

February 11, 1994

SEEK PEACE - BUT DO NOT PURSUE IT

ALMOST imperceptibly, a new motif has crept into pronouncements made by observers friendly to the "peace" process. It has been voiced by among others, Doctor Yosef Burg, a former member of many successive governments. As reported briefly on the radio Tuesday morning, he told a conference of the World Jewish Congress that the government had "moved too fast and given too much." More pointed and more detailed has been the articulation of the motif by a (retired) professional soldier, former head of IDF military intelligence, now a research fellow at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University - Shlomo Gazit.

He has come to the conclusion that the Israeli negotiating team has been committing three sins, arising out of the fact that it is Israel that continually takes the initiative (The Jerusalem Post, February 1). Summing them up, Gazit writes: "From the early days of Oslo, Israel has acted as though it is the side under pressure, as if getting a deal is more important to it than to the Palestinians." He goes on to say that "This is misleading ...

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...Abba Eban in a speech to the UN Assembly after the Six Day War.) No sooner had Israel, in the Six Day War that followed, beaten back all the aggressors, regained Judea, Samaria and Gaza, conquered the Golan Heights and the Sinai Desert, than the government proposed negotiations with those aggressors - and in advance of any negotiations, offered them the captured territories in return for peace.

The Arabs' knee-jerk reaction was to reject the proposal. They must have suspected a trick. Who indeed would expect a nation, the victorious victim in a defensive war, to make such a proposal, one worthy of a nation defeated, helplessly begging for peace? For years thereafter, Israeli leaders pursued King Hussein of Jordan with offers - preceding any negotiations - to give him the greater part of Judea and Samaria (for example in the "Allon Plan") in return for peace.

After a number of rejections, he was approached with a new proposal, as attested by Abba Eban, that he accept the Allon Plan without having to sign a peace treaty. In 1973, Israel won the Yom Kippur War, launched by aggressors Egypt and Syria, but at a horrendous cost in lives. The government did not even persist with a proposal for negotiations with defeated Egypt, but withdrew from occupied Egyptian territory simply at the demand of the US.

(To this day, Egypt commemorates with much pomp a great victory in the "October War.") Then came Begin with his peace plan in 1977. The plan promised Egypt, in advance, 90 percent of Sinai and a plan for Arab autonomy on the "West Bank." The subsequent negotiations were needed only in order to squeeze the final 10 percent of Sinai out of Israel's hands; and to tighten up the details of the autonomy plan, to ensure Israel's ultimate relinquishing of its historic exclusive right to sovereignty in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. The essential pattern of Israeli behavior - for all the differences in detail - has remained constant.

If the nation does not produce a dynamic element to bring about a sea-change in the behavior of its leadership, Israel is in for very hard times in the not too distant future. Paradoxically, Israel's leaders past and present would have done well to take note of the wisdom proffered by Henry Kissinger, 30 years ago, in his book *A World Restored*. Unrelated to Israel or its problems, it is, nevertheless, very relevant: "Those ages which in retrospect seem most peaceful were least in search of peace.

Those whose quest for it seems unending appear least able to achieve tranquillity. Wherever peace - conceived as the avoidance of war - has been the primary objective of a power or a group of powers, the international system has been at the mercy of the most worthless member of the international community."