

April 16, 1982

Return to Square One

On Thursday of last week, the Egyptian delegation at the conference of “Non-Aligned” nations in Kuwait announced its “plan” for the settlement of the “Palestine problem”. It requires Israel’s total withdrawal from all the territories occupied in 1967, including the dismantling of the “settlements,” and the establishment of a Palestinian state in Gaza, Samaria and Judea, including east Jerusalem. In addition, the “refugees” (the Arabs who abandoned their homes in 1948 so as not to encumber the invading armies of the Arab states) must be allowed to return — with their descendants — to those homes, in Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, Ramla *et al.*

The Kuwait occasion was surely historic. Egypt’s plan was proposed openly to the assembled delegates. This was the first time since Egypt signed the peace treaty with Israel that it has attended, or been welcomed at, an inter-Arab meeting: Egypt is back in the family of Arab peoples. With only two weeks to go before all Sinai is in its hands, there is no longer any need to pretend that it is suffering the terrible deprivations and agonies of isolation from her sister-states — for the sake of peace.

The terms of her plan — effectively the same as that of the Saudi Prince Fahd — will now become the spearhead of the international campaign for the two-stage destruction of the Jewish state.

The report in Davar of the Egyptian plan quaintly described it as “new” — implying that the Egyptians have hitherto concealed their intentions. This description is grossly unfair to the Egyptians. They have published the essentials of their purpose time after time. It is only bemused Israelis who have swallowed and then peddled the myth that the Egyptians — not being really Arabs — were no longer interested in the Arabs’ problems, or in Palestine, or in the Palestinians. They simply wanted to get back “their” Sinai (which, for some unknown reason, the Israelis had taken away from them) and thereafter mind their own business which, as it happens, was in very bad economic shape.

The Egyptians themselves have ensured that they should not be suspected of this deceit. They have insisted throughout that the “Palestinian problem” and the rights of the “Palestinians” are their major concerns. They have never suspended their support and sponsorship of the PLO terrorists; and they have remained wholly identified with the aim of the unification of the Arab world — which involves the elimination of the Jewish state from the map.

At least twice after signing the peace treaty in 1979 they supported UN resolutions approximating to the plan they have now put forward in Kuwait. That was in July and December 1980 — in Anwar Sadat’s lifetime.

When President Hosni Mubarak came to office six months ago, he promised the Egyptian parliament precisely what his emissaries have now affirmed in Kuwait.

All these statements represent a clear recantation of the Camp David Agreement. That agreement, it is true, opened up the prospect of Arab sovereignty in Judea, Samaria and Gaza; but that would become feasible only after the five-year transitional autonomy period and only as an outcome of negotiations.

The Egyptians aim simply at cancelling the “delaying” process. They want an immediate Israeli undertaking of unconditional surrender. Indeed, throughout the autonomy negotiations, the Egyptians have pressed for Israeli agreement to an interpretation of the Camp David Agreement which would effect that cancellation — in fact, a return to the Arab demands as formulated before ever the peace process began.

Now, with Sinai behind them, they may continue with these tactics; or they may simply announce that no agreement on autonomy is possible and therefore they offer their plan for a short-cut solution, with pan-Arab and international support. This way or that, the struggle over Judea and Samaria has begun.

The only real difference to Israel’s security that the peace treaty has wrought, therefore, is that now it is upon an Israel which is shorn of Sinai that the Arabs will direct their pressures and their threats.

The Egyptians themselves have, since the signing of the peace treaty, been reorganizing and increasing their armed strength. In the year before the “peace process” (1976-77) they spent \$2.25 billion on arms in 1981-82, they spent an estimated \$3.5 billion (not including arms acquired but not yet paid for).

Nor are they making any secret of it. Only last month, Mubarak announced that the existence of the peace treaty did not mean that Egypt was reducing its armaments (thus confirming the infinite gullibility of the Israeli negotiators of the peace treaty).

Neither in the lethal purpose towards the Jewish state, therefore, nor in martial preparation, has the peace treaty made any change in the Egyptian attitude to Israel. To add a pathetic footnote to the facts — the government of Israel last Sunday handed the Egyptian Government a protest against breaches of the military provisions of the peace treaty, and against the plan presented at Kuwait as conflicting with the Camp David Agreement.

Surely clear for all to see is the complete bankruptcy of the “peace policy” — and the dire prospect which now awaits Israel.

The events accompanying the expulsion of the Jews from north-western Sinai are charged with indescribable anguish. They are only one expression of the national tragedy that marches with the peace treaty.

Mindless and malicious criticism and denigration have been heaped upon the Jews at Yamit. Yet it is that remnant, straining with their faith and their bare fingers to stop the withdrawal from Sinai, that will be inscribed, in cold political terms, as the saving manifestation of national sanity in this chapter of our history.

Even if the Egyptians had not been so frank about their unchanging purpose, there need never have been any doubt about the implications and consequences of the Camp David Agreement and the peace treaty.

The prime minister, however, dominated by the desire (as Moshe Dayan once described him to the Americans) to be remembered as the man who brought peace, failed to heed the warnings that the Arab-Moslem doctrine would not permit co-existence with an independent Jewish state if there was a fair chance of getting rid of it.

He shut his mind to the knowledge — which he himself had so often disseminated — that surrender of territory, far from advancing peace, and weakening, as it must, the power of Israeli resistance, would only strengthen Arab belief and confidence that Israel could be overrun, even if in stages.

The Alignment opposition, though not responsible for national policy, was morally no less culpable than he. Wedded as they were to the theory of territorial “compromise” — that is, that surrender of territory would bring peace — they had indeed laid down the very minimal territorial requirements compatible with Israeli security: the surrender of almost all of Sinai, but insisting inexorably on retaining the strip between Rafiah and Sharm-el-Sheikh. It is they who planned the great naval base at Sharm and the three new airfields; it was they who called for volunteers to settle and fructify — and fortify — the desert at Yamit. Faced with Begin’s surrender of all of them, they crumpled and fell in line behind him. (Not one of them ever went to Yamit, even to apologize). Only one of their leaders appears to have retained a grasp of reality. According to the minutes (recently published by *Ma’ariv*) of the meeting of the Labour Party leadership before the vote in the Knesset on the Camp David Agreement, Golda Meir said she did not believe that Sadat would have come to Jerusalem if he had not had Sinai in his pocket in advance.

Today, again through sheer factionalism, they *are* participating in a new major act of deceit. They are promoting the Likud’s pretence that it intends to achieve Israeli sovereignty over Judea, Samaria and Gaza. This is cruel nonsense. The prospect of Israeli sovereignty there was thrown away at Camp David, and Begin insists on the sanctity of the Camp David Agreement.

Unless that agreement is abrogated, the danger to Israel is that in any negotiations on Judea, Samaria and Gaza, the Likud government will, under pressure, repeat there the kind of disaster it brought down on Israel in Sinai.