
INTERVIEW* WITH MEIR VILNER

...**Question:** There is a serious danger in the Middle East one year after the June war. What are the main causes of this situation?

Answer: Yes, it is true that a year after the June war the situation in the Middle East remains tense, blood is still being shed and there is the continuing menace of another war.

That no political solution of the crisis in our area has been found up to now is due chiefly to the policy of the Israeli government. It refuses to abide by the November 22 decision of the Security Council, which calls for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied areas and condemns the annexations resulting from the war.

If there were even a grain of truth in the primitive official position of the Israeli rulers that they had to start the June war because they had no choice, because, allegedly, there was the danger of annihilation of the Israeli people—if there were a grain of truth in that, they would readily accept the Security Council decision. For it guarantees, after an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, liquidation of the state of war with Israel and recognition of the right to existence and security for all countries of the area (including Israel). Moreover, the United Arab Republic and Jordan have officially stated that they would immediately carry out the Security Council decision if Israel did the same.

There need be no doubt that if there were no drive for territorial annexations, an immediate way out of the present crisis could be found and the road thus cleared for a peaceful and realistic settlement.

The evidence is plentiful. On January 19 Defense Minister Moshe Dayan said in an interview with the newspaper *Haaretz*:

“Possibly, Nasser would be prepared to enter into negotiations with us on the condition that we withdraw our troops to the June 4 frontiers. Possibly, in exchange for such a withdrawal Nasser would declare the end of the belligerency, allow free navigation in the Eilat Bay and make certain promises on Suez. By withdrawing to the June 4 frontiers, we would solve largely Egypt’s problem.”

The *Haaretz* correspondent asked Dayan: “And do you favor that?”

Dayan replied: “No, I am categorically opposed.”

General Haim Bar Lev, Chief of the General Staff, told a conference of military correspondents after the February operation against Jordan that the purpose of the operation was to “impose immediate

negotiations on the Arab states with the aim of adjusting the conflict . . . We can impose on Jordan an agreement, and we are dexterously using our military strength to compel King Hussein to seek negotiations . . . We can dictate our terms of settlement if we compel him to seek it, because he will have no choice in the matter. But we can do that only if we remain on the other side of the frontier (the armistice line).”

That statement appeared in the newspaper *Maariv* on February 19, 1968.

This is tantamount to an outright admission that Israel wants to impose on Jordan political negotiations and a separate agreement by means of military pressure. And that is one of the chief reasons for the continuing tension on the armistice line between Israel and Jordan.

It should be perfectly clear that the attitude of the Israeli leaders cannot be separated from that of the United States government. The Israeli leaders would never have ventured to unleash the war without the military, economic and political support of the United States. Now, too, they need that support to continue the occupation.

Israeli Finance Minister Sapir recently announced that the June war had cost Israel more than three thousand million Israeli pounds. Today Israel is more dependent upon American imperialism than at any time in the twenty years of its existence.

The June venture was a political setback for America’s policy-makers. The aims they had set in this war were not achieved and its results were the very opposite of what they expected. Far from having collapsed, the United Arab Republic and Syrian regimes have been strengthened. Progressive and profoundly anti-imperialist changes are taking place in Egypt. Relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries have become stronger. In Jordan, too, the situation is not developing in favor of the imperialists.

It should be noted, that in addition to the main factors engendering this dangerous situation in our region, traceable to the U.S. imperialists and the Israeli leaders, there is also the factor that some Arab circles obstruct a settlement by refusing to support the Security Council resolutions and casting doubt on the possibility of a peaceful accommodation. By so doing, they complicate the search for a political solution in which both the Arab nations and the Israeli people have a stake.

Question: What is the reaction to this state of affairs in Israel?

Answer: Mounting differences have appeared in Israel as a result of this sustained tension. The ultras have become more aggressive and conduct a strident campaign “against retiring from the liberated territory of the historical-motherland,” attacking all who voice the slightest doubt regarding this hard-headed government policy; they want a bigger military budget that would press down the living

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standards, and call for more repressions against the population in the occupied territories.

In the meantime, certain elements are waking up to the realities. They are beginning to think. No longer is our Communist Party in sole opposition to government policy as in June 1967. Many people want peace and no annexations.

In a public opinion poll by the Dahaf Research Institute in April, 66 per cent was "yes" to the question: "Is peace with the Arabs a crucial condition for our existence as a state?" To another question, "What is Israel's security situation," 57 per cent replied "disquieting" and 13 per cent "grave." Only 19 per cent said "encouraging" and 6 per cent "tranquil." These results are evidence of a process of disappointment stemming from the June war and of mounting fears for the future if no peace with the Arabs is achieved. This does not mean that the majority is clear about the obstacles to peace. For example, 80 per cent of those questioned thought that the government was "doing what has to be done to achieve peace in the region."

Opposition to the prevailing reckless line, to the policy of conquest and annexation, is growing, and many people are coming out against it openly and courageously. Dr. Isaias Leibovitch, professor of theology at Jerusalem's Jewish University, declared on April 12 in reply to a question by the newspaper *Yediot Ahronot*: "Annexation? That is disastrous, it breaks up the state, destroys the people, tears down the social foundation and corrupts people. . . . What, then, is the alternative? To give up governing one and a half million Arabs and go back to the status quo of June 5. . . . Some speak of federation. But federation imposes colonialism, it imposes new quislings. It is worse than annexation—it is occupation coated over with hypocrisy." This declaration evoked a broad response in the country.

Ex-Premier David Ben-Gurion, too, admitted in his speech to the Knesset on the 20th anniversary of the State of Israel on May 6, that the "international political situation of Israel has never been as bad as it is today."

Police Minister Elisha Sasson acknowledged at a conference of the Israeli Labor Party leadership that time is working against Israel and called for a more realistic policy.

Question: What do you think about the actions of the Mikunis-Sneh group?

Answer: This group, which enthusiastically acclaimed the June war in 1967, went even farther when the Israeli army made its bloody raid in Jordanian territory on the Karameh refugee camp on March 21, 1968—a raid that caused many casualties on both sides and was even denounced by pro-government circles; the Security Council condemned it unanimously.

In an editorial in *Kol Haam* on March 22, 1968, Dr. Sneh excused this aggressive act on the grounds of it being a "defensive compulsion."

Question: What is the situation in the occupied territories?

Answer: A general policy of repressions prevails in the occupied areas—demolition of houses with explosives, wholesale punitive measures in towns and settlements, and wholesale arrests.

The occupation has bred resistance. And increased repressions generated still greater resistance. Our heart bleeds at the sight of Jews and Arabs killed almost daily. There is no other way to end this sad situation but to fulfil the Security Council resolutions of November 22 in order to achieve a political solution terminating the occupation and, consequently, resistance to the occupation.

This policy of repressions, this violation of the most elementary human rights, is not only damaging to the people living under the invader's boot, but also to Israeli society, the upbringing of the younger generation, for it upholds the "might is right" principle. A fascist breeze is blowing in Israel, which cannot be ignored.

Question: What policy does the Communist Party of Israel recommend to clear the way for lasting peace in the Middle East?

Answer: In the present circumstances, we hold, the first thing is to resolve the crisis by peaceful political means in accordance with the Security Council resolutions. This would liberate the Arab peoples from Israeli occupation, relieve the Israeli people from the state of war with the Arab countries, and Israel's right to exist as a state will no longer be questioned. The agreement recommended by the Security Council covers these mutual undertakings.

In a relaxed and free atmosphere a solution could be found with international help on the basis of the Security Council resolutions in accordance with a principle of equality for the principal issues: stable boundaries between states, the problem of Arab refugees, freedom of navigation for Israeli ships along the Suez Canal, allocation of common sources of water, and the like.

All these issues must be resolved on a basis of respect for the just and legitimate national rights of the Israeli people and those of the Palestinian Arabs. Lasting peace and cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors for the good of all nations could be achieved along these principles.