

The Cannons of Napoleon

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NAPOLEON CAME TO a German town and was not welcomed with the traditional artillery salute.

Furious, he summoned the mayor and demanded an explanation.

The German produced a long scroll of paper and said: "I have a list of 99 reasons. Reason No. 1: we have no cannon."

"That's enough", Napoleon interrupted him, "You can go home!"

I WAS reminded of this story some two weeks ago, when I read Yitzhak Herzog's 10-point peace plan.

Herzog, the leader of the Labor Party, is an honest and intelligent person. All the bad things written about him when it seemed that he was crawling towards Binyamin Netanyahu's coalition have been refuted by the recent disclosure about the Aqaba peace initiative.

The rulers of Egypt, Jordan and Israel, so it appeared, had met in secret and asked Herzog to make peace possible by joining Netanyahu's coalition. Herzog was hoodwinked by Netanyahu and agreed. He kept silent under the storm of contemptuous reactions. That shows that he is both decent and responsible.

No doubt, he could be a good prime minister for Ireland, where his grandfather had been the Chief Rabbi, or even in Switzerland. But not in Israel.

Israel now needs a strong leader, with lots of charisma and a profound understanding of the historic conflict. Not a Herzog.

COMING BACK to Napoleon.

Two weeks ago Herzog proudly published his Peace Plan, consisting of 10 points.

Point No. 1 is an ritual repetition of the two-states principle. It is point No. 2 that is the crux of the matter. It says that the negotiations for peace will start 10 years from now.

That's where Napoleon would have said "That's enough. Go home!"

The idea that peace negotiations can be postponed for 10 years is preposterous. A people under a brutal occupation will not sit still for ten years. During this time, the plan obliges the Palestinians (Point 6) to act against

¹In a recent article, I have tried to describe what actually happened.

"terrorism and sedition". No mention of Israeli violence and "sedition".

After 10 years, "on condition that during these years there will be no violence in the area", peace negotiations will start.

In our area, 10 years are an eternity. Several wars are raging in the area right now. As the occupation goes on, an intifada may break out in Palestine any moment.

During these 10 years, Jewish settlement in the occupied territories will go on merrily. True, only in the "settlement blocs". These imaginary blocs have never been defined, and Herzog does not define them either. No maps of these blocs exist. There is no agreement about the number of these blocs, and most certainly not about their borders.

For an Arab, "settlement blocs" are just a device to continue building settlements while pretending not to. As an Arab has said: "We negotiate about a pizza, and in the meantime you eat the pizza."

There are claims that all the territory east of Jerusalem belongs to a settlement bloc and should be annexed to Israel right now. This would almost cut the future State of Palestine into two, with only a few kilometers of desert near Jericho to connect them.

AH, JERUSALEM! It does not exist in Herzog's plan. That may seem curious—but it is not. It means that the Herzog plan does not envision any change in the status of "United Jerusalem, the eternal capital of Israel."

Here Napoleon comes in again. A plan that does not include a solution for Jerusalem is a town without cannons.

Anybody who has even the slightest idea of Arab and Muslim sensibilities knows that no Arab or Muslim in the world will agree to make peace if it leaves East Jerusalem and the Holy Sanctuary in non-Muslim hands. There can be several solutions for Jerusalem—partition, joint sovereignty and more—but a plan that does not propose any solution is worthless. It shows an abysmal ignorance of the Arab world.

What else does not appear in the plan? The refugees, of course.

In the 1948 war, more than half the Palestinian people fled from their homes or were driven out.¹ Many of these

refugees and their descendants now live in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Many others live in the neighboring Arab states and all over the world.

No Arab can sign a peace agreement that does not provide at least a token solution.

By now it is more or less silently agreed that there must be a “just and agreed” solution, which would envision, I suppose, a return of a limited number, paying generous compensation to finance the settlement of all others outside Israel.

But for many Israelis, even letting one single refugee return constitutes a mortal danger to Israel as a “Jewish and democratic” state.

Not mentioning the problem at all—except as a nebulous “core issue”—is, well, silly.

THERE IS another issue that is not mentioned.

The plan demands unity among the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza as a condition for peace. Fine. But does that concern us?

It sure does.

In the Oslo agreement, Israel undertook to open four “safe passages” between the West Bank and Gaza, a distance of about 40 kilometers, through Israeli territory. It left open the character of these passages—extra-territorial roads, a railway line or whatever. In fact, no passage was ever opened, though road signs were set up and later removed. This was and is a flagrant breach of the agreement.

The inevitable result (see: Pakistan) is the breakup into two entities: the West Bank under the PLO and the Gaza Strip under Hamas. The Israeli government seems quite happy with this situation.

Reunification demands the opening of the passages. No word about this in the Herzog plan.

Altogether, the plan looks like a Swiss cheese—more holes than substance.

I HAVE in my life taken part in the formulation of a great many Peace Plans. In September 1958 my friends and I published the “Hebrew Manifesto”, a document of 82 points, including a comprehensive peace plan. So I might claim to be a kind of expert on plan-making (as, alas, distinguished from peace-making).

The Herzog plan has nothing to do with peace-making. It is not intended to win Arab hearts. It is a ramshackle verbal construct designed to appeal to Jewish Israeli voters.

All intelligent Israelis realize by now that we are facing a fateful choice: either two states, or an apartheid state, or a single Arab-majority state. Most Israelis want none of these.

Anyone who wants to lead Israel must come up with a Solution. So this is Herzog's Solution. It is designed solely for Jewish-Israeli eyes. Arabs need not apply.

As such, is it no better or worse than many other Peace Plans.

Just another exercise in futility.