

March 5, 1982

Peace Hoax

President Hosni Mubarak's reluctance to visit Jerusalem is perfectly justified from his point of view. Egypt does not recognize Jerusalem as part of the State of Israel. Why should he cast doubt on that non-recognition? Why incur the criticism of Egypt's Arab sister-states?

It is true that Anwar Sadat did come to Jerusalem, indeed performed one of the most dramatic political acts of the age by doing so — but that was when he had in hand only a promise by Premier Menachem Begin that the whole of Sinai could be his. Sinai was not yet physically in Egypt's possession, and the visit to Jerusalem was a small price to pay for beguiling Israelis into believing that he had the same concept of peace as they had.

That a gullible prime minister jumped to the conclusion that Egypt thereby recognized Jerusalem as the legitimate capital of Israel was also not unhelpful to Sadat's public relations campaign.

Now that phase in the "restoration of the Arab lands" is almost over. Only a few weeks separate us from the date set for the departure of the last Israeli soldier and the expulsion of the last Israeli civilian from the soil cynically proclaimed "holy" by Sadat.

If, as the prime minister has said, Israel prefers Mubarak not to come at all if he will not visit Jerusalem, he could not care less. He is not dying to visit the Jewish state. On the contrary, nothing could now better suit his programme for the reestablishment of public Egyptian relations with the other Arab states than a tiff with Israel over Jerusalem. Egypt is already on the way back into the Arab fold — bearing with her the tremendous prestige and the tremendous strategic gains of Israel's surrender of Sinai — while yet remaining no less committed to the dismantling of Israel than she was before the peace treaty. Maintenance of diplomatic relations and a modicum of commercial and cultural contacts need not disturb Egypt's activity, in concert with the other Arab states in the coming campaign for the next phase of the shrinking of Israel. That campaign has been promised publicly by Mubarak ever since he took office in precisely the terms employed by Arab leaders and spokesmen before the peace treaty. Who can now deny that on April 27 Israel will have attained no greater prospect of peace than it had in September 1977? Who is so blind as not to see that the central consequence of the peace treaty is that it will have been weakened grievously by the loss of Sinai and by the torrents of sophisticated arms pouring into all the Arab states, including Egypt? Who can deny the manifest bankruptcy of Begin's peace policy?

The prime minister has indeed recently manifested signs of a guilty conscience. On the most controversial and most sensitive of his surrenders at Camp David he has been trying to shake off the blame from his shoulders.

It is salutary to recount the story.

In his original peace plan, Begin proposed that the Jewish settlers remain in Sinai under Egyptian sovereignty. Months of subsequent dispute with the Egyptians and Sadat's angry insistence on

Sinai becoming *Judenrein* caused grave concern among the Sinai Jews. Before leaving for Camp David in September 1978, Begin visited the Yamit zone and there made a solemn promise that in no circumstances would he agree to the dismantlement of the settlements. If at Camp David he should be pressed to do so, he said, he would instantly pack his bags and come home.

At Camp David, Sadat did not budge from his stance. Begin subsequently reported to the Knesset that Sadat had said simply that he could not agree. "I shan't be able to go home. I shall not accept. I shan't be able to sign any agreement".

Whereupon Begin did not pack any bags. He signed the agreement; and came back to Jerusalem with the explicit proposal to the Knesset to approve the dismantlement of the settlements.

He told the Knesset: "We could not say no... The Camp David conference would have collapsed. No agreement would have been signed. The Egyptians would have gone back to Cairo, we to Jerusalem, the Americans to Washington". The agreement, of course, would be null and void unless approved by the Knesset.

Not content with this warning, he went on to intimidate the Knesset with the threat of war. The choice before them was "peace or settlements". "It is the duty of a prime minister," he said, "that there shall no longer be war, that there shall be no more slaughter, that there shall be no more bereavement of widows and orphans... I had no choice... There is no other way... no other way".

The Knesset thereupon passed by a large majority, including most of the Alignment opposition, the resolution empowering the government to remove the settlers and relocate them.

No evidence whatsoever was produced, then or later, that anybody at Camp David had threatened the prime minister with war.

Suddenly, nearly three years later, Begin "explained" — in a letter to Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren subsequently published that the Knesset decision to approve the removal of the residents from Sinai was the fault of the Alignment opposition. He, Begin, in putting up the Camp David agreement for Knesset approval, had suggested that there be a separate vote on his proposal to approve the abandonment of the settlements. The Alignment, upon whom the prime minister had impressed the fact that the Camp David agreement would be cancelled if the Knesset did not agree to the dismantlement, opposed a separate vote. Because of their opposition (so Begin claimed), the vote was combined. "Thus we were *forced*," wrote Begin to Goren, "to agree that the Rafiah settlers should be settled elsewhere". What Goren made of this farrago of nonsense has not been recorded.

Now even this monstrous distortion evidently seems inadequate to Begin. With the approach of the final withdrawal from Sinai, the fierce resistance among the settlers themselves — and the growing sense in the country that the "peace" is a dangerous hoax — Begin has blandly produced a new version of the Knesset vote. He told Richard Fairbanks, the new US delegate to the autonomy talks, that in fact he would "not have minded" if the vote in the Knesset had been negative. The only consequence would have been that the negotiations would have been reopened.

He even added that this had been agreed upon at Camp David (*Ha'aretz*, February 21, 1982).

Now the vials of his wrath are being poured out on the main individual victims of his submissiveness to the Americans and the Egyptians — the residents of the Yamit zone. They understand clearly that the sacrifice being forced upon them, and the sacrifice being offered up by the people of Israel, is a vain sacrifice; and that their human tragedy is wrapped in a national tragedy which will have repercussions for generations.

Mubarak's refusal to come to Jerusalem is directly related to the expulsion of the Jewish settlers from Sinai. Until recently, there were signs that Cairo entertained doubts as to the sincerity of the Israel Government's intention of completing the evacuation of Sinai. On the Israel Government's demonstration that it "means business" and is ready to drive the settlers by force from their homes and farms, Cairo put an end to the wordy evasions about the projected visit by Mubarak to Israel.

Mubarak performed his first significant political act towards Israel: he told Jerusalem that he did not intend to visit Jerusalem. A non-visit to Jerusalem by President Mubarak is as much a political act as was the visit paid by President Sadat in 1977.

Mubarak's act is Egypt's signal to the other Arab states that a new era is already opening. What the signal means is: "With Sinai safely behind us, we can now all together concentrate on the means at our power on the struggle for Israeli withdrawal from all the other occupied Arab lands and particularly for the end of Israeli rule in Jerusalem".