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Dumping the ballast

IT IS now being said in Washington that one reason for Professor Eugene Rostow's dismissal by President Ronald Reagan as head of the Arms Control and Development Agency was that he sent uninvited memoranda to the president on subjects outside his domain.

In view of Rostow's background it must be presumed that his interventions related to the Middle East. Be that as it may, the dismissal is at least a further symbolic demonstration of the distance that has been established between the statements and promises Reagan made on the Middle East before his election and the realities of his policy.

Rostow was an outstanding figure among the Democrats who supported the Republican candidate and who, it is fair to say, helped to turn the scales in Reagan's favour. He was an important member of the somewhat heterogeneous team set up by Reagan to plan and conduct his campaign; and he was active in the wing that urged the importance of Israel as an ally and the high desirability of putting an end to the tradition that had developed in Washington of hewing American policy to the Arab line.

It was Eugene Rostow and his group that generated some of Reagan's very friendly references to Israel during the campaign. Reagan's declaration on Jerusalem and on the "settlements" heralded a reversal of the hostilities of the Carter administration. His unequivocal denunciation of the PLO portended that the age of flirting with the terrorists was over; that, on the contrary, his administration meant to fight them with all vigour.

These manifestations certainly helped considerably in attracting a large number of Jewish voters as well as other voters who believe in America's need of a strong Israel.

Certainly, the assurance of such support was a legitimate purpose of Reagan's statements.

It was, as it transpired, their only purpose. On entering office, President Reagan divested himself as rapidly as possible of his "pro-Israel" policy, and his practice was revealed to be as inimical to Israel at least as that of the Carter Administration.

ROSTOW'S DISMISSAL was preceded, some nine months earlier, by the resignation of Dr. Joseph Churba (also from the Arms Control Agency) and, as it happens, also a highly articulate member of the Reagan election campaign team. Churba has since been making plain, from many forums, what he sees as the near-total abandonment of Reagan's pre-election programme over the whole range of foreign and security policy.

Certainly on the subject of the Middle East, the abandonment of that programme was reflected in the exclusion from the administration's decision-making group of any members of the campaign team who had worked for a policy in which Israel would be regarded and treated as an ally. Some protagonists of this view were indeed given appointments, they are to be found dotted over several departments, but all, including Rostow, Churba and UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick at secondary or tertiary levels (Kirkpatrick soon found herself in the invidious position of sitting down with the UN ambassador of the bloodstained Iraqi regime to draft, in a friendly duet, the outrageous resolution of protest at Israel's elimination in June 1981 of the nuclear reactor at Baghdad).

THE FALL back into the Carter system (itself a projection of the salami method for the shrinking of Israel introduced by former secretary of state Henry Kissinger) soon became evident. The administration had hardly warmed its feet in office when it launched the campaign for the supply to Saudi Arabia of AWACS and enhanced equipment for F-15 planes in breach of solemn undertakings given even by Carter to Israel and to Congress.

The campaign ended successfully in a crescendo of denigration of Israel, including a distinctly anti-Semitic counterpoint.

The jettisoning of the rest of the friendly-to-Israel pre-election ballast has gone on apace, accompanied by a tireless campaign, more subtle or less subtle, of anti-Israel propaganda, freed of restraint after Israel in April 1982 had safely delivered all of Sinai, and fuelled to high heat during and since the war in Lebanon.

These, after all, are known facts; and it is doubly nauseating that Israeli leaders and commentators should so persistently pour into Israeli ears the refrain that Reagan is a great friend of Israel. None will doubt that genial Ronald Reagan is well-disposed to Israelis and to the Jewish people, just as, one hopes, he wishes well to all mankind, but the policies of no administration have been more actively hostile to Israel than his.

MIXED, NO DOUBT, are the motives for his present pressures on Israel. He is in deep trouble in his country. Spiraling unemployment, the general economic situation, his severe budget problems, his failure to win Congress for the MX missiles – all spell failure, disillusionment, extreme public unease. As a politician, he is desperately in need of a success somewhere, somehow.

That is the secret of the special importunities he is directing at Israel to hasten, to hurry, to reach an agreement quickly, quickly with Lebanon (by giving in, of course). Again using the services of special U.S. envoy Philip Habib, the administration has pressed Israel to accept the U.S. as an arbiter in the negotiations.

A simple pattern has thus emerged in U.S. tactics. Hitherto, Washington has “coordinated” policy with the Lebanese government. It has reinforced the opponents of an accommodation with Israel (predominantly the Moslem, pro-Syrian elements) and has urged on Amin Jemayel rejection of Israel’s modified requirements for an agreement. The U.S. has been the central factor in hardening the attitude of the Lebanese government.

In the next phase the administration has turned to Israel proposing that now Israel “coordinate” policy with the U.S. Having already got Jemayel to agree to resist specific Israeli proposals, Habib now “coordinates” with Israel by telling the Israelis what proposals have no hope of acceptance by the Lebanese. If Israel does not accept this situation as final, a new chorus of denigration will undoubtedly be let loose – about Israel being “intransigent, always saying no.”

Acceptance of the American demand, of course, destroys the principle of “direct negotiations” – the cornerstone of Israeli political doctrine.

Worse than that, its consummation will undermine the very foundations even of Israel’s essential security requirements in Southern Lebanon. No Israeli early-warning installations in the 45-kilometre zone, the IDF replaced by a UNIFIL force of tried-and-tested inefficiency in keeping terrorists out of the area, abandonment of Major Sa’ad Haddad, a new inane version of the 1978 diktat (after the Litani operation) – all these

demands, of course, are in accord with the requirements of the Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia, Syria and the PLO for prospective renewed action against Israel.

YET THE PRIZE of “success” in Lebanon is intended to be only an appetizer for the greater glory of “bringing peace to the Middle East.” The Reagan administration has become obsessed with the idea that it has been chosen to achieve fulfillment of the policy propounded by former secretary of state William Rogers in 1969.

True, reports from Washington suggest that altogether a mood of insouciance envelopes the president.

An article in the *Wall Street Journal* last week suggests that “a whiff of panic emanates from the Reagan administration . . .” and that “the campaign to force the president to recognize reality borders on the bizarre. Frustrated Republicans say Reagan greets proposals for policy changes with silence, Irish jokes or irrelevant pronouncements that he is glad that everyone agrees on fundamentals. . . .”

It is this mood, no doubt, which induces the belief in the administration that by repackaging the Rogers Plan (whose acceptance then Prime Minister Golda Meir said would be “traitorous”) they could persuade Israel to accept the Reagan plan, which provides for Israel to cancel its sovereignty over Jerusalem and hand over the “West Bank” to the Arabs. The Arabs will at once take control of the land and its resources, establish economic, commercial, social and cultural ties with Jordan, all in preparation for the final status of an “Arab autonomous region in association with Jordan” and expressly isolated from Israel.

This seems incredible, but there it is, with much more, in the “plan.” Israel’s bitter experience dictates that there should be no delay and no ambiguity in delivering the message to Washington and, indeed, to the Jewish community in the Diaspora: the Reagan Plan is an invitation to suicide by degrees and must be fought as such.