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Words Versus Deeds

President Carter may have seen himself merely as a candidate making an election speech when he addressed a U.J.A. conference in Washington on the eve of the New Hampshire primary. As an incumbent, however, he has behind him a record of three years of presidential performance and carries on his shoulders the responsibilities of his remaining months of office. Certainly we, in Israel, who do not vote in US elections, must regard any statement by the president as a reflection of policy. How seriously can Carter's remarks on Monday be taken?

He was, it is true, applauded heartily when he referred to Israel's strategic value and emphasized that aid given to Israel was in America's interest, strategic as well as moral. The applause was undoubtedly sincere.

One must be blind or biased not to see that Israel is an unparalleled strategic asset to the West in the Middle East, and that the friendship between the US and Israel rests on the pillar of their perceived common security interests, in addition to shared conceptions of democracy and civilization. The president thus touched a sensitive chord among his audience.

But there is a yawning gap between Carter's statements and his operative policy towards Israel. If Israel were to conform to the demands he makes on her, the weight of her strategic value to the US and the West would be nullified — not to mention, of course, that her own survival would be imperilled.

On 2 August, 1939, as the German threat to Poland loomed, the British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax reported to the Cabinet that Winston Churchill, then a backbench MP, had called on him and said that "he had no wish to be more Polish than the Poles but he was anxious the Government should not put pressure on the Polish Government to take action which, in their view, would be destructive of their State".

Churchill was thus enunciating a sound axiom of international relations, that a sovereign state has the right to formulate its own doctrine of national security. As Abba Eban once put it: "We shall say to the Americans: 'It's our house that's in danger, and you have to accept our view of our security!'"

Carter did not mention to his UJA audience that he is pressing on Israel a policy designed to realize the ideas of the Brookings Report, long enunciated by his adviser on national security, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Its central proposal is that Israel, shrunken to the 1949 armistice lines, would be accorded guarantees by the United States and, to add to the general joy, perhaps also by the USSR. The doctrine makes plain that its application would so weaken Israel as to make her incapable of defending herself adequately if attacked.

When Israel's former Prime Minister, Golda Meir, was confronted with this proposal, she reacted spontaneously: "What use would guarantees be? By the time you got here we wouldn't be here".

Carter, a democratically elected president, should surely be sensitive to the perception of Israel's national security held by its elected Government. On the essentials of this perception, there is an overwhelming national consensus. These essentials rule out any possibility of a freely-arrived-at Israeli accommodation with the thrust of Carter's policy.

The overwhelming majority of Israelis accept that Israel's life depends on her controlling the central mountain range. The Jordan river as the country's "security boundary" was always a fundamental tenet of the policy of the Labour Party when in office. Even today, when its spokesmen proclaim their faith in a "territorial compromise," they are either vague about specifics or, as in the Allon Plan, their proposed surrender of territory is not only made conditional on a chimerical Arab agreement to demilitarization, but leaves unconditionally in Israel's hands the Jordan Valley and the Etzion bloc.

Carter's reference to Israel's strategic value can mean only that the US interest requires the integrity of Israel's basic security and the rational "strategic reach" in case of need; and fate has so ordained it that these minimal objectives are unattainable, unless Israel retains control of all of western Palestine. Thus, it does not make sense for an American president to extol Israel's strategic value while moving heaven and earth to deprive her of the minimal territorial depth upon which her strategic capacity rests.

There is cold comfort in the thought that the logic displayed in the case of Israel is fully in keeping with that behind the overall policy of the administration and its predecessors in their global confrontation with the Soviet Union. The inanity of that policy was recently admitted by the former Secretary of State Dr. Kissinger.

The gravity of US policy for Israel — and for the Western interest — is magnified by the other side to the doctrine. If Israel is to be squeezed into the 1949 Armistice Lines, the vacuum must be filled.

Carter assured his UJA listeners that he had rejected the idea of an independent Palestinian state. It makes little difference to Israel in the final analysis whether the honour of spearheading the "final" Arab offensive against the emaciated Jewish state is entrusted to a "Palestinian" state or to Jordan. Carter, however, is badly mistaken if he imagines that, with Israel out of Judea and Samaria, it is the President of the US who will decide whether there is to be a Palestinian state or not. All the Arab leaders, who without exception are pledged to the PLO, have asserted that the Palestinians alone shall decide their own future. The prevailing mood in Judea and Samaria and the PLO methods of intimidation leave little doubt as to what that decision will be.

If Israel were to surrender the territory, the Arab states would probably not wish to see the rise of a Palestinian state. But Arafat, on his frequent visits to Moscow, has certainly assured himself of eager Soviet backing.

Carter may thus rest assured that if Israel's locks are shorn as he demands, there will be one western bastion less in the Middle East, and one more Soviet bastion, in the heart of Palestine. Soon after assuming office, President Carter met with Syrian President Hafez Assad, who lectured him on the "Palestinian problem" and explained that Israeli withdrawal from "all the

territories” was only one part of the solution. It had to be followed by the return of the refugees to their homes (in Jaffa, Lod, Ramla *et alia*), the traditional formula for the dismantling of Israel. Carter then publicly described Assad as a “moderate”.

Now, in these last weeks, voices in Washington have been propounding a new reason for Israel to knuckle under. Only then, they say, will Syria, Iraq and the other Arab states cooperate in constructing a counterstrategy to the Soviet threat.

This ingenious nonsense can easily be laughed off. Yet we shall probably soon be hearing the theme developed in a new propaganda campaign, in which the Arabs will cooperate energetically. Israel will be called on, as Sy Kenen put it in a recent number of “Near East Report,” to strengthen the “lifeline” of the US by “surrendering its own lifeline to the PLO”.

Most of the presidential hopefuls have thought it necessary to express their views on the Arab-Israel “dispute”. It is surely not improper to suggest that Americans who are well-informed and sensitive to the profundity of the common interests with Israel should call on the candidates not to content themselves with generalities on friendship and concern for Israel, but to explain how they will deal specifically with the dangers facing Israel and the West from the Soviet thrust and in consequence of past American policy blunders.