

October 26, 1984

Truth from Egypt

TWO WEEKS AGO Osama Al-Baz, senior adviser to the President of Egypt, and since Sadat's day a central figure in the formulation of Egyptian foreign policy, asserted in a speech in Amman that Egypt's obligations to the other Arab states took precedence over its obligations to Israel under the peace treaty. Under the Arabs' mutual security pacts Egypt would have to obey the call to go to the aid of any Arab state going to war with Israel.

Al-Baz's assertion means that Egypt's treaty with Israel will bind her to peace only until the Arab states decide that the time has come to resume the shooting war with Israel.

Those people in Israel who were disturbed at the notion that Egypt remained part of the Arab "war-cycle," and who reproached Al-Baz as undermining the peace treaty, do him and Egypt an injustice. It is the peace treaty itself that contains legitimization for nullifying what is usually the central feature of a peace treaty: the promise to maintain peace. The Egyptians never intended to make that promise.

Two months after the signing of the Camp David accords in September 1978 it was officially announced that a peace treaty had been negotiated between Israel and Egypt, and it now only awaited signature. On 28 November Israeli newspapers published the full text. Article VI.5 read:

"Subject to Article 103 of the United Nations Charter, in the event of a conflict between the obligations of the Parties under the present Treaty and any of their other obligations, the obligations under this Treaty will be binding and implemented."

But no signing took place. A treaty was signed only four months later, on 26 March 1979. Signature was delayed for the reason that President Sadat refused to agree to Article VI.5. He insisted that it must be made clear in the treaty that Egypt's previous obligations to the other Arab states remained valid in all circumstances and would *not* be overruled by the treaty with Israel; that Egypt in the future would be as free to go to war with Israel after the treaty was signed as she had been in the past.

Many statements to this effect were made at the time by Sadat and his subordinates. One of them, Minister of State Dr. Butrus Ghali, put in a nutshell the whole of Egyptian thinking on the subject of Israel. Asked (on 6 December 1978) what conceivable set of circumstances would oblige Egypt to go to the aid of an Arab state "attacked by Israel," he replied "Egypt's entry into the war of 1948."

In 1948 Egypt followed the lead of the other Arab states in their onslaught on newly-born Israel designed explicitly to destroy it, population and all. (That war was, in Arab doctrine, an "attack by Israel" because Zionism as such is, in Arab doctrine, an act of aggression.)

When Sadat's demand became known, Prime Minister Begin quite rationally declared that the amendment demanded by Sadat was of course unacceptable; indeed that there could be no negotiations over the "heart" of the treaty. He certainly would not sign a "sham document" that would become "a treaty for war."

But, at the end of March 1979, pressed by President Carter, Begin and his government performed the usual somersault. An "interpretive" Article was added, in the

“Agreed Minutes” to Article VI.5. A notable piece of gobbledegook, it was adequate for Sadat’s purpose. It reads:

“It is agreed by the parties that there is no assertion that the Treaty prevails over other Treaties or agreements or that other Treaties or agreements prevail over this Treaty. The foregoing is not to be construed as contravening the provisions of Article VI.5 of the Treaty. . . .”

Astonishingly, the sequence of these dramatic events that surrounded the signing of the peace treaty, and their far-reaching significance, were ignored completely in the angry official reactions and in the media commentaries that followed Al-Baz’s statement of 8 October. For example, the report in *The Jerusalem Post* (10 October) quotes Article VI.5 as though it were valid – and omits any mention of the “interpretive” addition in the “Agreed Minutes,” which renders Article VI.5 meaningless.

The hoax of the Peace Treaty might have been hidden from sight, or at least mitigated, if, over the years, Egypt had adhered to the treaty. In fact she has ignored or failed to implement or contravened almost all its provisions. Trade, tourism (from Egypt) and cultural relations are all but prohibited by Cairo. In flagrant breach of the treaty, propaganda against Israel (and, at times, against the Jewish people) goes on unabated. Israel continues to be depicted in the media with a viciousness and obscenity reminiscent of the propaganda excesses of the German Nazis. Al-Baz’s insult in Amman was quite mild in comparison.

To African nations Egypt has time and again addressed exhortations not to resume diplomatic relations with Israel. At the U.N. she has supported resolutions which would nullify the Camp David agreement signed by Sadat in favour of even harsher demands on Israel. In official declarations of her own she has stated detailed demands on Israel identical with the “Fez Plan” which spells Israel’s destruction by stages.

Not least – in maps of the area published by Egypt since 1979 Israel already does not exist.

That Egypt has nonetheless maintained its reputation in the U.S. – and elsewhere – as a moderate peace-loving Arab state is in no small measure due to the myopic failure of the Israeli government to expose her abiding long-range design (in common with the other Arab states) for Israel. The Likud government pretended throughout, and has now carried its pretence into the national unity government, that the peace treaty is in tolerably good shape – except for the absence of Cairo’s ambassador from Tel Aviv. Its occasional protests on other breaches have been muted and almost casual. No less effective for Egyptian interests has been the amiable pretence of Labour spokesmen that, somehow, the blame for Cairo’s breaches of the treaty must be laid at the door – of the Likud.

The American administration is consequently able to pursue without restraint its cooperation with Cairo in planning the next phase of the campaign for the reduction of Israel – dubbed the “peace process” by Washington. There apparently it is innocently so regarded.

The American vehicle for that phase is the Reagan Plan whose full consummation would bring Israel back to the 1949 Armistice Lines, give a few metres take a few metres. The plan is not dead. It is in recess. It is after all merely the 1982 edition of established U.S. policy as thought up in the State Department and previously flourished as the Rogers Plan in 1969.

Its immediate terms include a “real freeze” of the “settlements” in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza district, and the cancellation of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem (which would be subject to negotiation). Its ultimate objective is a total Israeli withdrawal “in return” for “total peace” and it makes the derisory proposal that a partial withdrawal by Israel will win her the same partial measure of peace. (Does this mean perhaps shooting “only on weekdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.?”)

The Likud government wisely rejected the plan out of hand – just as the Labour-led government rejected the Rogers Plan in 1969; and that rejection stands, unless and until it is amended. Labour leaders, unctuously declaring that the plan had some “good points,” have kept hope alive in Washington that Israel might be seduced into negotiations on its basis. This hope has been reflected in repeated statements by American spokesmen suggesting that the only obstacle to opening negotiations on the plan is Hussein’s failure to cooperate, implying that Israel will be “manageable.” Most recently they were encouraged in that belief by the reported statement of Mr. Abba Eban that they need not take the Israeli government’s rejection to the plan “too seriously.”

If, as is highly possible, the U.S. President after the election tries to persuade the Prime Minister to bring about acceptance of the Reagan Plan, he should be told in all politeness that this government has no mandate from the people for such reconsideration; that its efforts are now concentrated on pulling the country out of its economic bog; and that only when that has been achieved can the dissolution of the national unity government be envisaged. Then – it will be for the Israeli electorate to decide on its foreign policy, and to whose hands to entrust its execution.