

July 5, 1978

To London — Without Prior Concessions

President Carter's latest statement contains a harsh challenge to the government of Israel. He will be able to judge by its reactions whether its tactical moves are determined by rational criteria and relevant considerations, or whether it can be made to dance to a tune of Washington's choice. Mr. Carter's statement to a group of newspaper editors last Saturday is only an additional move in the Administration's campaign for softening Israel towards submission to the demands of the Arabs.

The significance of his statement and its thrust are clear. Mr. Carter claimed that he does not know — Heaven forbid — the contents of the "peace proposal" which the Egyptians are about to submit to Israel through his mediation. Nevertheless he knows that the Egyptian proposal will not satisfy Israel. For this "blow" he has already prepared an antidote: he will arrange a meeting in London between the Foreign Ministers of Egypt and of Israel in the presence of his own Secretary of State. If they do not find a co-ordinating formula there, then "Back to Geneva!"

This description of an involved diplomatic process is designed to add a touch of novelty to facts which have not changed in the last ten years. As Mr. Carter could have guessed even without seeing their contents, the essence of the Egyptian proposals will be the withdrawal of Israel from "all the territories" as a first and obvious step. Israel's agreement to this proposal will be the condition for Egypt's resumption of the talks.

Israel, Mr. Carter assumes, will not accept this dictate — which he regards as "a step in the right direction". Thereupon the United States will put forward her own compromise proposal "as we have been doing" said Mr. Carter "for years". It can safely be said that the United States will indeed propose a compromise between the Egyptian proposal and the "peace plan" of the Israeli Government. Its essence will be an appeal to the Egyptians not to be obstinate and to agree to accept the concessions already contained in the Israeli "peace plan", and a demand of the Israelis not to be obstinate and to agree to the additional concessions demanded by Egypt. As concessions will be demanded only of Israel the US will ask Egypt to agree to a step-by-step timetable — so that Israel's return to the 1949 Armistice Lines will be completed only at the end of (say) five years.

If Israel does not agree to this generous compromise she will be led off to Geneva. There inevitably she will run the gauntlet between two rows of Arabs. Senator (now Vice-President) Mondale once said to an Israeli friend: "Sadat will come to Geneva and demand Sinai, Assad will ask for the Golan, Hussein the West Bank and Saudi Arabia will demand Jerusalem. So why should you go to Geneva?" He failed to add only that the Arabs will be flanked by their colleagues from Moscow and Washington.

Every Washington proposal is directed at the same unchanging target. It is part of its diplomats' job to divert the attention of the Israeli government and media from this target. Mr. Mondale is personally no doubt a friend of Israel, and when he visits us there is every reason to receive him

with the warmth due to him as a person — beyond his status as Vice-President of the United States. There is also no reason to suspect Mr. Mondale's political colleagues, nor the President himself, of having anything but a friendly attitude to Israel. Their business, however, is politics, and their policy is based on calculations of their own. These calculations derive from a doctrine which, if it is put into practice to its logical conclusion, would threaten Israel with destruction. If the attack on Yom Kippur had been carried out not on the banks of the Suez Canal but on the lines of the 4th of June, 1967 — to which the Arabs and the Americans call upon us to return — that, as Mr. Abba Eban has pointed out, would have been the end of Israel.

The Government of Israel mistakenly believed that even if Egypt did not accept its "peace plan", at least the US would accept it, and take up a position moral and political, in support of Israel — against Egypt and the other Arab States. The head of the American Administration has completely different thoughts. His dominant idea is to satisfy the Saudi Arabians (and the other Arabs); and while he is listening to what the Israeli Prime Minister is saying, he is thinking feverishly as to how these words can be used to promote his, the President's purpose. His spokesmen make this explicit from time to time: "After all you cannot expect us to endanger our most important source of oil".

The Arabs are of course completely aware of this American attitude. They consequently do not intend, nor do they need, to agree to any compromise proposal. They have made this quite clear to Washington.

Every request Sadat makes to the Americans confirms this truth. This being the case, the Americans will also not agree to any substantive compromise. When the present Israeli Opposition leaders were in power they were made painfully aware of this reality — from the days of the Rogers plan down to the unpleasant conversation between President Carter and Prime Minister Rabin in March 1977. The Americans use the word "compromise" in order to add an aura of apparent reasonableness to their attitude: American diplomacy packages the uncompromising stand of the Arabs in colourful wrappings: "compromise proposal", "moderate policy", "a step in the right direction".

Now the President of the United States has laid out the following steps. At every stage Israel will in fact be called upon to give up its position; and the Americans' propaganda will blazon forth the good news that their initiative has created a new opening to peace. In fact the exercise, for all its sophistication, is not intended to bring about peace but merely to secure an Israeli withdrawal. Of course the Americans want peace, and they do hope that somehow the problems will be solved; but first all Israel must withdraw and "then we shall see..."

The Israeli Government should meet this exercise by saying "nothing doing". A game in which the rules are not equal for all the participants is not acceptable. Israel throughout the years has insisted on the principle of direct negotiations without prior conditions; and the Prime Minister worked hard, in the first period of his incumbency, to make it clear that we shall agree to no conditions before negotiations are opened. Negotiations can take place therefore only at a clean table. With the rejection of Israel's peace plan, the concessions it contains are valid no longer.

The object of negotiations now shall be to arrive at conditions for peace, not to determine whether Israel has the right to sit down at the negotiating table with the Egyptian president. Negotiations imply that each side puts forward its proposals according to its own judgment and according to its evaluation of the other side's sincerity — in short, negotiations as conducted among the world's nations, normal negotiations between equals.

Should the government not insist on equality-in-foregoing-prior-conditions-and-concessions, she will be condemning herself and us to a new bout of purposeless suffering.