

November 22, 2006

OUR STATE OF CONFUSION

The peace-at-any-price brigade is back in business. The morning papers report that Amir Peretz is drawing up a peace plan. The other day it was Tzipi Livni.

The exposure of the deadly delusion that abandoning Jewish territory and clearing it of Jewish presence would open the way to peace with the Arabs seems to have had little effect.

Everything that's happened since disengagement illuminates a great divide within Israel that has existed since the state was established (and even before) between the people who believed the Arabs when they declared that their aim was the destruction of Israel and those who claimed, in spite of three generations of hard evidence to the contrary, that the Arabs only wanted a slice of land in order to make peace - and that consequently Israel should give it to them.

What followed the abandonment of Gaza was of course a new and emphatic vindication of the Right in the genuineness of the Arab threats.

As for the Left, its political creed was torn to pieces. The Arabs reacted to the Gaza operation exactly as the Right had said they would. Kadima, the ragtag-and-bobtail party that Ariel Sharon cobbled together after splitting the Likud, was left without its one defining idea (abandoning Gaza as the road to peace), while the one immediate change for Israel's security was the Kassam rockets being able to reach beyond Sderot into Ashkelon.

Not without irony was the proud boast by one of the Kadima stalwarts, Meir Sheerit, soon after his defection from the Likud. With head held high he declared: 'We have got rid of the kitbags of [Ze'ev] Jabotinsky and Berel Katznelson!' Had he lowered his head and looked down, he would also have realized how naked they had become.

IN THE midst of this confusion, everyone began casting around for some diversion, at least a safety belt. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, conflating his government, added loose-cannon Avigdor Lieberman and his party. Olmert now commands 78 Knesset seats, a motley company unified only by the hope of survival. He also has discovered a cause, to replace our parliamentary democracy by a president independent of parliament. He expects that will enable him to survive. Inevitably this only adds to the general disorientation: We don't know which way we are going.

As for the Left (Peace Now and its allies), a savior from nowhere, a *deus ex machina* (or *mashiach*?) has revealed himself: Bashar Assad, president of Syria. He has chosen a suitable moment. Viewing the disarray in Israel, he announced that he is prepared to make peace. The peaceniks at once jumped at the chance. They know, as we all know, that Assad wants only one thing, the Golan Heights - from which Israel, with Damascus in her sights, successfully guards her northern frontier.

Peace Now was completely discredited by the aftermath of the Gaza giveaway and now fantasizes the great benefits to Israel from giving him the Golan, including Assad's instant abandonment of his patron and ally, Iran.

But the fact that Assad has made this offer in the midst of a national state of confusion and doubt about Israel's future should be taken as an opportunity by Israel - to

demonstrate that it has learned the lesson of the follies of the national policy of her past leaders and intends now to start behaving like a normal people. Instead of laughing at Assad's offer like the joke it is, Israel should proclaim:

Of course we, in our sovereign borders, would like to arrive at peace with Syria. Israel does not demand territory from Syria, and it forgoes territory at Kuneitra which it captured during the Yom Kippur War of October 1973.

The Golan was a part of the Palestine Mandate of 1922 and, as part of the sovereign territory of Israel, is not negotiable. All anti-Israel terror groups must be expelled from Syrian territory. In negotiating peace, which can bring great benefits - economic and cultural to Syria - in order that we meet on equal terms we naturally require that Syria cease all propaganda against Israel's existence and stop the defamation of Jews in Syrian schoolbooks.

The State of Israel must be located in its proper place on Syrian maps of the Middle East. Israel can, of course, expect reparations, even if only symbolic, in view of Syria's long history of repeated and unprovoked aggression against the Jewish state. However, we shall not make it a burden to the Syrian economy.

Thenceforth the negotiations for peace could start at once.

IMPOSSIBLE TO achieve? Certainly by the present government. But our people must at last and at least demonstrate that it is rethinking itself, that it does not intend any longer to be the patsy of foreign interests and the daydreams of ignorant do-gooders, that it is no longer prepared to concede any of its rights, and precisely the rights to define its own identity, including its territorial rights under international law.

Moreover, in regard to Syria, there is every reason for Israel to adhere to the principle laid down by Winston Churchill, prime minister of the United Kingdom, during World War II. On February 22, 1944, Churchill made this statement in Parliament: 'Twice in our lifetime Russia has been violently assaulted by Germany. Many millions of Russians have been slain and vast tracts of Russian soil devastated as the result of repeated German aggression. Russia has the right of reassurance against future attacks from the West, and we are going all the way with her to see that she gets it.'

This of course is not a new principle. It is only that in Israel too many people have forgotten it and feel more comfortable trying to appease our enemies and attackers. No less important: There are signs that the leaders in the West are beginning to decipher the message contained in the threat from Iran - that Israel is a forward bastion in the global confrontation.

They must see that Israel should be helped to remain strong and not be coaxed or pressed or coerced to make concessions which it regards as dangerous to its existence and, by extension, to the security interests of the West.