

Israel's "Hasbara Offensive"

About a week before the Camp David summit, the Israeli cabinet held a most unusual meeting. How to handle the public relations problems arising out of a failure at Camp David was the topic. Never before had Israel's highest governing body discussed, before the fact, the public relations implications of an anticipated breakdown in negotiations and issued advance directives for a response.

The cabinet's decision, never made known publicly, was based on the expectation that Israel would either immediately or eventually be blamed by both the Arabs and the Americans when Camp David proved only a temporary reprieve in Egyptian-Israeli relations.

To begin the preemptive information offensive, two high-ranking Israeli officials were instructed to visit the US during Camp David. Zalman Shoval, Chairman of the Knesset's information committee, and Harry Hurwitz, Prime Minister Begin's new adviser on external information, came to America, in the words of Hurwitz, to prepare "a massive *Hasbara* (the Hebrew word for a combination of information and propaganda) campaign" to be spearheaded, of course, by American Jewry.

Hurwitz put forward his views the very week-end of the Camp David discussions before the 81st annual convention of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). It was Hurwitz's inaugural performance before the world's largest Jewish community in his new role, and he appeared to relish the opportunity to preach to his flock. His approach and attitude reveal much of the Begin government's thinking. And consequently his talk that evening deserves special attention.

Beginning with an admonition not to expect any major progress in the peace talks, Hurwitz told his ZOA partisans: "There is no shortcut to

peace. Neither the Panama Canal nor the SALT treaty nor Vietnam or any of the other international disputes were settled in a matter of months or days or weeks or years".

Then Hurwitz unequivocally endorsed the largely discredited Begin "peace plan", saying that "never in 30 years has there been anything as constructive, anything as forthcoming as the peace plan of the government of Menachem Begin". He added, "I urge the Arab world and I urge the leaders of this great United States of America, don't lose this opportunity offered you by the peace plan of the Government of Israel".

This was followed by Hurwitz's pledge that Israel would never budge from the following positions:

1. Israel will never go back to the borders of June 4, 1967.
2. Israel will never accept 'minor modifications'.
3. The Israeli army must stand in Gaza and on the Jordan River.
4. Israel's defence forces will be stationed within Judea and Samaria.
5. The city of Jerusalem will forever be the united capital of Israel" (this point received the loudest applause).

Dealing with the argument that Israel should not talk in terms of history or Jewish rights but only stress security considerations, Hurwitz urged the opposite. "Don't be ashamed, don't be apologetic, don't be afraid", he insisted. "about proclaiming the Jewish people's *inalienable* right to Eretz Yisrael. Don't have an over-emphasis on the exclusive security considerations. This is very important, very necessary, but don't make it the only consideration. Because if we do we may find ourselves in a position one day when those who want to guide Israel will say to us, 'you're worried about security, so we shall

take care of it".

"I believe", Hurwitz continued, "There is a link between security and biblical rights. I believe that the Almighty who has placed us in this corner of the globe was also a brilliant strategist. The borders that he defined provide a natural security for the land which he promised his people. Let us adhere to the primary, elementary right of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael without apology, without compromise, without consideration of embarrassment from any other quarter".

Hurwitz concluded with a double-barreled warning for the US implying that Israel defiance of US policy may be ahead. Hurwitz effusively praised Begin as an unyielding adherent of Jabotinsky, who taught him: "Fight for your ideal and don't bow to the mighty". Then Hurwitz put his American Jewish forces on alert by telling them, "I urge you not to follow opinion but to lead opinion. You may be called upon to engage in a massive *Hasbara* drive after Camp David. If Camp David is successful, then it is possible we and the US together may take the rap from the rejectionist front of the Arabs and from the Soviet Union for a short period of time. If Camp David is not immediately successful and Israel is again unjustly blamed, I say to all of you, including the great US, 'this is not the way. Israel's cause is true and just', and you will explain it", he instructed his followers.

In short, the Begin government speaking through Hurwitz is confident of its ability to withstand not only Arab efforts to win the public opinion war but also any Carter Administration attempt at alliance with the moderate Arab regimes to portray Israel as the barrier to a settlement.

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