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SALAMI TACTICS

ALMOST 13 years ago, a senior U.S. State Department official, Harold Saunders, came here to persuade the Palestine Arabs to accept the recently-signed Camp David Agreement. He recounted the treatment which had been applied to Israel in negotiating the terms, and he pleaded that if only the Arabs would cooperate the very same treatment could be employed in the negotiations for the implementation of the agreement by Israel.

Saunders demonstrated how Prime Minister Begin had been persuaded to accept single amendments and changes, one after the other, to his original "peace plan" of December 1977 until it had been stretched and bent into the shape desired by the American negotiators. "The art in the process," he said, "is to put the issues in sequence, so that one decision leads to another ... An example of how this works is found in the decision by the Israeli government to remove the settlers from Sinai. A few weeks ago that decision by the Israeli government would not have been possible.

But when the issue became the last remaining issue between Israel and the peace agreement with Egypt, then the Israeli people made the judgment that that issue should be resolved. I think it's possible in dealing with the many complicated issues that concern the Palestinians to see a similar sequence of issues that could be resolved." In short, the salami process ... The Arabs did not cooperate, and once the Israeli residents of Sinai had been forcibly driven out by their new government and the territory handed over to Egypt, that part of the Camp David Agreement relating to Judea, Samaria and Gaza seemed to have lapsed. Well-tried methods of persuasion or coercion, however, are not habitually abandoned by the State Department; and during this past year, the salami process has again been brought into action.

It started in a seemingly remote sphere: Israel's right to self-defense during the Gulf war. Israel did not respond to 39 Iraqi Scud missiles: the government was browbeaten by Washington into self-restraint, thus violating one of its most sanctified traditions - not to call for or allow foreign soldiers to risk their lives in Israel's defense. There were no valid military reasons to justify the U.S. pressure, and Israel could and would have dealt satisfactorily with the Scud threat.

The demand for Israeli self-restraint - with, moreover, its implications for Israel's future relations with its neighbors - was monstrous. Behind that demand, however, lay a motive which, in time, became increasingly transparent. An unpleasant illustration was the double falsehood uttered later by President Bush - that American soldiers had risked their lives "to protect Israel from her worst enemy." Further emphasis was given to that motive a few weeks ago, in Washington's indignant criticism of Israel's having carried out intelligence flights over Iraq.

These overt efforts to undermine Israel's sovereign responsibility for its security are part of a pattern that is emerging - evidently to give meaning to the pretentious idea of a "New World Order" proclaimed by the American leaders. Indeed, a survey of the Bush administration's policies since the Gulf war reveals an outline of what it intends that "order" to be in the Middle East. It suggests an accommodation to Arab power and ambitions and to the Arab dream of cleansing the area of all but Arab Moslem sovereign

entities.

Saddam Hussein, evidently at the urgings of President Bush's coalition partners - Moscow, Riyadh and Cairo - has been left in power, after carrying out the slaughter of thousands of Kurds. Lebanon has been delivered into the hands of Hafez Assad, a step toward the realization of the dream of Greater Syria, and the elimination of the last Christian power-base. Washington has also begun to pressure Israel to hand over the Golan Heights - giving Assad once again strategic domination over the whole of north-eastern Israel.

As for Israel, slice after slice of its resistance to unrelenting American pressure has been cut away. An international conference (though now dubbed regional) originally proposed by Arafat and Gorbachev is taking place. Co-chairman with Bush is the president of (the remains of) the USSR - the most persistent collaborator over the years in the all-Arab onslaught on Israel.

There are two more participants to whom the Israeli government was adamantly opposed as "observers": the European Community, a hotbed of hostility to Israel, and the UN, the most popular forum for anti-Israel diatribes and resolutions. Each of these represents a slice of the salami. Finally, Israel agreed, after months of doubts, to Palestinian representatives from Judea, Samaria and Gaza - on condition that they appear not as a separate entity but in a joint delegation with Jordan.

The U.S. gave a written undertaking to this effect, but manifestly did so with intent to deceive. For when the final arrangements were announced on the eve of the Madrid conference, the Palestinians had been granted the status of a separate delegation, equal to that of the participating states. Not inappropriately, that very day The New York Times published a scorching article on the pervasiveness of untruth in American public life.

"Washington," it opined, "is largely indifferent to truth." The extreme danger into which Israel has maneuvered itself should now surely be obvious to the architects of its policy. Whatever the precise outcome of the Madrid conference, there are a number of urgent lessons that - albeit belatedly - must be learned. The first is that in Washington we are faced by a malevolent administration with far-reaching plans for redrawing the map of the Middle East - according to Arab prescription - which would reduce Israel to a rump mini-state.

Before deciding on the essential new political and economic strategy, the Israel government must rid itself of, and free the minds of the people from, the fatuous and dangerous notion that the U.S. administration is, or can be, an "honest broker."