

# Optimism of the Will

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**S**O NOW WE HAVE another anti-Semite. Mazal Tov (“good luck”) as we say in Hebrew.

His name is Ban Ki-moon, and he is the Secretary General of the UN. In practice, the highest international official, a kind of World Prime Minister.

He has dared to criticize the Israeli government, as well as the Palestinian Authority, for sabotaging the peace process, and thereby making Israeli-Palestinian peace almost impossible. He emphasized that there is a world-wide consensus about the “Two-state Solution” being the only possible one.

The formulation sounded neutral, but Ban made it quite clear that almost the entire fault lies with the Israeli side. Since the Palestinians are living under a hostile occupation, there is not much they can do one way or the other.

Anyone blaming Israel for anything is, of course, a blatant anti-Semite, the latest addition to a long line, starting with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, a few thousand years ago.

I AM not criticizing Ban, except for being too soft-spoken. Perhaps that is the Korean style. If I had been—God forbid—in his place, my formulation would have been a lot sharper.

Contrary to appearances, there is no great difference between Ban and Bibi, as far as the prognosis is concerned. A few weeks ago, Binyamin Netanyahu announced that we shall “forever live by the sword”—a Biblical phrase going back to the admonition of Avner, King Saul’s general, who cried out to King David’s general Yoav “Shall the sword devour for ever?” (I always liked Avner and adopted his name.)

But what is good for a patriot like Netanyahu is not good for a Jew-hater like Ban. So to hell with him.

NETANYAHU MAY have disliked Ban’s statement that the “Two State Solution” is now the consensus of the entire world. The world except Netanyahu and his cohorts.

That was not always so. Quite the contrary.

The Partition Plan was first adopted by the British Royal Commission appointed after the 1936 Arab Revolt (called “the Events” by the Jews) in which many Arabs, Jews and British soldiers died. In this plan the Jews were allotted only a small part of Palestine, a narrow strip along the sea, but it was the first time in modern history that a Jewish state was envisioned. The idea caused a deep split

in the Jewish community in Palestine (called the “Yishuv”), but the outbreak of World War II put an end to the plan.

After the war and the Holocaust, there was a world-wide search for a permanent solution. The General Assembly of the new United Nations decided on the partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. The Jewish leadership formally accepted this, but with the secret intention of enlarging the territory of their state at the first opportunity.

This opportunity came soon enough. The Arabs rejected partition and started a war, in which we conquered much more territory and annexed it to our fledgling state.

With the end of the war, by early 1949, the situation was thus: the enlarged Jewish state, now called Israel, occupied 78% of the country, including West Jerusalem; the Emir of Transjordan retained the West Bank of the Jordan with East Jerusalem and changed his title to King of Jordan; the King of Egypt retained the Gaza Strip.

Palestine had disappeared from the map.

WHEN I WAS discharged from the army (because of my wounds) I was convinced that this situation would lead to permanent conflict. During the war I had seen many Arab villages and towns, from which the inhabitants had fled or been evicted, and was convinced that a Palestinian people existed—contrary to Israeli assertions and world-wide opinion—and that there would never be peace if this people was denied a national state of their own.

Still wearing uniform, I looked for partners in an endeavour to spread this conviction. I found a young Muslim Arab architect in Haifa and a young Druze sheikh. (The Druze are Arabs who seceded from Islam and founded a new religion many centuries ago).

The three of us met several times in the apartment of the architect, but found no public echo. Government policy and public opinion in Israel favored the status quo. The existence of a Palestinian people was fervently denied, Jordan became de facto an ally of Israel—as it had secretly been all along.

If someone had taken an international public opinion poll in the early 1950s, I wonder if they would have found a hundred people in the world who seriously favored a Palestinian state. Some Arab states paid lip service to the idea, but no one took it seriously.

My magazine, Haolam Hazeh, and later the party I founded (which bore the same name) were the only organizations in the world that carried on this struggle. Golda Meir famously said that “There is no such thing as a Palestinian people” (and less famously: “I am ready to mount the barricades to get Uri Avnery out of the Knesset!”).

This total rejection of the rights and the very existence of the Palestinian people was further strengthened by the 1967 Six-day war, when Israel took possession of what was left of Palestine. The ruling doctrine was the “Jordanian Option”—the idea that if and when Israel would give back the West Bank or parts of it, it would give them to King Hussein.

This consensus extended from David Ben-Gurion to Levy Eshkol, from Yitzhak Rabin to Shimon Peres. The idea behind it was not only the inherited denial of the existence of the Palestinian people, but also the hare-brained conviction that the king would give up Jerusalem, since his capital was Amman. Only a total ignoramus could have believed that the Hashemite king, a direct descendant of the Prophet, could give the third-holiest city of Islam to infidels.

The pro-Soviet Israeli Communist party was also for the Jordanian Option, causing me to joke in the Knesset that it was probably the only Communist Monarchist party in the world. This ended in 1969, when Leonid Brezhnev suddenly changed course and accepted the “Two States for Two Peoples” formula. The Israeli communists followed almost before the words were out of his mouth.

The Likud party, of course, was never ready to give up even an inch of Eretz Israel. Officially, it still claims the East bank of the Jordan River, too. Only a practiced liar like Netanyahu could publicly proclaim to the world his acceptance of the “Two-state Solution”. No Likud member took this seriously.

So when the world's highest diplomat says that there is

a world-wide consensus for the Two-state Solution, I have the right to enjoy a moment of satisfaction. And optimism.

“OPTIMISTIC” IS the title of my memoirs, the second part of which just came out this week. (Alas, only in Hebrew. Have not yet found publishers in other languages.)

When the first part appeared, people thought the title was crazy. Now they say that it is insane.

Optimistic? Today? When the Israeli peace camp is in deep despair? When home-grown fascism is raising its head and the government is leading us towards national suicide?

I have tried several times to explain where this irrational optimism comes from: genetic roots, life experience, the knowledge that pessimists don't do anything, that it is the optimists who try to effect change.

To quote the motto of Antonio Gramsci: “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.”

BAN IS not the only anti-Semite who was unmasked lately. Another one is Laurent Fabius, Foreign Minister of France.

How come? Fabius has lately floated the idea of convening (in Paris, of course) an international conference for Israeli-Palestinian peace. He declared in advance that if this idea is not accepted, France will officially recognize the State of Palestine, opening the gates of Europe for others to follow.

This raises a semantic question. In Zionist parlance, only a non-Jew can be an anti-Semite. A Jew who says exactly the same is a “Jewish self-hater”.

Fabius belongs to a Jewish family that has converted to Catholicism. Under Jewish religious law (the Halakha) a Jew who has sinned remains a Jew. Converting is a sin. So is Fabius a non-Jew and therefore an anti-Semite, or a Jewish sinner, a self-hater?

How, exactly, should we curse him?