

{JUNE 20 2004}

IRREVERSIBLE MENTAL DAMAGE

Two weeks ago, the international community made a shocking declaration. Giving in to a demand by George Bush, the “Quartet” accepted the “Revised Disengagement Plan” of Ariel Sharon. This means that the United Nations, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United States confirmed this document. I wonder if any one of the honorable diplomats has read the document with their own eyes.

In the first paragraph of the “plan”, the following words appear: “Israel has come to the conclusion that at present, there is no Palestinian partner with whom it is possible to make progress on a bilateral peace process.”

That is to say, the international community has confirmed that the Palestinian people has no right to take part in the determination of its own fate. Everything will be decided by the Government of Israel alone, with the backing of the United States, whose position will be automatically accepted by the other partners of the “Quartet”.

The European Union with its 25 member-states, the government of the Russian Federation and the organization that represents the entire world have humbly accepted the edict of Bush, the dictator of the world, who is himself a captive of Sharon. Sharon decided long ago that the elected president of the Palestinian people is “irrelevant”, together with the whole Palestinian leadership.

The Palestinian people have been eliminated from the list of decision-makers, thereby also abolishing in practice all the agreements signed with them, from Oslo to the Road Map.

This is a scandalous step, unprecedented in its dimensions, and it passed without comment. Apart from Sharon and his minions, nobody noticed the implications. The big boot of the international community trod on the Palestinian people without even noticing it, as if on an ant.

That is the culmination of a process that began with the return of the then Prime minister, Ehud Barak, from the 2000 Camp David summit. After the failure of that meeting, he coined the mantra that has since become the cornerstone of the policy of successive Israeli governments: “I have turned every stone on the way to peace / I have

AVNERY | IRREVERSIBLE MENTAL DAMAGE

offered the Palestinians more generous proposals than any of my predecessors / The Palestinians have rejected all my offers / Arafat wants to throw us into the sea / We have no partner for peace.”

This mantra is based on a series of lies that have been exploded long ago. American eye-witnesses like Rober Malley, President Clinton’s advisor at Camp David, as well as some of the Israeli participants and international researchers have published detailed reports that prove that Barak himself was responsible for the failure at least as much as Arafat – in fact, far more.

And as if by coincidence, just when the international community absent-mindedly accepted that the Palestinian people is not a partner for peace, in Israel itself things are happening that turn everything upside down.

The High Priest of the “We Have No Partner” creed is General (res.) Amos Gilad, who at the crucial time was chief of the research section (and as such the No. 2) of the Army Intelligence Department. Since army intelligence is the department solely responsible for the “national security assessment”, it has a decisive influence on the formation of national policy.

The army intelligence man reports directly to the Prime Minister and takes part in cabinet meetings. No minister would dare to question his assessments, which are the guiding star of the entire state. The research chief of the intelligence department is supposed to submit a professional summary of the huge amount of data amassed by the intelligence community. Most ministers are forbidden to read the written report, and even the few others are allowed only to glance at it. Therefore, the oral summary presented by the chief of research to the Prime Minister and the cabinet is of paramount importance.

Amos Gilad went even further: he appeared almost daily in the media, commenting on almost every political and security event. He was not only the “national assessor”, but also the “national explainer”, as he was commonly called in the media.

Who is this man, who has had a greater influence than any other person on the policies of Israel over the last few crucial years, and whose kontsepsia (Hebrew for “conception”) is still directing the path of the state? This is the very same Amos Gilad who some days ago claimed for himself the benefits due to disabled army veterans. He was not wounded in battle, God forbid, but claimed that the stress caused by his difficult job has inflicted on him irreversible mental damage.

This claim involves a considerable amount of Chutzpah, if not worse. But it also raises the question: This mental damage, when did it start? When were the first symptoms observed? Was it when he started endlessly repeating that Arafat wants to throw us into the sea? Or was this declaration, perhaps, itself a symptom of his mental

problem? And how can he continue to fulfil his present duties?

The last two weeks, Israel witnessed a stormy debate that should have shaken the very foundations of the state.

The former chief of Army Intelligence, General (res.) Amos Malka, who was the direct superior of Gilad, broke his silence of many years and published a thunderous accusation: that Amos Gilad arrived at his “kontseptsia” without any intelligence basis whatsoever. On the contrary, the huge amount of information collected by the intelligence department indicated the very opposite. That is to say, Gilad freely invented his intelligence reports, based on his political views and/or on the desire to please his political bosses, Barak and Sharon.

This grave accusation raised a storm in professional circles. Intelligence operatives of undoubted integrity emerged from their anonymity in order to support Malka publicly. They were headed by the man who, at the relevant time, was in charge of the Army Intelligence section for Palestinian affairs, Colonel Ephraim Lavie, who was then responsible for the collection of all intelligence material about the Palestinian leadership. There is no doubt that in the professional confrontation between Amos and Amos, Amos Malka emerged as the victor.

This means, in simple words: there was no intelligence material at all backing the assertion that Arafat is working for the destruction of the State of Israel, that Arafat had broken off the peace process in order to start a terror campaign, that Arafat is not ready for a reasonable compromise. All these assertions, uttered by diverse Israeli politicians and generals, were based on the “assessment” of one man who, while appearing to represent the intelligence department, was actually suppressing the considered professional reports of his own department, as well as of the General Security Service (Shabak).

When the debate heated up, the orientalist Matti Steinberg, a former advisor on Palestinian affairs to the chief of the Shabak, joined the fray. Steinberg not only confirmed that Gilad’s “kontseptsia” was completely false and contradicted the intelligence material assembled by his own people, but he also asserted that Gilad’s conception “fulfilled its own prophecy”.

Since Israel is immeasurably stronger than the Palestinians, its actions create reality. The acts guided by Gilad’s “kopntseptsia” created results that suited it. Much as the “kontseptsia” of Eli Za’ira, the intelligence chief at the time of the Yom Kippur war, resulted in catastrophe, thus the “kontseptsia” of Amos Gilad caused – and is still causing – the disasters of the present intifada.

(The 1973 intelligence conception was that Egypt would not dare to attack Israel, causing all the glaringly obvious signs to the contrary to be ignored, thus preventing

AVNERY | IRREVERSIBLE MENTAL DAMAGE

adequate preparations and resulting in the death of 3000 Israeli soldiers. Since then the Hebrew word “kontseptzia” has assumed an almost obscene connotation in Israel.)

As of now, Gilad’s immediate superior (Malka) and his immediate subordinate (Lavie) both accuse him of presenting his personal opinions, which were unsupported by any intelligence backing, as if they were the official assessment of the intelligence services.

Gilad has caused irreversible damage. His mantra was accepted by the vast majority of Israelis, as well as a large part of international public opinion. Its exposure in professional circles will not alter this fact. Indeed, the recent decision of the “Quartet” shows how deeply entrenched this lie has become throughout the world.

By the way, these revelations show that the secret assessment of the highest professional echelons of the Army Intelligence Department and Shabak were practically identical with the assessments published at the time by Gush Shalom, which were met with total disbelief by the media and the public, including a large part of the “peace camp”. To wit, that the Palestinian leadership, headed by Arafat, has never wavered from its readiness to make peace with Israel based on the creation of a Palestinian state on 97% of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (which together make 22% of historic Palestine), with territorial compensation for the remaining 3% and sovereignty over East Jerusalem and the Haram-al-Sharif (“Temple Mount”). The refugee problem would be solved by agreement with Israel (meaning: Israel will have a veto on any solution).

The experts of army intelligence and the security service, too, agree that Arafat has not wavered from this position. On this basis, peace can be achieved even now, as Arafat himself confirmed this week in a fascinating interview with the new editor of Haaretz, David Landau.

Ariel Sharon denies this, of course, because he is not ready for peace on these terms. He wants to annex at least 55% of the West Bank, hoping that the life of the Palestinians in the remaining 45% will become so impossible that they will leave the country of their own accord. Shimon Peres is eager to help him in the realization of this design.

For that, Sharon needs the “We Have No Partner” mantra. Amos Gilad delivered the goods. Now the “Quartet” has accepted it, bringing shame on itself and obstructing the search for peace.