subsequently, that self-imposed silence was indeed punctuated by repeated requests – even more humiliating than the silence – for a “report on the tragedy”; until, failing a response from Cairo, Ras Burka was finally buried as an “item” in the package of 14 points in the cabinet decision agreeing to the Egyptian demand for arbitration on Taba.

RAS BURKA was not a small matter. It was a monstrous crime of far-ranging significance. The fact itself that the Egyptian president spontaneously called it a small matter emphasized the real nature of Egypt’s attitude to Israel and to the peace treaty it signed.

The normal reaction by a civilized government to such a crime – and the Egyptians regard themselves and wish to be regarded as civilized – would be simple and self-understood: first of all, spontaneous horror and expressions of regret, speedy trial and punishment of all the guilty and investigation of the deeper causes of the atrocity. Thus would it emphasize the supremacy of law – and also demonstrate the moral gap between the murderers on the one hand and the society in which they live, on the other. What could be simpler, what should be more natural for the Egyptian government, than to react in this normal way?

They did not do so. The reason why Mubarak played down the Ras Burka murders – and, even after time for reflection, subsequently pressed Israel, by his displeasure, to forget about it – was that this crime in Egyptian eyes, and indeed in Arab eyes generally, is not so serious. Killing Jews is widely regarded as a *mitzvah*. Hence the widespread glorification in the Arab countries of the convicted killer at Ras Burka. Mubarak himself would not have called it “a small matter” if his soldiers had killed seven Egyptians.

Hence no public voice was raised in Egypt to denounce the accomplice-murderers.

ELEMENTARY TO the investigation of a murder is the determination of motive. Why did that soldier shoot those unoffending people, the grown-ups and the children? He was – as *The Post* article pointed out – hate-crazed. Correct; but why? What could he possibly have against those seven strangers? Why should he and his comrades hate them, and hate them so fiercely that they deserved to be shot at sight, and if they did not die at once, allowed to bleed to death?

The culpability of the Israeli government lies in the fact that they know the answer to this question and go on pretending that they do not. They began, immediately after the tragedy, by asking the Egyptians to supply the answer; and then repeated the request until the Egyptians told them, in effect, to stop bothering them or they would get really angry.

The Israeli government’s culpability is in their suppressing the knowledge that Ras Burka and its aftermath were made possible by the process of injection into the Egyptian people’s consciousness, year after year, almost day after day, of a demonic image of Israel as a state and the Jews as a people; and that the peace treaty did not put a stop to that process.

There is much hatred and contempt for Jews in Islamic literature and doctrine. It was elaborated on and intensified a hundred-fold after the failure of Arab aggression in 1948. An Egyptian government honestly intending to guide its people to regard Israel as a peaceful neighbour would have exerted itself to implement the peace treaty in all its clauses and taken special far-reaching steps to erase all those years of Nazi-like propaganda.

Over and beyond the heinousness of the crime itself, Ras Burka assumes historic importance for its renewed demonstration, now in most gruesome terms, of the truth that Egypt did not and does not intend to fulfill its obligations under the peace treaty (except for the minimal formalities); and it thus exposes the ongoing process of deception of the people of Israel by its own government – about the alleged peaceful intentions of Egypt.

Thus – the peace treaty was shelved, Ras Burka was pigeonholed, and an Israeli team is negotiating with the Egyptians – about Taba, in complete surrender to the demands of Mubarak.

FOR THIS present and ongoing humiliation the Likud members of the government must bear the main burden of blame. At the outset of the Taba dispute Foreign Minister Shamir insisted, correctly, that first the Egyptians should implement the peace treaty. Had he maintained that position, and publicly explained the simple logic, dignity and political wisdom by which it was sustained. Prime Minister Peres and his colleagues would not

have been able to push through their self-abasing compliance with Mubarak's importunate demand for "Taba Now" and "Taba Only."

The Likud leaders were, it is true, subjected to the accusation that by insisting on fulfillment of the peace treaty they were frustrating the "peace process." This charge would have collapsed under the weight of its own stupidity and falsity. Shamir and his colleagues, however, retreated instead of standing up for their viewpoint and principles. They allowed Taba to become the prime subject of discussion with Egypt; and finally became, albeit unwittingly, full partners in the process of downgrading the Ras Burka atrocity – so that it has now taken its place on the shelf with another minor matter – the peace treaty.

THERE IS reason in the Likud leaders' behaviour. They have ever been unwilling to expose the wholesale violations of the peace treaty by Egypt. By doing so they would expose the original hollowness of the treaty – which some of them recognized at the time, and thus the magnitude of Begin's historic blunders – including his own failure to cry "Halt!" when he saw – as he must have seen – that the Egyptians did not mean peace.

*See Letter to the Editor on the following page.*

*Readers Letters – 16 March 1986*

**RAS BURKA**

*To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post*

Sir, – Columnist Shmuel Katz tells it as it is, in his article of February 28 on Ras Burka.

No self-respecting Israeli can visit Egypt as a tourist until this matter is cleared up to the satisfaction of the bereaved families. It is incredible that our government and Knesset have swept the whole matter under the rug and are even sending Minister of Tourism Avraham Sharir to Egypt to promote tourism.

Recent events bear out the grave misgivings many of us have about the “peace” treaty with Egypt for which Israel paid such a steep price.

*STANLEY LEVIN*

Petah Tikva.