

## A Fantasy

I ADMIRE Prof. John Mearsheimer. His rigorous logic. His lucid presentation. His rare moral courage.

I was very honored to host him and his colleague, Prof. Stephen Walt, in Tel Aviv, after their book about the Israel lobby in the US provoked a furor.

And I don't agree with his conclusions.

A FEW days ago, Prof. Mearsheimer delivered an impressive lecture in Washington DC. He presented a profound analysis of the chances of Israel surviving in the long term. Every Israeli who is concerned about the future of his state should grapple with this analysis.

The professor himself sums up his conclusions as follows:

"Contrary to the wishes of the Obama administration and most Americans – to include many American Jews – Israel is not going to allow the Palestinians to have a viable state of their own in Gaza and the West Bank. Regrettably, the two-state solution is now a fantasy. Instead, those territories will be incorporated into a "Greater Israel," which will be an apartheid state bearing a marked resemblance to white-ruled South Africa. Nevertheless, a Jewish apartheid state is not politically viable over the long term. In the end, it will become a democratic bi-national state, whose politics will be dominated by its Palestinian citizens. In other words, it will cease being a Jewish state, which will mean the end of the Zionist dream."

WHY DOES the professor believe that the two-state solution has become a fantasy? Because, in his opinion, most Israelis are not ready to make the "sacrifices" necessary for its implementation. The 480 thousand settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem have immense power. Many of them will offer armed resistance to any solution. Binyamin Netanyahu is not prepared to accept a Palestinian state. The Israeli public has shifted sharply to the right. No effective pro-peace party exists in Israel now. No leader of stature, who would be able to remove the settlers, can be seen. And most importantly: "Zionism's core beliefs are deeply hostile to the very notion of a Palestinian state."

No salvation will come from Barack Obama. The immensely powerful pro-Israel lobby will crush any attempt of his to exert pressure on Israel. Obama has already capitulated to Netanyahu, and he will continue to do so in the future.

The professor does not hide his opinion that the two-state solution is by far the best. But he believes that it is "dead". Greater Israel, ruling over all the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, already exists. It is an apartheid state that will steadily become more consolidated and more brutal – until its collapse.

THIS IS a frightening prognosis. It is also very logical. If current developments continue in a straight line, this is exactly what will happen.

But I do not believe in straight lines. There are very few straight lines in nature, and there are no straight lines in the life of nations and states.

In the 86 years of my life, innumerable unforeseen things have happened, and innumerable expected things have not come about. The fate of nations is governed by unexpected factors. They are shaped by human beings, who are by nature unpredictable creatures.

Who foresaw in 1928 that Adolf Hitler would come to power in Germany? Who in 1941 foresaw that the Red Army would stop the invincible Wehrmacht? Who in 1939 foresaw the Holocaust? Who in 1945 foresaw the creation of the State of Israel? Who in 1989 foresaw the collapse of the Soviet Union? Who foresaw, the day before it happened, the fall of the Berlin wall? Who foresaw the Khomeini revolution? Who foresaw the election of a black US president?

Of course, one cannot build plans on the unexpected. But it should be taken into account. It is irrational to discount the irrational.

I do not accept the professor's judgment that "most Israelis are opposed to making the sacrifices that would be necessary to create a viable Palestinian state." As an Israeli living and fighting in Israel, I am convinced that the great majority of Israelis are ready to accept the necessary conditions, which are well-known to all: a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem, the 1967 borders with minimal land swaps, a mutually acceptable solution for the refugee problem.

The real problem is that most Israelis do not believe that peace is possible. Dozens of years of propaganda have convinced them that "we have no partner for peace". Events on the ground (as seen through Israeli eyes) have confirmed this view. If this perception is dissolved, everything is possible.

In this, President Obama could play a big role. I believe that this is his real mission: to prove that it is possible. That there is a partner out there. That there is a guarantee for the security of Israel. And – yes – that the alternative is frightening.

CAN THE settlements be removed? Will there ever be an Israeli government that will have the guts to do so? Where is the leader who will undertake this Herculean task?

The professor is right that "there is nobody with that kind of standing in Israeli politics today." And that "there is no sizable pro-peace party or movement."

Yet history shows that exceptional leaders often appear when they are needed. I have seen in my own lifetime a failed and generally detested politician called Winston Churchill become a national hero. And a reactionary general called Charles de Gaulle liberate Algeria. And a grey communist apparatchik called Mikhail Gorbachev dismantle a huge empire without a drop of blood being shed. And the election of a guy called Barack Obama.

I have also seen a brutal general called Ariel Sharon, the father of the settlements, destroying a series of settlements. His intentions may be debatable, but the facts cannot be disputed: he challenged the settlers' movement – which Prof. Mearsheimer describes in all its fearful menace – and won easily. In face of the total opposition of the settlers and their allies, he evacuated some twenty settlements in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Not a single military unit mutinied. Not a single person was killed or seriously injured.

Sure, there is a quantitative and qualitative difference between Sharon's "separation" and that task in front of us. But it is a big mistake to view the "settlers" as a monolithic structure. They are split into several different sectors – the inhabitants of the East Jerusalem neighborhoods do not resemble the West Bank settlers, the buyers of cheap apartments in Ariel and Ma'aleh-Adumim do not resemble the zealots of Yitzhar and Tapuach, the Orthodox in Modi'in-Ilit and Immanuel do not resemble the "Youth of the Hills".

If a peace agreement is achieved, it will be necessary to approach the evacuation job with determination, but also with finesse. For the inhabitants of the East Jerusalem neighborhoods, a solution will be found in the framework of the agreement about Jerusalem. A large number of settlers near the Green Line will remain where they are in the framework of a fair exchange of territory. Another large part will return home, if they know that apartments are ready and waiting for them in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. For some of them there may be a possibility to find an accommodation with the Palestinian government. In the end, the hard core of Messianic settlers will not give up easily. They may use arms. But a strong leader will stand the test, if the great majority of the Israeli public support the peace agreement.

THE TWO-STATE solution is not the best solution. It is the only solution.

The alternative is not a democratic, secular bi-national state, because such a state will not come into being. Neither people wants it.

As the professor rightly maintains, in the absence of peace, Israel will rule from the sea to the river. The present situation will go on and become worse: the sovereign State of Israel holding on to the occupied territories.

Except for a tiny group of dreamers, who can be gathered in a medium-sized room, there are no Israelis who dream of living in a bi-national state, in which the Arabs constitute the majority. If such a state came into being, Israeli Jews would just emigrate. But it is much more plausible that the reverse would happen: the Palestinians would emigrate long before that.

Ethnic cleansing does not have to take the form of a dramatic expulsion, as in 1948. It can take place quietly, in a creeping process, when more and more Palestinians simply give up. That is the great dream of the settlers and their partners: to make life for the Palestinians so

miserable that they take their families and leave.

Either way, life in this country will turn into hell. Not for one year, but for dozens of years. Both sides will be violent. The idea of Palestinian "non-violent resistance" is a pipe-dream. The professor's hope that in the putative bi-national state, the Palestinians would not treat the Jews as the Jews are treating them now has been disproved by the Jews themselves – the persecution they have suffered throughout the ages has not inoculated them against becoming persecutors themselves.

THERE IS a gap in the professor's analysis: he does not explain how the violent Israeli apartheid state will "develop" into an ideal bi-national state. In his opinion, this will come about "eventually", after "some years". How many? And how?

OK, there will be pressures. World public opinion will turn against Israel. The Jews in the Diaspora will distance themselves. But how will all this bring about a bi-national state?

Any comparison with South Africa is unsound. There is no real similarity between the situation that prevailed there and the situation that exists – or will exist in the future – here. Except for some methods of persecution, all the circumstances, in all fields, are vastly different.

(To mention just one: the apartheid regime was finally brought down not by international pressure, but by the massive and crippling strikes of the black work force. In this country, the occupation authorities do everything to prevent Palestinians from coming to work in Israel.)

In the end, it is a matter of logic: if international pressure does not succeed in convincing the Israelis to accept the two-state solution, which does no harm to their national identity, how will it compel them to give up everything they have – their state, their identity, their culture, their economy, all they have built in a huge endeavor of 120 years?

Is it not much more plausible to assume that long before their state collapses under all the pressures, Israelis would embrace the two-state solution?

I COMPLETELY agree with the professor: the main obstacle to peace is psychological. What is needed is a profound change of perceptions, before the Israeli public can be brought to recognize reality and accept peace, with all it entails.

That is the main task facing the Israeli peace camp: to change the basic perceptions of the public. I am certain that this is possible. We have already traveled a long road from the days of "There are no Palestinians!" and "Jerusalem united for all eternity!". Professor Mearsheimer's analysis may well contribute to this process.

An apartheid state or a bi-national state? Neither. But the free State of Palestine side by side with the free State of Israel, in the common homeland.