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THE PHANTOM ARAB MODERATE

Even those Israelis who claim that peace between sovereign Israel and the Arabs is a practical possibility rest their claim on the bald assumption that there exists a solid body of Arabs who are 'moderate.'

They do not face the reality, taught by many decades of experience, that the most 'moderate' of the Arabs (who might have a hand in setting the policies of their people) do not differ, in their view of what Israel's future should be, from the manifestly immoderate mainstream Arabs. They differ only on the method, or process, by which the elimination of the Jewish state is to be accomplished.

This is true of all the Arab states - members of the Arab League - but most importantly of the states that have launched wars against Israel since 1948.

The outlook of such phantom moderates has not been kept secret. It comes to the surface from time to time from quite authoritative quarters.

In December 1980, shortly after Israel's peace treaty with Egypt was signed, a former prime minister of Egypt, Mustafa Khalil, delivered a guest lecture at Tel Aviv University. There, speaking - as he said - 'frankly and scientifically,' he pointed out that the Arabs do not 'regard the Jews as a nation at all, but as a religion only. 'When it comes to nationality,' he declared, 'a Jew can be an Egyptian Jew, a French Jew or a German Jew.' Egyptians, he said, wanted to be good neighbors with Israel, but they expected the Jews 'to change.'

Five years earlier, another leading Egyptian intellectual, Boutros Boutros Ghali, cabinet minister and subsequently secretary-general of the United Nations, gave equally cultured utterance to the same idea, but then gave voice also to its underlying threat. He told a Cairo journal that if Israel maintained 'its Jewish character' and did not assimilate in the Arab homeland, 'then we will have no integration of Israel with this region.' Indeed, if Israel defended its right to sovereignty, he added, 'I think you can have no peace in this region.'

SHORTLY AFTER the Yom Kippur War, the editor of Egypt's leading weekly journal, Al-Mussawar, explained that the English word 'peace' can be translated into Arabic by either salaam or sulh, but these words had different meanings. Thus, he wrote, if the Jews returned to the 1949 Armistice Lines (where the Arab states' aggression against newborn Israel had been halted) the Jews could expect no more than 'salaam.' It was 'only by returning to their senses, and dwelling under one roof and under one flag with the Arabs of Palestine,' that they could expect 'sulh' (real peace, reconciliation).

At that very time reports were circulating in the West that in Egypt (which had launched four wars against Israel since the Jewish state's birth in 1948) a new, moderate, more friendly wind was blowing toward Israel. And so an American writer, Joan Peters, having been sent on a journalistic mission to Egypt, decided to test these reports on the spot.

Her findings were published in an article in Commentary magazine (May 1975) under the title 'In search of moderate Egyptians.' She started on her project in America by studying the literature attesting to a positive change in Egyptian attitudes toward Israel.

'To my amazement,' she wrote, 'once in Egypt I found virtually no evidence of such a change.' She interviewed as representative a cross-section of Egyptians as she could find. She lists them: government officials, writers, academics, scientists, demographers, doctors, architects, engineers, housewives, shopkeepers, students, soldiers, salesmen, cab drivers, waiters, women's rights activists, secretaries, carpenters, travel agents, communists, leftists, nationalists and right-wing conservatives.

She recorded in detailed quotation a number of her interviews and learned that far from Egyptians being friendly to Israel, there existed a consensus not only of fierce hatred of Israel, but of virulent anti-Semitism - which in sum would deny the Jewish state's right even to exist.

TWENTY-FIVE, 30 years have passed, and one fine day in September we read the report of another search for moderate Arabs. This time it is in Israel itself, and the search is reported by an Israeli writer, Yossi Klein Halevi, who sought common ground - cultural, spiritual and hence, as a Jewish moderate, political - with Muslim Arab counterparts. He too, like Joan Peters three decades earlier, had 'numerous candid conversations with - in his case Palestinian Arabs - 'at all levels of society.' And he cites 'one telling example,' with Gen. Nasser Youssef, the Palestinian Authority's interior minister.

Halevi, as he related in The Jerusalem Post of September 28, asked Youssef hypothetically what would happen if Israel withdrew to the 1967 'borders,' uprooted the settlements and redivided Jerusalem. Youssef replied that 'the refugees would be returning to the area' and then there would be no need for an artificial border between Israel and Palestine.'

'But,' said Halevi to Youssef, 'aren't we negotiating today over a two-state solution?'

'Yes,' Youssef replied, 'as an interim step. You aren't separate from us, you are part of us. Just as there are Muslim Arabs and Christian Arabs, you are Jewish Arabs.' He went on to speak of this unified Palestinian state joining with other Arab states.

General Youssef, adds Halevi, 'is widely known as a moderate, deeply opposed to terror - because it is counter-productive to the Palestinian cause.'

Youssef is thus fully representative of the supreme hutzpa, precisely of the moderate Arabs. Emboldened by the great success worldwide in disseminating the grotesque claim to a 'Palestinian' history that never existed, mainstream Arabs teach their children and make it plain to the world that their intention is to destroy the Jewish state, directly if possible, or by phases, as so often described by their late leader, Yasser Arafat.

Here the moderate Arab steps in and proposes a moderate alternative - the same one suggested in 1980 by former Egyptian Prime Minister Mustafa Khalil: vaporization of the Jewish national identity.

THE ARAB propaganda success has not been achieved without passive Jewish help - the help of unbelievable inaction. The most egregious blunder of successive Israeli governments and Jewish Diaspora leaders has been the complete failure to build a National Information Center (what we call hasbara), having the scope and authority of an Israeli government ministry, to tell the world - but first of all the Jewish people - the truth of their own nation's unique relationship with the Land of Israel, reaching back 3,000 years to its biblical history and resting on the momentous modern international

acknowledgement of that relationship in the 1922 League of Nations Mandate for the 'reconstitution of the Jewish National Home' in Palestine.

That center would, moreover, enlist all possible resources, Christian as well as Jewish, to counter the monstrous fictions of the so-called Palestinian cause - and now the vicious waves of anti-Semitism swirling through the nations of the West.