

April 3, 1981

Into the Jaws of Catastrophe

The idea that a foreign force stationed in Sinai will serve as a buffer protecting Israel is no more valid than was the idea behind the UN force stationed there in 1957. It will serve as a buffer only until the Egyptians and their allies are ready to attack Israel. It will then evacuate “Egyptian sovereign territory” within 24 hours of being ordered to do so by an Egyptian president. The discussions now in progress about such a force are a bad joke.

It is preposterous and hypocritical to suggest that any valid reason remains for Israel to consummate the remaining territorial terms of the treaty.

An international agreement remains valid only as long as there has been no change in the substantive circumstances prevailing at the time of signature. The maxim is famous: *Rebus sic stantibus*. And circumstances have changed radically, even derisively, since March 1979.

This is not a theoretical rule. It is being used against Israel at this very moment. Indeed, agreement after agreement with Israel has been broken on the ground that “circumstances have changed”. The American undertakings in return for Israel’s sacrifice in 1975 — of vital oil and territory — were flagrantly broken in 1978 when their fulfillment was made conditional on Senate approval of the supply of F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia and F-5 planes to Egypt, because “circumstances had changed”.

The Senate approved that deal after being given an undertaking that the planes would not be fitted with the additional offensive equipment asked for by the Saudis. The US administration is now struggling hard for approval of her intention to break that undertaking as well. The reason: “changed circumstances”.

Has it not been noticed that the very breach of the 1978 undertaking changes the circumstances much more drastically for Israel. Thus equipped, the F-15 planes assume a dramatic five-fold offensive capacity against Israel. Is *Rebus sic stantibus* a valid justification only when it is applied against Israel, to Israel’s disadvantage and mortal danger?

The circumstances affecting the peace treaty with Egypt have changed not only by the algebraic increase in the offensive capacity of all the Arab states, especially of Saudi Arabia and of Iraq, nor only in the dramatic implications of the events in Iran and Afghanistan, but precisely in the fact that the peace treaty itself has been, and is being, flouted by Egypt, and that it has become what the prime minister once described as a “sham” and “a treaty for war”.

Reason and its plain duty to its people dictate that the government halt the so-called peace process, and call for re-negotiation of the treaty. In this context, it is not at all irrelevant that the Americans have no difficulty in suggesting that the treaty be changed — by Israel’s leaving the Sinai airbases intact (and not dismantling them).

Of course, the purpose is to provide airbases for American use. But they will then become Egyptian sovereign property and they will be used by the US only for as long as the Egyptians allow them. This proposal makes nonsense of the idea of a demilitarized zone — which was supposed to be the central safeguard for Israel in leaving Sinai.

At a given moment, chosen by the Egyptians and their allies, one of the most sophisticated airbases in the world will be in Egyptian hands a few kilometres from Eilat, with potentially decisive impact against Israel when war is launched against her.

But what is immediately significant is that nobody bats an eyelid at this proposal for drastic alteration of the peace treaty. It is also not irrelevant to add that the only safe means of ensuring unhindered use of these bases by the Americans is by their remaining in the hands of Israel and not subject to the whims, longevity or pacific intentions of an Arab ruler.

Those who balk at the idea of Israel halting the peace process and demanding renegotiation of the treaty fear the diplomatic battle. On the contrary, she will be so hounded and harassed by the same international coalition to vacate Judea, Samaria and Gaza, and withdraw into the 1949 Armistice lines.

If she is not to countenance a direct attempt at her annihilation within those lines, she will have to make a stand somewhere. The alternative to a diplomatic struggle now is not diplomatic tranquility— and peace — later.

The choice is between a strong stand now and a postponement of war —and a diplomatic defensive later in straitened military circumstances, with an emasculated southern front and the much more credible threat of war if Israel does not submit to the last Arab demand.

This is the issue which should be engaging the government, the message it should be conveying to the nation, in Israel, to the US Government and people — and to the Jews of the world whose own fate is inextricably and even more clearly bound up with Israel's safety and future.