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SORRY WE TROUBLED YOU, MR. BUSH

IT is surely time that our government, as well as the spokesmen for the American Jewish community, stopped beating about the bush on the subject of the loan guarantees and started facing up to the reality of US policy. Several days ago, Shoshana Cardin, chairwoman of the Presidents' Conference in the US, proclaimed with evident pride that that body had resolved unanimously to oppose linking the loan guarantees to the subject of "settlements" in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. This resolve was no doubt conveyed to the American administration.

Then on Monday, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, addressing the Presidents' Conference at its meeting in Jerusalem, said that he just "cannot understand the connection between the absorption of hundreds of thousands of Jews and the continued development of Yesha [the Hebrew acronym for the three areas]." Last Monday, Secretary of State James Baker gave both Ms. Cardin and Mr. Shamir an effective reply. In a sub-committee of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Congress, he made the most forthright, indeed the most harsh-sounding statement on the issue. Unless Israel ceases all settlement activity - holus bolus, housing and infrastructure alike - the US administration will not grant Israel the loan guarantees.

Period. Baker did not explain literally for Shamir's benefit how the administration arrived at the connection that Shamir just "does not understand"; and it would indeed have been an insult to the intelligence had he tried to concoct some formula of "moral justification." The truth, which both Shamir and Cardin (like her predecessors) have declined to face, is simple and drastic. The issue is not one of tactics.

It is an issue of strategic, potentially historic import. As Israel is presumed to be dependent on these loan guarantees if it is to fulfill its natural and humanitarian purpose of providing a new home and a new life for the Jews of the former Soviet Union, the Bush administration believes that this gives it the whip hand in a longer-range purpose: to help pave the way for the ultimate transfer of Judea, Samaria and Gaza (as well as Jerusalem and the Golan Heights) to its Arab friends. LET it be said once more that this ultimate purpose is not new.

It has been the stated goal (with slight modifications) ever since 1967. What is new is the brutal tone of the pressure on Israel, which has increased in decibels since the Gulf war. It is apparent that at that time, in addition to a \$7 billion gift to Egypt and a maneuver adding power to Syria in an almost dechristianized Lebanon, promises were made to these allies relating to Israel.

They were given to understand that Washington would ensure the withdrawal of Israel back to the "Green Line" of 1949 - that is, the first phase of the Arab dream of dismantling Israel. What has aroused the repeatedly articulated anger of Bush and Baker is the fact that achieving this objective looks increasingly difficult because of the unceasing growth of the already sizable Jewish community in these areas. Therefore, from the administration's point of view: use your leverage in another area (the humanitarian loan guarantees) to achieve the stoppage of development in the "settlements" area.

It is pleasant to know that the Jewish organizations in the US have expressed

their unequivocal opposition to the linkage and to the attempt to dictate policy to Israel. But their effort has failed, as have Israel's own importunities. Indeed, the appeals should never have been made, certainly not after Bush's first "postponement." The Israeli government, as well as the American Jewish community, should long ago have combined as two arms of the worldwide Jewish people to organize the means for funding the great undertaking.

If a friendly nation were prepared to help, well and good. If not - so be it. The American Jewish community, for all its disappointment, does not have to quarrel with the administration.

On the contrary, it should convey a message to President Bush: "Sorry you've been troubled." The Jewish people, both inside and outside Israel, have enough financial strength and economic resources to solve the problem - which is not insuperable. The decision must be to roll up our national sleeves, do the job, put an end to self-invited humiliations of rejection and restore our national self-respect. Imagine what a wealth of satisfaction that will give to all our friends - and they are much more numerous than most people imagine.

It is universally understood that overcoming the immediate financial obstacle by our own effort will place a tremendous economic goal within our reach; and the political dividends may well be of historic import.