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Flat-earth syndrome

THERE ARE, or there were until recently, still some people who believe and insist that the earth, far from being spherical (more or less), is flat. There was until recently (and maybe there still is) in existence a Flat Earth Society for promoting the idea.

Israel appears never to have had a Flat Earth Society of its own; but it does have the Labour Party, whose leaders, in fascinating, sleep-walking persistence, pretend that if only they were in power again and thus were enabled officially to propose the Allon Plan to King Hussein, he would come rushing across the Jordan to sign a peace treaty.

That the leaders of the Labour Party (and first of all the late Yigal Allon himself) did, in fact, when they were in power, put the plan to Hussein in face-to-face meetings and were met with instant, outright and derisory rejection by Hussein, have not cooled their voluble dedication to the idea, nor moved them to turn their minds to the existing realities.

After all, if you know for certain that the earth is flat, it is a waste of time to turn your mind to physics or astronomy or other heretical sciences.

THE ALLON PLAN – more precisely the thinking behind the plan – was evidently at the heart of the failure of the talks for a national unity government.

The Labour representatives wished to ensure implementation of the principle that “settlements,” if established at all, should be established only in the area “allocated” in the Allon Plan to the Jewish state: predominantly the strip along the Jordan and the Etzion bloc (not to mention eastern Jerusalem and its environs).

In addition to Allon’s original motive for the plan – his fear of a large Arab minority in the Jewish state – the Labour Party leaders insist that precisely settlement outside these areas, “foreclose options for peace,” or “impede the peace process.”

In airy disregard for the public intelligence, neither Mr. Peres nor his colleagues have taken the trouble to explain which peace they are talking about, and where the “peace process” is to be found.

True, there is a peace treaty with Egypt (that is, a “peace process” that has ostensibly come to a conclusion), but in practice it barely exists.

Not only does one of its clauses (Annex No. 6) legitimize renewed war by Egypt on Israel if Egypt is called upon by one or more of the other Arab states, but almost all of its positive provisions – and the subsequent agreements on specific cooperation flowing from the peace treaty – have not been honoured by the Egyptians. They have kept trade at a derisory minimum.

Tourism is almost entirely one-sided: Israelis visiting Egypt. The difficulties which confront Egyptians who visit Israel are numerous enough to convince them that their government does not approve of their purpose; so they just give up and stay at home.

Anti-Semitic articles and pronouncements abound in the Egyptian media; and anti-Israel propaganda is a commodity peddled daily both in Egypt and at international forums.

Only last week the Egyptian delegation at a professional international conference of lawyers made a great effort to push through a sharply worded political resolution

against Israel. (This is the accepted pattern of behaviour of all the Arab states to use every gathering in the world, whatever its agenda, and its regulations, for anti-Israel propaganda and resolutions.)

All these, of course, are breaches of the peace treaty. To round them out, there has been on Egyptian ambassador in Israel for over a year – not because of any quarrel between the two governments, but as a “protest” against Israel’s Operation Peace for Galilee.

In a word, as far as the Egyptians are concerned, “relations” with Israel are pretty much as they were before the peace treaty – except, of course, that the Israeli presence in Sinai has been obliterated, and every inch of Sinai is in Egyptian hands, including oil resources and reserves and airfields and a naval base built by Israel.

THE EGYPTIANS have long since ceased to pay lip-service even to the Camp David agreement on Gaza and the “West Bank” (as Judea and Samaria were there cosily described).

The Israeli co-signers of that agreement did indeed believe (or pretend to believe) that that agreement was a stage in a “peace process” which would be concluded only after negotiations in some years’ time. Its provisions were disastrous for Israel, but their implementation was to be spread over years.

Egypt, however, has lost no opportunity to reiterate its commitment (as it was committed *before* it signed the Camp David agreements) to the demand for an unconditional withdrawal by Israel to the 1949 Armistice Lines (including, of course, the line running through the heart of Jerusalem).

Indeed, they have in the past year repeatedly identified with the “Reagan Plan,” whose application would ensure the fulfillment of that next phase in the Arab dream in Western Palestine.

The Camp David agreement on Judea, Samaria and Gaza and its “process” have long been dead. As for Jordan and the Arab residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza – they never once showed the slightest interest in joining the process.

There does not exist, even in the bare, formal sense, even in theory, any “peace process.” It is an empty phrase, no doubt useful to the U.S. administration – in that it suggests that Washington is “doing something” for the cause of peace.

Labour Party leaders in Israel know better; and even if they are honestly indulging in wishful thinking – prattle about a peace process is not intelligent or intelligible policy. It remains prattle.

Has it truly slipped their minds that “territorial compromise” has been an option the Arabs could grasp ever since 1947, and that never once in all these years has a single Arab leader ever even hinted that he is prepared to consider it?

Have they even now not learned that the only “peace process” to which Hussein today would – or could possibly – become a party is one which ensures the surrender by Israel of Judea, Samaria and Gaza (a surrender which would have to include east Jerusalem) and which, if consummated, would represent to Hussein and the other Arab leaders merely the comfortable base for the third attempt at a final assault on an attenuated Israel?

The Labour Party leaders are surely not so ignorant or so obtuse as not to know what is in Hussein’s mind (as it is in the minds of all his fellow Arab leaders).

Why else do they hedge their compromise proposal around with such grotesque condition as the retention by Israel of territory along the Jordan, and in the Etzion bloc (not to mention east Jerusalem) in the very heart of what they propose should become sovereign Jordanian territory; and, on top of it, to demilitarize that territory as well?

Surely their insistence on such safeguards (which would give Israel continued military control over all of Western Eretz Yisrael) suggests that they do not trust in peaceable intentions in Hussein's breast.

Yet they appear not to understand that for the very reasons that they seek safeguards, Hussein resolutely rejects their "plan" – as he, from his point of view, must reject it.

Why, then, do they continue to project the "territorial" compromise" as a viable prospect, a feasible plan, a rational basis for possible negotiations?

The question to be asked, however, really is: what would remain to them without this tattered loincloth of a policy?

THERE IS no doubt that if they seriously examine their – and the nation's – situation, they face an acute dilemma. They can return to the world of reality only if they free themselves of the fallacy of their "territorial compromise."

In the real world, they have two alternatives: They can follow the lead of the lunatic fringe on their "left" and produce a formula embracing directly or indirectly the surrender to the Arabs of all the "occupied territory" and a return to the 1949 Armistice Lines. Suicide is always a clear-cut feasible policy.

Or they can face the fact that the Arabs have never given up, and continue to maintain the doctrine of the "unification" of the Arab-Moslem world by the elimination of the Jewish state; that it is not enough for Israel to maintain military control over Western Palestine, that its security requires a massive civilian presence throughout the country.

They might then refrain from merely bewailing the existence of a large Arab minority and devote themselves to constructive promotion of an increased Jewish majority – through encouraging immigration.

They might then proceed to revive some of the other positive values of Zionism which Labour once used to stress, such as the dignity of labour, such as the settlement of Eretz Yisrael. . . .

In short, a proper re-appraisal of national security policy could lead to a salutary refurbishing of the Labour Party, away from its illusions and the barren oppositionism which appear to dominate its present thinking.