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### **Cairo's true position**

ARE THERE any rational people in Israel who can still say they honestly believe that Egypt, in signing the peace treaty in 1979, aimed at peace for Israel, at the establishment of normal relations, at the inculcation of mutual respect and understanding in the peoples of the two countries?

Those Israelis (in all the political camps) who have hitherto preferred to ignore the mess of facts and indications to the contrary, are now faced with a question that cannot be ignored. Why do the Egyptians object so strongly to the reported agreement for strategic cooperation between the U.S. and Israel – going so far as to describe it as portending “disaster” for the Arabs?

Why are they sending signals to the other Arab states to join in opposition to the agreement?

They know, just as we do, that the idea of cooperation evolved from the urgent American need to defend its immediate security interest in Lebanon, and that interest (if it can still be defended successfully) cannot be defended without the element of Israel's deterrent capacity. The agreement, whatever the nature of its ultimate application, is naturally intended as one means of influencing Syria towards withdrawal from Lebanon and certainly against trying to resume its domination over the country to which Syria has brought so much suffering and bloodshed.

Thereby the agreement serves as notice to the Soviet Union not to encourage Syria in expansionist ambition – which Cairo knows full well is an instrument in the Soviets' own expansionist design.

Why should Egypt object to such an agreement? Does Cairo want to see Soviet influence in the Middle East strengthened? Or indeed Syrian influence? More pointedly: why are American naval and air exercises reprehensible when held with Israel (as envisaged in the agreement) and constructive and welcome when held with Egypt (as they have twice already been held)?

There is no need to go far afield for an answer. Consummation of the agreement would strengthen not only the position of the United States, but possibly also that of Israel as a stabilizing element in the region. Any strengthening of Israel is anathema to Egypt – as it is to all the Arab states. It tends to undermine their unchanged, unchanging purpose of isolating and weakening Israel. That purpose Egypt has pursued with relentless persistence almost since the day the peace treaty was signed in March 1979 – as though the treaty did not exist.

Again and again in these near-five years the believers – or pretending believers – in the pure motives of the Egyptians have been offered grim reminders that for Egypt the peace treaty was a heaven-sent instrument – initiated by Menachem Begin, not by Anwar Sadat – for Israel's surrender of Sinai; and that surrender brought Egypt one step nearer to the next phase of the projected shrinking of Israel: its withdrawal to the 1949 Armistice Lines. That withdrawal is the essential condition for the future goal, to be sought in cooperation with the other Arab states, of the elimination of the Jewish State from the map.

Those who believe, who indeed still delude themselves, that Egypt intends a living Israel to enjoy peace, should remember Egypt's behaviour – not just the recent past

when Cairo used the “invasion of Lebanon” as the excuse for breaches or non-fulfilment of various operational clauses of the treaty, but all that has happened since Sadat signed the treaty in March 1979: vicious government-controlled media, uninhibited world-wide propaganda, the record at the UN, and even Cairo’s military preparations – all tell the same story – of abuse, denigration, contempt, condemnation and hatred of Israel, not to mention good old-fashioned anti-Semitism.

THE FEROCITY of Egypt’s reaction to the U.S. agreement with Israel has been matched by the apologetic stance of Washington. Donald Rumsfeld – Washington’s special envoy to the Middle East – hastened to “reassure” the Egyptians. How he reassured them has not been published. Significantly, however, his reassurances have not halted the Egyptians’ remonstrances and protests, and their warnings of the dire – though unspecified – consequences that will attend consummation of the agreement. Moreover, Rumsfeld’s visit to Cairo was followed immediately by Cairo’s decision to send Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali to Washington (together with his deputy, Dr. Butros Ghali).

Whatever official explanations may be offered for this sudden visit to the U.S., the central purpose of Washington’s invitation lies elsewhere: Egypt is about to be asked to cooperate in Washington’s campaign to promote the Reagan Plan, which has been brought to life again, in these very days, by the conclusion of the drama in Tripoli.

FATE, in Tripoli, has played into the hands of the Reagan administration. Yasser Arafat’s hopeless position forced upon him (for the second time) the choice between leaving Lebanon or being crushed – this time by his “own” Syrian-backed rebels. Under inter-Arab pressure, the Syrians agreed to permit him to evacuate. In order to leave safely by sea, he needed guarantees against possible interference by Israel. Hence the outrageous proposal submitted to the UN Security Council to hoist the UN flag on the ships carrying 4,000 international terrorists to safety. There, at the Security Council, what should have been unbelievable happened. Obscenity was heaped upon outrage: the proposal was adopted unanimously.

Only a few days earlier the PLO had reaffirmed its role as an organization of indiscriminate murder by blowing up a crowded bus in Jerusalem. Six people – men, women, and two little sisters – were killed in that blast or since have died of their injuries.

In historic irony, some days after the vote at the Security Council, Britain suffered a similar barbaric attack by terrorists. Five people were killed in the car-bomb explosion executed by the Irish Republican Army in central London last Saturday. In the universal cry of horror and revulsion that went up in Britain nobody, from Prime Minister Thatcher downward, recalled that but a few days earlier Britain had supported a resolution at the Security Council giving tacit legitimization to barbaric terrorism.

The U.S., like Britain, not only failed to veto that resolution, but thereafter even exerted itself to ensure that the evacuation of Arafat and his men (so often in the past the beneficiaries of American protection) should not be prevented or delayed by Israeli action.

As the U.S. policy-makers perceived at once, a live and articulate Arafat can at this moment be used to great account by Washington. In the light of the developments of the past fortnight, there can be little doubt that this time Washington has made a deal with

Arafat, probably through the good services of Saudi Arabia. Its content would be approximately: "We shall see to it that you get safely out of Tripoli on condition that you then give your blessing to Hussein's agreeing to negotiate with Israel on the basis of the Reagan Plan."

INSTEAD THEN of waiting until after the Lebanese crisis is "resolved," or indeed until after the 1984 presidential election, Washington may now expect, as soon as a tamed Arafat gets to confer with Hussein (who is already preparing a royal welcome for him in Amman) to be able to announce a great triumph in foreign affairs: Hussein's announcement of his willingness to negotiate with Israel. His conditions will of course be that the basis for the negotiations will be the Reagan Plan and that the U.S. undertakes to secure a freezing of the Jewish presence in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, and that Washington will exert its utmost influence to secure the handing over by Israel of the "territory occupied in 1967." As he has repeatedly been promised all this, he can safely make his announcement.

There is no time to be lost, therefore, from Washington's point of view, in drawing Egypt (which of course embraced the Reagan Plan with enthusiasm from the beginning) into the campaign for its implementation.

The Tripoli chapter should in itself be sufficient to demonstrate to Israel the limited, strictly "Lebanese," scope of the plan for Washington's cooperation with Israel. It demonstrates, moreover, that the policy-makers in Washington neither slumber nor sleep in pursuit of their doctrinal policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict.