

{SEPTEMBER 16 2006}

HELP? PEACEMONGERS!

Guess whose words these are: “Starting this war was a scandal...It was possible to solve the problem of the missiles in South Lebanon by diplomatic means...The offensive of the last two days of the war, in which 33 soldiers were killed after the cease-fire resolution had already been accepted, was a spin of the Prime Minister...The Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense and the Chief-of-Staff must resign...”

Right, it was Gush Shalom.

But that’s not new. What is new is that yesterday, the former Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Ya’alon, repeated these statements, almost word for word.

“Bogie” Ya’alon is the very opposite of Gush Shalom. Nobody could say that he belongs to a “marginal group”. He comes from the very center of the establishment. He is a Rightist. He was responsible for some of the most cruel acts of the occupation.

There is another difference: Gush Shalom spoke out when the events were actually happening, in the midst of the war, when it was still possible to save the lives of those 33 soldiers. At that time, these statements were unpopular in the extreme, bordering on treason. Because no Israeli medium was prepared to publish them, the Gush had to pay for them as advertisements. Now Ya’alon comes and repeats them, after the wind has changed and they have become popular.

Ya’alon’s motives are not important. (As will be remembered, Ariel Sharon removed him from office and replaced him with Dan Halutz a year ago, in order to ease the way for the “Disengagement”). What is important is that the things have now been said by a person with supreme military credentials. When such a person declares that 33 soldiers were sacrificed for no military purpose, for the personal interests of Ehud Olmert, that the war itself was quite unnecessary, and that the problem of Hizbullah’s rockets could have been solved by diplomatic means - these things carry weight.

This is not important only in regard to what happened a few weeks ago, when the leadership spoke of a terrible danger looming on our northern border, but even more so today, when the same leadership is warning of an even more acute “threat” somewhere else.

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In the corridors of power in Jerusalem the cry is going up: “Help! Peace is upon you, Israel!” A terrible enemy is conspiring to impose peace on us. He is advancing against us from two sides, in a giant pincer movement.

One arm of this offensive is the Palestinian Unity Government that is about to be set up.

The other is the decision of the Arab League to revive the Arab Peace Plan.

From the point of view of the Government of Israel, this offensive is far more dangerous than all of Hassan Nasrallah’s rockets put together.

The Palestinian Government of National Unity is designed to solve, first of all, domestic Palestinian problems.

Since the Palestinians elected Hamas, a state of anarchy has prevailed on the Palestinian street. The constant clashes between the President, who is the head of Fatah, and the Prime Minister, who belongs to Hamas, have created a state of paralysis, just when the Palestinian people need unity in the face of existential challenges.

Fatah has dominated the modern Palestinian national movement since its foundation by Yasser Arafat almost 50 years ago. It is not resigned to defeat. But a people fighting for its very existence cannot allow its two main factions to fight against each other, instead of cooperating in the struggle for national liberation.

To this must be added the blockade imposed on the Palestinian Authority by Europe and America, by order of President Bush. This is an unprecedented attempt to literally starve a whole people into removing its democratically elected government.

The National Unity Government is designed to restore public order and to break the international blockade.

For this to happen, the government must circumvent several obstacles. For religious reasons, it is difficult for Hamas to recognize Israel officially. This has nothing to do with anti-Semitism, as alleged, but with the fact that according to Islam, Palestine is a “Waqf” (religious endowment) belonging to Allah (similar to the Jewish fundamentalists’ belief that God has promised us the country, so that giving away any part of it is a mortal sin.) But the Muslim religion opens a back door here by allowing for a long-term “hudnah” (truce) that can last for decades or even centuries.

The way to solve this problem is to get the Unity Government, headed by Hamas, to declare that it is committed to the “prisoners’ document”, the UN resolutions, the agreements signed between Israel and the PLO and the Arab peace plan - all of which are based on the recognition of Israel. That should suffice for anybody who really wants to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace.

As far as our government is concerned, there precisely is the rub.

The second arm of the peace offensive is the renewal of the Arab Peace Plan.

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This plan was originally devised by Abdallah, then the Crown Prince and now the King of Saudi Arabia. It was adopted by the summit meeting of the Arab heads of state in Beirut in March 2002.

This plan says, roughly: the entire Arab world will recognize Israel and make peace with it, if it withdraws to the 1967 borders and makes it possible to establish the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The government of Israel has rejected the initiative, as the Hebrew expression goes, “on the threshold” (every peace initiative is rejected “on the threshold”, so as not to allow it, God forbid, to put a foot in the door.) The plan was consigned to a pigeon hole and has been collecting dust ever since. Now the evil Arabs have decided to dust it off and slap it back on the table.

Against this danger of the Arab peacemongers, the Olmert government is calling up all its forces. In spite of the fact the entire political and military leadership is now busy fighting for its survival after the Lebanon fiasco, it is uniting in the face of this frightening menace.

Tzipi Livni was sent head over heels to the United States, in order to avert the danger. She went to convince President Bush (who happened to “pass” the room when she was talking with Condoleezza Rice and who calls her “Tsiffi”) to use the deadly American veto against any Security Council resolution that might support peace. She is going to meet with some 20 heads of governments and foreign ministers to enlist their support against this menace.

For this, she took down from the Foreign Office attic a diplomatic rag called “the Road Map”. It has never even entered the mind of the Israeli government to carry out this agreement, whose sole purpose was, right from the beginning, to create the impression that President Bush has achieved something in the Middle East. From its inception, all the parties knew that this was a document that cannot be implemented.

Israel and the US will, therefore, declare that the Arab peace plan is damaging peace, because it contradicts the Road Map. The Palestinian unity government, when it is set up, must be boycotted, because it does not explicitly state that all its members recognize the State of Israel (as if all the members of the Israeli government were prepared to recognize the State of Palestine and its government, not to mention foreswearing violence and accepting all the existing agreements.) Therefore, the blockade of the Palestinian population must go on, until it sinks to its knees.

Why does the peace offensive frighten the Israeli government?

If somebody had come to us on June 4, 1967, and told us that the entire Arab world was ready to make peace with us within the borders existing on that day, and that the Palestinian leadership, too, was prepared to declare an end to the historic conflict, we

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would have felt that the Messiah had come.

But on June 5, 1967, we started a war that changed everything. We were soon in control of the whole of Palestine and huge additional territories. We declared that we were holding them temporarily in order to trade them in, but, as is well known, appetite comes with eating. We started to annex territories (East Jerusalem with its surroundings and the Golan Heights), and to cover the West Bank with settlements.

In the eyes of the Israeli leadership, the peace initiative – any peace initiative – is nothing but an evil conspiracy of the peacemongers to rob us of these territories. It would compel us to put an end to the settlement enterprise – which has not stopped for a moment since 1968, and which is even now in full swing – and to dismantle the existing settlements.

The pincer movement of the peacemongers could gather momentum and generate international pressure that would be difficult to withstand. That's the reason for the panic in Jerusalem.

The Arab peace initiative could be successful if it puts in front of the Israeli public the straight and unequivocal choice: peace without the occupied territories – or the occupied territories without peace.

After six major wars and several minor ones, we may be inclined to suspect that the price in blood and money is too heavy, and – more importantly – that it does not bring victory, but multiplies the burdens on Israeli society.

In the six years of folly between the 1967 and the 1973 wars, Moshe Dayan coined the phrase: “Better Sharm al-Sheikh (on the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula) without peace than peace without Sharm al-Sheikh!”

Such slogans cost the lives of some 2700 Israeli soldiers (and who knows how many Egyptians and Syrians) in the Yom Kippur war. Afterwards we returned Sharm al-Sheikh and all of Sinai and got peace with Egypt. Dayan himself played a role in achieving this peace.

How many soldiers and civilians, Israeli and Arab, must die before we finally understand that peace with the Palestinian people and the entire Arab world is immeasurably more important to Israel than trying to hang on to the occupied territories and the settlements?