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Squeezing Israel

THE DOMINANT fact in the life of Israel today, a fact too often blurred or crowded out of the media, is the determined efforts of the United States government – the most publicized effort since the Six Day War – to bring about the reconfinement of the Jewish state to the Armistice Lines of 1949.

In the U.S., it is common knowledge, filtered down from the highest levels, that the administration is hoping for an early change of government in Israel; and it is widely believed that it is trying to actively promote the rise to power of the Labour Alignment.

The massacre in Beirut, in its crude and viciously distorted presentation, is providing a convenient additional weapon with which to bludgeon Israel.

The vigour of its exploitation – by spreading the calumny of Israeli blame – is certainly not a reflection of moral revulsion at the killing of unarmed civilians. After all, neither the U.S. administration nor the media lost their cool over the seven-year reign of terror, including mass killings, that existed in Lebanon until Israel put an end to it. Not to mention the very minor note in reference to the long list of horrors involving millions in the Far East, or in Central Africa.

If it were moral revulsion that moved the U.S. government and media, they would, after all, have been heard and seen throughout the world denouncing the murderers; they would have been heard expressing their distress at the election as Lebanese president of Amin Jemayel, the leader of the Phalangists, whose members carried out the massacre; they would have pressed for immediate apprehension of the culprits, all of whom must be known to the authorities.

In that context, it would have been right and just to censure the Israeli authorities for their grievous blunder in allowing the Phalangists into the camp, and trusting them to behave like officers and gentlemen.

No. What was clearly uppermost in the minds and hearts of the Washington policy-makers and of the U.S. media was that that blunder provided a timely opportunity to add fuel to the flames long being stoked under Israel – to bring about its surrender to the demands of the Arabs.

THE TURMOIL in Israel – and the exploitation of the Beirut tragedy by the Alignment opposition – have given impetus to the unconcealed efforts of the Reagan Administration (launched already during the AWACS debate) to split the Jewish community in the U.S., and to encourage the opposition in Israel in its campaign against the Likud government. These efforts have come in for severe criticism in the U.S.

“One assumes,” wrote Prof. Irving Kristol in the *Wall Street Journal* (September 10) “that our State Department . . . is counting on a response from Israeli public opinion, one that would bring down the Begin administration and replace it with another, more flexible leadership. . . . This kind of gamesmanship on another country’s court is a very tricky affair, and more often than not ends badly.”

The New York Times columnist William Safire attacked Mr. Reagan directly: “What would your reaction be,” he asked (September 13), “if Menachem Begin invited Ted Kennedy to Israel, and in return for Democratic support of Israeli policy, promised to help him oust Ronald Reagan? Outrage, of course. No democracy has the right to

conspire to overturn the electoral decision of a democratic ally. Yet that is what Mr. Reagan has done. He invited the twice-beaten leader of the Labour Party, Shimon Peres, to Washington and made a tacit arrangement: support our Mideast plan and it will be clear to Israeli voters that you, and not the stiff-necked Begin, are the chosen instrument of future American largesse.”

Mr. Peres (in Safire’s words) “leaped at the chance to become the State Department’s best friend in Jerusalem. He was the only Israeli politician with a clear idea beforehand of Secretary Shultz’s proposal to strip Israel of its rights in the West Bank.”

Peres did indeed then deny that he had made a deal with Reagan on his plan, and described the accusation as “false, ugly and unfounded.” Safire, however, persisted (September 16): “The fact is that Mr. Peres, the opposition leader, and not Prime Minister Begin, was consulted in the formulation of the Reagan Mideast decisions; Mr. Peres has since bragged that he hoped his expressed opinion had some influence, which they surely did . . .”

Shimon Peres has allowed himself – also in his public appearances in the U.S. – to stray far from the accepted norms of what is morally permissible in the political struggle. He is the first opposition leader in a democracy to campaign openly abroad against the foreign policy of his own country, to intrude himself into the handling of its diplomacy, and to allow himself to be manipulated into giving advice in effect to a foreign leader on how to contend with the policy of his own democratically elected government.

THERE IS, however, a deeper significance in the fact that Mr. Peres has spoken approvingly of the “Reagan plan.” Many people have seen his remarks as an endorsement of the plan. It is certainly very nearly a complete endorsement. What else indeed does it mean when Mr. Peres says (on ABC television) that “*we found in the president’s position a rather very close approach to our own?*”

A very close approach? To a plan which calls in fact for the surrender of Gaza, of Samaria, of Judea including east Jerusalem? A “very close approach” to the traditional State Department doctrine which denies Israel’s rights beyond the 1949 Armistice Lines? A very close approach to the Rogers Plan – if newly-painted-and-powdered – whose acceptance Labour Prime Minister Golda Meir – in an interview in *The New York Times* on December 23, 1969 – declared (I wrote in error in a previous article that she had made the statement privately) “would be treasonable.”

Has the Labour Party made a drastic change in its policy away from a “territorial compromise” based on the Allon Plan, which it has been promoting incessantly for years and years?

In this case, it is misleading the Israeli public. Or is it misleading the Reagan Administration (to Washington’s certain delight)? For the Alignment’s declared policy of “territorial compromise” is *not* a “rather very close approach” to the Reagan plan. Very far from it.

Many good, innocent people have been persuaded in the past that the territorial compromise suggested by the Labour Alignment is desirable and feasible. They are not necessarily people who read, study and dissect documents. They depend on leaders. They will certainly be deceived by Peres’s endorsement of the Reagan Plan into believing that the Reagan Plan endorses the territorial compromise.

Let it be quite clear: The Reagan Plan, like the Rogers Plan, would not only legitimize the deprivation of the Jewish people of the heart of its historic homeland, not only legitimize the 1948 rape of Western Palestine by Transjordan – it would reduce Israel to the highest degree of vulnerability to an attack on its very life by the combination of Arab states.

THE PRESENT campaign of American pressure encapsulated in the Reagan Plan is in fact only the first act in the developing international design to reduce Israel. It was long foreseen – as the inevitable aftermath of the surrender of Sinai to Egypt. The battle against it will, moreover, have to be waged in unprecedentedly difficult, indeed tragic, circumstances.

All the friends of Israel around the world, Christians as well as Jews, should be alerted to the urgency of their joining in the battle. Indeed, the several thousand Christians now in Israel for their now traditional joyful Succot rally organized by their embassy in Jerusalem, meet at a moment opportune for somber deliberations on the part they – particularly the Americans among them – can and should play in the forthcoming political struggle.

They, like all of us, must moreover open their eyes to the even darker cloud that has been gathering for the last seven years and more; the campaign for the delegitimization of Israel as a nation and a state. This obscene project is reflected by the new wave of anti-Semitism unprecedented since the days of the Nazis, whose central target is now the sovereign State of Israel.

The purpose will surely be defeated but the battle has yet to be waged with steadfastness, and with skill.