

The Map on the Wall

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A FORMER CABINET MINISTER, an intelligent person (nonetheless) asked me the other day: "Let's assume that your plan is realized. A Palestinian state will come into being side by side with Israel. Even some kind of federation. Then, in a few years, a violently anti-Israel party will come to power there and annul all the treaties. What then?"

My simple answer was: "Israel will always be powerful enough to forestall any threat."

That is true, but that is not the real answer. The real answer lies in the lessons of history.

HISTORY SHOWS us that there are (at least) two kinds of peace agreements. One kind, the stupid one, is based on power. The other, the intelligent, is based on common interest.

The most notorious of the first kind is the Treaty of Versailles that followed World War I.

It was signed four years before I was born, but as a child I was an eye-witness to its results.

It was a "dictated" peace. After four years of fighting, with millions of victims, the victors wanted to inflict the maximum of damage on the vanquished.

Large parts of Germany were separated from the Fatherland and turned over to the victors East and West. Huge indemnities were levied on Germany, which was already totally exhausted by the war.

Perhaps worst of all was the "war guilt" clause. The origins of the war were manifold and complicated. A Serbian patriot killed the Austrian heir to the throne. Austria answered with a harsh ultimatum. The Russian Czarist Empire, which saw itself as the protector of all Slavs, declared a general mobilization to frighten the Austrians off. The Russians were allied with the French. To prevent an invasion from both sides, the Germans, who allied to the Austrians, invaded France. The idea was to knock the French out before the cumbersome Russian mobilization was completed. Fearing a German victory, Great Britain rushed to the aid of the French.

Complicated? Indeed. But the victors compelled the Germans to sign a clause that indicted them as solely responsible for the outbreak of the war.

WHEN I went to school in Germany, there hung before my eyes a map of Germany. It showed the present

borders of the Reich (as it was still called), and around it a prominent red line that showed the prewar borders.

This map hung in every class in every school in Germany. From earliest childhood on, every German boy and girl was daily reminded of the great injustice done to the Fatherland, when large chunks were torn from it.

Worse, every German child was taught that his or her father had fought valiantly for four whole years against a vastly superior enemy and surrendered only from sheer exhaustion. Germany had played only a minor role in the events that led to the war, yet the whole blame for the war was laid on it. So were huge "reparations" that ruined the German economy.

The humiliation of signing such an unjust treaty was a permanent sting, and became the battle-cry of Adolf Hitler's new National-Socialist party. The politicians who had signed the document were assassinated.

History has blamed the leaders of the victorious allies for their stupidity in dictating these terms, especially after the far-sighted American president, Woodrow Wilson, had warned against it.

Probably they had no choice. The terrible war had bred intense hatred, and peoples were thirsting for revenge. They paid for it dearly when Germany, under the leadership of Hitler, started World War II.

THE OPPOSITE example is provided by the Peace of Vienna of 1815, almost a hundred years earlier.

Napoleon's troops had overrun large parts of Europe. Unlike Hitler's Germany, Napoleon's France brought with it a civilizing message, but its troops also committed many atrocities. When France was exhausted and broke down, the victorious allies could easily have imposed on it the same punitive and humiliating terms imposed by their successors a century later. They did not.

Instead of treating France as a vanquished foe, they invited it to the table. Napoleon's ex-foreign minister, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, was welcomed as one of the leaders to shape the future of Europe.

The leading spirit of the Congress of Vienna was Klemens von Metternich, ably assisted by the British Lord Castlereagh. France was allowed to recuperate within a short time.

One of the great admirers of Metternich and his col-

leagues is Henry Kissinger. Unfortunately he did the opposite when he himself became the US Foreign Minister.

The “Concert of Nations” created by the Peace of Vienna established a solid system that kept Europe peaceful for almost a hundred years, with a few exceptions (like the Franco-Prussian war of 1870). The spirit of its founders shines today as an example of wisdom.

WORLD WAR II, the most terrible of all, could have ended with a second Versailles treaty. It did not.

After Germany's Unconditional Surrender, no peace treaty was signed at all. After the awful atrocities of the Nazis, no generous treaty was possible. Germany was divided, but instead of paying huge indemnities, it—incredibly—received huge sums of money from the victors, so it could rebuild itself in record time. It did lose a lot of territory, but a few decades later Germany became the leading power in a united Europe. Any major war in Europe is now unthinkable.

Winston Churchill and his partners had obviously learned the lesson of Versailles. They disproved the popular saying that nobody learns anything from history.

Even the new State of Israel behaved with a lot of wisdom—as far as Germany was concerned. The chimnies of Auschwitz had hardly stopped smoking when Israel, under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion, signed a treaty with Germany. Sadly, Ben-Gurion did not display the same wisdom facing the Arab world.

There was the moment of Oslo, when everything was possible. Martin Buber once told me: “There is a right

moment for a historic act.

The moment before it is wrong. The moment after it is wrong. But for one moment it is right.” Unfortunately, Yitzhak Rabin did not recognize that. I doubt if he knew much about world history.

WHAT IS the lesson? Kissinger put it well in one of his books, before he became a war criminal.

It is this: Peace will hold only if all sides profit from it. Peace will not hold if one major side is left out.

At the moment of victory, the victor believes that his power is eternal. He can impose his terms and humiliate the enemy. But history shows that power changes, the strong of today may be the weak of tomorrow. The weak may become strong and take revenge.

That is the lesson Israel should absorb. Today we are strong, and the Arab world is in shambles. It will not always be so.

A peace treaty with Palestine and the Arab world will hold if it is wise and generous. Wise enough so the Palestinian people, or at least a great majority, will come to the conclusion that it is both worthwhile and honorable to keep it.

It is always good to have a strong army. Just in case. But history shows that it is neither strong armies nor an abundance of weapons that guarantees peace. It is the goodwill of all sides, based on self-interest.

And the wisdom of politicians—a rare ingredient, indeed.