

1 July 1983

Rewriting history

U.S. Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Lawrence Eagleburger, recently made a remarkable statement about the late President Anwar Sadat. His first step, that “eventually led him to Jerusalem,” according to Mr. Eagleburger, “was the expulsion of the thousands of Soviet advisers invited into Egypt by his predecessor. Sadat recognized the pernicious linkage between the futile and interminable struggle against Israel and the mortgaging of his country to the Soviet Union. Setting Egypt free and enabling it to tackle its immense internal problems required both disentanglement from the Soviets and peace with Israel.” Mr. Eagleburger then referred to Israel’s “responding with vision and magnanimity to Sadat’s overture.”

How could a senior official in the U.S. Administration perpetrate so demonstrable a falsification of history? After all, the events involved did not happen 1,000 years ago. It is only 11 years since Sadat expelled the Soviet advisers. Sadat himself subsequently boasted (on October 24, 1975) that the expulsion had been a “strategic cover . . . a splendid strategic distraction for going to war.”

His next move was indeed to prepare the Yom Kippur attack on Israel. For this “peace overture,” Israel paid with 3,000 dead (the equivalent of 200,000 in U.S. population terms).

YET EAGLEBURGER’s venture into the re-writing of history may have been useful in making his hearers (members of AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobby in Washington) more wary about another of the statements in his address – on current policy. That statement echoed the new tune startlingly launched by Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger at the American Jewish Committee on May 13.

Weinberger had said: “Leaving all sentiments aside, looking only at our own national interests, it is clear that we in the United States have an important stake in Israel’s security. We have enormous strategic interests in the Middle East.

“Israel has a most effective military force and, because it is a democracy, one of the most stable governments in the region. We know that the Soviets would dearly love control over the Middle East’s resources and chokepoints – but Israel stands determinedly in their way!”

It is no secret that these and other similar declarations from administration spokesmen came on the heels of the breakdown of a series of U.S. assumptions– and the collapse of Washington’s political strategy – based on cooperation by Hussein (and Arafat) and on the dependability and influence of Saudi Arabia. All together proved to be made of cardboard.

The speed, however, of the metamorphosis, from earlier American vilification of Israel to the honeyed words and emphatic assessments of the common interest with Israel, suggests that there has not been a deep and thorough reappraisal of U.S. policy.

On the contrary: in the very speeches in which these friendly statements were uttered, their content was rendered empty of serious political significance.

WHAT SENSE is there in the pronunciation of the importance of Israel’s essential security, and indeed of its sharp relevance to the deterrence of Soviet expansionism in the

Middle East, if it is accompanied by the assurance that the administration continues to promote the “Reagan Plan.”

“One of the great things” about the plan, said Mr. Weinberger, “is that Israel would be able to rely on something better than its military might to preserve its security – and that would be friendly neighbours which recognize Israel and its right to exist forever.”

Mr. Eagleburger, in turn, making his pitch on the Reagan Plan, described it as “the only approach which would both fully protect Israel’s security interests and provide the minimal political elements necessary for an acceptable solution to the Palestinian problem.”

There is no need to mince words. It is the height of cynicism for Washington to proclaim with serious mien an undying commitment to Israel’s security and in the next breath to urge upon Israel the Reagan Plan, a prescription for suicide by degrees. It surely indicates, moreover, a high degree of irresponsibility towards the global interests of the West for U.S. leaders, who claim to perceive Israel’s capacity to stand athwart Soviet expansionism, then to urge upon it a territorial shrinkage which would largely nullify that deterrent capacity, and reduce it to an unrelieved febrile preoccupation with the defence of the bare bones of its existence.

Or, do we have to assume that these American statesmen are simply ignorant (or forgetful) of some of the crucial facts about the “conflict.”

If Mr. Eagleburger did not remember Egypt’s Yom Kippur onslaught, maybe he is also not conscious of the fact that for 19 years (between 1948 and 1967) the eastern Palestinian Kingdom of Jordan was in occupation (illegally, as the result of unprovoked aggression, it is true – but in effective occupation) of Judea and Samaria; and that it lost that possession only because King Hussein wished and tried, in 1967, to deliver the final death-blow to the Israeli within the 1949 Armistice Lines?

Maybe Eagleburger (and Weinberger and the rest) have never pondered the fact that those Armistice Lines (to which, by the Reagan Plan, they would confine Israel) came into existence as the consequence of the earlier war launched upon the infant Israel by all the Arab States with the vociferated purpose of destroying it at birth – within the minuscule territory of the 1947 partition plan – and of wiping out its population?

Nor, presumably, have they pondered the strange fact that if the phenomenon of a “homeless Palestinian people” really existed there was nothing to prevent its being handed Judea and Samaria during those 19 years of Jordanian Arab occupation of these areas.

Have Mr. Eagleburger and the others never, never read the Palestinian Covenant of the PLO, whose central theme is the snuffing out of Israel and the elimination of the majority of its population; and are they not aware that all the Arab states are committed to the objectives of the PLO – which, after all, was fostered and sustained and protected by all of them – and that it is they, indeed, who made possible the dimensions of the PLO scourge?

However, whether the origin of the utterances of U.S. spokesmen is ignorance or cynicism or both, or simply automatic “accommodation” to the will of beautiful Saudi Arabia, Washington has shown little wisdom in ignoring the fact that the Reagan Plan was rejected out of hand by the Israeli Government.

When the Rogers Plan was published in 1969, then prime minister Golda Meir said it would be “treasonous” to accept it; and the Begin government has accurately diagnosed the Reagan Plan as merely the Rogers Plan clothed in the semantics of 1982.

NOW A MOST significant fact emerges: It is perfectly clear that at this moment Washington is interested in relaxed relations with Israel and in a friendly atmosphere all round. One would imagine then that the administration would, for the time being, avoid controversial, let alone crucial, issues.

Yet, it obviously finds it essential to reiterate, on every possible occasion, its determination to pursue the Reagan Plan.

As it is aware of the Israeli government’s unqualified opposition to the plan, the administration’s persistence is serving as notice that it intends, as soon as convenient, to launch a campaign, in conflict with Jerusalem, for Israel to surrender to its demands. It can have no other meaning than a declaration of such hostile intent.

Why should Israel wait until it is convenient for Washington to open such a campaign? The government should act now: launch a diplomatic and information campaign to make plain that no Reagan Plan is going to be carried out. Moreover, now – in the relaxed atmosphere – is the time to press upon the U.S. Administration the urgency of a thorough re-examination of its whole policy in the Middle East – in the light not only of the very large distortion of elementary facts on which the Reagan Plan is based, but of all the famous misconceptions and blunders of recent years throughout the Middle East zone.

There is no doubt that such a campaign in the United States will meet with considerable response; but it should be launched without delay.