

January 14, 1994

WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD

MOHAMMED Bassiouny, the Egyptian ambassador, told a meeting of Zionist women in Tel Aviv last Monday that he was convinced Israel and Syria would reach a peace agreement in April. He no doubt meant that by then, he expected the Knesset to have agreed to the relinquishment of the Golan and the "transfer" of its Jewish citizens. He explained that there was no reason to fear that Syrian President Hafez Assad would not fulfill his obligations under a peace treaty.

Had he not refrained punctiliously from any infringement of the "Separation of Forces" agreement of 1974? Mr Bassiouny was overlooking the fact that Israeli tanks and planes were stationed 30 miles from Damascus expressly in order to discourage such infringement. He also failed to draw attention to Syria's other front, in Lebanon - where there are no such direct constraints; where, if agreement had meaning, there should be no Syrian troops at all; and where Syria plays a not inconsiderable role in the ongoing hostilities against Israel. The ambassador, as an able exponent of his government's policies, may reasonably be regarded as an expert on the subject of honoring agreements.

Did not president Sadat sign a peace treaty with Israel in 1979? His government concluded some 50 agreements with Israel, covering just about every conceivable item of normal relations between states. Must the story be told once more of Egypt's failure to implement any of those agreements - except for those that could be actively violated? For example, any tourist in Egypt who reads Arabic need only pick up a Cairo newspaper or journal to discover that, where vilification of Jews is concerned, Egypt has nothing to learn from the most vicious publications of the German Nazis, adding only its own twist: vilification of the Jewish State. Thus it honors the ban on hostile propaganda proclaimed in that peace treaty.

There can surely be no illusions about the kind of implementation of obligations that may be expected from Assad, should Israel be foolish enough to sign a peace treaty involving the surrender to him of the Golan. Prime Minister Rabin must know full well that the present stability on Israel's eastern front with Syria rests on its possession of the Golan and the proximity of its armed forces to the Syrian capital. He surely also knows enough about Assad's character, his ambitions - for himself and for Syria - and the history of his aggressions and brutalities, to realize that what Assad has in mind for the Golan would be disastrous for Israel.

The repossession of the Golan would be not an end, but a beginning, the essential first phase of the doom he (like his fellow Arab dictators) has in mind for the State of Israel. It is Rabin who should long ago have told President Clinton that Israel is prepared to make peace with Syria, but requires from Assad the one valid indication of his serious desire for peace: that he stop demanding the return of the Golan - the base of his aggressions against Israel. AS INCREDIBLE as the folly of the government in its proclaimed readiness to hand over all or part of the Golan is the strange behavior of some of the respected and otherwise serious commentators who support that policy.

Regard this strange phenomenon: Last year saw publication of a book by Gen. (res.) Aryeh Shalev entitled Peace and Security on the Golan; last week Dore Gold published

an article in The Jerusalem Post entitled "Knitting a security blanket." Now, if Shalev were to draw the conclusions from all the facts and arguments he presents to his readers; and if Gold in his article were to do the same, then, if there is any logic and rationality left in the world, that conclusion would have to be - inescapably - a rejection of any notion of Israel's leaving the Golan. But what do they do? They start with the assumption that Israel will, or should, give up the Golan, and then describe in detail the pitfalls and changes that must ineluctably drive one to the opposite conclusion.

Of course, they offer a series of speculative solutions to the problems and dangers that would inevitably arise. We hear again of demilitarization, of advanced technology, of the most sophisticated and expensive arms (that the US might or might not supply) and (Shalev's idea) of American soldiers. And Gold, who writes his article in the spirit of a friendly adviser to Rabin, warns him that "alternative models of security will have to be carefully examined in advance as to whether they can realistically be implemented; errors of judgment cannot be fixed at a later time." But that, after all, is the question that must surely be raised about the whole idea of giving up the Golan to Syria.

Why should we even have to consider giving the Golan to Syria? Because president Bush said so? Or President Clinton? All that supporters of the idea can offer is that if we give up the security we now enjoy, we may be able to find some artificial alternative. Let us amputate our healthy leg, and maybe we shall find a suitable crutch. But the supporters looking for a crutch in their diligent strategic analysis ignore the essence even of the physical problem.

Leave aside the surrender of national territory and the inevitable encouragement of the Arabs and others who declare that we are not a nation at all, but merely a community concerned with security. Leave aside the manifest stupidity of giving up the nation's most important topographical asset. Leave aside the disgusting idea of driving the Jewish citizens off their land, and the idea of being protected by foreign soldiers.

Leave aside the trauma of the whole affair. Note only that this whole terrible sacrifice will not bring peace. The Arab nation has changed in these last years: there is renewed belief in Arab hearts that the consummation of their cherished hope of Israel's disappearance may be appearing over the horizon.

Syria is not alone. Egypt and Iraq and Saudi Arabia all share that hope; and what they are seeing is an Israeli government tearing down the nation's defenses with its own hands. They are all waiting for this "peace process" to reach The Day - when their overflowing arsenals can be put to the sacred purpose once invoked by president Nasser of Egypt on the eve of the Six Day War: "Let us finish with Israel." That is the urgent lesson that our people should learn.