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### **The Prime Minister is Heading for a Trap**

Defence Minister Ezer Weizman has already managed to recompense the US administration handsomely for the honour accorded him by President Carter in inviting him to a private meeting just a week before the visit of the Prime Minister to Washington. Has such an invitation, and its positive response, ever been heard of in the history of relations between democratic states in our day?

Israel's status in Washington has deteriorated considerably ever since her leaders manifested the policy of subservience (or "co-ordination") to American official "ideas", and the extent of their readiness to bend their declared political principles — beginning (in September 1977) with the grotesque idea of confining settlements in military camps (in Judea and Samaria). This provided the first signal to Washington that it is possible to achieve retreats by this government from the policy of the straight back and common sense.

That is why the sources in the administration quoted in the media do not bother to hide the fact that the invitation to Weizman is an act of recognition of his more pliant attitude towards American demands. It is evident that the administration intends to work through him in order to achieve a "moderation" of the Prime Minister's position on the subjects in dispute between the two governments, and to make him a party to the attempt to bring the Prime Minister closer to complete surrender to the American outlook, that is: to the Arabs' demands.

The Defence Minister was not content with his firm stand against the entry of the Kadash Barnea settlers to their lands, a stand transparently designed to ensure him the warmest possible reception in Washington as the most obedient child among the members of the Israeli government.

No sooner had he arrived in New York than he expressed himself demonstratively (even threatening to resign) against the continuation of the preparatory work at Nebi Salah, where a nucleus of settlers, with official permission, is already in place.

To make assurance doubly sure he exploited the first opportunity — within hours, at a gathering of Israeli emissaries in New York — to lecture the Jewish people. In harsh terms reminiscent of the tone used by Israel's adversaries in the State Department, Mr. Weizman announced that Israel "cannot do everything she would like to do" (for example to settle the land, or to take decisions according to her own judgment). His remarks unquestionably brought joy to all the friends of the Arabs in Washington.

It is however a disturbing fact that his attitude on Jewish settlement is only a sharpened version of the policy that appears to be shaping in the government as a whole. When on the eve of his departure for the US he forbade the Kadash Barnea settlers from taking possession of their land, his edict gained considerable added authority when it was given support by the Prime Minister. It appears that he was thus confirming that the Government's decision last week "not to decide" really meant "to freeze".

It is public knowledge after all that these pioneers have for a full year been preparing to establish themselves on the land, with letters of authorization from the Alignment government and from the Zionist Organization.

No extensive legal training is needed in order to understand that it would have been perfectly logical to ensure that a decision to freeze does not apply to Kadesh Barnea. Letting the settlement at Kadesh Barnea proceed would not have affected in the least the sanctity of the government's decision "to freeze".

Confirmation of the ban — and of the freeze itself — point to an intention, certainly to an inclination. The choice of negatives in the Government's actions and decisions — "to prevent", to "forbid", "not to act" — suggest the adoption of the American point of view that the establishment of settlements are an obstacle to negotiations and an obstacle to the peace process. The announcement of the Defence Minister after he reached Washington from New York (and a similar statement by Deputy Premier Yigael Yadin) that now, officially and formally, new settlements and even the thickening of old ones would be frozen until after the Prime Minister's visit to Washington — are a serious blow to the future of the settlement policy altogether.

Have the members of the "Likud" government suddenly erased from their minds the understanding that acceptance of the argument that the settlements are an obstacle to the peace process, is equivalent to adopting the argument that we are the reason for the absence of peace in Eretz Yisrael, that peace came to an end with the "occupation" of 1967, and that the restoration of peace requires only our departure from "the territories"? After all, we have asserted — and what could be more true, and how heavy is the price in blood forced upon us in learning this truth — that the absence of peace in this country is due not to these or those "territories", or one settlement or another, or to our presence in one part of the country or another, but to the desire and the purpose of the Arabs to liquidate the Jewish State completely. We know, after all, the extent of the tactics being used against us (or has this been forgotten in the corridors of government), how clear is the attempt to lull us into sleepy acquiescence of the proposition that we should make "only" a partial concession, or only a temporary suspension of Zionist activity.

A suspension of settlement, however, even if intended as only "temporary" is burdened with implications very much deeper and more far-reaching.

After all the concession is designed to satisfy the desire of the Arabs — who oppose any Israeli presence. Their opposition is a function of their claim that the country belongs to them. Our settlement is an expression of our ownership of the land. A suspension of our settlement as a result of their opposition inevitably conveys recognition of the legitimacy of their claim, and a weakening, to the same degree, of our claim that the country belongs to the Jewish people. This is an understatement. Any concession, and especially if publicly-declared, on the establishment of settlements, adds strength to the forces working for our eviction from Judea and Samaria. The Prime Minister will now be faced by a concentration of these forces on his visit to Washington. That, after all, is why Carter invited him to come.

The present visit to Washington is in the nature of things altogether a trap — a trap shaped by the government with its own hands. As long as it does not retract the concessions included in its “peace plan”, the talks in Washington will turn exclusively on further concessions. What does President Carter want to achieve now? His purpose is not secret, and it is constant. When he uttered praises in the December talks for the “peace plan” presented him by the Prime Minister, and asserted that it represented a fair basis, it was clear that he meant that he found in it a measure of progress towards the consummation of the American aim. The essence of this purpose is the surrender by Israel of all of Sinai, of Judea and Samaria, of Gaza and the Golan (with minor modifications here and there). Latterly the American outlook has been broadened by a new clause, one that has not been mentioned in the past, not even in the Rogers Plan: the return of refugees. Carter calls it “internal migration”. A paragraph on this subject (it is one of the most dangerous paragraphs) was included in the Prime Minister’s “peace plan”, and Carter regards it as an important step towards the “Arabization” of Judea and Samaria.

The government’s choosing to ignore the fact that neither the Arabs nor the Americans have accepted the plan only makes it easier for them to base their demands on those clauses in the plan which they do accept. The President has thus made up his mind as to how he will use the plan as a jumping-off ground towards his goal. All the threads he needs are in the plan. According to the statements he made to the delegation of Jewish leaders whom he received in the White House on 8 February, he will call on the Prime Minister to make the following changes in the peace plan:

- a) That the plan should not be revised but cancelled at the end of five years.
- b) That at the end of five years a plebiscite should be held among the residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. They will decide, and they alone, whether these areas should be included in the Kingdom of Jordan or in Israel.
- c) That during the five years Israeli army units will be concentrated in camps along the Jordan and near the “Green Line”, but will not be seen in the area as a whole.
- d) During the five years the Commissions consisting of Israeli, Palestinian Arab and Jordanian representatives, will function in regard to two central subjects: preparing the plebiscite and making arrangements for the return of refugees.

Israel will be asked to endorse this programme on the grounds that this will facilitate the continuation of “momentum”. Failure on Israel’s part to accede will reverberate through all the American and Arab channels of propaganda — as further proof that it is Israel that is obstructing the peace process.

The government knows that its peace plan remains in the field only as a scaffolding for the plans of the American administration and of the Arabs. It knows the details (more or less) of the President’s plan. The Prime Minister has accepted the President’s invitation; he is consequently travelling towards the trap with open eyes.