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Surrender to Washington

TWO STATEMENTS of deep significance for Israel were published last weekend – one in *Ma'ariv* on Friday by Defence Minister Moshe Arens: the other by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz in Washington.

Arens told interviewer Dov Goldstein that “Israel’s relations with the U.S. are definitely a weighty component” in “the broad range of Israel’s interests – which are examined one-by-one before the decision is taken. But it is definitely not the dominant component. The dominant component is Israel’s relations with Lebanon, the situation in Lebanon and its influence on security in the north.”

The inescapable conclusion to be drawn from this assertion is that in embracing the agreement with Lebanon, Arens and his colleagues had been persuaded that the Lebanese Army possesses the necessary degree of indispensable generalship and efficiency, of determination and resolve, to be given the decisive voice in the day-to-day efforts to prevent PLO infiltration into Southern Lebanon. What revolutionary knowledge then reached the Israeli negotiators after the arrival of Mr. Shultz on the scene to justify so drastic a reversal of their opinion about the Lebanese Army?

It transpired, later in Arens’s interview, that in fact no change had taken place in their view of the Lebanese Army’s capacity. On this question, Arens replied that “there were different evaluations. The Lebanese were the most optimistic. We were the most skeptical and the most realistic. The Americans were in the middle.”

On the issue most crucial to Israel, the most pregnant with danger – the security of northern Israel, the cause of Operation Peace for Galilee – the Israeli negotiators simply abandoned their skepticism and their realism and accepted Shultz’s plan (and, in effect, Lebanese “optimism”).

Presumably trying to mitigate the gravity of such an abandonment, Arens added that “there was no doubt about the desire of the Lebanese to prevent the return of the terrorists.”

So what? The crucial question is not whether the Lebanese have good intentions – but their capacity. After all, throughout the crisis their most notable characteristic has been passivity, failure to act at all (for which Israel has been paying a price in lives).

Arens himself, knowingly or unknowingly, simply demolished his earlier claim that the dominant element in the government’s decision was not its desire to placate the Americans. It was, of course (even if Arens had not obliquely admitted it), blatantly the dominant element – just as in the past firmly held, final and irreversible Israeli government positions have collapsed at the end of disagreements with U.S. negotiators.

THIS GOES FAR to explain Mr. Shultz’s statements, on his return to Washington, reported on Israeli Radio on Saturday. He forecast that in spite of its outright rejection of the Reagan Plan, Israel would yet agree to negotiate with Jordan on the basis of the plan.

Shultz knows that Jerusalem holds that the plan’s consummation would threaten Israel’s very existence. His forecast is, therefore, a grave reflection on the Israeli government’s steadfastness and its sense of responsibility. Whence does he draw his confidence?

First, from his own experiences; his success with Arens and his colleagues over Lebanon. More significantly, he has certainly been briefed by the State Department experts, who have a fat file on how to handle Israeli negotiators. Their experience did not start with the Likud, but with the Labour government. It is stark in its outline.

In 1973, in spite of the disastrous opening of the Yom Kippur War, Israel was on the brink of overwhelming victory and, as then foreign minister Abba Eban asserted, the government was not even thinking of a cease-fire but only of victory. It nevertheless accepted a cease-fire resolution dictated – via Moscow – by U.S. secretary of state Henry Kissinger.

Then it abandoned its proposal (generously put forward in spite of Israel's tremendous advantage in the field) to restore the *status quo ante*, and agreed to withdraw both from the large enclave it held inside Egypt and from the canal – all for good relations with the U.S., which was seeking Egyptian favours.

Several months later, it repeated the performance on the Syrian front. After weeks of resistance to Kissinger's demands, the Golda Meir government caved in, returned to Syria the captured enclave and, for good measure, a slice of the Golan Heights captured in 1967.

Here was manifestly – in both cases – acceptance of the posture of defeat in the field – where Israel had lost 3,000 dead – all for those good relations.

A further price was yet to be paid – in 1975 – by further withdrawal in Sinai. The Rabin government at first refused to hear of surrender of the vital Mitla and Gidi passes and the Abu Rudeis oilfields – but in the end it capitulated, demonstratively as a favour to Washington.

Now came THE TURN OF THE Likud. The allegedly formidable, intransigent Mr. Begin turned out to be formidable and intransigent only temporarily. Throughout the negotiations on the “peace plan,” he finally accepted nearly every American formulation – which he had declared in the process unacceptable, jettisoning cherished and long-proclaimed principles.

At the Camp David conference, which came after nine months of preparatory negotiations with Washington, only an emasculated remnant remained of his original autonomy peace plan. Nor did the agreement contain a hint of Zionist purpose, of the Jewish relationship and right to the Land of Israel; on the contrary, it quashed (if it were to be consummated) any hope of future Israeli sovereignty in Judea and Samaria.

In the negotiations for the subsequent peace treaty, President Anwar Sadat at the last moment demanded the nullification of the clause which would prohibit Egypt from going to war with Israel in fulfillment of previous pacts with the other Arab States. Begin – correctly – proclaimed this would make the treaty a “sham treaty.”

President Jimmy Carter, however, anxious for a foreign policy success, pressed Begin, and an annex satisfying Sadat was introduced into the text.

In Lebanon, in 1981, with the PLO on the brink of a major defeat, Israel agreed to a cease-fire, expressly at Washington's demand.

In fact, it was in response to an appeal by Yasser Arafat, passed on to Washington by Saudi Arabia.

The PLO, given the respite, then reorganized and, with Soviet aid, launched the tremendous build-up which preceded and made necessary Operation Peace for Galilee in 1982.

The series of Israel's self-inflicted diplomatic defeats in the negotiations with the Lebanese government – which was, in fact, sustained and primed by the American “mediators” – are too fresh to require repetition. It is always the same story of withdrawal from “firm” positions.

MOST SYMBOLIC of the government's performance since 1977 was the surrender of Yamit and the villages in Sinai.

What could have been more solemn, more credible, than the prime minister's promise not to evacuate them?

That surrender provided U.S. statesmanship with a most telling guideline. It was cited in 1978 by Harold Saunders (a senior State Department official) as an example. His pithy formula is surely now learned by rote by all his successors.

“The art in this 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 of the Israeli government to remove the settlers from Sinai. A few weeks ago, that decision would not have been possible. But when the issue became the last remaining issue between Israel and a peace agreement with Egypt, then the Israeli people made the judgment that that issue should be resolved. 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.”

Now, in 1983, the price demanded for the next round of improved relations with Washington will be the “freezing” of the settlements.

THERE ARE serious psychological reasons for Israel's repeated defeats in the diplomatic field, more specifically in relations with the U.S. They deserve special examination.

What is more apparent is the “economic” reason; the perceived “dependence” of Israel on the U.S.

One of the central sins of Israeli governments has been their failure to reduce the need for financial assistance from the U.S. Particularly guilty has been the Likud, which promised drastic reforms in economic policy.

It is not true that Israel is “dependent” on the U.S. There exists, in fact, a state of mutuality – but Israel's benefits are immediate and visible, while its contributions are long-term and less tangible.

There exists, however, among many Americans, a conviction of Israeli dependence. What is worse, many Israelis have a *sense* of dependence; worst of all, it is a sense that exists also among Israeli leaders.

But the moral health of the people of Israel requires in any case that they live within their means and that they reduce and finally cease their requests for American handouts.

A drastic change in Israeli economic policy is urgent – along the lines tried by Yigal Hurvitz three years ago – both for that moral health and as a vital corrective to the way Israel has been handling its relations with the U.S.