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Reagan — More of the Same

In September, 1975, the Israel Government succumbed to the pressures of US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and agreed to a withdrawal whereby Israel gave up control of the strategic Mitla and Gidi passes and her only source of oil — in the Abu Rudeis region — which supplied 60 per cent of her needs.

Kissinger was lavish in his expression of US gratitude for these grievous concessions and, in recompense, even gave written undertakings to Israel. When, in 1978, the time came to supply Israel with F-15 planes in fulfillment of that agreement, the US Government suddenly made a condition. It would not supply the planes to Israel unless Congress agreed that F-15 planes should be supplied also to Saudi Arabia (and F-52s to Egypt). This ultimatum was accompanied by a vigorous public campaign depicting the Saudis as paragons of all the democratic Western virtues.

Nevertheless, it was only by promising that the planes would not be equipped with offensive weapons that the administration overcame, by a small majority, the strong objections of senators to this threat to Israel's security — and to American credibility.

Now, three years later, the new administration proposes to renege on that promise as well, and to equip the Saudi F-15 planes with the previously barred weapons. Saudi Arabia will thereby acquire what experts regard as the most dangerous aerial weapon in the future war against Israel.

This is not the only shock the Reagan Administration has administered its friends in the very first few weeks of its tenure.

Only a fortnight ago its spokesman announced, reasonably, that the administration was studying the issues and that it would take some time to evolve a policy. Yet this was followed within days by a series of policy statements. These revealed that the administration did not recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel; that some of the PLO were not terrorists; and that Israel's establishment of "settlements" hindered the peace process.

The Washington spokesman's statement that the administration was studying the issues was thus not altogether true. It is evident that on these issues, all it has done is simply to repeat some of the Carter Administration's formulations, perhaps without realizing their damaging, even outrageous, implications.

The unsolicited testimonial to unidentified (and, in fact, unidentifiable) elements in the PLO suggests that the Reagan Administration is adapting to the Carter search of seeking ways to "legitimize" contacts with the PLO.

The testimonial itself bears no relation to facts, nor to the underlying truth that even if the PLO as a whole were not what it is — a barbarous terrorist organization (and one, moreover, that is contributing strength and dimension to terrorism all over the world), even if it were not a protege

of the Soviet Union — its only coherent doctrine, enshrined in a hate-filled document of historic mendacity called the Palestinian Covenant, is the destruction of the Jewish State.

No less grotesque, and even more far-reaching in its implications, is the flat statement that Jewish “settlements” hinder the “peace process”. Which peace process? Peace with whom? There is after all no peace process in progress, even formally. This well-worn cliché of the Carter Administration is more significant than its shallow illogic would suggest.

The demand that Israelis refrain from settling in Judea and Samaria and Gaza is merely a function of the demand that Israel simply accept, even without negotiation, the Arabs’ insistence that she give up these territories to them.

Even if the Arabs were benevolent friends of Israel, Israel has a right to hold these areas and to allow and encourage and promote Jewish settlement in them (a fact of which President Reagan has publicly stated he is aware).

That the Arabs reject this idea (to put it mildly) is precisely what the dispute is about. They claim the Jews have no right whatever in Eretz Yisrael. In the name of what logic, what commonsense, what diplomatic practice, what concept of justice, should Israel promote the case of its antagonist, by accepting their central demand?

If the US Administration believes there is a peace process going on and that it must make an immediate statement on the subject, logic and justice would dictate a somewhat different text: “The peace process is being hindered by the endless repetition of the demand that Israelis refrain from settling in Judea and Samaria and Gaza”.

Indeed, it may be salutary to draw the attention of President Reagan and Secretary of State Alexander Haig and their subordinates to some of the salient facts bearing on the subject, which they evidently have not had the time to study. Palestine is the Jewish national homeland; and the Jewish people’s unique connection with this land was in our own time given international recognition, enshrined in the Mandate for Palestine in 1922.

No Arab national entity ever existed in Palestine until Britain, for her own imperialistic reasons — and at the expense of the Jewish people — created “Transjordan” in Eastern Palestine. This became the Kingdom of Jordan, the Palestinian Arab State. The present claims of a *second* Palestinian people were voiced only after the Jewish nation began restoring the land from its centuries of neglect.

But the Arab nation dominating a vast territorial domain (covering 22 sovereign states) finds it intolerable that a non-Arab, non-Moslem state should exist in the heart of what they call the Arab world. This is the origin of the dispute, fuelled by traditional Moslem hatred and contempt for the Jewish people as such.

That is why, when the Jewish leaders in 1947 — in the naive belief that this would appease the Arabs — agreed to set up their state in only a part of Palestine, the Arab nation refused to cooperate.

Believing in their military capacity to destroy Jewish independence in embryo, seven Arab states launched a war for its annihilation. Israel then did not include Judea or Samaria or Gaza. Only at a cost in lives greater for size of population than the total losses suffered by the US in World War II did the fledgling state ward off the Arab attack.

After that war Judea and Samaria (renamed by the Arabs “the West Bank”) and Gaza remained in Arab hands. No Jewish settlements were permitted. It did not bring peace. On the contrary. The tempting vulnerability of the tiny state triggered a further offensive in 1967, for her annihilation. This, too, failed; but this time Judea and Samaria and Gaza remained in Jewish hands. The present demand for Israel’s withdrawal is in fact no more and no less than a demand for the restoration of her pre-1967 vulnerability.

If the members of the new US administration were really to make a study of the issues, they would soon confirm that their recent statements are largely identical with the Arab formulations as disseminated by the Carter Administration. They would also reach the unavoidable conclusion that the consummation of those demands would bring about not only a mortal danger to Israel but a power vacuum in Western Palestine to be filled inevitably by the Soviet sponsors of the PLO. It would deepen inordinately the state of American insecurity in the Middle East; and it would effectively neutralize in favour of the USSR whatever other measures might be taken by Washington to strengthen her posture in the Persian Gulf region.

The most disturbing aspect of the surprising series of statements from Washington is that the new administration is *not* studying the problem in depth. It is apparent that, precisely like the Carter Administration, it is motivated by the over-riding purpose of appeasing Saudi Arabia. If readiness to supply offensive equipment for Saudi F-15s (in addition to vast quantities of other arms) were not enough, we have now been provided with a startling indication of the thinking of Haig when facts are thrust at him.

The Paris *L’Express* recently published an interview with him. He was there confronted with a statement by Saudi Prince Fahd that “only a holy war can resolve the Israeli-Arab conflict. Peace with Israel is only a myth”. To this Mr. Haig replied: “I am confident that Saudi Arabia will continue, as in the past, to play a constructive role”. Period.