

January 27, 1997

A VERY PERNICIOUS PROCESS

In November 1936, months after Adolf Hitler made his first moves toward the subjugation of Europe, British prime minister Stanley Baldwin made a historic confession to parliament. Fellow conservative Winston Churchill had attacked him for failing "to keep his pledge to ensure Britain's air power," an obvious cause of Britain's famous state of unpreparedness. Baldwin did not deny his culpability.

He explained that, prior to the general election, he had found that the dominant mood in the country was very pacifistic. Consequently, he declared, "I asked myself what chance was there that the country would give a mandate for rearmament. Supposing I had gone to the country and said that Germany was rearming and that we must rearm, does anybody think that this pacific democracy would have rallied to that cry at that moment? "I cannot think of anything," Baldwin concluded, "that would have made loss of the election from my point of view more certain." This indeed, writes Churchill in his memoirs, was "appalling frankness.

That a prime minister should avow that he had not done his duty in regard to national safety because he was afraid of losing the election was an incident without parallel in our parliamentary history." So the conservative party won that election; and Neville Chamberlain, Baldwin's successor as conservative leader, led Britain into the appeasement of Hitler, into Munich, and into World War II. And so Binyamin Netanyahu in 1996 won an election he would surely have lost had he told the people what he was going to do as prime minister. The majority that voted Netanyahu into power was moved by the deep-seated belief that the "peace process" was a transparent confidence trick, a process which, if consummated, would lead to an Arab-Israeli war, with Israel reduced to a state of utmost vulnerability.

They refused to ignore the frank, indeed vehement, declarations by Yasser Arafat and other Arab leaders that the national objective - enshrined moreover in the Palestinian National Covenant - was the destruction of the Jewish state and the concomitant dispersal of its Jewish inhabitants. They believed that the conflict with the Arabs was not over border modifications but over possession of the Land of Israel; that surrenders of territory not only weakened Israel strategically but increased the Arabs' confidence that, this time, they would win the war they were planning. Netanyahu's voters refused to ignore the massive armaments undeniably piling up in all the neighboring Arab countries.

No less strong was a widely shared sense of the need to overcome the defeatism that had become a hallmark of Israeli government policy; and of the need to stem the grinding down of the moral fiber of a segment of the Jewish population. In that segment it has become a commonplace that "if we do anything Arafat doesn't like and to which he may respond with terrorism, we must refrain from doing it; we must give in, give up, withdraw, or at least postpone, and wait for the 'right time.'" For all this, and more, Binyamin Netanyahu was voted into power. Symbolically, his first political "act" was to prevent MK Avigdor Kahalani from renewing in the Knesset the resolution for a mandatory requirement of a special majority for ceding national territory.

(That proposal, designed primarily to secure the Golan, was unquestionably supported by an overwhelming majority of the nation, but was defeated by the previous government's mobilizing a narrow majority in the Knesset. They bribed two opposition MKs, Gonen Segev and Alex Goldfarb.) But what of the plea, repeated almost daily, that "signed agreements must be honored," and Israel has signed the Oslo agreement? Sounding so "right" and decent it is, in the

circumstances, wrong and fraudulent. THE essential assumption of a peace negotiation is that both parties aim at achieving peaceful relations.

Sometimes one side can be innocently deceived into believing the pacific purpose of the other. In the case of the present "peace process," nobody has any reason to be deceived. Repeatedly Arafat has made it plain that the concessions he expects to extort under the agreement are intended, by phases, to bring about not peace but the most favorable conditions for jihad.

So deeply and widely committed is Arafat to that purpose that he hasn't dared push through even his pledged formal abrogation of the Palestinian Covenant, whose be- all and end-all is Israel's destruction. Yitzhak Rabin understood the macabre travesty in the existence of the covenant. Before the Oslo negotiations he demanded an undertaking that it be abrogated. In November 1993, Arafat actually wrote out a promise, which he did not keep.

To this day that precondition for negotiations has not been kept. On what grounds, then, does the prime minister continue negotiating? (Let us leave aside the gross violations of the text of the Oslo agreement.) When prime minister Menachem Begin was asked in 1977 whether he would agree to negotiate with Arafat, he replied: "Am I expected to negotiate Israel's suicide?" The history of Zionism and of the State of Israel is replete with unhonored agreements and undertakings. There is no need to recall the historic violation of the mandate granted to Britain for the "reconstitution of the Jewish national home," which ended up in 1939 (precisely when Hitler was on the rampage in Europe) with a policy (the "White Paper") for the establishment of an Arab state with a Jewish minority.

In more recent history: In 1975 Israel was pressed by Washington into giving up the strategic Mitla and Gidi passes in Sinai, and the Abu Rhodeis oil fields. In return, Washington undertook not to negotiate with the PLO without Israel's consent. That undertaking was not honored.

Washington also undertook to furnish Israel with the exclusive acquisition of the forthcoming new aircraft (F15). In 1977 the next (Carter) administration publicly reneged on that undertaking; but under Congressional pressure president Carter agreed to withhold from client Saudi Arabia the plane's important enhanced fuel tanks. Then came the Reagan administration.

It unabashedly restored the fuel tanks for Saudi Arabia, as well as providing it (in the face of fierce protest in the Senate) with the new AWACs spy-plane. The Reagan administration, however, did at least offer an apology, using the argument accepted in international relations to explain and justify not keeping an agreement: *Rebus sic stantibus* (circumstances have changed). Has there ever been a more drastic and deliberate "change of circumstance" than what was intended by the Israeli government at Oslo as negotiation for a peace agreement turning out to be intended by the other side as a vehicle for Israel's destruction?