

{JUNE 4, 2005}

# THE BOGEYMAN

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**W**hile the new Chief-of-Staff, Air Force general Dan Halutz, was assuming his new job, I stood with a group of demonstrators at the gate of the General Staff building, to protest against his appointment. Our slogan was: “You have blood on your wings!” – a reminder of his remarks when the Air Force dropped a one-ton bomb on a residential area in Gaza, in order to kill Hamas leader Salah Shehadeh. As will be remembered, the bomb also killed 14 uninvolved people, including nine children.

When Halutz was asked at the time what he feels after dropping a bomb, he replied: “A slight bump to the wing.” He added that afterwards he sleeps well. I don’t think that a person who expresses himself like that should be the supreme commander of our army.

That does not mean that his predecessor was much better. But there is a rule: “Every bad office-holder can be replaced by a worse one.”

(That reminds one of the Jewish joke about the mean rich man in the ghetto. When he passed away, nobody could be found to say something good about him, as required by custom. In the end, someone volunteered: “We all know that he was an evil old man, a thief and a miser, but compared to his son he was an angel!”)

Even before he took off his uniform, the dismissed Chief-of-Staff, Moshe (“Bogy”) Yaalon, shot off a salvo of declarations that disclose both his character and his views. In an interview with the right-wing Haaretz journalist, Ari Shavit, he said:

1) “If we don’t give the Palestinians more and more and more, there will be a violent explosion. There is a high probability of a second terrorist war ... Kfar Sava (on the Israeli side of the Green line) will be treated like Sderot. Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem too.” Sderot was a regular target for Qassam missiles.

2) “What will happen after the disengagement? ... Terrorist attacks of all kinds, shooting, bombs, suicide bombers, mortars, Qassam rockets ... You left Gaza? Quiet. You will leave Judea and Samaria? There will be quiet. You will leave Tel-Aviv? There

will be real quiet ... (The Palestinian side) speaks about Safed and Haifa and Tel-Aviv.”

3) “The paradigm of the Two States will not bring about stability. No! ... (The Two-State solution) is not relevant. Not relevant ... (The Palestinian state) will undermine the State of Israel. From there, the confrontation will go on.”

4) “The State of Israel is ready to give the Palestinians an independent Palestinian state, but the Palestinians are not ready to give us an independent Jewish state ... Every agreement you make will be the starting point of the next irredenta. The next conflict. The next war.”

5) “The establishment of a Palestinian state will lead at some stage to war. Such a war can be dangerous to the State of Israel. The idea that it is possible to set up a Palestinian state by 2008 and to achieve stability is disconnected from reality and dangerous ... Bush’s vision is disconnected from reality.”

6) “(So what is the solution?) A much longer process, that will first of all necessitate a revolution of values on the Palestinian side ... I do not see an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in my generation.”

7) “Abu Mazen has not given up the Right of Return ...to come back to the homes, to come back to the villages ...This would mean that there will be no Jewish state ...Even Abu Mazen is not ready to accept a Jewish State here.”

8) “(On Palestinian democracy) This is democracy? This is gangs!”

9) “There is a possibility that the Israeli army will be compelled (after the disengagement) to return to the Gaza Strip.”

The general outlook: “We are a society at war. Our sword must remain unsheathed. Every day it must remain unsheathed ... A society at war. Without illusions. Without the false belief that we shall solve this, one way or another. No, it will not be solved.”

What does that remind one of? This is an almost exact copy of the famous speech made by Moshe Dayan in May 1955 at the grave of Roi Rotenberg. Moshe Yaalon was a toddler at that time. Like the Bourbon monarchy in France, he has forgotten nothing and learned nothing.

One can view this discourse with cynicism. Yaalon is full of resentment against Ariel Sharon and Shaul Mofaz, the two people who pushed him out of office after only three years, instead of giving him the customary fourth year.

Since the withdrawal from Gaza is the baby of Sharon and Mofaz, Yaalon is trying to torpedo it.

But why stop there? One could cynically assert that Yaalon is expressing the views of the army High Command, and the army has no interest in peace. No human organization seeks a situation that will make it superfluous. On the contrary, it yearns for circumstances where it will be needed even more. Therefore, the higher officers’

corps is not really interested in a peaceful solution.

This is confirmed by the fact that after the publication of these remarks, on the day Yaalon left office, he was treated to a huge outpouring of support and affection from his colleagues. Nobody contradicted him, not even anonymously.

However, the cynical approach does not lead to a deeper understanding. This phenomenon goes beyond conscious personal interests.

The army educates for war and thinks only in terms of war. A real general cannot even imagine himself in a state of peace. For many years no important Israeli general (with the honorable exceptions of Amram Mitzna and Ami Ayalon) has made a declaration from which it could be adduced that he really believes in peace.

That is serious for two reasons:

First, because Yaalon represents an elite group that has a huge influence on Israeli society. Through the hundreds of retired generals, the “generals’ party” controls almost all the key political and economic positions in the country, from the government, the cabinet and the political parties to most of the big public and private corporations.

Secondly, because the Chief-of-Staff, the chief of the Mossad and the Chief of the Security Service attend cabinet meetings, and their political evaluations practically dictate the steps of the government. The views of the C-o-S are not a private matter - they have a huge impact on the behavior of the entire state.

For three years, Yaalon was the chief of the Israeli army. During this period, the West Bank has been covered with more than a hundred settlement “outposts”. One of the founders of these outposts testifies in Haim Yavin’s new TV series that all these outposts were put up according to army directives, according to a military plan designed to cut the West Bank into ribbons and thereby prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state. Yaalon’s declarations expose the ideological background of this.

When the Chief-of-Staff believes that peace is impossible, now and in the future, naturally all his advice to the cabinet - advice with the force of directives - is influenced by this belief.

Yaalon’s assertions lead to the conclusion that there is not - and cannot be - a Palestinian partner. In this respect there is total agreement between General Yaalon, General Ehud Barak and General Sharon. Abu Mazen, who is plotting to lead four million Palestinian refugees back to their former homes and villages, certainly is no partner. The conclusion: the disengagement must be unilateral, as decided by Sharon. Another conclusion: There is no place for a political process after the disengagement, since the Palestinians just want “more and more and more”.

Peace? Don’t make Bogy laugh. Or Ehud. Or Arik, either.

For several weeks now Yaalon has been busy with a farewell tour he has organized for himself. He has gone from command-post to command-post, from camp to camp, and everywhere had himself photographed from every angle, always with the helmet on his head, the boots on his feet and the gun at his shoulder. Rather pathetic.

His subordinates and colleagues accorded him the adulation due to one of the great Captains of History, the man who “vanquished terrorism”.

Truth is, of course, that Yaalon was a very small captain. At best, the Israeli army finished the “war” with a draw. It did not find an answer to the mortar shells and the Qassam rockets, it was compelled to accept an unofficial cease-fire it did not want. In a confrontation between a mighty army and small underground organizations, a draw is a big failure for the C-o-S. All in all, he failed like all his predecessors, as his successor will also fail. As all generals around the world have failed in similar situations.

As his last remarks have shown, Yaalon is a rather limited person, with an average intellect and quite primitive views. In his declarations one can find all the stereotypes and all the myths of 120 years of Zionism. There is not a gram of independent thought.

And that may well be the most depressing aspect of the affair.

While in office, the leaders of our army are shielded from all critical appraisal. They are surrounded by a protective shield of spittle-licking “military correspondents” and spokespersons duty-bound to lie. They always appear omniscient, in possession of a superb analytical mind, devoted with head and heart to the security and the future of the state, having no other interest.

When they take off their uniforms and lose the military aura, they reappear as quite different people. Recast as civilians, the former chiefs of the army, the Mossad and the Security Service show themselves as very ordinary people, most of them mediocre, some rather less. Occasionally there was one of serious caliber, but not a few were plain stupid, and perhaps disturbed. It is quite frightening to think that such people led the state and were responsible for matters of life and death.

What is even more frightening is that Yaalon does indeed look like an angel compared to his successor.