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THE MORTAL DANGER OF CAMP DAVID

AFTER the gruesome killing of three soldiers by a group of PLO terrorists last Friday night, Minister of Defense Moshe Arens spoke with studied scorn about Arafat and his organization. There, at the talks in Washington, they were talking of peace; here, they went on killing. He recalled, too, the filthy remarks about Jews in general uttered by Arafat.

Some hours later, Foreign Minister David Levy expressed himself in similar terms: the Palestinian Arabs, he said, wanted the best of both worlds - to talk about peace and to continue with terrorism. This, he declared, was unacceptable. Thus, for the first time, Israeli leaders officially admitted that they were in fact negotiating with the PLO terrorist organization (with whom, as everybody knows, we were never, never, never going to negotiate).

Our ministers' comments on the PLO were quite unfair. The Arabs do want to have the best of both worlds; but it is the government which accorded them that privilege. That the members of the "Palestinian delegation" in Washington were PLO activists and that they represented that organization officially under orders from Arafat were facts known to all.

Yet once the government had maneuvered itself into negotiations with the PLO, its delegation, though spending days on end talking with the PLO delegation in a State Department corridor, never once stated the crucial condition that terror must be stopped. Why, then, from Arafat's point of view, should he voluntarily make such a "concession"? Thus the talks went on, the killing went on, and there was no warrant for snide and supercilious remarks by Israeli leaders. Indeed, the charge of hypocrisy implicitly leveled at the PLO was doubly unjust.

It is simply not true that they are talking - or thinking - of peace. What Israel's spokesmen, blindly parroting the American formulation, call "the peace process," is for the Arabs a process merely leading to Israeli surrender of Judea, Samaria, Gaza and - not to forget - Jerusalem. As for peace, that is a different opera altogether.

The libretto of that opera, too, has never been a secret. The Arabs have spelled it out time and time again. It is to be found in all the newspapers and in radio and television programs, including Egypt's, and in speeches by all Arab leaders.

Last but not least, it is the centerpiece of the PLO's "Palestinian Covenant." Our government, before and at the outset of the negotiations, proclaimed that Israel's policy conformed to the Camp David Agreement and that, in fact, Israeli was "bound" by that agreement. It cannot be repeated too often that this is nonsense: an agreement between two sides is obviously valid if it is ratified by both sides. Egypt was party to the agreement and received Sinai and achieved even the forcible expulsion (by the Israeli government) of the Jewish residents.

The people involved in the terms of the other part of the agreement - relating to Judea, Samaria and the Gaza district - never accepted the agreement at all. The reason was not secret. By its terms, the hoped-for independent "Palestinian state" could come within their grasp only after five years and more of autonomy.

This did not satisfy them. They wanted it instantly. The Camp David Agreement

relating to Judea, Samaria and Gaza became a dead letter until - after 13 years - Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir resurrected it.

SUDDENLY, however, a few weeks ago, Shamir announced that Israel is not bound by "every word" in the agreement. Presumably, then, he is thinking of significant changes, in effect invoking the principle of *rebus sic stantibus*, "circumstances have changed." Indeed, if Shamir is serious, he proposes to offer the Arabs a different agreement. His change of mind has surely come about because he has discovered the mortal danger to the Jewish state enfolded in the agreement.

It certainly stands to reason that a new text will be less to the taste of the Arabs than the old Israel's point of view, then, it is clear that there is no solution that will accommodate the Arabs under the Camp David Agreement - whether original or amended. The circumstances that have changed only serve to emphasize the central blunder in the Camp David Agreement, and to make the need for its correction acute. It was the failure to establish Israeli sovereignty: a plan for autonomy could be encapsulated in that framework.

In 1977, there were only a handful of Jewish communities (founded by a Labor government) in Judea, Samaria and the Jordan Valley. (One of them, Ma'aleh Adumim, has just been accorded the status of a city.) There is no record of what the framers of the Camp David Agreement thought would be the future of those communities. They did not foresee the monstrous solution they would apply in Sinai.

Nor is it apparent that Shamir is seeking a solution for the 120,000 Jews living in Judea, Samaria and Gaza; and their number is growing fast. It seems that he is taking a line that will bring him to a dead end - a kind of special regime of semi-Israeli sovereignty over a patchwork quilt of communities. They would be served by a special police force, and of course protected, when needed, by the Israeli Army.

This would make nonsense of Arab autonomy and would rule out Arab sovereignty. Shamir must surely see now that unless the "Arab solution" is applied - and the Jews driven out - there is no avoiding the declaration of Israeli sovereignty over the whole of Western Palestine. The Arabs could be accorded a generous autonomy, with equality of personal status; and a few kilometers away, across the Jordan, a Palestinian sovereignty exists, not to mention all the other Arab states in the Middle East.

There are stormy days ahead; but that is true whatever the specific developments of the near future. Israel has no alternatives. If this is not clear today, it will be clear tomorrow.