



The Best of Bitterlemons

Five years of writings from Israel and Palestine

Edited by Yossi Alpher, Ghassan Khatib and Charmaine Seitz

bitterlemons.org

Palestinian-Israeli Crossfire

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Preface

For five years, the *bitterlemons* family of internet publications has hosted a rare gathering of enemies and friends.

From the neutral territory of the internet, our websites have sponsored important contemporary discussions on the Middle East peace process—crossing state boundaries, military lines and taboos—helping readers to understand the region's complexities.

The Best of Bitterlemons: Five years of writings from Israel and Palestine is a compilation book of the most prescient and important articles published through the bitterlemons family of publications.

Creators and editors Yossi Alpher and Ghassan Khatib introduce this volume of 83 short essays and interviews touching on the most fundamental issues of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Contributors include former prime ministers, negotiators, military leaders and journalists, hailing largely from Israel and Palestine. The articles selected for publication in *The Best of Bitterlemons* faithfully reflect the diversity of authors and topics that characterizes bitterlemons, while telling the story of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a unique and informative way.

This book was arranged by selecting some of the most interesting *bitterlemons* contributions and then grouping them into key issues, which appear as chapters. Any categorization is in essence a political act—the kind that *bitterlemons* on the web has studiously avoided. The issues explored under each heading are not exhaustive, but provide several windows into subjects that are important to both Palestinians and Israelis.

The *bitterlemons* family of publications was born in 2001 with the commencement of *bitterlemons.org*. The initial magazine sought to provide a neutral space on the internet for Palestinians and Israelis to present their views on equal footing. Each week, the Israeli and Palestinian editors invite others from their own respective communities to write or be interviewed for the publication, with the idea of presenting four very different views—two Israeli, two Palestinian—on an agreed-upon topic.

In 2003, the project expanded to include *bitterlemons-international.org*, also a weekly publication of four articles or interviews on subjects important to the entire Middle East, and including contributors from all

over the world. In 2005, *bitterlemons-international.org* was developed, which allowed two writers from different perspectives to correspond in depth on a particular subject, with their exchange then published online.

Even at the bitter height of the Palestinian uprising and after the events of September 11th and the war in Iraq, the *bitterlemons* publications have been uncommonly successful. Their readers number around 100,000, including 13,000 regular subscribers. Their articles have been reproduced and redistributed in English, Arabic, Hebrew, Farsi, French, Portuguese and additional languages by newspapers from Saudi Arabia to Israel, websites from Syria to Iran, and governmental and private on-line “clipping” services from France and the US to Brazil.

While so many joint Israeli-Palestinian endeavors suffer because they replicate power relationships characterizing the heart of the conflict or bring together small numbers of like-minded people to “preach to the converted,” the *bitterlemons* publications have largely managed to escape this fate. Their presence in cyberspace, and the editors’ commitment to honesty and diversity of voice have allowed outsiders a glimpse into the deepest, most personal yearnings of two peoples.

This book brings those yearnings to life as a window, record and textbook for our time.

Palestinian Forward

Creating a space for our voices to be heard

The *bitterlemons* family of publications has served as an important outlet for Palestinians, in an atmosphere where the Palestinian perspective is either invisible or is filtered through the agendas of others. Articles or contributors solicited by one editor of the *bitterlemons* family are not screened or vetoed by the other side. On these pages, Palestinians—all kinds of Palestinians—speak for themselves on the issues most crucial to our time.

My co-editor Yossi Alpher and I set out early on committed to these principles of inclusion. As such, *bitterlemons* has largely managed to avoid the pitfalls of other dialogues and conferences, where the terms of discussion are set by Palestinians and Israelis already amenable to compromise. Here, the wide range of views fully and fairly displays the intensity and motivations of the Palestinian case.

And what I have discovered is that while other solely Palestinian publications have also portrayed the breadth of Palestinian thought, the fact that *bitterlemons* has Israeli interlocutors gives it unprecedented traction in the West. This is a sad comment on the persistent blind spot of many Americans and Europeans to Palestinians and their case. It also says, unfortunately, that Palestinians must do much more to nurture and maintain western allies. It has given me hope to know that, through the *bitterlemons* publications, Palestinian voices have made their way into the most elite corridors of power. The timely nature of *bitterlemons.org* and *bitterlemons-international.org* provides a snapshot of the real debates taking place on the ground.

Internet technology has allowed us to dodge the question of location and space, which is so bitterly contested, and create a new space outside of the conflict’s physical realities. During the Israeli incursions into Palestinian Authority towns in 2002, when most Palestinians spent weeks under curfew in fear and uncertainty, sometimes without water and electricity, we continued to publish online. Our editions then reflected the average Palestinians’ despair and fear, as well as attempts to end the crisis.

Yossi Alpher and I conceived this project in 2000 in my Jerusalem office. Since then, Israeli checkpoints and a policy of “closing” Palestinian towns off from Jerusalem have made it very difficult for me to meet him

there. Our contacts now are mostly by email and telephone—and still the publication goes on.

What may surprise many of our readers (indeed it surprised us) is the fact that recruiting contributors for *bitterlemons* was never difficult. In five years, only a handful of people declined our requests for political reasons, and these detractors were not Palestinians or Israelis; they were experts living in the Arab and Muslim world, where the boycott against Israel remains for some an important tool of protest. This experience demonstrates that Palestinians and Israelis of every political shade are eager to talk to each other, and to express their views.

Thus the *bitterlemons* publications provide an honest window to the conflict, showing the exchange as it unfolds. And now, at a time when dialogue is barely happening at all, the *bitterlemons* publications have become crucial.

There are many people who must be acknowledged for the success of this endeavor. Among them are the former and present staff of the Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre, whose involvement made them political and technological pioneers. Charmaine Seitz, former administrative editor, was instrumental in conceptualizing the project and establishing its integrity early on. Omar Karmi took over for her in 2004 and helped to develop and establish the third *bitterlemons* publication, *bitterlemons-dialogue.org*. Manal Warad deserves gratitude for holding together the financial strings of the operation. A special thanks must also be extended to the IT company Intertech, especially manager Ala Alaeddin, for designing our web pages, and investing many hours in publishing promptly and problem-solving at all times of day and night. Last but certainly not least, I must thank my co-editor Yossi Alpher for taking the first step in initiating this project, and for his professional and fair approach over the years.

I continue to be amazed that the *bitterlemons* publications are familiar to nearly every interlocutor I encounter. As attested by politicians and educators, journalists and policymakers, *bitterlemons* has proven to be an invaluable tool in understanding our cause. From that understanding, we hope to see the seeds of justice.

Ghassan Khatib
Ramallah, Palestine

Israeli Forward

Toward an alternative Middle East culture of civilized discourse

Since November 2001, with the launching of *bitterlemons.org*, our rather unique Israeli-Palestinian partnership has sought to apply the advantages of the internet to the need for a free exchange of ideas among peoples in conflict in the Middle East. The result is the *bitterlemons* family of web-based publications.

Bitterlemons.org, which deals with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and informs this book, fosters and demonstrates the alternative of a civilized dialogue. It focuses on the questions that divide the two sides in a prolonged and painful bilateral conflict with strong regional ramifications. This is by no means about a “warm and fuzzy” consensus: many editions of *bitterlemons.org* highlight areas of intense disagreement and feature spokespersons for hard-line positions, who nevertheless accept the need to test their views in a pluralistic environment.

In July 2003 Ghassan Khatib and I, the founders and coeditors of *bitterlemons.org*, launched *bitterlemons-international.org*. This, our second web-based weekly, deals with Middle East regional topics and provides a “Middle East roundtable” for an open exchange of views among writers and interviewees from all Arab countries, Iran, Turkey and Israel, as well as concerned and informed writers from Europe, the US and elsewhere. More recently, we have experimented with an extended dialogue format, *bitterlemons-dialogue.org*. A small number of the articles from these additional *bitterlemons* projects are included in this collection as well.

The name *bitterlemons* was inspired by Lawrence Durrell’s book of the late 1950s, *Bitter Lemons*, which told the story of the EOKA revolt in Cyprus. In 2000, when we began formulating the project, Ghassan and I were looking for a title that seemed to hint at the hard realities in the Middle East, but at the same time was catchy and easy to remember, and of course was available as a domain name on the web. One day when I was sitting under the lemon tree in my garden, the Durrell title came back to me. I ran to the computer to check whether the domain name was available; *bitterlemons.com* was being used by a New Jersey used car dealer! But *bitterlemons.org* was available. And so we began.

What has made *bitterlemons* possible? Politics and communications in the Middle East have “ripened” to a point where policymakers, business

Land

AN ISRAELI VIEW

The green line as past and future boundary

by David Newman

The green line, the boundary separating Israel from the West Bank, has retained its significance in all the negotiations concerning the demarcation of a boundary for a future Palestinian state. At the most, it is possible that the green line will be modified to take into account some of the Israeli settlements that are in close proximity to the line. But despite the many geographical changes that have taken place around the line during the past 35 years, it is still perceived by many policymakers as the default line for future boundary demarcation.

The green line was drawn up at the Rhodes Armistice talks in 1948-49. The precise demarcation of the line reflected the military realities of the time following Israel's War of Independence. The implementation of the boundary gave rise to numerous functional problems for Arab Palestinian villages and townships. Some Arab residents of the region became Israeli citizens, while others became stateless under Jordanian administration. Many villages on the West Bank side of the boundary were cut off from their fields on the Israeli side. Others were no longer able to travel beyond the new boundary to their jobs in places such as Jaffa, Ramla and Lod, thus causing substantial economic dislocation for many of the Arab inhabitants.

The "opening" of the boundary in 1967 brought about a new geographic orientation. During the 1970s and 1980s, tens of thousands of Palestinians from the West Bank crossed the boundary to work inside Israel, as did Israeli settlers who retained their jobs in Israeli cities. In the other direction, many Israelis crossed the line, especially on weekends and holidays, to shop in the markets of Qalqilya and East Jerusalem and to use other services (such as dentists and car mechanics), which were offered at a considerably cheaper price than inside Israel itself.

Despite these trans-boundary movements, the line remained an important point of separation between the two territories. Since no Israeli government attempted to annex any part of the West Bank, the green line retained its administrative functions, with the legal status of

interests, diplomats, journalists and academic elites on all sides are readily prepared and indeed motivated to read high quality analyses of key issues emanating from the 'other' side. Even those who oppose various forms of joint economic and cultural cooperation, nevertheless follow the other side's media closely. *Bitterlemons-international.org* has proven that it is indeed possible to get Iranians, Syrians, Lebanese, and Saudis on the same virtual "page" with Israelis, and then to witness websites and the print press from these countries reproducing the articles.

For their part, Israelis and Palestinians have a tradition of more than two decades of informal, or "track II," exchanges that has come to include even some of the extremists on both sides. The violent events of recent years have not at all constrained this interest. Ghassan and I are veterans of these years of dialogue; the *bitterlemons* format has enabled us to "marry" track II to the web.

The *bitterlemons* family of internet publications is funded primarily by the European Union, with additional main funding from the United States government and the Ford Foundation and Open Society Institute, as well as the National Endowment for Democracy, Canada and Sweden. Our funders have never attempted in any way to influence the contents of *bitterlemons*, and of course are in no way responsible for its content. We are eternally grateful to them.

On a personal level, two words of appreciation. While Ghassan and I have long disagreed on many issues of substance with regard to the conflict, we have always managed to concur fully on the need for *bitterlemons* and on the best way to manage it in a spirit of equality, symmetry and friendship. After more than five years of publishing, my thanks to Ghassan for making *bitterlemons* work. And thanks, too, to Charmaine Seitz, for several years our managing editor, for so ably editing and producing this volume.

Yossi (Joseph) Alpher
Ramat HaSharon, Israel

the residents on both sides of the “non-existent” line remaining separate and subject to Israeli and Jordanian law respectively.

These functional realities contrasted strongly with the public statements made by many Israeli politicians to the effect that the green line no longer existed—a policy reflected in the decision not to show the green line on maps of Israel issued by the Surveyors Department or in atlases used in Israeli schools and universities.

Nor did the creation of regional councils for the benefit of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank tamper with the existing administrative divide. Even where it would have seemed to be more logical to annex some of the settlements to municipal authorities on the Israeli side of the line, this did not take place, as it would have signaled the extension of Israeli civilian law to the occupied territories, an act that is strictly forbidden under international law.

With the return of violence following the first intifada beginning in 1987, the green line became even more apparent. Whenever curfews or closures were imposed on the occupied territories, the road blocks were established at those points that had been the boundary. As Palestinians were gradually prevented from entering the Israeli marketplace, it was the green line that determined the point beyond which they were no longer allowed to move. For Israelis, the apprehension of traveling in the West Bank and Gaza Strip created a geography of fear in which people no longer crossed the green line. It may not always have been clearly marked on the maps, but most Israelis developed an intuitive understanding of just where the boundary was and ceased to travel beyond the line.

The recent construction of walls and fences along parts of the West Bank has taken place in close proximity to the green line (with deviations that include some Israeli settlements on the Israeli side of the fence), thus creating, de facto, a physical barrier that may yet prove to be the future boundary separating Israel from a Palestinian state.

For its part, the line separating the Gaza Strip from Israel has remained permanent and, for the past 10 years, has been enclosed by a fence clearly demarcating the limits of this region. In the Jerusalem area, it is the municipal boundaries of the city, as determined by the Israeli government after 1967, which define the course of the boundary, although this may change even further in the lead-up to renewed negotiations, as the government attempts to draw surrounding Jewish communities (especially Ma’aleh Adumim) into the Jerusalem municipal area.

The history of the green line is testament to the powerful impact of arbitrary and artificial boundaries, even over a relatively short period of time. It served as a political line of separation—between Israel and the Jordanian-administered territories—for no more than 18 years, half the time that has passed since it was “opened” in 1967. Yet, its retention as a line of administrative separation, coupled with the events of the past decade during which it has re-emerged as a barrier preventing movement of people and goods in both directions, have only strengthened its impact. If, and when, a political resolution of the conflict is reached, the green line—with some minor deviations—has the greatest likelihood of constituting the formal international boundary between two independent states.—*Published February 24, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

The ghostly green line

by Ihab Abu Ghosh

To truly understand the nature of the “green line” in contemporary political and legal discourse, one must first indulge in a bit of historical memory.

In 1949, the state of Israel was admitted to the United Nations under the condition that it accept United Nations resolutions 181 and 194. Resolution 181, the United Nations partition plan, had in 1947 allowed for a Jewish state on 57 percent of the land (although Jews were then only 33 percent of the Palestine population). When the Arab states opposed the partition of land they saw as solely their own, the 1948 War commenced.

The aftermath of that war found the Zionist militia in control of an expanded 77 percent of the land, and hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees displaced from their homes. The remaining 23 percent of mandatory Palestine was under Egyptian and Jordanian control. These armistice lines are what we refer to today as the “green

line.” Nowhere are these borders codified into international law as border lines (“blue lines”); the Rhodes agreements of 1949 set them as the ceasefire lines between Israel and the Arab states.

Even so, the “green line” has become the major demarcation used in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. Acceptance of this terminology has had immense political ramifications for the Palestinian cause, the most important being that it destroyed the international legal framework of the partition plan and established Palestinian acceptance for boundaries created through belligerent acts. International law does not allow the acquisition of land by force, a principle repeated in numerous UN resolutions concerning the Palestinian problem.

Examine, for instance, the peace agreements between Israel and other Arab states. Agreements between Egypt and Israel in 1979, and Jordan and Israel in 1994, were both based on “blue lines,” the boundaries between historical Mandate Palestine and the relevant Arab neighbor. Even Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 was realized largely on the basis of the United Nations’ report on UN Security Council Resolution 425, which was also based on “blue” international borders.

Comparably, the 1993 Oslo agreements called for a staged Israeli withdrawal from population centers in the lands occupied in 1967, which are demarcated by a “green line.” There is only one document in international law that sets out “blue lines” for Jewish and Palestinian states, and that is Resolution 181, which has been rendered useless by the subsuming of those lines to the “green lines” of 1967. It is not hard to understand that, having accepted a flexible “green line,” Palestinians are now expected to have no problem with further modifications to the “green line” itself.

The official Palestinian position, as written by the Palestine Liberation Organization, begins by accepting the “historic compromise” of a state on 22 percent of mandatory Palestine, i.e. the “green line.” This position is not supported by international law, the relevant UN resolutions, or common sense. Further, making these kinds of compromises before negotiations begin is not in the interest of any party bargaining on behalf of its people.

Yes, negotiations have maintained the semblance of a relationship to international law. The 1993 Declaration of Principles includes vague references to UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, a fact used to bolster the DOP’s weak standing. Both of these resolutions, however, state only that the acquisition of territory by force is unacceptable and that states have the right to exist within secure and recognized borders.

Palestinians should never have accepted that this first principle applies only to the borders of June 5, 1967. (Nor does the second point help us, as Palestinians have never had a state of their own.) The acquisition of land by force is unacceptable under the principles of international law, whenever it occurs. Over the last few years, we have tasted the fruits of this poisonous tree deeply rooted in the Oslo accords.

The consequences of these official Palestinian positions are manifest. They include a complete refusal by Israel to accept the idea of June 5, 1967 borders (they are only “green lines,” after all). Israel also refuses to acknowledge the principles of UN Resolution 194, which establishes the right of return or compensation for Palestinian refugees (and is notably one of the resolutions that Israel was required to accept before joining the United Nations). Because its companion, Resolution 181, has been vacated of all meaning, the truly vital issues pertaining to the Palestinian cause have now been left to the principle of de facto changes transformed into de jure legitimacies. One need only examine the course of history over the last 50 years to see that this de facto rule governs the Israeli understanding of refugees, settlements and Palestinian statehood.

Outside the context of international law, negotiators have been left to broker a deal based on force and belligerent activity. The “green line” is invisible, undocumented and unfounded in international law. As such, using it as a reference point is in Israel’s favor because it sets a precedent of substituting principles of international law with agreements signed under duress. Even worse, it leads to a situation where one is torn between demanding full implementation of United Nations resolutions to the letter or totally abandoning these resolutions. If these are our choices, they can only lead to hostilities now and in the future.

Having arrived at this difficult point, it seems time to remember that United Nations resolutions and principles of international law were established to remedy issues of conflict. These principles continue to hold remedies for resolving the wrong that has been done Palestinians over the years, remedies that do not disregard the realities of the current situation. Based on these principles, one can find solutions for the agony and misery of Palestinian refugees, solve issues related to Jerusalem and crack the problem of the settlements. The key is to remedy wrongs, not legitimize them.

If one looks at the experience of South Africa, problems of no less scope had to be remedied after the dissolution of the apartheid system. These remedies neither forced the original African landowners to accept the hundreds of years of wrong done to them, nor led to the demolition or

displacement of the white colonial presence or economy. This embodies the legal principle of “restitution,” the idea that one can never turn back the clock to undo a wrong, but one can claim responsibility for that wrong and offer restitution to make it right.—*Published February 24, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

It would bring about a terrible response

a conversation with Ephraim Sneh

bitterlemons: What is your position on unilateral redeployment?

Sneh: I’m very strongly in favor of building an effective fence and other barriers along the green line, mainly in the central part of Israel—say from Mei Ami to Latrun. This would be a technical defensive measure to make the movement of terrorists into Israel more difficult. It would be a partial but necessary measure.

bitterlemons: Can this be effective if the Israel Defense Forces are busy defending the settlements beyond that fence?

Sneh: As deputy minister of defense, I headed a project in the year 2000 to prepare a unilateral separation plan for Prime Minister Barak in case the Camp David talks failed. This did not include dismantling settlements, but it examined the practical implications, so I’m very familiar with the facts. I drew the map. I can speak about it authoritatively.

bitterlemons: Could you relate, then, to a plan that involves withdrawing to the settlement blocs near the green line and dismantling the settlements in Gaza and the West Bank heartland, while remaining in the Jordan Valley and Greater Jerusalem?

Sneh: The plan means the de facto annexation of 30 percent of the West Bank, half in the Jordan Valley, which you have to keep if there is no agreement, and half in the settlement blocs. Once you put an effective fence on the eastern side of the settlement blocs, this is de

facto annexation. It makes you the total sovereign in the settlement bloc areas. It includes around 70,000-100,000 Palestinians who reside in these areas.

All the experts on international law told us that this would bring about a terrible response. The international community, let alone the Arab world, would accuse us of annexation. Terrorism wouldn’t stop; it would use the de facto annexation as a pretext to continue. Indeed, terrorism would increase to show that it doesn’t work for us to take Arab territory and Arab population by force. Terrorism would gain more legitimacy from the international community. The fence would prevent penetration into the settlement blocs but wouldn’t stop the annexed Palestinians from fighting from inside. Nor would the fence stop rockets and mortars, for example, fired from Salfit toward Ariel. So even settlements included inside the fence would be easy targets.

bitterlemons: How would unilateral redeployment affect Israeli deterrence?

Sneh: The withdrawal would send a very bad message regarding deterrence. The Palestinians would have no incentive to negotiate and every incentive to keep fighting.

bitterlemons: Even a negotiated and agreed plan for Israel to keep the settlement blocs, such as was discussed at Camp David and Taba, would leave some Palestinians inside Israel.

Sneh: The agreed maps I know would reduce this number to a few thousand. But under unilateral withdrawal, what do you do with them? You can’t annex them, you don’t want to make them citizens, and you don’t want to impose a new military government.

bitterlemons: Won’t your plan of building a fence directly along the green line be seen as a de-facto border also?

Sneh: No. I would not redeploy the IDF [Israel Defense Forces]. It would remain in the West Bank and Gaza to secure the settlements. Having said that, I have no problem declaring that long segments of the future Israeli-Palestinian border will be identical with the green line that I’m fortifying, for example between Kfar Saba and Qalqilya, where in any case we have no room to maneuver.

bitterlemons: If you leave 50,000 settlers and the army beyond the fence, this isn’t separation at all.

Sneh: I don't believe there is an Israeli government that has the political power to dismantle settlements against the settlers' will and without an agreement.

bitterlemons: Do you believe that an Israeli government could dismantle these settlements if it did have an agreement?

Sneh: Yes. The public is ready to pay the price if the reward is peace, but not if the conflict continues under different conditions.

bitterlemons: Opinion polls show that around 50 percent of Israelis already favor unilaterally dismantling settlements. Why shouldn't the Labor Party consider this as its policy?

Sneh: A serious party cannot take something non-implementable and make it a slogan. This idea has become popular due to public despair. When you give the public the details, it reconsiders its support. Look, I'm a medical doctor. This is like a patient with terminal cancer suggesting that he drink hydrochloric acid to burn out the cancer. This is not a solution. I don't agree that there's no hope. Things are not static. That's why I favor [Knesset Chairman Avraham] Burg's going to Ramallah [to address the Palestinian National Assembly].—*Published February 4, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

The Sharon line

by Yisrael Harel

The broad—one might say sweeping—movement for building a separation fence “tens of meters high, so that I won't ever see them again” (in the words of one interviewee on Israel national television) last week even co-opted the institution that by all ideological and political logic should have been the most aggressive and most vocal opponent of separation: the settlement movement. In an Israel Radio broadcast on June 6, 2002—the day Israel conquered, 35 years ago, northern Samaria where Benzi Lieberman, the Chairman of the Council

of Settlers in Judea, Samaria and Gaza [or “Yesha Council”], lives—Lieberman announced that the Council, the premier institution of the settlers, would no longer oppose the construction of a fence separating the State of Israel from the body of settlements to the east, including Jewish settlements.

Is this the policy of the Yesha Council? Do the settlers whom Lieberman represents really want to be separated from the rest of the Jews inside Israel? Don't they understand that separation begins as a functional act, then becomes conscious separation wherein the settlements of Samaria and Judea are seen as a separate entity in all senses of the word, and ultimately renders it easier to enact political separation? The Yesha Council's acquiescence to a separation fence reflects—even more than the acquiescence of politicians who ostensibly have to satisfy public opinion—the mental state that has gripped the vast majority of Israelis for some 21 months since Chairman Yasser Arafat initiated a terror war that has succeeded in wearing them down. The Yesha Council, seeking somehow to bridge the disconnect that divides it from most of the frightened public (some of whom actually believe that vicious terrorist attacks are being carried out because of the settlements), feels obliged to cease swimming against the current. And “if the mighty have succumbed, how shall the weak emerge unscathed?”

The first Israelis to demand the construction of a fence for physical separation—as high and thick as possible—between Israel and the Palestinians, were paradoxically the heads of the Labor Party, men and women of peace who signed with Yasser Arafat the Oslo agreement, which was supposed to put an end to all the bloodshed and render any physical barrier superfluous. And after Haim Ramon, Ephraim Sneh and Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, minister of defense and head of the Labor Party, came the Likud ministers, too. Surprisingly, these include Minister of Internal Security Uzi Landau, an adherent to the [concept of the] Greater Land of Israel. Finally, as public pressure built up, they were joined by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

This is indeed astonishing: Sharon, in character, substance, military practice and even political inclination, takes the offensive. He has always sought to decide a conflict by attacking—and overwhelming. Defensive trench warfare, he used to say, is costly in both human and budgetary terms. In particular, the defending side never wins. It is the initiator, who enjoys mobility, who always has the advantage.

During the War of Attrition launched by Egypt in 1968, Sharon opposed construction of the Bar Lev Line of fortified emplacements along the Suez Canal. When the line eventually collapsed in 1973, Sharon took

his detractors to task very pointedly. Yet here he is in the position of supreme decisionmaker, altering the concept he held his entire life. He has accepted—perhaps surrendered to—the completely pessimistic mood sweeping Israeli public opinion.

He knows what the results of the separation fence will be: the de facto determination of the border between Israel and the Palestinian state along the green line, without Arafat even ceasing his terrorism. And if Arafat achieves this prize of the green line without a ceasefire, why should he stop the violence afterwards, since the Jews have demonstrated to him that [Hizballah leader Hassan] Nasrallah's spider web formula works, despite the achievements of Operation Defensive Shield.

The Bar Lev Line along the banks of the Suez Canal was constructed hundreds of kilometers from Israeli population centers. The "Sharon Line" is being built by Ariel Sharon within rifle and machine gun distance from Israeli cities and villages like Kfar Saba and Kochav Yair, where hundreds of thousands of Israelis live. Judging by its sweeping support for a separation fence (over 80 percent), Israel has despaired, at least for the foreseeable future, of achieving any kind of agreement with the Palestinians. Accordingly, the terrorist attacks among the Jewish population of Israel and the settlements, especially the suicide attacks, will not cease. And the settlers, following Ariel Sharon, are lending their support to a step that will not bring peace and—certainly in the long term—will not bring security, and that demonstrates to the Arabs, like our flight from Lebanon, that terrorism pays. And how it pays!—*Published June 10, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Settlements plus

by Ghassan Khatib

The recent and immense Israeli project of the "separation wall" (or what Palestinians have come to know as the "apartheid wall") has once again raised the specter of ongoing Israeli settlement expansion and

the confiscation of Palestinian land. Palestinians have long considered these practices and the policy behind them the single most dangerous threat to their legitimate right to self-determination. Settlement is not a new phenomenon that began with Israel's 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Confiscating and buying up land, building outposts and homes and bringing immigrants to live there is precisely how European Zionists gradually took over Palestinian land in what has now become Israel.

It is understandable then, that Palestinians are driven by a deep fear that this policy is strategically aimed at further consolidating Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, rendering it irreversible. The continuity of settlement during and in spite of the peace process deeply shook Palestinian confidence in a process that, in the Palestinian mind, was supposed to be about ending the occupation in exchange for an end to conflict, and the beginning of peace and security for both sides.

The recent takeover of the Israeli government by parties opposed to the peace process has offered Israelis who do not believe in territorial compromise a new opportunity to continue the rapid confiscation of land and the establishment and expansion of illegal Jewish colonies. This process has been aggravated to such an extent that many moderates from the peace camp—including one of the most moderate, Palestinian finance minister Salam Fayyad—now believe that the rate of expansion of these colonies has transformed the reality overnight and invalidated the possibility of a viable and contiguous Palestinian state. This, of course, annuls the possibility of a two-state solution, and in turn makes peace itself impossible.

The current settlement project of choice is the "separation wall." This project will consolidate the past 35 years of settlement growth by building walls to divide Palestinian-populated areas from Jewish colonies that will simultaneously be integrated with Israel. While Israel is attempting to give the impression that these walls will strengthen the security of Israelis, it is not hard to see past the smokescreen. One foreign diplomat who conducted a field study of these walls sardonically dubbed them "Settlements Plus."

While this Israeli government has yet to fulfill expectations that it might exploit the war in Iraq to expand its campaign of violence against Palestinians, it has quietly but vigorously pursued a combination of land confiscation and "closure" in order to build high cement walls in Jerusalem, Ramallah, the Jordan Valley and along the western side of the West Bank. It is a supreme irony that this project, which will

for all intents and purposes render the Palestinian state impossible, is scheduled for completion even before the “roadmap” (which is supposed to be about creating a Palestinian state) even commences implementation. The lack of American attention and diplomatic protest against this project gives rise to grave doubts over the credibility of the American call for an independent Palestinian state. Palestinians are left to wonder about the wisdom of their own strategic decision to seek a two-state solution.—*Published March 31, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Only think of us as human

by Sharif Omar

Dear Members of the Quartet,

Let me tell you about our West Bank village of Jayyus. By last July, we knew that Israel had already mapped out the course of the separation wall in Qalqilya District, but we had not yet seen the plans. Then, one September evening, a shepherd found white sheets of paper tacked to some olive trees. He brought them to me, and I saw that they were military orders handwritten in Arabic. The order said that all of the farmers of Jayyus village were to come to their farms, where a military officer from the nearby settlement of Qedumim would show us the path of the wall. We thought that the Israeli military might confiscate 50 or 100 square meters—no more. But 200 farmers showed up that unbelievable day to hear that the wall would be built six kilometers inside the green line, what we consider the political border with Israel. Many of the farmers were weeping.

I have worked all my life to build my farm, which stretches over 192 dunams. My orchards are full of loquats and avocados, mangos and peaches, walnuts and figs. I have the richest land in Jayyus.

But that Wednesday, I learned that 175 dunams of my land, the best and well-irrigated earth, was to fall on the other side of the separation wall.

To get to it, I would have to circumvent barbed wire, electronic sensors, military patrols and an eight-meter high cement barrier. Without those resources, I knew I would be a beggar.

And so we began our peaceful demonstrations. With international supporters, we farmers sat in the path of the bulldozers to try to prevent the uprooting of our olive trees. Many Israelis from the peace camp and Jews from America and Europe came, too. One day, we were sitting in the road when an Israeli army officer came and asked us why. We told him that it would be better for them to kill us than to uproot our olive trees.

“We are constructing the separation wall to prevent attacks between Israelis and Palestinians and—in the end—for peace,” he replied.

I said to him politely, “I represent Jayyus village. I am ready to pay half of the cost of constructing this wall, if you would only build it on the green line. If you have no security now, how do you expect to get it when you are 28 meters from our homes?” He became very angry, and said, “I want to show you something.” He put his arm on my neck and then under my shoulders, as if to whisper in my ear, but I could feel his arm wrenching painfully against my neck bones.

This land was my father’s land and that of his father before him. We have already lost land to the settlement of Tsofin, which was established in 1988. The dust from a nearby Israeli quarry—also a settlement—collects on the leaves of my fruit trees. But it is only because of the earth’s wealth that I have been able to educate all of my seven children. I have four daughters: one economist, two English literature majors and a third who will graduate in physics. My sons include an electrical engineer, a lawyer and an agricultural engineer.

This last son, Muhammad, breaks my heart. He won honors in school and a scholarship to study medicine in Tunisia. But when Muhammad called me from abroad, I spoke to him of my sadness that none of my children would care for my farm. He quit his program and returned to the West Bank to study agriculture. Now we will lose our farm and I wonder every day, what gift have I given my son?

The bulldozers work on the wall 24 hours a day. Israeli patrols run incessantly past our home and we do not sleep for the noise. The village of Jayyus is home to 550 families, 400 of which depend entirely on agriculture. Often, when we go to work the land, the military stops us to ask for our identification papers. Israel says that we will continue to have access to our farms, but no one really knows what the future holds.

North of Tulkarem, the farmers were told this, too, but to this day they are barred from their farms. I have advised all of the Jayyus farmers to live on their land, because if that is lost, we will have nothing.

During the Aqaba summit, the Land Defense Committee of Qalqilya came to Ramallah and set up a tent in front of the office of Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas. We established this tent because we wanted the world to know that we are the new refugees (as if there are not enough refugees and tents in the Arab world). Since 1980, the settlements have been annexing our land bit by bit, and I worry that soon we will be no better than Thai and Filipino workers in Israel—day laborers on our own stolen land. We told Abu Mazen that this land is as holy for us as Jerusalem, and that we will not exchange it for even the best of that city.

My message to you, the Quartet, is a simple one: to ask you to pressure Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to treat us as human beings. If he could only respect Palestinians as humans, he would stop annexing our land, he would stop arresting our sons and he would release all our prisoners.—*Published June 23, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Israel's interests take primacy

a conversation with Dore Gold

bitterlemons: Is there room for a viable Palestinian state alongside a viable Jewish state in the Land of Israel?

Gold: The word “viable” has been introduced into the political parlance of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in recent years, even though it has largely remained an undefined term. The Israeli government has stated that it is prepared to live alongside a Palestinian state. But at the same time, it will have its own territorial and functional interests that must be protected in order to provide for Israel's security. Ideally, the borders and the powers of a Palestinian state should be a product of negotiation. But at present Israel does not have a negotiating partner to help define these elements.

bitterlemons: So if Israel withdraws unilaterally, can the remaining territory be defined as a Palestinian state?

Gold: Israel will approach the final boundaries that it regards as acceptable from the standpoint of its interest in retaining defensible borders, which has been a long-term interest of every Israeli prime minister since 1967. In his last address to the Knesset, one month before his assassination, the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin outlined his concept of defensible borders for Israel. There were elements that had nothing to do with security but with Israel's national history, e.g., his insistence that Jerusalem remain united under Israeli sovereignty. But he also spoke of the need to retain settlement blocs and the Jordan Rift Valley “in the widest sense of the term.” This was Rabin's legacy to the people of Israel.

bitterlemons: Do the disengagement plans of the current Israeli government allow for a viable Palestinian state?

Gold: In the future, Israel should approach its options on the territorial aspects of a settlement in the West Bank and Gaza with two factors in mind. One, what are the lessons of the Oslo failure and how can Israel avoid repeating them? And two, what is the likely security environment that Israel will face in the Middle East in the foreseeable future?

bitterlemons: You appear to insist on defining the viability of a Palestinian state in terms of Israel's needs. What about Palestinian needs?

Gold: The term “viable” is like the term “the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.” As [United States President] Jimmy Carter once asked [Israeli Prime Minister] Menachem Begin, “are there illegitimate rights?” Accordingly, would Israel support a nonviable Palestinian state? “Viable” is a term that is difficult to debate. Clearly, different parties attach different meanings to the term. Does it mean territorial contiguity? Imply a certain number of square kilometers? If so, is Singapore viable?

Israel will recognize a Palestinian state as long as Israel's interests are protected. In the 1980s, many concluded from this discussion that federal and con-federal structures would be preferable. But that's voluntary, and there's no indication that Jordan has such an interest.

bitterlemons: You are a former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations. Does the United Nations define membership criteria in terms of viability?

Gold: There are in international law criteria that serve as guidelines for states to decide upon recognizing newly-emerging countries. For

example, that there is a defined territory, a permanent population, the capacity to enter into relations with other states. But territorial critical mass or contiguity are not criteria.—*Published March 15, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Tearing down the walls

by Samah Jabr

My ears are full of war cries; there is no doubt that we sit on the edge of a maelstrom of violence. But the “peace” that the world wishes upon us is based on walls: a two-state proposal that is mistakenly being called a “solution.”

This solution will maintain the ethnic exclusivity of occupation and propagate profound inequalities in land and resources, water, economy, advancement and military that exists between the two states. This solution will reward foreign occupiers by offering them legal status and normal relationships in the Middle East, while giving Palestinians bits and pieces of our homeland, cantons that are separated from each other by Jewish-only settlements and their safe roads.

This two-state solution advocates a demilitarized “Palestinian state” with no direct borders with any of its Arab neighbors, but surrounded by the Middle East’s only nuclear power. A “transitional state,” says the American administration, that will be bestowed on one condition—that we Palestinians behave and “elect” a “reformed” and “democratic” authority—and then only after another three years of occupation.

And so, while Israel continues to welcome “refugees” from 2,000 years ago, extolling its war criminals as national heroes and electing them as prime minister, we Palestinians are expected to give up the right of return, to abandon our political prisoners and to condemn our fighters.

Palestinians are described sometimes as the last colonized people, the last frontier of genocide and ethnic cleansing—words we deign to

speak for fear of being labeled anti-Semitic. Always we must coach our own horror in appreciation for Jewish suffering.

At home, I look out of the kitchen window to see that the Israeli flags have moved forward, closer to our neighborhood, demarcating the new boundaries of the Pisgat Ze’ev settlement. The Israelis claim that they want peace after separation—they are establishing a wall between us for security reasons. They want separation, a separation that will ensure that Palestinians are denied access to the land of their immediate fathers and forefathers, while Israelis continue to traverse their secure bypass roads to settlements lying in the heart of the Palestinian territories.

The vision of two states does not meet any minimal ambition of peace, freedom and a dignified future for Palestinians. It jeopardizes our basic human and national rights of sovereignty. Except for municipal matters like collecting our own garbage, our nation will be totally dependent on the state of Israel. In return, we will be expected to collect Israel’s garbage, wash Israel’s dishes and offer cheap labor to our oppressors.

However, I oppose the two-state solution not only because it is impossible, but because it is immoral.

The Palestinians are a cosmopolitan nation. We are the descendants of civilizations that have lived in this land since the Stone Age. We have Canaanite, Semite, Aramaic, Arab, Turkish, African and European blood in our veins. Here we were born, and here our forefathers have lived. A common history, a common passion for our homeland and the same unstaunched wound unite us.

We are not xenophobic or exclusive. We are Muslims, Christians, indigenous Jews, Baha’is and Druze. Over the centuries our doors were open to foreigners. The Armenians fleeing genocide found shelter among Palestinians; Africans came as pilgrims and were entranced by the magic of Jerusalem. Early Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution were accepted within the Palestinian community, worked with Palestinians, lived in their towns, and intermarried with them. According to the Palestinian National Charter, the document that lays out our national principles, Jews who immigrated to Palestine before the 1948 Nakba are Palestinians.

Our rejection of the Zionist project is not based on hatred, but on the rejection of foreign occupation, the theft of our homeland and resources, and the crimes that have been committed in realizing the dream of an exclusively Jewish state.

Identity & Culture

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Coming to terms

by Yossi Alpher

One of the biggest mistakes Israel made in drafting the Oslo Declaration of Principles in 1993 was an error of omission concerning the “Israeli Arabs”—the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel. The Israeli negotiators assumed that, once Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had accepted the Israeli condition that the Palestine Liberation Organization could represent all Palestinians everywhere except those living in Israel (who as Israeli citizens are represented by the government of Israel, the other signatory to Oslo), the ensuing peace process would not involve them. Accordingly, Israeli governments could continue to ignore not only Israeli Arabs’ material and civil needs, but their national sentiments as well.

The consequence of this mistake burst upon us dramatically in the violent clashes of October 2000, when the Israeli Arab community briefly joined the intifada and 12 of its members were killed by the Israel Police. The Israeli Jewish majority suddenly and painfully realized that the emerging prospect of a neighboring Palestinian state, coupled with the strengthening of the Islamic movement and against the backdrop of decades of second-class citizenship, had radicalized Israeli Arab politics. Israel was being told to provide a national solution for Palestinians not only in the West Bank and Gaza, but in the Galilee and the Triangle, too.

These developments, and more, began to radicalize Israeli Jewish attitudes as well. Arafat’s insistence on the right of return of the 1948 refugees and his determination that Jews have no status on the Temple Mount, coupled with waves of suicide bombings and the growing evidence that tens of thousands of Palestinians from Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza were illegally “returning” into Israeli Arab villages (one of them was the 13th victim of the brief Israeli Arab intifada), in effect merged the “Israeli Arab” and Palestinian issues in the eyes of many Israeli Jews.

I acknowledge that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is very complex. The emergence of two generations of Israelis born in the land occupied by their forefathers makes things infinitely more confused. It means that this conflict will not be solved until we recognize the presence and the humanity of the other, rectify the wounds of the past, acknowledge the wrong that has been done to Palestinians and then undo those wrongs as best we can.

My hope lies in a multi-national, multi-ethnic democratic state of historic Palestine for all its citizens. I do not care about the safety of Israelis any less than I care for the safety of my own people, nor am I suggesting that we jump into this process without preparation. We must start by demanding that Israelis remove their armed children from our doorsteps, with a United Nations force as a common buffer zone. We Palestinians everywhere need to heal and work with each other to elect new democratic representatives instead of the same tired faces. And then, as two equal nations, we need to set out upon the business of making right the wrongs. It is time for something new.

“You are asking us to commit mass suicide,” one Israeli told me. No, I am calling for Israelis’ moral and ethical liberation from the sin of occupation, for their freedom from pathological fear and the neurosis of security, and the restoration of their human rights as equal citizens in a free country.

This is not my fantasy—it is my enduring hope. The making right of colonization has been achieved in recent history. South Africa is a living example of the triumph of hope and reconciliation over oppression and prejudice.

When Palestinians live together as equals with the people of Israel, when not only Israeli security matters, but Palestinian security as well, and when both of us take the same bus to work, stand at the ministry of interior together, endure the same procedures at the airport and have equal wages for the same jobs, then the last shall be first in keeping the peace.—*Published June 16, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

For most Israelis, alarm focused on what appeared to be a short-term Palestinian strategy of “one and a half Palestinian states”: the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza based on conditions (the Temple Mount, return of refugees) that embodied Palestinian denial of the Zionist precept of a Jewish state for the Jewish people, while Israel itself would absorb returning Palestinian refugees and yield to the demands of its Palestinian citizens to become a “state of all its citizens.” Time would take care of the rest, with Israel moving through binational status to eventually become another Palestinian Arab state.

The reaction to this perception among Israeli Jews has been a sharp reaffirmation of the precept of a Jewish state. The post-Zionist school among some Israeli intellectuals who used to advocate a “state of all its citizens” has been severely delegitimized. Radical new solutions have been formulated that combine measures for the West Bank and Gaza with measures concerning Israeli Arabs, and that emphasize the need for national physical separation between Jews and Arabs.

Some of the solutions are positive. Thus, support for a Palestinian state has actually risen among Israeli Jews during two years of intifada. So has support for unilateral withdrawal by Israel and dismantling of provocative settlements. Some are problematic. Increasingly, Israelis advocate redrawing the green line so that Israeli Arab villages in the Triangle and Wadi Ara regions are included in the State of Palestine. And some of the solutions are criminal: there is a growing and frightening camp of advocates of arbitrary “transfer” of Palestinians to areas beyond the confines of Israel/Palestine.

The “Israeli Arab” issue in effect is now at the cutting edge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the two are no longer separable.

Both communities have a lot of soul-searching to do. Israel must remain a Jewish state—otherwise it has no “raison d’etre”—but it must be democratic in nature and cannot obliterate or ignore the Palestinian identity of 18 percent of its population. The latter must recognize that one Palestinian state is the most they can aspire to, and that they won’t be living in it. If they want a Palestinian Arab national identity, and that is certainly legitimate, they should plan to move to that state.

Israeli Jews can hardly approach the challenging task of defining some sort of culturally autonomous status for the Israeli Palestinian minority until they have defined among themselves the Jewish “majority” nature of Israel itself: how religious, how secular national, and how pluralistic? This is a daunting task that threatens to split the Israeli national fabric.

Palestinian citizens of Israel can hardly be asked to rationalize their status until the final borders that delineate and separate “independent Arab and Jewish states” (the language of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 from 1947) in Mandatory Palestine are determined. They should have truly equal civil status and minority rights, but they must come to terms with the basic nature of Israel as a Jewish state. Recognizing that Jews are a people with a legitimate right to self-determination in their historic homeland is a daunting challenge for most Arabs and Muslims anywhere. The Palestinian citizens of Israel must take the lead.—*Published November 11, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

The long journey to two demands

by Adel Manna

The Arabs in Israel were an inseparable part of the Palestinian people until 1948. After the wars that led to the establishment of the state of Israel and the dispersal of the Palestinian people, this community was separated from the other Palestinian communities in neighboring Arab countries. Before delving into the history of Arabs in Israel, however, it is useful to examine the results of the 1948 War, which still form a basis for the socio-political status of Arabs within Israel and indeed, most of the greater Palestinian community.

After the 1949 ceasefire agreements signed between Israel and the neighboring Arab states, there were approximately 150,000 Arabs still living within the green line. This community comprised nearly one-sixth of the Palestinians that had been living in the area that became the state of Israel. The war had dispersed some 750,000 Palestinians, who became refugees in neighboring Arab countries.

The Arabs who stayed in their homeland found themselves in an unenviable situation. While the Arabs in Israel became citizens and enjoyed some of the rights of citizenship, they were also completely cut off from the rest of the Arab world—in particular, the Palestinian

people. Inside their homeland, they were treated with hostility, large tracts of their land were expropriated and they lived under military rule until 1966. This was the most difficult period for Arabs in Israel, who were struggling just to survive under the oppressive policies enforced by military authorities in Arab areas.

The 1948 War destroyed Palestinian society and its cultural and political elite. When the leadership was dispersed and only vulnerable segments of the Palestinian people remained, Israel was able to Judaize the Arab areas and dispossess the Arabs within Israel of their Palestinian identity. The Israeli authorities then imposed their policies on the Arab areas, which were completely isolated from the rest of the Arab world.

A very small minority of Arabs within Israel challenged Israeli policies under that military rule. The most prominent among them were the Communists and Pan-Arabists, who rejected Israeli policies towards the Arab community. But in general, until 1967, the Arabs within Israel paid dearly for holding fast to their homeland. They were isolated from the Arab world and were subjected to Israeli policies of the military administration specific only to the Arab community.

After the disastrous 1967 War, the Arabs within Israel emerged from their isolation and renewed their contact with the Palestinian people and the rest of the Arab world. The 1966 end of military rule and the Israeli authorities' subsequent preoccupation with controlling the Palestinian areas occupied in 1967 had an overwhelming effect on Arabs within Israel. Starting in the mid-s-'70s, they gained self-confidence and shaped a clear political agenda.

This agenda still stands today, although it has been refined over the last three decades. It is based on two fundamental demands: peace and equality. Peace is to be based on the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and civil equality is to be created between Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel as a condition for reaching historical reconciliation and an end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The overwhelming majority of Arabs within Israel supported the Oslo Accords in 1993 because they broached the possibility of ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state. At that time, the government of Yitzhak Rabin sought to bridge the gaps between Arabs and Jews by applying a policy of gradual parity.

These policies of the Rabin government enraged Israel's extreme right-wing opposition. Rabin's assassination on November 4, 1995 was the

beginning of the end for the policies of equality and peace. Today, years after Rabin's assassination, it is fair to say that the assassin and his supporters in Israel's extreme right have succeeded in their mission.

The future of Arabs within Israel and their attainment of equal civil rights are inextricably tied to the future of the struggle between Israel and the Palestinians. The continuation of the occupation and the bloody conflict between the two peoples threatens even the few gains the Arabs within Israel have achieved since the s'70s. On the other hand, ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip only realizes one demand of the Arabs within Israel. Their second demand is total equality. They demand an end to the discrimination inherent in a state "solely for Jews," and demand that Israel become a state for all of its citizens, both Arab and Jewish.

Today, as Israeli society stands on the threshold of new elections, its citizens must choose between peace and equality, or occupation and the continuation of conflict. If the government chooses the latter, then the political right will have succeeded in blocking the path to peace and equality based on dividing historic Palestine and establishing two states. In that case, the Arabs in Israel, and Palestinians in general, will be forced to create a new political agenda. For example, this agenda might press for the establishment of a democratic binational state on the entire land of Palestine from the Jordan River to the sea, rather than an oppressive regime of racist policies and apartheid.

Ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state in the areas occupied since 1967 is a condition necessary to enable the Palestinian minority within Israel to obtain total equality as citizens. Accepting that solution would be a major concession, one made in order to reach a historic reconciliation between the Jews and Arabs. If the political right wing succeeds in thwarting this solution, it will not only undermine chances of peace between the two peoples, but will also threaten the stability of Israeli society and the Israeli political system.—*Published November 11, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Human misery comes from human mistakes

a conversation with Ahmad Yassin

bitterlemons-international: How important is religion in providing justice and solving the political problems of the Arab world?

Yassin: The basic difficulty here is a misunderstanding of the true meaning of the word “religion.” In the Islamic belief, “religion” refers to every system on earth that human beings abide by to run their lives. In general, “religion” might come from God or be manmade by humans to run their own lives. Life can’t continue without religion to protect and maintain the human existence.

In Islam in particular, religion is created by God to protect and maintain itself as religion and maintain property, thought, humanity, and progeny. Islam is an ideal and practical system that was implemented and applied for hundreds of years through Prophet Mohammed, his caliphs (Prophet Mohammed’s successors), the Umayyad Islamic state, and then the Abbasid Islamic state. History has proven Islam as a successful system at building and maintaining good societies. The system that succeeds once can succeed many more times.

bitterlemons-international: How does Islam explain Palestinian misery and unhappiness? Is this the work of God or man?

Yassin: First of all, [in the Western world] there is some ignorance towards the true Islamic doctrine. When God sent his messengers and holy books, it was to solve the problems of human beings, but not to end them, because these problems are basic. Periodically, God sent his messengers and holy books to resolve and find solutions for these problems.

The misery that occurs in the lives of humans is a result of their behavior and their mistakes. But the welfare that human beings are offered comes from God. God said in his Holy Quran, “And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought.”

Therefore, the misery that inflicts human beings is due to their non-commitment to the system that God sketched for them, and the result is a life of misery and unhappiness.

bitterlemons-international: Hamas has set its goal as an Islamic state in Palestine. How would that state include ideas often associated with modern statehood: democracy, equal rights and religious freedom?

Yassin: Islam gave every human being the right to worship, and rights in matrimony (personal affairs like marriage, divorce, and so on) and this will not be an obstacle in shaping international relationships.

Islam also opened all the gates and borders between the various nations and peoples and led them to the way of goodness and human happiness. In other words, in Islam it is forbidden for Muslims to drink alcohol, but non-Muslims (Christians and Jews) were allowed [to drink] so that Islam was not an obstacle in their lives. Also Islam allowed non-Muslims to make their own internal arrangements according to their own personal status laws so that Islam didn’t interfere in their personal lives.

If we have our Islamic state, we will have our own laws to control and standardize our society. I want to ask these modern countries, if the individual breaks the law of the state, would they not punish him or would punishing him be considered a violation of his rights?

Accordingly, in our Islamic state there will be Islamic law that will punish anyone who breaks or violates the law—as in any country. We, as Muslims, have absolute freedom for all people to be creative and to learn. We also have political, economic, social, and personal freedom, but [freedom that is] derived from Islamic law if the individual is Muslim and from the laws of Christianity or Judaism for Christian and Jewish individuals.

bitterlemons-international: What has more effect on the Middle East today, divisions among Sunnis, Shiites, Christians and secular Arabs or political divisions over power and money?

Yassin: The real suffering in the Middle East and the problems that the Middle East faces are colonialism and occupation—American, Zionist, Jewish and Christian problems. Shiites and Sunnis are both Muslims, but the occupiers and colonizers are those who evoke sectarianism: either between Shiite and Sunni or between Muslim and Christian. The colonizers have adopted a policy to divide and conquer, and accordingly, they are doing their best to separate the various Arab and Muslim groups to make them easier to control and colonize their countries.

bitterlemons-international: What does Islam teach about reconciliation and making peace, and what does that mean in the Middle East today?

Yassin: Islam's basic principles are to make peace and reconciliation, not only among human beings but also in the world of animals and plants. But Islam does not teach Muslims to reconcile with aggressors or occupiers that kill innocent people and ravage the land. God said in His Holy Quran, "And there is life for you in (the law of) retaliation, O men of understanding, that you may guard yourselves."

Or there is the verse "And if you take your turn, then retaliate with the like of that with which you were afflicted; but if you are patient, it will certainly be best for those who are patient."

So, you must defend yourself, your land, your dignity, your property, and your country. One cannot simply tolerate that an aggressor stole one's land and murdered one's people. To do so is not reconciliation or tolerance but surrender, defeat and a trouncing. These days, the Israeli and American enemies are trying to confuse the terminology of "reconciliation" and "self-defense."

Islam is a world system calling for tolerance and reconciliation with all religions. It deals with them in the spirit of brotherhood, but it also does not accept aggression.

God said in the Holy Quran, "Allah does not forbid you respecting those who have not made war against you on account of (your) religion, and have not driven you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly; surely Allah loves the doers of justice."

The aggressors want us, in the name of reconciliation and Islam, to give up and surrender our occupied lands. If we were to apply the true Islamic system in the Middle East and the world, Islam would create a global civilization and produce enlightened thought and build bridges of friendship and cooperation between the various nations in all aspects of life, science, society, and economy. Islam breaks all barriers between countries concerning commerce and trade.

But in the current situation, the colonizers and occupiers want to open all the gates of the Middle East on behalf of Israel. These gates haven't opened yet, and therefore they are doing their best to damage relationships between the Arab countries. This will maintain and support Israeli existence at the expense of the Palestinian, Arab and Muslim nations.—*Published July 31, 2003 in bitterlemons-international.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Reflections of a Jerusalem Christian

by *George Hintlian*

The Christian minority in Palestine has always benefited from a privileged status, and rulers from Emperor Constantine through Caliph Omar to the Ottoman sultans all issued decrees to ensure respect for the rights of the various churches, their patriarchs and local communities.

Conversely, and depending on the rulers and political circumstances, the churches have themselves been able to play their own political roles and exercise their influence, either overtly or behind the scenes.

The last 100 years have witnessed some of the more profound changes for the Christian community here even by the standards of its particularly turbulent history.

In the late nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century Palestine and especially Jerusalem and Jaffa saw extraordinary prosperity. Modern urban patterns emerged and there was a sharp increase in the population. There was also significant growth in both foreign and local Christian institutions. The greater access to a western-oriented education available to the local Christian population resulted in upward demographic changes, as wealth increased and there was migration of rich Christians from neighboring countries into Palestine (mainly to Nazareth, Acre and Jaffa).

The economic boom picked up momentum during the British mandate but was discontinued with the 1948 War. The displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians during that war affected all, and the Christian presences in Jaffa and Haifa were dramatically reduced as many formerly affluent Christians suddenly became refugees, having lost their homes and businesses almost overnight.

The Christian population in Palestine never recovered (quantitatively and qualitatively) from this exodus. Its demographic growth was arrested and it never regained its intellectual vigor. And while the 1950s witnessed major rehabilitation programs, many continued to immigrate to the western countries for greener pastures.

The 1967 capture of the West Bank and Jerusalem by Israel ushered in yet a new period. Perhaps overestimating the power and international

influence of the churches, Israel undertook a well-calculated policy to impress upon the world that Christians in the occupied territories would be treated fairly. In a solemn declaration in the Knesset in 1967, Israel undertook to honor the status quo with the Christian communities as it had been observed by previous governments and rulers. In four decades of occupation, Israel did not interfere in issues related to the Christian holy places, leaving them mainly to the concerned communities to resolve their differences.

Indeed, in the first two decades of Israel's occupation, the Israeli authorities worked hard to reach out to the Christian churches. Liaison offices between the churches and the authorities were established to deal promptly with practical issues created as a result of the occupation. This practice, at the same time, ensured that the lines of communication were open mainly to the ecclesiastical leadership.

Thus, in this period of transition when daily life was full of bureaucratic detail and red tape, the authorities empowered the church leadership to play a middleman role. The congregations became heavily dependent on their church leadership to solve day-to-day problems. This in turn meant the churches had to maintain close relations with the state to obtain favors for their congregations.

The first intifada changed the picture again. Both the churches and the lay communities became more active in daily politics. Many Christians took an active part in the intifada and the churches articulated public statements and positions against the occupation and Israeli measures to fight that intifada.

Since then relations between the churches and the Israeli state have witnessed a steady decline. Some liaison offices have been suppressed or lost their momentum, and there are many pending issues that await resolution. For instance, Israel never attempted to codify or finalize tax exemptions, which are an indivisible part of the daily functioning of Christian institutions (as non-profit organizations), and to date any formal pledge to do so by Israel to the Vatican has not yet materialized.

Undoubtedly, the churches have been politicized and political developments are followed closely. Because of this growing involvement in politics, there are also more frequent tensions with the Israeli authorities.

The Christian communities have a clear vested interest in final status talks concerning Jerusalem. The churches were vocal in their objection to the Camp David proposals regarding a Quarter-based division of the

Old City, insisting instead that the Old City should remain one unit to ensure freedom of movement and access to the holy places.

In fact, the destinies of the churches here are inextricably intertwined with the survival of their local communities. The overall numbers of Christians are falling and it is an issue of great concern. The churches are trying to cope with the continuing loss of the faithful and mobilize resources to provide reasonable conditions of life to stem the exodus. But only a peaceful resolution of the conflict will ultimately relieve the churches from the political entanglements they have become embroiled in, allowing them to devote their resources to ecclesiastical matters and their congregations.

As the situation stands, the churches and the Christian communities are facing an existential threat of the greatest acuteness. Only if—and when—peace comes will the Christians here be able to witness a resurgence as the Christian communities blend back into their natural environment and rejoin their brethren in the wider Middle East.—
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AN ISRAELI VIEW

Touching the core: The politics of narrative on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif

by Daniel Seidemann

In the summer of 2000, barely a month before the Camp David summit, a group of Israelis and Palestinians convened in Europe to discuss the issues of the holy sites in Jerusalem. A number of religious leaders also took part. At one point in the discussion, an Islamic cleric let loose with a verbal volley, rife with anti-Semitic imagery, the gist of which was: “You Jews should look for your Temple elsewhere. You have no ties to Haram al-Sharif.”

An embarrassed hush fell over the deliberations. When we broke, one of the senior Palestinians came over and said apologetically: “Do

you see the kind of prejudices Chairman Arafat has to deal with in his constituency?”

Two weeks after the Camp David summit, I received a phone call from a senior American negotiator. “I just came from Arafat,” he said. “He really doesn’t think the Temple is there. How do we explain it to him?” It turned out that the barriers to a resolution of the issue of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif were not only in “the constituencies” but in the hearts and minds of the senior decisionmakers. It also became apparent that the negotiators were singularly unprepared to deal with the volatile and complex issues at hand.

Any attempt to move forward towards a political resolution of the issue of the Mount/Haram requires an analysis of the underlying factors that led to failure in the political talks. I wish to offer a number of tentative observations in this regard:

- The Mount/Haram is no mere “real estate”: the site and the symbolism it evokes are the primordial materials of which national consciousness is made. Two mutually-incompatible national narratives compete in the same limited sacred space, in the place most important to each party.
- In the past, those engaged in the preparatory negotiations concerning the Mount/Haram, were least prone to hear the symbolic “siren call” of the Mount/Haram—and on both sides, those most attuned to its powerful imagery were least prone to dialogue.
- In the years prior to Camp David, Jewish claims to the Mount were subsumed in the monolithic claims enunciated by Israel in regard to “a united Jerusalem,” further contributing to the Palestinian failure to fathom the depth and intensity of the Jewish sentiments.
- The “creative ideas” for the Mount/Haram often proved to be “gimmicks” that did not disclose a grasp of how the symbolic imagery resonates in each constituency. The Clinton proposals, which envisaged a “vertical” differentiation of sovereignty on the Mount/Haram, proved counterproductive, exacerbating rather than allaying irrational fears. An extensive Palestinian popular literature exists, promulgating the baseless fear that the Zionists would emerge from underground shafts and engulf the mosques. The Clinton proposals inadvertently fell on these irrational fears. Israeli Prime Minister Barak’s position that he would not “turn over” sovereignty on the Mount to Palestinians (implying he could turn it over to a third party, who in turn would deliver sovereignty to the Palestinians, as though it were an “assist” in basketball) had little potential popular credibility.

- Israeli public opinion perceives the denial of legitimate Jewish claims to the Mount as a litmus test, indicating that the Palestinians have not acquiesced to the legitimacy of Israeli presence anywhere in the Land of Israel.
- The Mount/Haram is the quintessential arena in which the extreme elements on both sides attempt to undermine a comprehensive political agreement between the parties. A sustained assault, rhetorical and otherwise, by these extremes, is a given, and requires clear and aggressive crisis-management mechanisms in any future political settlement.
- There are established Jewish and Islamic religious traditions that are conducive to compromise. Strong religious/cultural Jewish schools of thought place little stock in physical control of the Mount—provided that the legitimacy of the Jewish narrative and claim is recognized, and that the sanctity of Jewish artifacts is protected from desecration. There is a respected Islamic tradition that recognizes the legitimacy of historic Jewish ties to the Haram, in ways that do not derogate from the depth of the claims of Islam.

It is regrettable that the arrangements on the Mount/Haram have “congealed” around the issue of sovereignty, a term singularly inappropriate to resolving the “clash of narratives.” However, after the Clinton parameters, it is highly unlikely that a settlement of the Mount/Haram will take place without some form of Palestinian sovereignty over the Mount/Haram. The stronger the affirmations of the legitimacy of Jewish ties to the Mount, and the mechanisms for protection of Jewish interests—the stronger Israeli public willingness will be to cede sovereignty on the Mount to the Palestinians.

The issues involved cannot be solved by either gimmick or obfuscation. At the end of the day, a political settlement will require the courage of two national political leaders attuned to their own national and religious traditions. They need to hammer out of these malleable materials arrangements that will allow each party to maintain its ties to a site sacred to both, in a manner not threatening to the beliefs and interests of the other. The materials exist—and await the political courage necessary to put them in place.—*Published June 3, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

History

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Zionism & the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

by Shlomo Avineri

In the 1950s, an American sociologist coming from the social-democratic tradition, published an influential study called *The End of Ideology*. In it he argued that with the emergence of the welfare state, the old divisions between “left” and “right” are being blurred, and the political discourse is becoming de-ideologized, more “pragmatic” and less polarized.

The last half-century has not borne out this assessment. Even the description of the dissolution of the Soviet Union—by another American thinker, this time coming from the right, Francis Fukuyama—as the “end of history,” has once again turned out to be simplistic, as shown by the cruel wars in the former Yugoslavia or Chechnya.

Certainly the Middle East is a good—or bad—example of the staying power of ideologies. One way of looking at the role of ideologies in the region is to try to conceptualize the Arab-Israel conflict in an ideological framework.

On the Israeli side, the fundamental ideological underpinning of the Israelis’ self-understanding is grounded in Zionism. This ideology, growing out of the impact of secularization, the Enlightenment and the ideas of the French Revolution on Jewish identity, views the Jews as a nation with a historic homeland—the Land of Israel—a national language and culture, and the claim for self-determination.

This understanding is the framework within which most Israelis also see the conflict with the Palestinians. While initially many Israelis were reluctant to view the Palestinians as a nation, today most agree that the conflict is between two national movements—the Jewish (i.e. Zionism) and the Arab/Palestinian. It is based on this understanding that the Zionist movement accepted the 1947 United Nations partition plan, when the international community viewed a territorial compromise as the only means that would give each of the two national movements a place in the sun in part of the area that each claims as its homeland. While Israeli left- and right-wingers currently disagree about the boundaries

between the two entities, it is now the mainstream Israeli position that a conflict between two national movements can be solved only on the basis of a compromise.

The Arab position on the conflict is viewed in totally different ideological terms. Historically, Arab nationalism grew in the nineteenth century out of a similar impact of the ideas of the Enlightenment and secularization on the Arabic-speaking people of the Middle East: hence, incidentally, the high proportion of Christians among the founders of Arab nationalism. Yet, for Arab political discourse, the Middle East conflict is not between two national movements. To the Arabs, the Jews are not a nation, but merely a religious community; hence they lack the right to self-determination and the claim to sovereignty. Arab ideology views the conflict not as one between two national movements, but between one national movement (the Arab/Palestinian) and a phenomenon—Zionism—which in the Arab understanding is akin to European colonialism and imperialism. Zionism is thus basically illegitimate, analogous to the French presence in Algeria—and, basically, destined to suffer the same fate.

Hence the Arab refusal to accept the 1947 UN partition resolution; hence the historical reference to “the Zionist entity;” hence the consistent avoidance of reference to a Jewish people; hence the claim for a right of return for 1948 Palestinian refugees. Hence also the occasional parallels drawn with the Crusaders, and the intellectual inability to recognize in Zionism anything other than rapaciousness, aggression and intolerance.

It should be added that the refusal of mainstream Arab nationalism to accept the Jewish national movement is coupled with a wider reluctance to accept any other legitimate nationalism in what is considered “the Arab region.” Hence the refusal, over decades, to accept the right of the Kurds to self-determination; the refusal (until recently) to grant language rights to the Berber community in Algeria; and the insistence that the Maronites, despite their historical distancing from Arab nationalism, are Arabs with no further qualification. This hegemonistic and exclusivist aspect of Arab nationalism of course makes it difficult for it to embrace universalistic norms; it is not an accident that the only serious challenge to Arab nationalism came from the communists, with their supra-national ideology.

These conflicting views of the conflict—one viewing it as a conflict of two national movements, the other seeing it as a conflict between a national movement and a foreign colonial phenomenon—cannot be overlooked if one wishes to find a solution to the conflict. Previous attempts to find a mutually acceptable solution have foundered when

the ideological issues were addressed. So long as they prevail, the chances for reconciliation are slim.—*Published September 18, 2003 in bitterlemons-international.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

The Palestinian narrative clashes with a two-state solution

by Yossi Alpher

During the year 2000 and early 2001—prior to, at and after Camp David II—Israelis and Palestinians tried for the only time at the official level to negotiate a final status agreement. Since those negotiations failed, relations have deteriorated seriously and many Israelis have lost faith in the two sides’ capacity to reach a solution in the foreseeable future. The current post-Lebanon war reality in which fighting still rages in Gaza, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s convergence plan for the West Bank has been shelved and Palestinian internal governance is in disarray in some ways constitutes a new low in the relationship and bespeaks a greater degree of stagnation than ever.

Precisely because things are so bad, this may be a good time to look again at the basics. A considerable majority on both sides appears today to agree broadly on issues like borders, settlements, security, water and economic arrangements between Israel and a Palestinian state. A majority appears to concur on the geopolitical model of a two-state solution. But what we learned in 2000 is that even near-agreement on these topics couldn’t prevent the process from collapsing because we remained so far apart on the narrative, or “existential” issues: the refugee/right of return question and the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

In the years since 2000, it has become apparent that the consensual Palestinian position on these two issues actually contradicts the underpinnings of a two-state solution as Israelis understand it and, as UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of November 29, 1947 defines

it: “an Arab state and a Jewish state” in Mandatory Palestine, i.e., a Palestinian Arab state adjacent to Israel, a Jewish state.

Ostensibly, Palestinians are roughly divided in their allegiance and historical-philosophical approach to the conflict, between a large minority that supports Hamas’ insistence that genuine peace with an Israeli state is impossible and the only true solution comprises Israel’s disappearance (a plurality voted for Hamas in January of this year), and a majority that accepts Fateh’s advocacy of a two-state solution based on the 1967 lines. In fact, nearly all Palestinians insist on two “narrative” versions that, at least at the historical-philosophical level, contradict a solution that juxtaposes a Jewish state and an Arab state.

First, the Palestinian argument that there was no Jewish temple on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, which therefore has no overriding national-religious significance for Jews, denies Israel’s Jewish national roots in Jerusalem and in the Land of Israel/historic Palestine. It projects Israel as an artificial state, the product of colonial settlement by foreigners, which is indeed precisely the way most Palestinians (indeed most Arabs) see us. Israel could make peace with Egyptians who hold to this view because Egypt makes no claim to the land of Palestine or Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, thereby rendering the issue irrelevant to good (albeit cold) neighborly state-to-state relations. But the intimacy of Israeli-Palestinian relations—two peoples sharing the same land—makes this far more difficult.

The same argument holds for the right of return. The problem is not whether Israel will accept Palestinian refugees as part of a settlement or even the question of how many refugees. Rather, the real narrative issue is the Palestinian insistence that, regardless of the fate of specific refugees, Israel must acknowledge as a principle the right of return of all the 1948 refugees and their descendants, more than four million people. As Israelis understand this demand, if all Palestinians have even the theoretical right to return, this is because Israel expelled them in an unjust war. If the descendants of those expelled in 1948 have, in perpetuity, the right of return, this is because Palestinians’ link to the land is eternal, whereas Jews’ link to the land is not.

In other words, Israel was born in sin in 1948, meaning, once again, that it has no right to exist, that it is a foreign and illegitimate entity. This is what Palestinians in a Palestinian state next to Israel will teach their children in school. It is not an acceptable basis for a two-state solution, because it comprises the kernel of one side’s negation of the other and opens the door for future irredentism and subversion.

Note that Israelis do not call into question the sacred and historical importance of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif for Palestinians and Muslims in general. They don’t demand that Palestinians and other Arabs apologize for rejecting 181 and trying to destroy the nascent Jewish state in 1948. They don’t insist that Palestinians recognize that wars cause refugee problems, that the 1948 War generated as many Jewish refugees in Middle East countries as Palestinian refugees, and that each country should in principle absorb its own. They don’t care what Palestinians think about the first and second temples as long as they acknowledge that Jews have a national-religious historic tie to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif that must find expression in arrangements for its sovereign status, and in respect for Israeli and Jewish rights on and access to the site, all without prejudice to Palestinian and Muslim rights. In other words, Israelis don’t insist that Palestinians (or other Arabs contemplating peace with Israel) ratify the Israeli narrative in order to end the conflict, even though Palestinian logic dictates that we should.

If Palestinians cannot adjust their narrative to accept Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state in the Land of Israel/historic Palestine—and I see little likelihood of this happening in the foreseeable future—then we cannot truly end this conflict. Israel would legitimately fear lest Palestinian acceptance of a two-state solution and recognition of Israel be tempered by Palestinian adherence to a set of narrative beliefs that negate Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state and harbor an agenda of eventually Palestinizing Israel through legal and illegal “return,” subversion and incitement of Israel’s Palestinian minority.

Meanwhile, we can and should find ways of coexisting with one another and with our conflicting narratives. We Israelis should dismantle settlements and withdraw unilaterally from as much of the West Bank and East Jerusalem (but not the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif!) as possible in order to provide the Palestinians with the best possible conditions for running their own lives in their own political entity. We can reach partial agreements and solutions. But we cannot truly end the conflict.—*Published September 4, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

The myth says we compromised

a conversation with Meron Benvenisti

bitterlemons: In retrospect, was UN General Assembly Resolution 181 a wise decision, in your view?

Benvenisti: From my point of view, it was an inevitable decision. It was in line with the solutions current in that period, the British tradition of partition to resolve ethnic conflicts in India, Ireland, etc. It was fashionable. It was inevitable because it was a legitimate way of declaring war. The British left, knowing partition would not be implemented, so UNGAR 181 legitimized the beginning of hostilities, enabling the Jews to profit and get more than their share of Palestine.

Nothing of UNGAR 181 was implemented, not the borders, not the economic union, not the provisions that safeguarded the interests of Palestinian inhabitants on a par with Israelis; we tend to forget that within the 181 Jewish state there was an almost equal number of Arabs and Jews. There were provisions to forbid confiscation of land. So UNGAR 181 was a dead letter from the beginning. Later a myth developed that the Jews accepted it and the Arabs rejected it. But the Jews never accepted to honestly implement it. The main aspect of partition rejected by the Jews was the internationalization of Jerusalem.

bitterlemons: Still, the Arab states officially rejected UNGAR 181.

Benvenisti: This was their mistake. But this has become a myth to buttress the justice of the Israeli clause, like the myth that [Israeli Prime Minister Ehud] Barak offered the Palestinians everything at Camp David and they rejected it and caused a war. So UNGAR 181 is an example of historic compromise only in principle, not in reality.

bitterlemons: Are you arguing that the idea of partition into two states was a mistake?

Benvenisti: With hindsight, the answer is no. Let's assume the United Nations enforced the federation solution, the minority recommendation, instead of partition. That would have been disastrous for the Jewish people; there would have been no Jewish state, there would have been one-man, one-vote.

Thinking about it today, with the failure of the idea of partition, now that the demographic/ethnic proportions are the opposite of then (at present Jews are a majority, then the Arabs were a majority), it's safer to think in terms of a federated state or at least to give it a try. The fashion is no longer partition. Then, after World War II, world borders were fluid. Now the international borders are rigid, and the international community is more prone to think in terms of soft internal boundaries and federated states. So today, maybe we should reopen the dilemma of 1947 and adjust it to the present situation.

bitterlemons: Were the 1947 borders—the Bosnia-like partition map of interlocking cantons—viable?

Benvenisti: They were not meant to be implemented. Especially in Jerusalem, Jaffa, western Galilee—the triangles and points where the cantons merged. Bosnia is a good example of a successful decision to maintain old, rigid international boundaries but with soft borders inside. Had UNGAR 181 been implemented like at Dayton by the international community after a terrible war, it could have worked. But this did not happen. Instead, the Jews saw UNGAR 181 as an opening to legitimize their state and expand. [David] Ben Gurion said as much: this is what we take now.

So if you think in terms of bi-zonal confederation as in Bosnia or Cyprus, the answer is yes, the borders were viable. For this, you need an atmosphere of cooperation and agreement to the demographic status quo and this was not the case. Instead, one side (the Arabs) was weak and militarily aggressive, while the other was dynamic, wanting to bring millions of Jews to Israel, based on the UNGAR 181 foothold. The *raison d'être* of the Jewish acceptance of the partition plan was a Zionist plan to expand. We should be proud that we strategically won that diplomatic battle and made it the foundation of a state. But we did not, as the myth says, accept a compromise while the other side rejected it. The objective of UNGAR 181 was not to solve the conflict from the Jews' point of view, but rather to create a Jewish state as a safe haven for victims of the Holocaust. The rest is commentary.

bitterlemons: UNGAR 181 has returned to Israeli parlance in the last few years, in the context of the peace process, because it provides the international legal foundation for Israel as a Jewish state. Suppose the Arabs had accepted it in 1947?

Benvenisti: If we suppose the Arabs embraced UNGAR 181, this would mean an internationalized Jerusalem, the 1947 borders, equal rights for Palestinians in the Jewish state, near demographic parity, and Jews

forbidden to expropriate Arab lands. This is a typical ahistoric question, because it is trying to invoke something that was meant to deal with an entirely different situation of 57 years ago, so much so that, in 1948, people like me were for partition, and now we support a federated state—just to show how things have changed.—*Published September 13, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Wiping the landscape clean

by Issam Nassar

The status of Jerusalem was disputed between the Zionist movement and Palestinian Arabs even before Israel came to be. Then, Jewish settlements in Jerusalem tended to fall largely to the west and north of the city, although in the western neighborhoods, Jews and Arabs were gradually mixing. But despite this growing presence, the 1947 United Nations partition plan did not give Jerusalem to either Jews or Arabs.

(This was not a matter of dispute for Zionist leaders who, unlike the Arabs, officially accepted the plan. David Ben Gurion was reportedly planning a capital somewhere in the Negev.)

But in 1948, at a time when certain forces on both sides seemed to tacitly agree on implementing the partition plan through war, Jerusalem was the site of bitter fighting. From the Zionist perspective, the battle over the city was intended to secure a connection between the Jewish settlements in and around Jerusalem and the rest of the Jewish communities in the new Jewish state. The Zionists fought very hard to take the key Latroun junction and, after the war was over, the Israeli government expelled the Palestinian residents of Lod and Ramla in July 1948. Left as they were, those towns would have been a fork disrupting Jewish continuity between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Even before the war there had been several Zionist campaigns intended to drive villagers from the areas neighboring Jerusalem. The impetus was on one hand to create Jewish continuity and secure the

road to Jerusalem, and on the other to push the Arabs to the east into Transjordanian-held territories or what would have been the Arab state. In April 1948, there were also similar campaigns in the western Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem. As a result of this slow dispossession, by mid-1949 following the Transjordan-Israel armistice agreement, the area of Jerusalem falling inside Israel's boundaries was almost entirely Jewish-composed. There were some Arab villages that remained on the periphery of Israeli-occupied Jerusalem and along the borders of Jordanian-held territories, but only one or two villages survived between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Historically then, Israel's policy has been to cleanse the land of Arab presence. If Palestinians must remain, they are to be cut off or hidden so that the average Israeli or European visitor does not notice them and gets the feeling that all of this land is and always has been Israeli.

A similar logic seems to have been in the mind of Israelis after the 1967 War. We cannot say for sure that Israel wanted to keep all of the territories occupied in 1967, but it was clear one day after the war ended that Israel was planning to keep all of Jerusalem under its control. Israel's very first act was to cleanse the "Jewish Quarter" of Jerusalem from its Palestinian Arab residents. The Arabs were kicked out of the quarter and many of them moved north towards Ramallah, to what is now the topsy-turvy border neighborhood of al-Ram. Israel then demolished the Mughrabi Quarter just in front of the Western Wall. It also established Jerusalem's settlement activities with the building of the settlement on the French Hill that would connect with Mount Scopus to the east, an island of Jewish control, as well as the settlement of Neve Yaacov. In a sense, the goal of severing Jerusalem from its Palestinian environs and connecting it with the Jewish communities within Israel, the very same goal that motivated the 1948 attacks on the villages west of Jerusalem, was being implemented.

That marked the beginnings of the creation of a "ring" around Jerusalem. In time, that ring would allow the insertion of more than 200,000 Israeli Jews into occupied Arab Jerusalem. The process was easier on Jerusalem's Bethlehem flank because there already were Israeli settlements in Baqaa and Talpiot and the only connection between Bethlehem and Jerusalem Arabs were a few mixed villages like Sur Baher. The forested hill of Jabal Abu Gneim lay in this area, and now the once-controversial settlement of Har Homa has been constructed to block Arab access to that.

On the other side of the city, Maale Adumim lies in the middle of nowhere, with a Palestinian population between it and Jerusalem's Jewish

presence. That Palestinian population, through Jericho, is still able to interact with Palestinians in the West Bank, but not—it appears—for long. Gradually, Israel is closing this gap.

Now, with the escalation of violence and closure policies in the last two years, Israel has found an opportune time to completely seal eastern Jerusalem. While Jerusalem has been “closed” in the sense that West Bankers and Gazans are not allowed to travel there without Israeli permission, now there is the opportunity to physically encircle the city with walls. These walls, purportedly to keep the Palestinian West Bank population out of the city and besiege Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Abu Dis, will more importantly completely strangle Arab East Jerusalem. Indeed, the only remaining weak point in this circle is that Palestinians are still able to exit the Old City through its Palestinian-inhabited areas and Ras al-Amoud, heading on to Jericho and deeper into the West Bank.

Enter right wing Zionist Irving Moskowitz. More of Moskowitz’s millions made off of the elderly in Florida bingo halls will go to settling the Palestinian village of Ras al-Amoud with Jews. Now that negotiations are about to restart (or so we hear), the current Israeli government is doing all it can to excise any final physical connection between Jerusalem and Palestinians who see the city as their geographical, spiritual and economic heart.—*Published April 28, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

What happened to Palestinian nationalism?

by Salim Tamari

Every decade or so since the 1948 War, it seems that the Palestinian national movement goes through periods of historical re-thinking. Almost all of those episodes are focused on inherent tensions and dynamics between the remnants of Palestinian society that remained on the land (in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza) and those forces that led the movement in the dispersed communities in the Arab host countries

(primarily in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon). But today the challenge comes also from an ideological source: an Islamic vision of salvation that is not tied to the territorial principle.

We can point out three critical junctions in the growth of secular Palestinian nationalism in the period preceding the Oslo accords: the merger of the Palestinian movement into mainstream Arab nationalism during the late 1950s and ‘60s (the Baath Party, the Greater Syria Movement, and Nasserism); the rise of the armed struggle movement after 1967 as inspired by Maoism and Guevarism; and the decline of the doctrine of liberation through notions of guerrilla struggle and people’s war after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982) and the dispersal of the Palestine Liberation Organization and its militias. Throughout this period, the Islamic movement (mainly the Muslim Brothers) was busy with moral rearmament, and distancing itself from effective politics.

The main lessons of these achievements (and defeats) were epitomized in the Palestine National Congress meeting in Algiers (November 1988), when Yasser Arafat announced the Declaration of Independence and the Peace Initiative. The gist of that declaration was that Palestinian nationalism was now reconciled to two states in historic Palestine (Israel and Palestine) on the basis of the 1947 partition plan. The border of the two states would be the June 1967 borders in line with international legitimacy and consensus, underwritten by Security Council Resolution 242.

Obviously, this new development at the time was protracted and had been in the works for 18 years of debate, polemics, and (occasionally) armed conflict within the various factions of the PLO. It started hesitantly with the early 1970s’ launching by the Democratic Front of the notion of independent Palestinian territory “that can be liberated from the enemy” (again a Guevarist formulation). The subsequent adoption by a majority vote in the tenth PNC in Amman (1974) of the same idea amounted to the first step towards independent statehood (as opposed to the total liberation of Palestine). The result was that the PLO was now split into two currents: the pro-state trends (Fateh’s majority, the DFLP, and the communists), and the “rejectionists” led by the Popular Front, and the opposition tendency in Fateh led by Abu Musa and the pro-Syrian Palestinian Baathists.

The great turning point in this reformulation of nationalist ideology was the return of the PLO to Palestine after 1994. The main consequence of this return was that the historic opposition between a localized political culture that paid symbolic allegiance to “its” leadership in Tunis (and before that in Beirut and Amman), and that of the PLO came to a historic

end. The returning leaders of diasporan nationalism now forged a new institutional edifice (the Palestinian Authority) with local urban elites and the internal wings of Fateh that effectively marginalized the PLO in all but name, and with it sidelined the role of Palestinian diaspora communities in affecting the course of Palestinian politics.

It was the state-in-the-making, and its various components, that became the instrument of this new transformation: the enhanced presidency, the parliament, the security apparatus and the bureaucracy. While the elections of 1996 legitimized the new regime in the eyes of the world and the local constituencies, it was the public sector bureaucracy that allowed Arafat and the returning leadership to underwrite an effective (but not so efficient) system of clientalism and patronage. It was also the institutional lynchpin that created a new political apparatus uniting the returnees (external leadership) with local elites and movements. But the main weakness of this process was an endemic inability of the new/old leadership to create effective and accountable institutions of governance.

This whole symbiotic process between the two wings of Palestinian nationalism and the inevitable decline of the diaspora came to a sudden reversal with the collapse of the Camp David talks. The inability of the state-in-the-making to bring about territorial consolidation of its population base (i.e. sovereignty), and the rise of the Israeli right, which was keen at preventing any Palestinian state from having contiguity (barring a quisling segmented regime), dealt an effective blow to the whole idea of a two-state solution.

Palestinian nationalism is being re-defined today as a result of these twin developments: the failure of the project for independence (the two-state solution) mainly due to intransigent and superior Israeli settlement policies within an overwhelmingly uneven power relationship; and secondly, the rise of Islamist movements positing themselves as an alternative paradigm of national deliverance.

Of the former, it must be said that Palestinian civil society failed to present an effective challenge to the system of patronage and segmental power that was inherited from the years of the PLO in exile. But the main blow was dealt by an Israeli system that seems to be unable and unwilling to tolerate another state between the river and the sea. (Israel today adopts the mirror image of those stands of territorial maximalism adopted by the Palestinians and Arabs during the '50s and '60s vis-à-vis Israel.)

The rise of Islamic movements was predicated on this weakness. Hamas and their allies have presented themselves, paradoxically, as

both an alternative worldly and millenarian system of adherence—worldly, through a seemingly-accountable network of social services for the poor (something that the patronage-based institutions of the Palestinian Authority were unable to deliver). The Islamists have also promised a paradigm of otherworldly salvation, through the cult of martyrdom. But this combination has built-in limitations on its ability to set itself as the alternative to the PLO, since it feeds on the inability of secular Palestinian nationalism to create a state, rather than its own (Islamist) ability to create a workable system of governance. These limitations are most obvious in the country where they reached their highest success: Iran.

We are witnessing an impasse today: the major blow to the project of self-determination in Palestine has not led to a revitalization of extra-territorial Palestinian nationalism, as in the '60s and '70s, nor has the set-back of the two-state solution given rise to a movement to adopt binationalism. The most likely short-term possibility is the current Israeli vision of apartheid rule and cantonization. At no time was there a more pressing need for intellectual coherence and political leadership to give the Palestinians a new direction, in a time when the old formulas (Arab nationalism, steadfastness, and people's war) ring hollow.—*Published September 18, 2003 in bitterlemons-international.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Mind the gap

by Ghassan Khatib

The narratives that inform Palestinians and Israelis are important and dangerous components of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that are rarely touched upon by those trying to bring it to an end.

Their respective narratives have been used liberally by both sides for all kinds of purposes: first, as a tool for incitement and to secure political support and consensus as well as increase the hostility necessary to continue the fighting. Second, narratives have been used in order

to justify each party's position to the outside world. This is especially important in light of the fact that the two sides, to different extents and during different phases of the conflict, have been heavily dependent on external support, whether from governments or public opinion.

The differences in the two narratives are very deep and serious. They encompass the whole array of historical, religious, cultural and political facets of the conflict. It is difficult to see a serious reconciliation process and lasting peace agreement succeed without dealing with these contradicting narratives in a way that will allow both sides to agree on a growing number of issues, thus reducing the number of issues they disagree on.

Some elements from outside the establishment in Israel have recently seriously revised parts of the Israeli narrative, particularly vis-à-vis the historical aspect. Many of the "new historians" in Israel have now revealed the lies that were created to serve political ends in the official and non-official narratives of Israelis, especially regarding the establishment of the State of Israel.

These are the kinds of initiatives that need to be encouraged and developed in order to proceed toward greater understanding. Hopefully, they will one day include other aspects of the Israeli narrative, notably the religious aspects. The religious Israeli narrative has been solidifying in Israel; top politicians in the last few years have based some of their political positions on religious claims. This group includes the otherwise secular former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, but a growing number of others as well.

On a cultural level, a certain Israeli feeling of superiority over others, particularly Palestinians and Arabs, is also something that needs to be addressed as a component of the narrative about the conflict.

The problem also exists on the Palestinian side, but with some differences. There is a difference between the positions, mentality and narrative vis-à-vis the conflict on an official level, as compared to that on the public level. The Palestinian leadership, until the recent victory of Hamas, was less influenced by an unscientific narrative than the public. The Palestinian leadership has historically been rather secular and thus less influenced by biased religious narratives and—relatively speaking—more accurate when it comes to the historical understanding.

The problem of narratives on the Palestinian side is serious and real on the public level. The Palestinian public is influenced and compromised by certain narratives that need a lot of revision and education. The

weakness of the Palestinian side in the conflict and the weakness of the Palestinian leadership internally, however, restrict the possibilities for debating and revising these narratives.

One of the possible constructive contributions from civil society institutions on both sides is to try to establish several arenas of debate on aspects of the respective narratives. Such an undertaking should include relevant personalities and institutions from both sides, but also relevant third party institutions specializing in the issues. Such groups could establish the ground rules for processes of academic debates that might teach both sides about each other's narratives and also eliminate certain aspects that do not belong in objective and academic forums.

Such an initiative could be extremely constructive in terms of confidence-building and the narrowing of narrative gaps among the public, to create a situation more conducive to peacemaking between the two sides.—
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Seeking Security

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Israeli lessons from the armed conflict

by Zeev Schiff

After two years of the current armed conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, both sides are summing up the lessons learned, and each is taking stock morally. Israel's assessment holds that the confrontation was planned in advance with the objective of forcing it to make concessions. A few months prior to the conflict, an Israeli intelligence estimate predicted that the Palestinians would initiate violent activities if they did not attain their demands through negotiation. In so doing, the Palestinians withdrew from the commitment, given by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in his letter to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, not to use violence to obtain political objectives.

Just as the Palestinian side incorrectly assessed Israeli society and its reactions, so too the Israeli side failed to understand the serious internal pressures under which the Palestinian population labored after the Oslo agreements: its economic situation deteriorated despite the agreements, while it interpreted the expansion of Israeli settlements as the intensification of Israeli occupation. One way or another, Arafat's great mistake was in not stopping the military conflict at a relatively early stage.

On the Israeli side, the overriding consideration was the decision in principle that under no circumstances would it offer concessions as a consequence of the use of terrorism and violence against it. If substantive concessions were to be made—then only at the negotiating table. Israel has held to this position successfully, with the backing of its public, most of which has for some time favored the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

The primary Palestinian objective is understood to be the desire to cause maximum civilian casualties, particularly within the green line. Two years after the outbreak of violence the number of Israeli dead exceeds 600, most of them civilians rather than soldiers. It is this fact

that has most influenced Israeli public opinion and brought about a change in the political views of Israeli society, weakening the Israeli “peace camp” and reducing the chances that the Labor Party will return to power in the foreseeable future.

An additional Palestinian objective was to bring about the internationalization of the conflict, and to cause international forces to be deployed in the territories while the conflict rages. While this proposal was raised repeatedly in the United Nations, it was thwarted. A further Palestinian goal in Israeli eyes was the effort to generate active involvement, including a military threat, by Arab states. Although Egypt removed its ambassador at an early stage of the confrontation, the conflict never spilled across the border, even when the Palestinian Authority was reoccupied. Nor was a “second front” opened by Hizballah along Israel’s northern border. In a number of Arab countries, the leadership perceived Arafat as the party jeopardizing regional stability. One reflection of this approach is the Saudi initiative, which can be read as a signal to Arafat that the Arab states cannot wait forever for him to produce a peace initiative; hence they are bypassing him with their own proposal.

While the concept of “Israeli occupation” has penetrated international opinion, the Palestinians failed to persuade the world public that murderous terrorist acts against civilians are justified. Their failure was particularly evident after 9/11. Arafat’s standing in Washington totally collapsed. Israel was able to show that the steps he took to prevent terrorism were at best cosmetic and tactical. The failure of the Zinni and Tenet missions due to vicious terrorist attacks inside Israel persuaded Washington of the justice of Israel’s argument. The US also accepted that Arafat was personally linked to the Iranian arms ship *Karine A*. When Washington declared that it rejected contact with him and expected him to be replaced by a leadership that would resume negotiations, this was a personal strategic failure on Arafat’s part.

Israel has twice besieged Arafat in his headquarters in Ramallah. This was a mistake, for in so doing Israel managed to refocus attention on Arafat and in fact delay reforms within the Palestinian Authority. Here it is important to note that the demand for reforms and for transparency in the Palestinian Authority is supported by the European Union. In this sense there is a very widespread perception that the administration of the Palestinian Authority is dysfunctional.

The American turnabout is particularly striking in that it touches on the military sphere as well. Compare the angry American reaction on April 16, 2001, when an Israeli force penetrated Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip and intended to remain there for the night, to Washington’s silence

when the IDF initiated two far-reaching operations in the West Bank—in April-May 2002, when it entered the refugee camps, and in June when most of Area A was occupied. One can only conclude that the US has in effect given Israel a free hand to take major military steps in its war against Palestinian terrorism. This is a net achievement for Israel, if it exploits it for a political initiative.

If causing damage to Israel can be considered a success, then the Palestinians registered achievements. First and foremost is the damage embodied in the crisis generated between Israel and its Arab minority. Here the Palestinians succeeded in expanding the military conflict to include elements that were not actively involved previously. Scores of Israeli Arabs have been apprehended for involvement in serious acts of terrorism. The damage will inevitably influence Israel’s position regarding a variety of issues. For one, there is a far deeper perception that Arafat intends to destabilize Israel from within, and that the struggle is over the existence of the state of Israel. The immediate reaction is Israel’s tough rejection of proposals that any Palestinian refugees return to Israeli territory.

These developments have also influenced the idea of a separation fence along the border. The settlers reject the idea, insofar as they interpret this as leaving them “beyond the fence;” but public pressures to take unilateral steps continue to grow. The separation fence projects a negative psychological connotation in that it constitutes a statement by the Israeli public that it has lost hope in reaching agreements with the Palestinians. The overall psychological import is, in non-diplomatic terms: we don’t want you in our midst. Better to bring guest workers from all over the world, rather than risk acts of terrorism on our territory. This can hardly be considered an achievement by Arafat. In general, the Palestinians cannot claim that the armed conflict they initiated improved their chances for realizing their aspiration to establish a viable Palestinian state.

In Israel there is an understanding of the natural limitations of military force with regard to conflicts in which ethnic and religious elements predominate. A decisive military victory cannot be attained in such a war. For example Israel, like others, has no military solution for suicide terrorism. Moreover, Israel’s operational achievements clearly do not have a life of their own, especially if they are not exploited for political initiatives. Since the government of Ariel Sharon took over, Israel has no genuine, comprehensive political initiative, just as the Palestinians lack such a genuine political plan. Hence the current conflict is not over. Additional chapters await us.—*Published September 30, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

There is no ceasefire with occupation

by Ghassan Khatib

The truth is that the term “ceasefire” has no relevance in the current Israeli-Palestinian confrontations. The situation here is one where a belligerent illegal military occupation is being imposed by virtue of force on the Palestinian people who, as a result, are deprived of their basic rights including all of the important rights that derive from citizenship under a government, including the right to self-determination.

Consequently, the Palestinian people have resisted this occupation since its start in 1967. During that time, the resistance has taken different forms. Sometimes Palestinian resistance has been one of armed struggle, while at other times—such as the first intifada that began in 1987 with a groundswell of popular protest activities and civil disobedience—it has taken the shape of non-violent demonstration. Indeed, the only period in which there was no Palestinian resistance, especially a violent resistance, was the years of the peace process. The reason for that calm was that the Palestinian people were under the impression that this peace process would end the Israeli occupation—exactly what they had been fighting for. Israeli journalist Danny Rubinstein noted just days before the outbreak of the current phase of confrontation on September 29, 2000 that the most recent Palestinian attack had occurred four years before.

With this history in mind, for Palestinians to call a “ceasefire” now means to express willingness to live peacefully with the Israeli occupation, an occupation that is violent not only in the traditional sense in that its army shoots and kills Palestinians, but is violent at its heart. Because even when the Israeli army’s guns are completely silent, the occupation continues to forcefully restrict the rights of the Palestinian people.

One must never be fooled; the Israeli occupation is about the forceful confiscation of Palestinian land to build more settlements for expanding Israel’s presence on the land. The occupation is about the forceful demolition of Palestinian homes to erase Palestinian roots and historical claims. The occupation is about the violent restriction of Palestinian thought, political expression and political leadership. As such, the only way to have real calm and security and safety is if there is a real exchange: an end to this violent occupation in return for an end to Palestinian violence.

To discuss a ceasefire in the sense of stopping all shooting at one another only makes sense in the context of a meaningful political process based on relevant international law and legality. That process should give the impression to both Palestinians and Israelis that it is truly about producing a political settlement that will give Israelis their legitimate right to peace, security and economic prosperity, and Palestinians their legitimate right to self-determination, independence, liberty, an end to the occupation and, of course, economic prosperity.

If there is such a process, the call for a ceasefire will make sense, first because it will be possible and convincing and second, because it will create a process that is vital to both sides. That is why all tries at a ceasefire in isolation of a meaningful political discussion have failed, including American government attempts through Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet and US envoy Anthony Zinni. Everything that has been tried has separated the security components from the other aspects of this conflict. There will be no meaningful ceasefire until there is an end to the occupation on the one hand, and the realization of Palestinian self-determination on the other.—*Published August 19, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Time for reassessment

by Shlomo Gazit

The Oslo Declaration of Principles (DOP) was signed more than eight years ago. About three years ago a bilateral Israeli-Palestinian permanent agreement was supposed to take effect. We are as far away from such an agreement today as we were nearly six years ago, in February-March 1996, when the process came to a halt following a wave of terrorist attacks. All attempts made since then to get negotiations back on track and renew the Oslo process have collapsed. Six years appear to constitute a sufficient period of time to recognize that we have failed and to search for alternative approaches.

The first suitable step is soul searching: what was accomplished and what was not accomplished through the Oslo process?

On the positive side, the Oslo DOP was revolutionary. After more than 70 years of zero-sum confrontation between the two sides, the two national movements, Zionist and Palestinian, recognized and accepted one another's right to exist as an independent national unit. The Palestinian national leadership established itself among its people, within the borders of the future Palestinian state. From Israel's standpoint, the government ceased bearing political and administrative responsibility for the fate of three million Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, thus bringing to an end 30 years of imposed military rule.

On the negative side, the drafters of the agreement made one huge mistake; they tried to put the cart before the horse. The DOP ushered in a process of territorial transfers that pinned hopes on confidence-building measures by both sides; these in turn were intended to prepare public opinion prior to initiating final status negotiations. Herein lies the catch: it quickly (and predictably) became evident that a reverse process had commenced. Both sides began feverishly creating new and negative facts on the ground that would enable them to improve positions in anticipation of the final dispensation of each final status issue.

The al-Aqsa intifada began 14 months ago. During this time we have witnessed repeated mediation attempts intended to bring about a ceasefire and to facilitate renewal of negotiations. By any standard, 14 months are enough time to conclude that there is no chance for such an initiative to succeed. On the contrary, the violent, persistent and painful struggle has gradually hardened public opinion, to the point where both sides are less and less ready to end the violence without knowing in advance what the political payoff is.

Historical experience teaches us that in nearly all armed conflicts it is not the ceasefire that precedes negotiations but, to the contrary, it is political negotiations and the agreement they produce that facilitate and generate a ceasefire. Indeed, both sides in such a violent conflict take into account that negotiations and a political agreement will clearly express the balance of forces in their armed conflict.

Isn't it time we learned from the experience of others? Does it still make sense to adhere stubbornly to a failed process and repeatedly renew a sterile effort focused entirely on achieving a ceasefire prior to negotiating? It would be better for all three parties—Israel, the Palestinians and the US—to abandon the Tenet and Mitchell plans once and for all, and to open negotiations even as the violence and armed struggle continue on

both sides. Renewing negotiations under these conditions will create a new situation: at a stroke the ground will be pulled out from under those terrorists who enjoy the capacity to torpedo negotiations at any moment by carrying out acts that destroy the "quiet" demanded as a precondition for negotiating.

Such an approach is based not only on practical logic. It also constitutes pressure on both parties to accelerate the negotiating process, in the clear knowledge that if they don't reach agreement and understanding, then the current impasse will necessarily be solved by decisive military action between them.—*Published December 3, 2001 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Instead of the rule of force

by Maha Abu Dayyeh Shamas

The Middle East conflict has no shortage of international law to guide its resolution. What is missing is the political will of governments to undertake their responsibilities according to their mandate within the body of international law and international humanitarian law. This absence of political will has kept Middle East societies, particularly Palestinian society, lingering too long in a situation of perpetual fear and conflict.

Palestinian society has yearned for too long for peace and security. We have yearned to be able to move around freely without asking permission from young gun-toting Israeli soldiers placed practically on our doorsteps. We have yearned for the time when we do not have to worry about our children going safely to school. We have yearned for too long for the security of exercising our right to self-expression and self-determination without being thrown in jail.

I can say, as a representative of Palestinian civil society and the women's movement, that despite these handicaps and with international support, we were coming a long way in developing institutions to address Palestinians' social needs for a future Palestinian state.

For example, the Palestinian women's movement had succeeded at making inroads in addressing cultural values and attitudes particular to the Arab world that handicap the healthy development of girls and women. We Palestinian women were in the process of engaging ourselves in legislative development locally and internationally. And we were witnessing the development of a budding but vibrant young feminist movement, an essential sector for democratic development within Palestinian society.

But the last Israeli "reoccupation" of Palestinian-controlled areas has resulted in the systematic destruction of all that we have achieved over the last ten years. The military onslaught was aimed at dashing any hopes for a coherent Palestinian state and identity.

In the eyes of the average Palestinian, our society has been effectively left at the mercy of a hostile state that continually violates with impunity through the illegal and endless Israeli occupation almost every law in the book regarding the behavior of states in armed conflict. Having no effective Palestinian state to defend our interests, nor an effective international third party to ensure respect of the law, desperate elements in Palestinian society have felt they have no choice but to resort to their own means for self-defense.

Israel's continued violations of the laws of conflict have resulted in a likewise violent and illegal response by Palestinian non-state actors. This cycle of action and reaction has allowed the Israeli state in the name of self-defense to use formal state military strategies and means against non-state actors and the communities they belong to as collective punishment, leading the Palestinian community to feel that it has nothing more to lose. Palestinians understand that the political objectives of this military campaign are to break the Palestinian spirit and force them to accept an agreement that is no agreement at all.

For the sake of preserving life, and in order to make political negotiations possible, it is essential to create an environment of hope by immediately sending international peacekeeping forces with a mandate of protection. Any future negotiations must remain under international auspices to ensure respect for international frameworks. The two parties—Palestinian and Israeli—are not equal and should not be left on their own. Otherwise, the process will be dictated by the imbalance of power that characterized the Oslo negotiations, whose bloody consequences we are now witnessing.

Peace is made between peoples and not between leaders. A process leading to a sustainable and consequently permanent solution should

be just, and should not be left to the confines of the generals, and should be transparent to the relevant societies.

We have to address and understand each other's history with open minds. Our leaders have a responsibility to educate their societies about the other as a matter of policy. If we leave things only to government officials, we get Israeli generals and Palestinians who will not be defeated, and there is no room to negotiate. Women's participation in any future peace process is essential to maintaining the connection between each society's realities and its yearnings for peace and security.

We cannot afford to waste any more time, or any more lives. We need to think of a new approach. We as women want to bring a new understanding to the situation in the Middle East. We want to approach peace-building in a way that will promote long-term stability. But we cannot do it alone. We are asking for the help of the international community. Women know instinctively that the use of force will never lead to peace, justice or even security.

Despite all the disappointments and recent setbacks, it is important not to give up on the region and, indeed, to capitalize on the strong need and desire existing in both societies for security and stability. The rule of law is essential for peace and harmony. We have to replace the rule of force, which has governed our region for too long, with the rule of law. This is the challenge before the international community.—*Published September 9, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

Refugees

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Freedom and return: a conflict between two rights?

by Sari Nusseibeh

The Palestinian refugee problem has always been a thorny and sensitive issue. While pundits and politicians alike have formulated and reformulated different scenarios and solutions, one single and unified stance has yet to be taken. However, I believe that there are certain points that must be made within the context of the refugee problem, especially in light of the recent controversy over some of my recent statements on this issue.

First, the idea of the establishment of a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders is one that is or should be understood to mean that it is primarily within the borders of this state that the problem of resettling the refugees will be addressed. This understanding is in no way inconsistent with United Nations Resolution 194, although of course that resolution does not necessarily imply such an understanding. It also accounts for the distinction often heard by Palestinian leaders between the need to have Israel recognize “the right of return,” and the negotiated agreement between the two sides over the actual implementation of this right. Ever since the establishment of the State of Israel (but right up to the negotiations at Camp David), Israel’s position has been that it is in theory prepared to accept a partial repatriation, with the bulk of the rest of the problem addressed through material and political compensation. A resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-state solution, involving as it does a national ceding of part of the Palestinian homeland to Israel, clearly presumes that the Israeli part of the homeland will be Israeli, and not Palestinian.

My second point is to say that acceptance of this compromise, and a full realization by the Palestinian people and/or the leadership of its political implications at this point is clearly painful. Therefore, the demand for a Palestinian state, while upholding one basic principle concerning self-determination and freedom, clearly involves a painful compromise concerning the wholesale return of Palestinians and their descendants to their original homes.

Speaking in terms of history, Palestinians could have adopted one of two possible strategies: one based on individual rights, and the other on collective or national rights. A strategy based on the first approach might have been formulated in terms of the struggle for the rights of return and equality (I long ago espoused such a strategy only to find almost total opposition to it in the mid-eighties). A strategy predicated on the basis of the second approach can be—and eventually was—formulated in terms of the struggle for the rights of self-determination and statehood. My contention is that these are two incompatible strategies, at least in terms of the practicable international framework. In terms of personal preferences, I would support the adoption of the first strategy, but I realize it has far less support, among both Israelis and Palestinians. Furthermore, it is my contention that, given a balance between collective and individual rights, giving weight to one clearly and logically supposes a minimization of the weight accorded to the other. Thus, giving a preference to a national right clearly diminishes the weight accorded to an individual right.

I have heard it argued that these two strategies are compatible, not contradictory. If the aim is to dissolve Israel as a state, then this is indeed true. But if so, we cannot expect Israel to be a peace partner in any negotiations aiming to achieve that end. Therefore, to espouse those two strategies simultaneously is to opt out of the peace process in which we have been engaged for the past decade. This may be the option of some, but it is by no means clear that this is the option of the majority of the Palestinian people.

Another point that needs to be made as an elaboration in this context is that while the right of return to individuals is indeed sacrosanct, so is the national right to freedom from occupation and independence. If upholding the right of independence detracts from the right of return, upholding the latter equally detracts from the former. We therefore have a case of two sacrosanct rights from which we are compelled to choose by our political circumstance.

Finally, I am on record from the initiation of the Madrid conference as being in favor of a general referendum on any peace agreement reached with Israel. If it is possible to reach an agreement concerning our national right of independence, then this agreement, fully elaborated as to explain the future implications on individuals, whether refugees or not, should be presented for a public vote. Options should also be presented clearly and realistically.

My observations on this issue are clearly analytical, rather than legalistic or moral. They have to be so, given the nature of the conflict our people are engaged in, for it is neither a conflict in court nor before a moral judge.—*Published December 31, 2001 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

An issue of conflicting rights

a conversation with Ingrid Gassner Jaradat

bitterlemons: What is the meaning of UN General Assembly Resolution 194?

Jaradat: It's very clear what the meaning of UNGAR 194 is, and there has been little controversy over its meaning except among legal experts and politicians on the Israeli side who have been trying to reinterpret it. But generally there is consensus within the expert community and the international community what UNGAR 194 means. It affirms the right of those refugees who wish to return to their homes and properties and receive compensation, and for those who do not wish to return to have the option of resettlement and compensation elsewhere.

This is very much in line with the principles that are usually applied to solving refugee problems the world over. In that sense, UNGAR 194 is nothing exceptional. It is very much in line with principles applied in peace agreements—especially recent peace agreements. The fact that we have these ongoing arguments over what this resolution and what the right of return means [is], I see, a way to try to avoid the real issues.

bitterlemons: One of the reasons people say UNGAR 194 does not imply the right of return is because it is not explicitly stated. Where does the right come in?

Jaradat: The resolution states that refugees who wish to return should have the possibility of doing so and basically affirms existing international law. General Assembly resolutions don't establish rights; they are passed based on existing international law. This is what UNGAR 194 does. It affirms that refugees who wish—and here we have the issue of the choice which is very important—should be able to return, and those who do not should be offered other options. The fact that it does not state the right per se is meaningless.

bitterlemons: The right of return has often been portrayed as a deal breaker in terms of a Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement. What are your thoughts on that?

Jaradat: Two things here. First of all—and unfortunately—we have never reached a stage in peace negotiations where everything was

resolved except for the right of return of the refugees. So in that sense you cannot call it a deal breaker because there are still many other issues—the settlements, sovereignty—where we haven't seen any negotiated solutions yet. So it may be a little premature to declare this issue a deal breaker.

On the other hand, it is maybe the most substantial question because it does not fit into the framework of separating Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews on territorial lines. Palestinian refugee rights are not situated in the 1967 occupied territories. In that sense it is particularly challenging because it is maybe the one issue where major concessions are required from the Israeli side; an Israel after a peace agreement couldn't be the same as the Israel we have now.

bitterlemons: Israelis say the fulfillment of the right of return would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state. What would you say to them?

Jaradat: I think what we really need is a discussion over the solution of the refugee issue as an issue of conflicting rights. Instead of always arguing over whether Palestinian refugees have a right of return or not, we should look at the rights they have—which is the right to return to housing and property, restitution and compensation—and look on the Israeli side and see what kind of rights we have there. We have to look at the right of Israel to be a Jewish state, which is situated on the level of collective rights, if there is one—i.e. whether Israel in fact under international law has a right to maintain a Jewish state. And we have to look at the level of individual rights: the rights of Israeli Jews who have been living on refugee property for so many years under specific conditions and maybe have invested and have ownership, etc. These are the things you normally look at in other refugee cases and conflicts where refugees return. You have to ask, what are the rights on both sides?, and then these have to be balanced. This is where we have compromises—not on the level of the rights per se.

bitterlemons: In recent years, we have seen a number of unofficial peace initiatives—the Geneva Accords or the Nusseibeh-Ayalon agreement—in which it seems that the right of Palestinian refugees to return has been seriously compromised. What is your position on such efforts?

Jaradat: The problem with these proposals is that they suggest a political deal by the leaderships on both sides, and in both cases, refugee rights—which are individual rights—are massively ignored and violated. In that sense they are extremely problematic, and there is

probably no Palestinian leadership that wants to remain legitimate that could pass such a deal. Nor is it the way refugee problems have been resolved in other cases. This is why I think it is so important to look at comparative studies and learn from other experiences. If there is a serious approach to resolving this issue, of course we will benefit from the experience of other regions and cases.

The problem with the Israeli side is that there has been an effort to block even debate on this level, and to just keep arguing over whether Palestinian refugees have rights or not. It is more comfortable to propose deals where these rights are either put away by political decision—Nusseibeh-Ayalon—or interpreted in such a way that they become meaningless, and this won't lead anywhere.

bitterlemons: There are also those who argue that Palestinians have to make a choice between the right of return or the two-state solution. What do you think?

Jaradat: It's a very hypothetical question. So far we haven't seen in past negotiations an Israeli government that explicitly said it was for a two-state solution and for a Palestinian state, and all the activities on the ground have always suggested the opposite. How should Palestinians make these choices, when it's so abstract? If the situation in the Oslo years had developed in such a way that both sides had agreed to a sovereign state of Palestine in the 1967 occupied territories, and settlements had been frozen and gradually dismantled, then maybe there would have been a Palestinian leadership that could legitimately and with popular support have made a deal on refugee rights. But since we never had such a situation, it is very abstract to even think of such scenarios. What kind of guarantees do people have that, if they give up their right of return, they will have a sovereign state?

bitterlemons: Assuming the right of return is not going to be implemented any time soon, what should be done in the short term? For example, could there be an international community decision to resettle refugees and pay compensation without prejudicing their possible future status?

Jaradat: There are lots of things that could be done in the meantime. There are two things in particular that are very obvious and would be very helpful.

The first is if the whole current international system of refugee protection was reviewed and improved when it comes to Palestinian refugees. We have a situation where Palestinians are very much left out of the international protection system that was set up under the United Nations

High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Palestinian refugees need an agency that is not only providing assistance the way the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) does, but an agency that protects refugee rights, on both levels—day-to-day legal rights, and rights in the framework of a durable solution. This is something that people can work on today, and where they can make a big difference when it comes to both the current situation of refugees but also in building stronger support for refugee rights when we have political negotiations again.

The second issue where I think a lot of work can be done now is really to make an effort to engage—and this initiative has to come very much from the Palestinian side—to engage Israelis, not necessarily on the level of policymakers and government, but on the level of civil society institutions and academia, in this debate over conflicting rights. It is not helpful to keep arguing this black-and-white scenario: that either there is a right of return that means over five million Palestinian refugees will flood Israel, or no right of return at all and the Jewish state has the right to maintain demographic and property relations as they are now. Such a black-and-white scenario is not helpful.—*Published September 27, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Solving the refugee problem

by Yossi Beilin

The Oslo Agreement from 1993 required solving the refugee problem, alongside other major issues, before reaching the permanent agreement, which was due to have been signed by May 1999. It was obvious that if we did not find a solution for this painful problem, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would remain unresolved, even if a Palestinian state were set up according to agreed borders. The refugee problem comprises various components: the story of its creation; the questions “who created it?” and “why hasn’t it been solved until now?”; and its organizational and financial solution.

The Palestinians prefer to start their version of the chain of events with the Israeli War of Independence of 1948, claiming that the refugees were expelled by Israel during this war, and that it is their right, according to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194, to choose between return and compensation. The Israelis, however, describe it differently. According to the Israeli point of view, the Palestinians made a huge mistake when they rejected the UN’s partition resolution of 1947, according to which two nations would have been located in Palestine. Since the Arabs did not find this satisfactory, preferring to fight with Israel, the situation arose whereby, during the war, some 700,000 Palestinians lost their homes. About half of these Palestinians lost their homes because they fled, and about half because they were expelled. UN Resolution 194 was rejected by the Palestinians and by the Arab countries, as was Prime Minister David Ben Gurion’s willingness, proposed in Lausanne, to absorb 100,000 refugees.

For many years, the Palestinians demanded to set up a secular-democratic country instead of Israel, and to absorb in this country any refugee who wished to come. They took the “Wish to Return” as mentioned in UN Resolution 194, and turned it into the “Right of Return.” The year 1974 saw the beginning of the process of separation from the idea of a secular-democratic country, and since 1988, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has accepted the idea of two states—the State of Israel and the State of Palestine—coexisting alongside one another. It was clear to many Palestinians and to the Israelis that even if the Palestinians insisted upon the principle of the “right of return,” this right would be applicable to those who would return to the Palestinian state, rather than to any person wishing to live in Israel, and that if a “right of return to Israel” was granted to the refugees, it would be tantamount to abolishing the Jewish majority in Israel, practically overnight.

Until the commencement of the talks with the Palestinian leadership concerning the permanent agreement, there was an understanding that the solution of the refugee problem would be found by rehabilitating them in their current place of residence, relocating them in the Palestinian state, relocating them in countries that would agree to absorb them, and paying them compensation. A small number of refugees would be permitted to enter Israel under a family reunification plan and including special humanitarian cases. This was also the nature of the understandings reached between [Palestinian negotiator Mahmoud Abbas or] Abu Mazen and myself in 1995.

When the talks began with the government of Ehud Barak concerning the permanent agreement, the Palestinians said that the principle of the

“right of return” must be incorporated as part of the agreement, and that this principle would be realized in such a way so as not to endanger the demographic balance in Israel. Israel presented a contrary approach: it was willing to receive a limited number of refugees, but it absolutely rejected the principle, claiming that this would in all likelihood lead to the foundation of two Palestinian states—the new Palestinian state and the State of Israel, which in a very short time would become a state with a Palestinian majority.

The Clinton plan, dated December 2000, made a determination in this matter and that was agreed upon, in principle, by the two parties. A solution to the refugee problem would be devised in which the Israelis would acknowledge the suffering of the refugees, but Israel would not assume the sole responsibility for their suffering. A committee would be set up headed by the United States to handle the problem’s economic aspects; it would be determined that Israel could not accept the right of return within the boundaries of the State of Israel, but that there would be a right of return to the Palestinian state and to areas that Israel would transfer to the Palestinian state under a land exchange agreement. It would be determined that the refugees could be accepted in third countries; that Israel would agree to receive a certain number of refugees in accordance with its sovereign decision; that priority would be given to solving the refugee problem in Lebanon; and that the agreement would be deemed to be the implementation of Resolution 194.

The Taba talks were based on the Clinton plan, and indeed it was easy to reach various understandings at the Taba talks, based on this plan. At Taba, agreements were reached concerning the nature of personal compensation, compensation for assets, options of rehabilitation and absorption in third countries, and compensation for the host countries. Above all, we were very close to an agreement concerning the story of the creation of the refugee problem, which described the Israeli approach and the Palestinian approach to the issue, and their common denominator. Specific sums of money were not agreed on, nor was the actual number of refugees that would be permitted to come to Israel. However, the distance under dispute between the parties was narrowed substantially, and the Palestinian side agreed that the number of refugees must be such that it would not damage Israel’s character as a Jewish country.

Regrettably, the refugee issue has become “proof,” as it were, of the “fact” that it was impossible to reach an agreement between the Palestinians and Israel, even at a time when Israel was headed by a

particularly moderate government. This claim, however, is quite simply untrue. The talks at Taba were the best ever held between the parties, and the closest ever to reaching an agreement. Were it not for the fact that the talks were held at such a late stage, on the eve of elections in Israel for a new prime minister, it would have been possible to complete the Israeli-Palestinian framework agreement at the Taba talks. If we return to the Clinton-Taba guidelines, we will be able to reach an agreement on all the open issues, including the refugee problem. And the quicker we return to these guidelines, the better it will be for all of us.—*Published December 31, 2001 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

The broken boundaries of statehood and citizenship

by Sari Hanafi

There is no simple solution for the Palestinian refugee problem—only a creative one. One must first begin by questioning the nature of both the Palestinian and the Israeli nation-states, the concept of state sovereignty and its inherent violence, and the inclusion/exclusion that the state exercises to determine who is a citizen.

In the spirit of Hannah Arendt, the state is seen as more of a problem than a solution. Take, for example, a Bethlehem Fateh communiqué of December 2003: “If we must choose between the Palestinian state and the right of return, we will choose the latter.” But is there a solution that encompasses the right of return and a Palestinian state? Only the framework of an extraterritorial nation state does, especially if one-third of the population of that state is refugees. We must rethink all traditional political-legal categories, particularly in the Middle East. In that process, the refugee figure becomes the frontier of humanity, revealing the current crisis in the “trinity” of nation-state-territory.

The crisis of the modern nation state is that the exception is everywhere becoming the rule. We increasingly live in a time where populations’

ontological status as legal subjects is suspended. The failure of laws that govern citizenship marks a decisive turning point in the life of the modern nation-state and a definitive emancipation from the naive notions of “people” and “citizen.”

In this context, the status of the “refugee” vis-à-vis the “citizen” is more than problematic. Can we imagine a solution to the problem of stateless and refugee Palestinians that does not rely on the disciplinary apparatuses of the police and security forces? This issue is not relegated to the Middle East; more and more refugees are excepted from legal norms in many European countries. There, refugees maintain the vulnerability of their status even after acquiring nationality. Any criminal or other questionable activities put them at risk for denaturalization.

A solution that proposes head-counting the refugees in a given place and offering them a few months to decide their fate is an utopist solution. Individuals prefer to maintain flexible citizenship and multiple passports, even if they choose to settle in one place.

According to a 2003 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research survey, some 60 percent of Palestinians willing to return to Israel want to hold nationality to the Palestinian state. Only two percent want Israeli nationality and one fourth of the entire sample prefer to hold both nationalities. If the accumulation of foreign passports for some globalized businesspeople is “a matter of convenience and confidence” in uncertain political times, for almost all of the Palestinians who reside abroad it is a matter of survival. For those who have never possessed a passport in their lifetime, having been forced to make do with a travel document, the passport signifies and allows basic connectivity to family and labor markets.

As such, while the classic model of return migration studies mainly envisions a definitive return, the concept of return can be amplified to include a form of being “in-between.” Transnational studies provide an excellent conceptual framework for analyzing the experiences of migrants, those who choose to live between worlds. This emerging new form of refugeeness and migrant status is marked by active participation in the cultural, social, economic and political lives of both the country of origin and the host country, and provides new boundaries for solving the Palestinian problem. This cannot be realized if the future Palestinian state is conceived as a classic nation-state. Instead, why not propose extra-territorialized Palestinian and Israeli nation states?

Currently, the political environments that frame Palestinian transmigration are hostile to many transnational practices—or at least do not facilitate

them. Broadly, there appear to be two asynchronous dynamics at work: one that accelerates the presence of transnational actors in the territories, and another that is bound up with the identity and political cohesion of the decisionmakers of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). For example, since the 1999 promulgation of a PNA law regulating non-governmental organizations, the Palestinian Ministry of Interior has refused to allow Palestinian Israelis to serve on the administrative board of any Palestinian organization. This demarcation policy was also shared by some in the private sector who wanted to reinforce the separation between the interim Palestinian territories and Israel. The Palestinian Telecommunications Company, PALTEL, tried for some time to price calls between the Palestinian territories (including East Jerusalem), and West Jerusalem and the rest of Israel as international calls—not taking into account how this might impede connectivity within family networks, for one. The tension between these interests is quite normal. Refugees develop a flexible notion of citizenship in order to accumulate capital and power. Meanwhile, however, the state seeks to preserve its inflexible sovereignty.

While Palestinian scholars are accustomed to dealing with identity in its strict legal sense, it is important to recognize that capitalism, colonialism and culture also constrain and shape the subject, the individual and the collective. The crystallization of Palestinian identity is a relatively recent phenomenon. The same can be said for the Arab and Israeli identities that emerged during the same period. Because of the tenuousness of this process, the state in the Arab world became a nationalizing state: after “making” Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, those states must subsequently make Syrians, Lebanese and Jordanians. The same could be said of Israel and Israelis.

Thus we are far from a civic type of nationalism that relies on voluntary commitment, a flexible criteria of membership in the national collectivity, and a consensual legal process for resolving tensions. Generally speaking, migrants are not encouraged (and sometimes hindered) from declaring allegiance to both their countries of origin and their host countries. This fact explains the manner in which some Palestinians are assimilated to their host societies, while others retain a sense of unstated double identity.

The weakness of the center of gravity of the Palestinian diaspora, alongside the relatively new Palestinian national identity, raises many complex questions about Palestinian state formation and the ability of the PNA to challenge the classic pattern of citizenship and nation-states. One can imagine two forms that might allow a nation-state to deal with

people outside of its borders: a de-territorialized nation-state or an extra-territorialized nation-state. Studies on transnationalism may be a good framework for thinking about the former. Some consider countries of origin as “de-territorialized nation-states” in the sense that the state now stretches beyond its geographic boundaries. By this logic, there is no longer a diaspora because wherever its people go, their state goes with them. In this region, however, it is very hard to imagine this kind of state being born. Anthony Smith’s argument that nation-states are “territorial by definition” bears some weight.

The tension that currently exists between the practices of Palestinian transmigrants/returnees/refugees and the policies of the PNA shows that the prospect of an extra-territorialized nation-state is more feasible than the former. In this case the state is territorialized, but it distinguishes between citizenship and nationality. Accordingly, the rights and the duties of those who live in Palestine would not be a function of their nationality (i.e. whether they are Palestinian or not.) At the same time, those who live abroad who are of Palestinian origin could also enjoy rights and duties, even though not residing permanently in Palestine. Such an arrangement would be possible only if the PNA was able to enter into special agreements with countries that host Palestinian refugees, in order to facilitate full dual citizenship. This, particularly in light of outstanding questions regarding the capacity for absorbing Palestinian refugees, could be an honorable solution for those not willing to return but who would nevertheless like to belong to a Palestinian nation and be involved in Palestinian public affairs. It can be expected that many Palestinian refugees will return only to obtain Palestinian nationality and then leave, or simultaneously maintain two places of residency.

The model of two extraterritorial nation states—Israeli and Palestinian—is a model that falls somewhere between the two-state solution which, due to power inequities, is now leading to an apartheid system, and the absolutely unpopular solution of a bi-national state. A sort of “confederation” may be a more feasible solution: two extraterritorial nation states, with Jerusalem as their capital, contemporaneously forming, without territorial divisions, two different states.—*Published March 15, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

Leadership & Strategy

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Arafat put to the test

by Ali Jarbawi

For almost four decades, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has dominated the Palestinian national movement. Arafat himself, and his kuffiyeh, beard and khaki clothes, have all come to epitomize the Palestinian people and their national struggle. It is he who has determined the traits and direction of the fight with Israel; this longevity despite one obstacle after the other is not only due to Arafat’s charismatic character and good luck, but also to his strategic instinct and tactical ingenuity.

Arafat’s strategic will to survive revolves around three interrelated areas. These are: self-preservation; preventing the dissipation of the Palestinian cause; and the achievement of real gains for the Palestinian people on the land of Palestine (it is often said that Arafat likes to compare himself to Haj Amin Hussein in that he, too, desires to leave behind tangible and concrete accomplishments for the Palestinian people, however limited).

Tactically, Arafat is a master. He will do whatever it takes to maintain his hold on the reigns. For this reason, Arafat early on realized the importance of controlling money and the media. He has commanded them and used them to achieve his tactical purposes and strategic goals. Although Arafat is possessive and has authoritarian inclinations, he is not a dictator.

Instead, from the beginning Abu Ammar has been pragmatic, able to talk and willing to maneuver. He has also been willing to offer the necessary concessions even when they were too late, burdened the Palestinian people and cost them heavily. Still, Arafat has never been dogmatic. He understands his limits and has tried to stretch those limits, with varying success. At the moment it appears that he is trying to stretch those limits farther than they can handle.

As a pragmatist, Arafat has been conciliatory and not dismissive. Although he always made political decisions on his own, he tried to

make these decisions by preserving legal frameworks and appeasing the political factions, powerful people and VIPs around him. In turn, this meant he was always the center of an internal polarization that led—among other things—to Arafat's turning a blind eye to great excesses. There have been double standards in policies, which reaped corruption and the buyout of personal interests. Palestinian public finances reflect this situation (by no means a problem particular to Palestinians, but one that is growing).

In short, Abu Ammar has always constituted the compass among Palestinians for determining what is possible. He has worked to expand possibilities and whatever internal problems this caused for him, he always patched things up with incredible conciliatory talents. While he could not be diverted from his aims, his conciliation guaranteed him a satisfactory level of acceptance and loyalty among Palestinians. Hidden within this cycle are an amalgam of internal dysfunctions and problems that continue to multiply. This is the anomaly—troublesome, but enduring.

The Palestinian condition is desperate and complex. In a region where ultimate pride lay in statehood, and in a world deeply involved in the Cold War, Abu Ammar set off on a national liberation movement, using all of his tactical abilities, political pragmatism and conciliatory talents. Despite the tremendous difficulties he faced internally, regionally and internationally, he has always been able to maneuver and create the allies needed for his survival. He adapted himself to change and moved from one phase to the next, absorbing every loss as if it were a victory.

In this fashion, Arafat was able to paint himself as the one and only leader of the Palestinians, imposing himself not only on the region but on the entire world. He was able (as he always says of the Palestinians) to impose himself as an indispensable quantity necessary in every equation related to the fate of this region or others. Arafat has, therefore, achieved his first two goals of survival and the preservation of the Palestinian cause. Now he must produce the third component of lasting results in order to secure his place in history.

Despite repeated political concessions (in 1969, 1974, 1979, 1988), the world has not yet allowed Arafat to achieve this last component. That was his goal when he laid the groundwork for a Palestinian state. He realized the price that would be paid, but thought, as always, that once he put down the first bricks, the building would grow.

Abu Ammar was able to maneuver much and expand the patch of land under the Palestinian National Authority a little. But he was not able to

expand his political abilities into achieving the aspired-for Palestinian state.

Until, of course, Ehud Barak came to power in Israel. After the assassination of the skeptic Yitzhak Rabin, and the tenure of a hesitant Shimon Peres and loud-mouthed Binyamin Netanyahu, Barak began talking about a comprehensive deal that would result in a Palestinian state. Arafat (now over 70 years old) was the closest that he had ever been to his last goal. Still, Barak demanded one condition—an end to the conflict.

As usual, Arafat tried to maneuver. But Barak refused and, with active American help, he trapped Arafat. His offer to accept a Palestinian state came with a number of conditions, most importantly, those related to Jerusalem and the refugees. Arafat rejected the offer at face value, but not in essence. He wanted Barak to come back with something better. But Barak did not really want to reach a settlement and instead burned himself out politically. He and Clinton painted a negative picture of Arafat and international support for Palestinians began to crumble.

The situation called for a Palestinian uprising and it came. But with it, it brought Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. The two bitter enemies met again and the conflict, previously camouflaged by the peace process, rose to the surface and exploded.

Sharon's personal vendetta against Arafat and political objections to the Palestinian cause are married together. As such, Sharon launched an escalating systematic campaign to eliminate the possibility that the Palestinian National Authority would become an independent state, preferring a framework of autonomy under Israeli sovereignty. At the same time, he began to politically strangle Arafat, weakening him towards collapse—either by forcing him to carry out Israeli demands to act as an Israeli tool, or by bringing him down.

Arafat is trying to use all his tactical talents in maneuvering with Sharon to get out of the present crisis. But the situation, internally, regionally and worldwide, does not leave him much leeway. Rather, he is only facing more pressure. In light of a disintegrating relationship with the Arab world, Arafat has lost all of what he needs to move. What is required of him exceeds the limits of his pragmatism and his ability to justify compromise.

As such, Arafat has come back to defending, not the last of his three strategic components, but the first—his own leadership. It is a battle that will determine his own fate, and therefore, the future of the Palestinian cause.—*Published December 10, 2001 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Arafat's relevancy

by Boaz Ganor

The government of Israel decided several weeks ago that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat "is no longer relevant" from its standpoint. This statement had a largely declarative value: on the one hand it expressed the Israeli public's deep disappointment with Arafat; on the other, it served as an additional instrument of pressure to persuade Arafat to recognize that he will not profit from the violence and terrorism that he initiated in late September 2000.

During the years of 1994-2000, the Israeli public pinned its hopes on a peace process that would "end the conflict" and usher in security and economic prosperity. While it was disappointed with the ongoing Palestinian violence that accompanied the process, it generally accepted Arafat's explanation that he was not responsible for the terrorist attacks, and that he would do all in his power to prevent them. It acknowledged the distinction Arafat presented to the world between "good Palestinians"—supporters of the peace process led by the chairman himself—and "bad Palestinians," the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Throughout the Oslo process this division enabled Arafat repeatedly to plead his innocence concerning terrorist attacks. He demanded that Israel make concessions that would ostensibly strengthen his standing among the Palestinian public vis-à-vis his violent, refusalist opposition.

Following Arafat's rejection of Israel's far-reaching proposals at Camp David in July 2000 (which included the establishment of a Palestinian state on 97 percent of the territory and the division of Jerusalem into two capital cities), even the most moderate Israelis understood that he was not moving toward a political solution to the conflict. Their disappointment grew yet further when it emerged that he had not only elected to abandon the negotiating table, but that upon his return to the Palestinian Authority he directed the terrorist organizations and his own units to launch a wave of terrorism against Israel.

In fact, this directive constituted a direct continuation of Arafat's policy since establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Arafat believes terrorism serves his objectives. Accordingly, upon signing the Oslo accords he adopted a strategy of maintaining a terrorist potential for the achievement of political goals. At times, when he assessed that terrorism would

genuinely damage immediate Palestinian interests, Arafat invoked a policy of "threats and persuasion" to prevent attacks against Israel. On these occasions, he informed the Islamic fundamentalist organizations that the costs attached to such attacks outweighed the benefits; hence, he directed them to avoid such attacks for the time being. To ensure he was understood, Arafat used the code phrase "damage to the Palestinian national interest." When these efforts proved unsuccessful, he relied on arrests and local violent clashes to enforce his message.

But even at its height, Arafat's counterterrorism campaign focused only on restraining the terrorist organizations' motivation to attack Israel. He never acted to eliminate their violent capabilities. He never destroyed their explosives laboratories, never arrested, tried and jailed terrorists for extended periods, never destroyed illegal weaponry and never began educating his people to seek peace and to accept the existence of Israel as a sovereign Jewish state. Instead, he elected to ignore the terrorist organizations' military expansion and to violate his contractual commitments to Israel to prevent terrorism. He continued to incite his people against Israel through the media, school texts and any other available means. From Israel's standpoint, this meant that even during periods of relative quiet, it was sitting on a powder keg.

Arafat's policy since 1994 testifies like a thousand witnesses that he has opted for a strategy of non-acceptance of Israel's existence. One expression of this strategy is his repeated declarations that, while ostensibly he does not seek Israel's destruction, he can't be prevented from dreaming about such a goal.

Thus it is perfectly legitimate for Israel to query Arafat's relevancy. Not only did Arafat not fulfill his promise to provide peace and security to Israel in return for its painful concessions—he himself has emerged as the prime terrorist.

Today the Israeli public discussion centers on the question whether Arafat is at all capable of stopping the terrorism.

A negative response to this question means that Arafat has indeed ceased to be relevant from Israel's standpoint. Israel must wait until, sooner or later, there emerges an alternative Palestinian leader or coalition capable of leading the Palestinian people to a resolution of the conflict by stopping the violence and destroying the military infrastructure of the terrorist organizations.

A positive response to the question of Arafat's capacity to stop terrorism leads to the conclusion that he has deliberately elected not to exercise

this capability. Here, anyone who still believes that additional Israeli concessions, territorial or otherwise, made under the pressure of terrorist attacks, will cause Arafat to adopt a policy of peace and to strike at the terrorist infrastructure, is mistaken and misleading. Further concessions will merely reinforce Arafat's belief that violence pays.

The only way to try to force Arafat to make a strategic choice for peace is to apply ongoing pressure: Israeli, American, European and Arab. Pressure that will force him to abandon his strategy of terrorism and opt for non-violent means to resolve the conflict. The enlightened world must raise the cost for Arafat of Palestinian terrorism to a point where it no longer pays him to initiate and tolerate it.

In conclusion, Israel must bide its time until one of two developments takes place: either Arafat's strategy changes, or the Palestinian leadership changes.—*Published January 28, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Ridding ourselves of slavery

a conversation with Abdel Aziz Rantisi

bitterlemons: If it is said that Palestinians and Israelis are engaged in a war, how then will Palestinians know that they have achieved victory?

Rantisi: We, the Palestinians, have been engaged in a war that the Zionists have imposed upon us ever since 1948 when they left their countries to occupy ours—from that time, they imposed the war on themselves.

By their crime of occupying Palestine, they have caused and created suffering for Palestinians for 56 years. In those years, they slaughtered tens of thousands of Palestinians aggressively and unjustly, and exiled millions of them from their original lands and properties. The exiled are still looking forward to returning to their lands, cities, villages and houses. The Zionists also imprisoned tens of thousands of Palestinians; 7,000 of them remain imprisoned today.

The Zionists continue destroying our lives for no reason but that we demand our legitimate rights and because we fight to put an end to the tragedy and multi-faceted suffering of our people. Therefore, we think that if the suffering of the Palestinians stops, we have achieved victory.

bitterlemons: Are there different levels of victory, or will only a complete victory be enough?

Rantisi: Of course there are different levels of victory, whereas sometimes you can win by executing a plan to push Israeli tanks away as they invade any area in our country—because at that time, you would protect our children from being slaughtered by the Zionists. Accordingly, that is a victory.

Also, when we force the enemy to leave any piece of our land without giving up any of our legitimate rights as a price for that, we consider this victory.

We might also win a round of confrontation or win the media war, thus producing a victory in the broader war. All of the things I have mentioned are partial, field or periodic victories, but the perfect and complete victory that Palestinians seek is that which can put an end to their suffering, and achieved by regaining all of their stolen rights, comprehensively and intact.

bitterlemons: How does Islam define victory and is this important in the Palestinian context?

Rantisi: In Islam, there is no specific definition of victory. Muslims' concept of victory is the same as others'. How did the French understand it when the Nazis occupied their lands? Or the Algerians, when the French occupied their lands? The Vietnamese? Or even the Americans themselves?

All of [these people] are still celebrating the anniversary of the date that they pushed back the invaders or occupiers of their lands and liberated their lands, accordingly ridding themselves of the slavery and humiliation practiced by their occupiers. We, as Muslims, taste victory the same way they did.

Therefore, I don't think that there is any misunderstanding between the Palestinian factions, national or Islamic, about the definition of victory; we all have the same concept of victory.

bitterlemons: Has the Palestinian definition of victory changed in the last 50 years?

Rantisi: I think that the majority of Palestinians have the same concept and definition of victory as 50 years ago, otherwise they would have accepted all of what has been offered them from 1948 until today. [By this], I mean solutions that detract from their rights and international resolutions, peace initiatives or signed agreements.

Some might say that the Palestinians have missed many opportunities, but the fact is that they rejected defeat. Or we might say that they were and are still seeking victory.

It is obvious that Palestinians still want and insist on regaining their comprehensive and complete rights. They have consciously refused any solution that detracts from their national and legitimate rights. The Palestinians also have defended this decision strongly and paid a precious price for that. [They have] sacrificed and are still sacrificing because Palestinians understand that victory means liberating the entire land.

bitterlemons: Is it possible that Palestinians might win the battle with Israel but lose the battle within their own society?

Rantisi: I don't think it is possible, because Palestinians cannot win the battle with the enemy unless they are able to win it within their society after defeating the enemy.

Look at the deep significance of verses 40 and 41 from Surat al-Hajj (which is Sura 22 in the Holy Quran). In this verse, God says that those who win rule themselves after they defeat their enemy, because the people that are controlled by various groups that fight each other as they fight the enemy cannot achieve victory. And if one day any one people achieves victory, it will be due to their national triumph. If they were unified during the battle, then they will be able to protect and maintain their unity after achieving victory. God said this in his Holy Quran, Surat al-Anfal verse 46 and Surat al-Assaf, verse 4.

bitterlemons: Do you believe that you will see victory in your lifetime?

Rantisi: I hope so, but I don't know when I will die, therefore, I can't be certain that I will see it, or that I will not.

But I want to remind you that the enemy's might does not distance or prevent the possibility of achieving victory. So many unjust countries have collapsed while at their strongest. This is what happened to Germany, to the former Soviet Union. It would not be strange for the Zionist entity and the United States of America to collapse while they are strong.

I think that the strong will of Palestinian youth is mightier than that of the Zionist soldier by thousands of times. The battle itself has never been one only of weapons because if that were so, the Zionists would have conquered the Palestinian people by practicing their various kinds of destruction and terror against the Palestinians. If that were the case, [Israeli Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon would have been able to destroy the intifada and the Palestinian resistance in 100 days, as he promised.—*Published April 19, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Hamas is leading the process

a conversation with Matti Steinberg

bitterlemons: Is Hamas' entry into the political sphere ultimately good for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement?

Steinberg: There is no alternative to the politicization of Hamas. It cannot change its Islamic values, but it can be driven to strike a balance between adherence to its values, and its responsibility and accountability toward Palestinian society as a whole.

bitterlemons: How do you view Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' timing and tactics in drawing Hamas into politics?

Steinberg: The main factor is not Abbas, but public opinion. The fact that Hamas is compelled to pay attention to the necessities of society is the main factor in bringing Hamas into the political field. This is more of a constraint than an advantage for Hamas. The ideal situation for Hamas would have been for most of Palestinian society to accept its ultimate values, but the fact that society is tired, worried and yearning for a kind of timeout from the intifada compels Hamas to enter the political arena now.

Hamas would not have volunteered to pragmatize its attitude. Politicization is the only way that Hamas can be changed. Provided the Palestinian Authority headed by Abbas and Fateh are leading this process, Hamas can be contained. But as things stand today, Hamas

seems to be leading the process; Hamas is threatening to contain the [Palestinian Authority] and Abbas.

Extrapolating from the present point in time, Hamas, I believe, would gain between 30 and 50 percent in the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council in July. Fateh is in total disarray and is searching for its lost identity. It is sufficient to indicate that from 1989, the Fateh Congress hasn't convened and some of its members have passed away. Today, in the eyes of most of the population, Fateh is identified with corruption and the dysfunctionality of the PA, whereas Hamas is considered clean by comparison. I accept the findings of recent polls by Khalil Shikaki and al-Najah: on the one hand people want a political process headed by Abbas, as was indicated in the presidential elections. But on the other hand, people want clean stables, the end of corruption, and personal security, and these are connected with Hamas.

bitterlemons: What should Abbas do to lead the process? What should Israel do to help?

Steinberg: Not only Israel, but the US and the EU—this is an across-the-board situation. First of all, internally, every passing hour is critical. Fateh has to reorganize before the elections. It has to recognize the problem and then address it. It is pitiful that the Fateh General Congress is going to be convened only in August, in the wake of the elections and the Israeli disengagement from Gaza. Fateh can change that timetable.

Secondly, the Palestinian population needs a broader political context. It must feel that the disengagement will not be both the beginning and the end, because if it is the end this signifies in its eyes that the West Bank will continue to be occupied. It must be assured that disengagement is not an expedient way for Israel to continue to occupy the West Bank.

bitterlemons: Do you expect Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to take this step?

Steinberg: Ideally, Israel would devise a plan that specifies the main principles for an overall settlement and indicates the end result of the process, but I don't expect it to. So the task can be done by making concrete the general guidelines of the roadmap regarding final status and specifying an ironclad timetable and interim aims.

Further, Israel must understand that insisting that Abbas dismantle the Hamas terrorist infrastructure before the July elections will weaken Abbas and strengthen Hamas. Only after the elections, and assuming Abbas can still lead, should Israel make that demand. For Palestinians,

complying with the roadmap timetable [on this issue] means that Israel is trying to drive the PA into a civil war. With the Cairo announcement the Palestinians decided to avoid a civil war, and this is the logic of Palestinian political behavior now.

Israel has to update its understanding of the roadmap and look at these demands for dismantling the terrorist infrastructure—not as a precondition but as a process; look at it less legally and more politically. Israel also has to change its position regarding the roadmap demand to establish a state with provisional borders, because this is understood by the Palestinians as a demand to paralyze the situation. To summarize, the Palestinians must feel that there is a light at the end of this tunnel in order for Abbas to lead the process of politicization of Hamas, rather than Hamas leading the process. For Hamas, politicization is only a means, a maneuver.

bitterlemons: If it's only a maneuver, why should Fateh, or for that matter Israel or the US, be interested in the politicization of Hamas?

Steinberg: Because Hamas is bowing to constraints. You can't liquidate Hamas. It is not a sect. It is a very popular movement. It has a deep and broad societal base. The only way to neutralize Hamas is to create a "positive" tension between its ultimate values and its responsibilities.

bitterlemons: How does this fit into the broader context of Arab Islamist movements?

Steinberg: The main paradox is that Hamas, Hizballah, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, indeed most fundamentalist movements are, in contrast to al-Qaeda, part and parcel of society, and are eager to exploit the process of democratization. But here we have to differentiate between the medium and the message. They adopt the medium of democracy but not the message of democracy because they want an Islamic regime, or democracy according to Islam, which is more a kind of "shuracracy" (shura = consultation). This is far from the values of western democracy. The Islamists have taken note of the American emphasis on democratization and intend to exploit it to reach their goals, and legitimize their objectives regarding the conflict with Israel. Hamas wants to remove the stigma of being a terrorist organization.

And yet we all have an interest in letting this happen as long as we can lead it. We don't have an interest if Hamas leads. The main issue is, who is dominant?

bitterlemons: You mentioned the Cairo announcement of March 17, 2005. How does it fit into this picture?

Steinberg: The negative aspect of politicization is ingrained in the Cairo announcement, which does not include recognition of Israel and emphasizes the guaranteed right of return of the refugees to their homes and possessions. This means the end of Israel. The other clauses deal with the integration of Hamas into the democratic process. When we compare these phrases about the refugees with those used in recent years by Abbas, or by the recent Arab League summit in Algiers which spoke about “solving the problem of the Palestinian refugees in a just and agreed form and according to UNGA Resolution 194” (, i.e., the March 2002 Beirut summit formula), we see a world of difference.

In order to buy a “lull” Abbas has, under the auspices of the Egyptians, accepted the political demands of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In return for integrating Hamas into Palestinian politics, Abbas has integrated the movement’s political approach. He did so in Cairo under extreme duress; this is not his real position. This must cause us concern.—
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A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Fateh and Hamas: A coalition in the making?

by Mahdi Abdel Hadi

We are currently witnessing the historic transformation of Hamas, previously a popular movement based on armed struggle and opposition to the established Palestinian order. Hamas has managed to firmly place itself within that order in a bid to confirm its position, power and legitimacy both inside Palestinian society and outside.

It is doing so at, for it, a politically advantageous time and after much thought. Indeed, what we are witnessing now is the unfolding of a four-point doctrine laid down by assassinated Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin some two years ago: First, the implementation of a ceasefire, whether formal or not. Second, a bid, through the ballot box, to take a share of political power on the internal Palestinian scene while distancing itself explicitly from the Oslo Accords. So far, this has expressed itself

in the movement’s successful municipal elections campaigns and the decision to stand for the legislative elections currently scheduled to take place in July. The third point of Yassin’s “agenda” was to challenge other Palestinian factions’—read Fateh’s—dominance over Palestinian political legitimacy, realizing that only through elections can the movement punch its proper weight in society, and—what is more and often ignored—determine the extent of its popular power base.

The final and probably most significant item on Yassin’s strategic list was the implicit acknowledgement of the PLO’s 1988 decision to endorse the two-state solution, i.e., a Palestinian state on all territory occupied in 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a solution to the issue of refugees to be found according to international law based on UN General Assembly Resolution 194. Regardless of whether or not this is explicitly acknowledged by Hamas as a permanent or temporary solution, it will become the movement’s operational political guideline.

Hamas has changed with the times. This is quite a natural process: when you talk to people in 2005, it is no longer like talking to people back in 1995. For the past four years, the lives of the Palestinians have been dominated by what I call the three Gs: guns, guards and gates. They live in the biggest prison in the world. In response to the hardships encountered and the forlornness of their situation people have started looking to the fourth G—God. They are doing so in a bid to maintain their identity, their heritage and their culture without surrendering in this prison.

People are realistic, and, however painfully, they have to contend with the “culture of the prison” that has been imposed upon them by Israel. The question facing people at present is how to survive in this prison without giving up their dreams, dignity and demands, and without losing the last bit of hope for a better future. The task for the factions in this context is to develop a strategy to get out of the prison with the cross-factional priority being to bring the bleeding and suffering of the people to an end.

Today, leaders of political factions, including Hamas and Fateh and regardless whether based inside or outside Palestine, as well as leaders of civil society, have realized that one prerequisite for surviving in this prison is for everyone to join efforts and work together.

However, what is still lacking is an overall strategy for changing the general environment and possibly undoing the increasingly disturbing *faits accomplis*, particularly Israel’s separation barrier and the settlements, which have become the dominant factors determining

the future not only of Palestine, but of Israel, too. The situation on the ground cries for a fast change since, as long as Jewish settlers are determining the agenda of the Israeli government and Palestinians are only reacting to what Israel is doing, the peoples on both sides will suffer and the Palestinian prison will only become more entrenched.

One of the main questions regarding Hamas' entry into the PLO house is thus whether or not this will be accompanied or followed by the development of an urgently-needed strategy across factional lines. In this respect, it is important also to note the effect on Fateh.

Hamas' challenge to Fateh is not new, but at this stage in history it hurts Fateh doubly because the latter is weakened by intra-party divisions, mainly along the rift between the so-called old and new guards. Fateh itself has undergone several transitions in recent history—from a military resistance movement to a governing political faction; from negotiators to developers of a political agenda to creators of a movement caught between armed and non-violent resistance options and having to perform as a player on the international arena. To handle all these tasks effectively and maintain, at the same time, unity among its ranks is the biggest challenge Fateh itself is currently facing. In order to succeed, it will have to solve its leadership crisis in a convincing way and prove its ability to develop a coherent vision for the future.

Nevertheless, both Fateh and Hamas have made a major step in the required direction by agreeing to share political power. If their intentions are serious, they have climbed a major hurdle on the way to develop a joint—that is a Palestinian—strategy for the future. However, it remains to be seen whether either or both (and here we must not forget the crucial part that might be played by the leftist groups as well as forces from within civil society) are prepared to truly erase their political colors for the sake of the Palestinian nation and the unity that is so desperately needed.

I remain skeptical. Hamas' entry into Palestinian Authority institutions is the right step in this context, but only the first of many that are needed.—
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A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Arafat's influence will reach far into the future

by George Giacaman

Most nations have heroes who occupy a central place in their national narrative. Heroes are made, and remade, especially after their death. Arafat was already well on his way to becoming a Palestinian icon during his life. These processes will be completed soon after his death.

Yet what he ultimately stood for will be contested. His legacy will be claimed by different groups and parties, including those who opposed him politically at some point or another, and by various factions within his own party, Fateh. Arafat will continue to play a political role after his death.

For in spite of his long career, his death clearly portrays an unfinished journey: he died in Paris; official ceremonies were held in Cairo and not in Palestine, and he was buried "temporarily" in Ramallah. Any final peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis will have to allow for an appropriate final resting place for Arafat in Jerusalem.

It is also clear that Palestinians will be entering a new phase in their political life. Two broad issues will dominate in the near and longer term: the fate of the political process with Israel, and the nature of the Palestinian political system in the post-Arafat era.

Initial assessments made soon after Arafat's death about possibilities now open for progress in negotiations with Israel have a short-term focus but no strategic significance. For even if one were to suppose that another interim arrangement will be made between the new Palestinian leadership and the Israeli government, the seeds of conflict will remain, all the more so because of the separation wall that will become a focus for continued protest and resistance.

The new Palestinian leadership may have some political leeway in the immediate future to continue steps started with the intercession of Egypt, especially if there is a higher degree of American and European involvement. Ultimately, however, gradual political restraints will be placed on the new leadership due to the increased political influence of varied contenders for power, who will assume a more prominent role after the death of Arafat. In his lifetime, he could not be challenged on power sharing by other groups. The new Palestinian leadership will be

in a far weaker position in the face of such demands, and ultimately may have to accede to them, at least partially.

But the main longer-term constraint and challenge for any new Palestinian leadership is whether it will have an Israeli partner in any future government of Israel. There is no reason to believe that such a leadership will be able to “sell” to Palestinians what an Israeli government is likely to offer. The internal Israeli political scene will remain deadlocked on the issue of where to draw the line territorially on the end of the Zionist project in historic Palestine unless there is consistent outside pressure that could influence Israeli public opinion in a leftist direction. This does not appear likely under the Bush administration. Any interim arrangement will therefore keep the seeds of conflict smoldering.

The nature of the political and administrative system of the Palestinian Authority after Arafat is the second main challenge where changes are to be expected. As most Palestinians agree, no one person will be able to replace Arafat. In addition, he created, under the Palestinian Authority, a de-institutionalized mode of government where the informal system predominated over the formal system. His system of patronage and clientism tied ultimately to himself resulted in his being the glue that bound the system. His departure may well result in the fragmentation of his own party, Fateh, and various centers of power in the PA as well.

The new leadership is very keenly aware of this, but it remains to be seen how successful it will be in holding things together in the coming weeks and months. Centralizing the various security services under one command will not by itself be enough. This is an Israeli requirement but from a Palestinian point of view is not the only element of reform required. Without rule of law and a reformed court system, there is a danger that Palestinians will be governed by security organizations. In terms of priority, rule of law comes first.

Beyond a short transition period, the issue of the legitimacy of the government will come up. The demand for elections has already been raised in the past year and more persistently than at any time before. If elections for a new representative council are not held soon, the legitimacy of the government will be undermined and wide rifts in society will open. The new leadership will be too weak to stem what will be a swelling tide. This will also be a political decision that Israel and the US will have to take—i.e., whether to facilitate elections or not.

Ultimately, issues related to reform and democratization in the Palestinian context will not be separate from issues related to national rights. No Palestinian leadership will be able to govern democratically if

it is perceived by Palestinians to be making undue concessions on such rights. This will also be seen as the heritage of Arafat, who died while under siege in Ramallah. His burial site will remain a potent, visible, and concrete reminder.—*Published November 13, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

A sound Israeli perspective

by Gilead Sher

The Israeli political system is on the verge of massive transformation. Traditional distinctions between left and right, doves and hawks, are no longer valid. From the Likud on the “right” to Meretz on the “left,” the vast majority of the Israeli people is converging around the idea of a two-state solution.

Aware of the existential threat caused by perpetuating the current status, there is a growing civil non-partisan movement of Israelis dedicated to a unilateral disengagement from the Palestinians via a substantive attainable plan aimed at safeguarding the vital interests of Israel as a Jewish, democratic state. Guided by a realistic analysis of the geo-political realities of our region, it seems that unilateral—although coordinated—disengagement offers a viable alternative to the dangerous, endless cycle of violence that prevents any serious peace negotiations.

In the absence of a comprehensive governmental disengagement initiative, Israel’s society, economy, security and major institutions will continue their current decline. For us Israelis this is truly a matter of life and death: if we fail to meet the current demographic challenge, we ourselves will be the agents of the destruction of the State of Israel, and the Zionist dream will thereby come to an end.

Two assumptions should be made from the outset.

First, despite Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s “historic” December 2003 Herzliya speech and his recent statement about a plan to evacuate the

Gaza Strip, the Likud Party, currently holding 40 seats in the Knesset, is constrained by its internal central committee whose politics are significantly more right wing and militant than those of Likud's overall constituency. As a result of this schism, the party has neither the capacity nor the will to bring about a disengagement from the Palestinians in any way that would require more than the relocation of just a couple of settlements. Likud's official stance suggests that it has no real intention to ever negotiate a permanent status agreement.

Second, the international community, led by the United States, the United Nations, the European Union, Russia and moderate Arab states, such as Egypt, Morocco and Jordan, will support any practicable platform offered by Israel within the framework of the roadmap. Such support might include, under particular conditions, the introduction of an international force to the territories. Such an Israeli initiative, being pre-coordinated rather than fully unilateral, has therefore a chance to obtain international legitimacy.

Disengagement between the two peoples has been the underlying logic of the political process since the early 1990s. However, it seems that permanent status is not to be reached in the near future. There is therefore a need for a substantive, well-established plan, one that would be both responsible and attainable, aimed at safeguarding the vital interests of the State of Israel and reinforcing national security in the broadest sense.

A prerequisite for achieving these goals is an initiated unilateral disengagement—to borders dictated by the needs of security and demography—as part of a responsible and sovereign decision of the government of Israel.

The following are the essentials of the plan:

- The temporary border for this initiated unilateral disengagement will be designed to safeguard Israel's vital security, political, demographic and economic interests, in addition to the interests of settlement and infrastructure. In this scheme, over 80 percent of settlers in Judea and Samaria will remain within the borders of the State of Israel, while a minimal number of Palestinians will also be included;
- Israel will receive solid long-term international guarantees that promote the stability of the region;
- The Palestinians will not have the right of return to the State of Israel;
- Concurrent with the establishment of the Palestinian state, the historic conflict between the sides will be declared at an end. As a

condition for its establishment, Palestine will be demilitarized;

- Jewish Jerusalem will be the capital of Israel, while Palestinian al-Quds will be the capital of the Palestinian state. The area of the holy sites will come under a separate special regime, which will guarantee unimpeded access and freedom of worship to members of all religions;
- Israel will support any effort towards international/third party involvement in the running of the Palestinian territories until the setting-up of a responsible Palestinian government; and finally
- Negotiations on permanent status will resume parallel to the above process in order to lead to a final comprehensive agreement on all core issues including, but not limited to, the final borders between Israel and Palestine.

Thus a national security and foreign policy plan would be established, combining unilateral disengagement with a call to simultaneously renew permanent status negotiations. It would foster international US-led involvement in the territories and aim at pursuing negotiations, possibly on the basis of either US President Bill Clinton's parameters or the principles of any of the other recent peace initiatives.—*Published March 8, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Give peace a chance: women speak out

by Shulamit Aloni

At times of popular insurrection, revolt, revolution, war of liberation or existential war, even in conservative societies (male societies where women have no voice and no presence and are invisible) here, too, women participate in the struggle.

For the most part they are delegated to take care of services, maintaining the family, the community, education and hygiene. But there are always intelligent women, leaders, beginning with the Prophetess Deborah or

the Prophetess Hulda, who penetrate the leadership and whose voices are heard.

In our time, after two brutal world wars in which women were recruited to industry and to auxiliary tasks in uniform, after victory over fascism and over the arrogance of the strong and the oppressors, there came recognition of human rights and democratic society. Now it is understood that a woman is also a human being; no longer can women be made invisible or be silenced. They have something to say and the right to make demands. In particular, they have something to say in the struggle for peace, the struggle to replace the strategy of force by a strategy of conciliation, equality, respect for the other and his/her rights.

In matters of peace, the voice of women is clearer and brighter than that of men. Men enjoy their manliness; they receive medals and trumpet victory. But women, after the battle remain with the ashes, the mourning, the widowhood and the orphans. Without medals, they have to rebuild the family, the home, the community.

Accordingly, once the painful reality of our region became clear—the fanaticism, the hatred and the monstrous intentions—and as we witnessed more and more destruction and death, we decided to organize and act.

Israeli and Palestinian women—women from around the Mediterranean and members of European Union institutions—together linked up in order that our voice be clearly heard, and not drowned out by the sounds of our heroic fighters and our ostensibly “all knowing” intelligence men and fighters in the field. As women of responsibility and strong motivation to advance the cause of peace and equality, we resolved to act in concert.

In 1989, Israeli law did not permit us to meet with women of the Palestine Liberation Organization, but we found a way. Our friend, Simone Susskind of Brussels, a woman of accomplishments in peace and human rights, an initiator and a doer, contacted leaders of the European Union and recruited them to our cause. She succeeded in convening more than 150 women leaders from around the Mediterranean, including all the Maghreb countries, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, as well as Europe and the United States, for a meeting held at the European Union, with a large media presence: “Give Peace a Chance—Women Speak Out.”

I have been to many international meetings, but none compared to this. Understanding, pragmatism, a readiness to listen, the joy of dialogue,

and an effort to achieve consensus regarding demands—all in a positive atmosphere. The meeting produced a joint declaration, a considerable achievement.

By the time of a second meeting in Brussels in 1992, we knew one another from our work in the field, so we met as friends. There we decided on the Jerusalem Link. Since then, activities are coordinated on the Israeli side by Bat Shalom, which represents the entire women’s coalition, including Women in Black, activities against destruction of homes, against torture, etc. On the Palestinian side, there is the Jerusalem Center for Women. Both organizations are active and recognized worldwide. In recent years, Link organizations have participated in a large convocation in Marrakesh, Morocco; received awards in Barcelona; appeared before an audience of thousands in Porto Alegre, Brazil; and appeared before the European Parliament and elsewhere. At the Free University in Brussels in 1997, Hanan Ashrawi and I received honorary doctorates for our struggle for peace. Sadly, in Israel, unlike in many parts of the world, the press is nearly silent regarding these activities.

Today we all understand that without a solution to the problem of Israeli-Palestinian relations there will be neither peace nor prosperity in the region. When the army and the terrorists take over and there are no negotiations, it is very bad for us all. Nevertheless, women go from country to country, meeting with communities and lecturing at universities. In Europe, in particular, we are listened to and enjoy full cooperation. Europe believes in reconciliation. So do we. Hence they listen to us and offer encouragement.

This is a great honor, but there is still no peace. While today women are not able to stop the killing, nevertheless when the time comes for peace arrangements, their work will lead to a reduction in hatred, vengefulness, alienation and bitterness, and through reconciliation and a moral approach we shall look ahead with hope and to build peace.—
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AN ISRAELI VIEW

The immediate challenges

by Yossi Alpher

The loss of Ariel Sharon's leadership is a blow to the cause of additional Israeli unilateral withdrawals, demographic sanity and the narrowing of the military occupation in the West Bank. Only after Israel's elections of March 28 will we begin to know how well Sharon's successor as prime minister—presumably, though not certainly, acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert—manages these tasks.

Clearly, Olmert is committed to further withdrawal. Indeed, he proposed it, citing the demographic argument and the danger of falling into a South Africa model, a year before Sharon. In this regard, he may have more strategic understanding than his predecessor, who was essentially a master at tactics, both military and political. But clearly, too, Olmert has none of Sharon's credentials as a warrior hawk, nor his charisma, his grandfatherly image and teflon coating, nor his incredible determination and thick skin in the face of terrible odds. And he is relatively untried in the tasks of an Israeli prime minister. Despite his decades of political experience, Olmert was never minister of defense or foreign affairs, has never worked with Washington on major strategic issues and has never managed negotiations with the Palestinians.

Israeli-Palestinian relations will almost certainly present him with more pressing challenges than disengagement in the immediate post-Sharon era. Sometime in the coming days, Olmert may have to decide whether, and how, to allow Palestinian Jerusalemites to vote in the January 25 Palestinian national elections. Avoiding a decision could place the onus of cancellation of those elections on Israel. US administration emissaries David Welch and Elliot Abrams, who were on their way here to find a solution in consultation with Sharon when he became incapacitated, have postponed their trip. Olmert may need more than American help if he is to navigate this pressing issue without losing electoral support or doing damage to Israeli-Palestinian relations. As mayor of Jerusalem for a decade prior to 2003, he largely ignored the needs of his Palestinian residents.

Yet even the Jerusalem vote question may pale in the coming weeks—if the authority of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas continues to falter in the face of internal violence and anarchy inflicted largely by his

own Fateh supporters, and if Hamas wins the January 25 elections, or even gains decisive veto-power within the Legislative Council. Many Israelis and friends of Israel will have a knee-jerk inclination to blurt out, "Arik would have known what to do." Will Olmert know? Has he internalized the two key rules of policy behavior that Sharon learned so well after the debacle of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon: coordinate closely with Washington, and maintain public consensus in support of your policies? Does he have a realistic vision of a viable two-state solution—something Sharon never had? Can he, or anyone else on the political scene, for that matter, replace Sharon's powerful presence with something equally compelling and perhaps less destructive?

Sharon's removal from the scene suggests a second troublesome cluster of immediate crises that Olmert may have to deal with. We saw an inkling of it after Sharon's first minor stroke, when Palestinian militants in Lebanon with an al-Qaeda link launched katyushas into Kiryat Shmona, Gazan militants aimed their Qassam rockets at Ashkelon and radical settlers set up a dozen new outposts. Now we may see a heavier display of provocations against Israel on the part of all those extremist elements in the region, often egged on by Syria and Iran, that are inclined to interpret Sharon's sudden departure as a sign of Israeli weakness. Inevitably, most of these provocations—Qassams, outposts, suicide bombings and who knows what else—will generate tensions at a time when both Israelis and Palestinians need a little peace and quiet to get their respective houses in order.

Sharon's entire approach to the Palestinian issue evolved significantly during his premiership. But it took two years in office, fighting the intifada, before he discovered, in the words of the popular song he liked to quote, that "things you can see from here you can't see from there." Only then did he begin to come to grips with the limitations of force, the counterproductive nature of the occupation, and the demographic threat, and bought into the public's overwhelming advocacy of the fence and disengagement.

Olmert, seemingly, has a head start because he learned these lessons before Sharon. But any leader who takes over from Sharon has a hard act to follow. Israelis and Palestinians who hope in the coming weeks and months to see some sort of progress, however hesitant and one-sided, should wish him well. The US, EU, Egypt and Jordan should help him—but without interfering in Israel's elections. This is no easy task.—*Published January 9, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Power will not moderate Hamas

by Martin Kramer

The election of Hamas has prompted an epidemic of self-induced amnesia among pundits who interpret Palestinian politics. For years they argued that Israel should do everything to bolster Yasser Arafat, and later Mahmoud Abbas, lest Hamas gain ground. Hamas would grow if Israel did not make far-reaching concessions, thus destroying any prospect of a negotiated peace.

But now that Hamas has assumed power, these very same pundits ooze reassurances that Hamas is a partner for Israel after all. True, it has yet to recognize Israel, renounce violence, or dismantle its clandestine “military wing.” True, it declares openly that it will do none of those things. But this is mere rhetoric, insist the pundits. Now that Hamas is in power, it will have no choice but to accept Israel *de facto*.

The problem with this interpretation is not that it ignores the past history of Hamas. The problem is that Hamas acquired power too easily. It has never sat in opposition, joined a larger coalition, or acquired the habit of compromise.

Hamas entered parliament with an absolute majority in its first election. It has achieved, in 20 years, what the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has not achieved in 80 years. Turkey’s Islamists, regarded as the model of Islamist moderation, came to power only after decades of up-and-down parliamentary politics.

Hamas, in contrast, has never experienced any period of across-the-board suppression. Leaders of the movement were targeted by Israel, and some of its activists did time in Israeli prisons or were forced into exile. But Hamas has been largely free to organize, publish, acquire arms and launch attacks.

Islamist movements have been domesticated in strong states, where they have learned to interact with more powerful forces. But in the West Bank and Gaza, Arafat preferred struggle to state-building. Hamas accepted his nominal status as figurehead of the Palestinian cause, in return for almost complete freedom to do as it pleased.

Not only has Hamas assumed power on its first try, it has done so with its militia, its guns and its ideology intact. Its speedy and sweeping ascent has simply validated its past militancy.

Now, late in the game, the United States, Israel and Europe seek to extract from Hamas those gestures of acquiescence Hamas would not make when it was weaker. It is no surprise that Hamas evades them. Like Hizballah, it believes itself to have forced an Israeli retreat. It won a decisive electoral victory without parallel in the Arab world. And Hamas is convinced it enjoys the sympathy of millions of Arabs and Muslims, prepared to extend unconditional moral and financial support. Why should it bend?

Hamas will devote its rule to achieving three goals. First, it will seek to consolidate its grip over the institutions of the Palestinian quasi-state, at the expense of Fateh. Second, it will move gradually to Islamize Palestinian life. (Hamas will meet less resistance than secular observers think. Last year, a poll showed that two-thirds of Palestinians believe Islamic law should be the sole source of legislation.) Third, it will write its own “roadmap” in Palestinian consciousness, leading away from a two-state solution. For that purpose, Hamas will make the media and the schools into extensions of the mosques.

Hamas might continue the *tahdiya*, the informal “hold-your-fire,” if Israel executes more unilateral withdrawals. But this process will slow or stop somewhere well short of the green line. Then, if not earlier, Hamas is liable to open space for “resistance”—terror which, to its mind, is the only language Israel understands.

The Hamas concept of victory through “resistance” not only delegitimizes Israel’s peace with Egypt and Jordan. It undercuts the United States, which trades on its reputation as the only force that can deliver Israeli concessions. Israel, the US, Egypt and Jordan thus have a vital interest in seeing Hamas fail. So, too, does Europe, which has invested heavily in Palestinian civil society.

To make Hamas fail, the Palestinian electorate must be made to realize that, tough as life has been, Hamas is making it worse. If Hamas is allowed to feed the Palestinians both bread and illusions, the bread will sustain the illusions. Only a regime of targeted economic sanctions can break the cycle.

Palestinian pollsters tell us that Palestinian opinion largely favors negotiation with Israel. Hamas thus needs the illusion of a “peace process” created by desultory contacts with foreign governments and mediators. If Hamas is to fail, it must be denied any legitimacy for which it refuses to pay a price. That requires an effective diplomatic blockade.

Will Hamas evolve? History shows that Islamist movements change only when confronted with strong counter-forces. Hamas has never faced such forces; it must be made to face them now. Power will not moderate Hamas. The prospect of losing it just might.—*Published March 27, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

We have what it takes to succeed

a conversation with Ismail Haniyeh

bitterlemons: Did you expect to become prime minister?

Haniyeh: I imagined that one day Hamas would be at the helm of power, but at the personal level I never thought about any position or seat because this is not part of our education. This position, however, is a mandate from the people first and Hamas second.

bitterlemons: What were the main points and conditions included in the letter of commission you received from President Mahmoud Abbas?

Haniyeh: The letter did not include any conditions. President Abbas spoke about the components of his political vision, but without stipulating conditions. While forming its political platform, the government takes into consideration all political issues. However, it must also preserve the vision on which the movement based its electoral platform. At the moment, we are searching for common ground.

bitterlemons: What are the main components of the new government's political platform?

Haniyeh: I do not want to go into detail about the political platform of the government because there are still ongoing discussions with other factions. I can say, however, that the government's political platform is based on Hamas' electoral program. The wording may eventually be different in order to absorb other political outlooks.

bitterlemons: Where have you arrived in your discussions on forming a unity government with Fateh?

Haniyeh: We have repeated time and again that we would prefer a national coalition government in which all the factions participate, including the brothers in Fateh. We are striving for this through our intensive discussions and meetings with everyone. Until now, Fateh has not given an official response; everything being said about its refusal to join the government is media speculation. Furthermore, [Fateh's] Revolutionary Council left any decision until the outcome of talks with Hamas was clear.

We are interested in Fateh's participation given that it is a major faction and has a long history, in addition to its presence in the Palestinian Authority. I believe national interests also necessitate its participation.

bitterlemons: What if Fateh refuses to join?

Haniyeh: If Fateh will not join, we will move on with other factions. Our discussions with the other factions have progressed well and there is preliminary agreement with the [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine], the [Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine], the Independent Palestine Bloc and Badil to join the government, in addition to a number of independents.

bitterlemons: Is there a possibility of including Fateh personalities in the government if Fateh refuses to join as a movement?

Haniyeh: We have addressed Fateh as a faction and in an official capacity but we have no problem looking into different options.

bitterlemons: What about the security services? Will you face difficulties in controlling them, since most of their members are affiliated to Fateh?

Haniyeh: We believe the security services must work for the benefit of the people and not for the benefit of a certain group. They should also work within the context of the law so there will not be any violations that would affect the performance of these services. I am confident that the relationship between the security services and the government will be fine and run smoothly.

bitterlemons: In this context, what kind of person are you looking to appoint to take over the interior ministry?

Haniyeh: We are looking for a personality who is well established in his relationships and is not a new face to the security services.

bitterlemons: How will the new government fight corruption?

Haniyeh: Let me say here that follow-up on the corruption files will be dictated by several considerations: first, the judiciary and the law must be followed; second, we need a gradual reform process; and third, we will not take any steps that throw PA institutions into confusion.

In our last meeting, President Abbas confirmed that he would continue to present files to the attorney general. As a government, we will follow up on these files in a way that coincides with the people's interests.

One of the government's top priorities is to put the Palestinian house in order. We want to restore respect for the law and the judicial authority. These are crucial issues, but they demand patience.

bitterlemons: How will the Hamas government deal with any armed group that abducts foreigners or carries out other acts, provoking security chaos?

Haniyeh: There are several aspects to the issue of security, including family feuds and the abduction of foreigners. These issues must be dealt with, regardless of political affiliation.

bitterlemons: But what would happen if there were a kidnapping after Hamas took power?

Haniyeh: The government will do its duty to provide protection. We will act wisely.

bitterlemons: What is your response to reports that the US and western parties are working to undermine a Hamas-led government?

Haniyeh: There is no doubt that the elections in general, and Hamas' victory in particular, threw these parties off balance. This has made them put forward contradictory positions after losing their "compass" in dealing with the election results.

There are also media-inspired efforts to limit our powers and place obstacles in our way by belittling our platform. However, we have what it takes to succeed and we will offer a good model of governance and general administration.

I don't think President Abbas will entertain any proposals to reduce the jurisdiction of the government. He actually told me this in our last meeting where he reaffirmed that he would offer the government all the jurisdictions he offered previously, when he became president after the late President Yasser Arafat.

There are also contacts with and signals from various EU countries and others, including Japan, which confirm their commitment to supporting the Palestinian people.

After the government is formed, the nature of its regional and international relationships will become clear and the government's performance in the various aspects of Palestinian life will become apparent. Those who have rejected the Hamas government will find themselves before a new reality that they must deal with. In spite of everything being said in the press about threats [to this government], I am still optimistic.

bitterlemons: What did Hamas achieve from its Russia visit?

Haniyeh: The results of the Russia visit were positive and we achieved our goals in terms of penetrating the international arena through a major country and a member of the UN Security Council. Russia is also a member of the Quartet and has a long history in the region.

We listened to them and they listened to us and our mutual assessments were positive. We were informed by the Russians via their ambassador in Damascus that the Russian leadership was comfortable with the visit.

bitterlemons: Hamas maintains that it will not abandon the armed resistance. How will Hamas strike a balance between that pledge and its responsibilities as a government?

Haniyeh: The underlying problem remains the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and continuing Israeli assaults against our people. During the [current] period of calm, the [Palestinian] factions have proven that they were not the problem, and have been willing to work within the calm.

Furthermore, self-defense is a legitimate right, and we will handle the resistance in a way that serves our people. That is our responsibility as a government.

bitterlemons: Recently, Israeli officials said you were not immune from assassination. What is your response?

Haniyeh: These threats are nothing new and they are part of the general Israeli escalation against our people, as well as public figures. They are also part of the whole atmosphere surrounding the Israeli elections. Such escalation and threats have always been used for Israeli electoral purposes. I am not afraid and I have faith that God decides every person's time.—*Published March 13, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

Law & Rights

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

The question of “prior use”

by Rami Shehadeh

The Middle East is one of the world’s most water-stressed regions, and the deteriorating quality and limited capacity of the region’s water resources are of paramount importance to all residents of the area.

Since much of the freshwater that is available in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories comes from shared sources—i.e., groundwater and surface water—water has been the subject of several Israeli-Palestinian agreements, namely: the Declaration of Principles of 1993, the Gaza-Jericho Accord of 1995, and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of 1995 (hereinafter “Interim Agreement”). As a number of issues related to water were not resolved definitively in the Interim Agreement, water was listed as one of the main subjects to be negotiated in the permanent status negotiations.

Until the Interim Agreement, the water resources of the Occupied Territories were under the direct control of the Israeli military government, which in turn was guided in its policies by domestic Israeli government institutions, including the Water Commission. The commission drastically limited Palestinian access to and use of freshwater from aquifers in the Occupied Territories. In contrast, however, it has allowed illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories vastly greater consumption of the same water sources. On average, when including Israelis living inside the green line, Israelis consume more than four times as much water as Palestinians on a per capita basis.

Under the Interim Agreement, the situation did not improve much for the Palestinians. Israel retains veto power over Palestinian development, not only of groundwater that is shared with Israel, but also that which is wholly Palestinian in the sense that it does not flow from the territories into Israel. The disparities remain blatantly inequitable and unreasonable.

Israel does not attempt to justify its disproportionate share of the international water resources such as the Mountain Aquifer and the Jordan River Basin under the doctrine of equitable utilization. Instead,

to the extent that Israel has attempted to justify its conduct on legal grounds at all, it has relied on its prior use of the water resources. The “prior use” or “historic use” doctrine states that a pattern of use of water in an international watercourse gives rise to a right to such use.

This argument is baseless for two fundamental reasons.

One of the most fundamental principles of international law is that no benefit can be derived from an illegal act (*ex injuria non oritur jus*). Israel’s belligerent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza since 1967 is unlawful. Even if its occupation were not unlawful, Israel’s conduct in administering the Occupied Territories and exploiting Palestinian natural resources violates its obligations as an occupying power under the law of “belligerent occupation” (the 1907 Hague Regulations and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949), and also violates the principle of Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources.

With regard to water from the Jordan River, Israel’s unlawful military actions have enabled it to appropriate more than an equitable share of the waters of the Jordan River basin. Its occupation of the Golan Heights and, until recently, the “security zone” in southern Lebanon, contrary to United Nations Security Council resolutions, have resulted in Israeli control of many of the headwaters of the Jordan River. Furthermore, Israel expelled Palestinians from the area of the West Bank bordering the Jordan River, destroyed Palestinian wells (including wells built pre-1967), denied Palestinians access to Jordan River water resources, and established settlements (most of which are agricultural) in the strip of land bordering the river, all in violation of the law of belligerent occupation and laws on the use of international watercourses. These unlawful actions have enabled Israel to divert water, drill wells, and otherwise appropriate water to which it would otherwise not have been entitled. International law does not permit Israel to profit from its illegal actions.

As mentioned, Israel has defended its present allocation of water on the ground of “prior use.” But if prior use conferred absolute rights, as Israel appears to claim, states such as Turkey and the United States would have been sharply restricted in the development of their international watercourses, in particular the Euphrates and the Rio Grande respectively, and Ethiopia would be virtually precluded from any development of the Blue Nile. But this is not the law.

According to international law, the fundamental principle is that international watercourses must be used in an equitable manner. Article 6 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses

of International Watercourses (1997) included “existing” uses as one of the factors that may be relevant in determining equitable utilization—i.e. in the present case by arriving at an equitable apportionment of waters shared between Palestine and Israel. Although “existing” uses may also be “prior” uses, neither of these circumstances is automatically entitled to a particular weight in the balancing process that is employed to arrive at an equitable apportionment.

For the above-mentioned reasons, the present allocation of water from sources shared by Israel and the Palestinians violates the rules of international law. Israel’s use is inequitable because it cannot be justified according to the factors relevant to equitable and reasonable utilization. The West Bank is the recharge source of much of Israel’s water (80-85 percent of rainwater entering into the shared aquifers). The Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories is more than half that of Israel, yet Israel permits Palestinians to consume much less water per capita than Israelis. In addition, Israel’s use is unreasonable because much of it is subsidized or otherwise wasteful, and because it has been accomplished largely through forcibly preventing Palestinians from gaining access to their rightful share.

If the Palestinian and Israeli people are going to live as “equal neighbors,” the principles of equity and equality must form part of the peace process itself. A peace agreement that is made at the further expense of the Palestinian people’s rights and needs will not achieve that result—on the contrary, it will only serve to strengthen the sense of injustice and national grievance among the Palestinian people, and therefore not produce a meaningful, durable and sustainable peace.—
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AN ISRAELI VIEW

If only there were quiet, the Palestinians have numerous opportunities

a conversation with Noah Kinarty

bitterlemons: What is your forecast regarding the water shortage in the Palestinian Authority?

Kinarty: The water shortage in Gaza is catastrophic. The quality of water is also catastrophic. In the Gaza Strip they need an additional 30 to 40 million cubic meters of water a year for drinking. Nothing will help but desalinating seawater or brackish water and building an advanced water system, and establishing a modern sewage system. We know where the desalination plant will be located, and American funds for construction have been allocated, including for a central distribution pipeline the length of the Strip. The plans are ready, but you can't build under fire. You don't even need peace, just a ceasefire. The cost to Palestinians (operation and maintenance costs, without capital return) will be 35-40 cents per cubic meter if the Americans build the installation as a grant.

bitterlemons: And in the West Bank?

Kinarty: South of Jerusalem there is a shortage of water, and many villages are not hooked up to water systems. In our extended talks with the Palestinians, they were presented with proposals for increasing supply immediately: some 30 wells to be drilled in the area of the "nature reserve" transferred under the Wye agreement, which would supply 25 million cubic meters a year to the Hebron and Yatta regions. Here again, the drilling is not taking place due to the intifada. The plans and permissions were delivered to the Palestinians in January 2001. The Americans have to drill the wells, which are deep and expensive and require peace and quiet. Israel is prepared to give all the technical support. There are additional reserves of water in the Judea area.

North of Jerusalem there are no more unexploited water sources and there is no solution but to bring desalinated water from the Mediterranean Sea. I have proposed that the international community build a desalination plant at Hadera with a supply pipeline to the northern West Bank. The Americans will build the facility and the additional donor countries perhaps will lay the distribution pipes for the Palestinians.

Israel will allocate the land and give the international consortium the right of way for the pipeline. This solution supplies unlimited quantities of quality water; even the sewage created by using this water will be of an improved quality that is more suitable for purification and recycling for agriculture. In view of international involvement, the Palestinians will have no fear of Israel stopping the flow due to an emergency situation, and no dependency on Israel. The cost will be about \$.50 per cubic meter, including delivery, on condition that the international community builds the installations as grants, compared to \$.50-\$.60 the Palestinians pay today to Israel's Mekorot company.

bitterlemons: What is delaying this solution for the northern West Bank?

Kinarty: If the Palestinians say yes, the Americans are prepared to request the funds. With the Europeans it's more a matter of talk at this point. But there is no agreement with the Palestinians because some of them are still insisting on water rights from aquifers that in any case are empty and becoming saline. In other words, some of the Palestinians who deal with this issue are in the ideological phase, not the phase of pragmatic solutions.

bitterlemons: Can this desalination solution help Jordan too?

Kinarty: Yes. We can enlarge the facility at Hadera and extend the pipeline to Jordan.

bitterlemons: How do you relate to the proposal to import water from Turkey?

Kinarty: Importing from Turkey is still problematic because the use of oil tankers for transporting drinking water still has to be tested. If the experiments of a certain Israeli company succeed in producing alternative means of importing drinking water via the sea, we'll have another option. Water from Turkey for Jordan and the Palestinians will cost some 30 cents per cubic meter, less than the cost of desalinated water (without capital return). Perhaps, for a period of time, the Turks won't charge the Palestinians and Jordanians for the water as aid to fellow Muslim countries.

bitterlemons: Can sewage recycling be solved the way water issues are dealt with?

Kinarty: Sewage purification and recycling and prevention of contamination of water supplies are no less important than water supply itself. The problems involved in operating sewage recycling plants are

greater than managing water systems. So the international community will not only have to build these plants for the Palestinians as grants, but subsidize operations as well for several decades. We, in Israel, are most interested in sewage purification in the West Bank because of the flow down from there into our water sources. But recycling in Gaza is no less important.

bitterlemons: Finally, in view of the intifada, what is the current status of cooperation on water issues between Israel and the Palestinians?

Kinarty: The cooperation framework set up between the two sides is a good one. It is holding firm even under fire. The commitment each side gave the other, to help one another even under difficult conditions is, in general, working. There are repairs, there is instruction, spare parts are delivered and water is distributed—all in the spirit of good will prevailing since the interim agreements.—*Published August 5, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

On kangaroos and courts

by Diana Buttu

Even prior to its ruling on the illegality of the wall, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was denounced by Israeli government pundits as a “kangaroo court.” After the ruling, one commentator opined, “The court is biased,” while another proudly proclaimed that the ICJ decision would “find its place in the garbage can of history.” The same stance was not, however, taken with respect to the Israel High Court decision. Justice Minister Yosef Lapid aptly summarized Israel’s position on these two decisions: “We will comply with our High Court decisions, and not with the International Court, whose decision is in any case a legal opinion for the United Nations.” Herein lies the fundamental problem: Israel reserves the right to act both as defendant and judge of any suit against it and will not accede to independent adjudication of its crimes.

It would be easy to dismiss the decisions of the Israel High Court on the basis of its track record. This is the same court that has failed to outlaw completely the use of torture against Palestinians; legitimized the presence of Jewish-only colonies built on stolen Palestinian land (now a war crime under international law); and legitimized the demolition of homes of suspected offenders and their families as a form of punishment (a tactic also used by Saddam Hussein in Iraq).

Yet this decision of the Israel High Court should not be dismissed outright. The court rightfully acknowledges that Israel is in “belligerent occupation” of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and correctly demands that Palestinians be compensated for Israel’s illegal actions. In an eloquent statement, the court noted, “Only a separation fence built on a base of law will grant security to the state and its citizens. Only a separation route based on the path of law will lead the state to the security so yearned for.”

Remarkably, despite this statement, the High Court failed to do the very thing that it was asked to do—determine a wall route based on the law. Why? Not because of malice on the part of the court, but because the court is, in essence, adjudicating the very crime that its authorizing state claims is for its benefit. “Our task is difficult,” Justice Barak writes, “We are members of Israeli society.” This statement speaks volumes.

In determining what impact Israel’s actions have on Palestinians, the High Court examines only what is best for Israel (a country that was not only built on the dispossession of others but has, for 37 years, tried to expand its territory) and not the rights of the people subjugated by Israel. In other words, the application of international law (with its inherent principles of justice and equality) is optional, not obligatory.

Because the Israel High Court views international law as optional, it fails to contest the military establishment’s pronouncement that the wall is necessary. More importantly, the High Court fails to adjudicate the most important questions: Why has Israel not built the wall on its pre-occupation border (the green line)—a shorter and more easily defended line? What is the link between the wall and the colonies? If the wall is truly about security, why will the proposed path of the wall leave more than 200,000 Palestinians trapped between the wall and the green line? It is therefore not surprising that the High Court only confined itself to calling for moving (not removing) a mere 30 kilometers of the wall (less than five percent of the total length of the wall) because of the “disproportionate injury” caused to the Palestinians.

Juxtaposing the ICJ's decision with that of the Israel High Court, one can clearly see the far-reaching power of an independent ruling based on international law versus one based on domestic politics. The world court correctly pronounced on the most basic (yet disputed) issues faced by Palestinians: that Israel is, indeed, in occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (which Israeli government officials cannot even acknowledge); that the colonies are illegal, irrespective of whether they are in Jerusalem or otherwise; and that Israel has flagrantly violated the law for decades.

The world court went further than simply restating the law—it applied it. By examining the current and proposed path of the wall, the 14-1 decision noted the following salient facts. The wall has been routed around not only the colonies but also their planned expansion, in an attempt to leave 80 percent of the settlers (320,000 Israelis) living in the West Bank colonies. More than 200,000 Palestinians would remain trapped between the wall and the green line. Of the more than 650-kilometer wall, only six percent (39 kilometers) would be within 100 meters of the green line. Over 16 percent of the western side of the occupied West Bank would be “de facto” annexed into Israel.

With these staggering facts, the ICJ could only conclude that the wall built in occupied Palestinian territory is not there for military necessity; it is there to consolidate Israel's hold on the colonies. Though “security” is the proffered excuse, coveting Palestinian land (and water) is the real reason behind the wall. Because the colonies are illegal, so too is the very structure that is designed to ensure Israel's hold on them—the wall.

Unlike the Israel High Court, the world court did not confine itself to a mere 30-kilometer stretch of wall. It demanded that Israel demolish the entire wall built in occupied Palestinian territory; return the land, orchards, and olive groves it seized to build the wall; and pay compensation to Palestinians for all damages and losses.

The victory of the World Court decision lies not in the decision itself but in the reframing of the conflict. No longer is this an issue of two equal parties who cannot get along; it is about Israel's 37-year military occupation and the inherent power imbalance. Many will dismiss the case as “non-binding,” and indeed, the decision is non-binding. However, the decision is based on law that is binding: UN resolutions and international humanitarian law. Accordingly, the World Court's ruling affects not only Israel but also the international community.

Israel has, for 56 years, viewed itself as above the law and the Palestinians beneath it. That will not change. Israel will continue to

trample on the Palestinians' rights. It will continue to build Jewish-only colonies on Palestinian land, and it will continue to build the wall—unless it is stopped. The real test will be not what Israel does but what the international community will do: will it apply the power of law or the law of power?

I recently relayed to a friend Israel's labeling of the World Court as a “kangaroo court.” “If it is,” he responded, “it is only because even a kangaroo would recognize that the wall is illegal.” It is a pity that the Israel High Court did not.—*Published July 12, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

The Hague ignored the security aspect

a conversation with Michael Eitan

bitterlemons: How do you explain the radical difference between the fence decisions/recommendations of the Israel High Court of Justice and The Hague International Court of Justice?

Eitan: The subject we are dealing with is not purely judicial. As a matter of fact, every judicial expert will tell you that you cannot disconnect the judicial process from its social, human, and economic environment. This is one of the cases that demonstrates how two independent judicial systems come to different conclusions based on the same set of facts. The international court was constrained from the beginning by the way the case was presented for its judgment. The international court did not use the judicial tools that the Israeli court used.

bitterlemons: Let's begin with the Israeli court.

Eitan: The Israeli court used the mechanism of balancing between two principles and rights. On the one hand, the right of Israel to defend itself from terrorism, its right of self defense, and its humanitarian approach that justifies measures in order to save lives—and there is no doubt the fence has succeeded in saving lives. And on the other, the fact that the fence caused inconvenience and damage and was a massive intrusive

element in the lives of groups of people. The question the Israeli court dealt with was the best route to balance these two factors.

bitterlemons: And the international court?

Eitan: The international court decided to concentrate on another issue and deal with the fence through the question of the rights of an occupying power. By ruling that Israel should destroy the present fence and move it to the green line, the international court took a one-sided and extreme decision that is political because it prefers the political aspect over the security aspect.

bitterlemons: What could the government of Ariel Sharon have done to prevent the decisions?

Eitan: Regarding the Israel High Court of Justice decision, it could do nothing. Israel is a democracy committed to the rule of law, and High Court decisions are binding for the government. In The Hague, Israel had no chance of getting a fair and reasonable comprehensive approach to the problem.

The whole idea of building the fence was a response to barbaric terrorist acts. Around 1,000 Israelis were killed and thousands wounded before Israel started to build the fence. The court didn't mention this and did not note the terrorist phenomenon, which was the only reason to build the fence. As Israelis, we can say that, in spite of the inconvenience and even humanitarian suffering that the fence has caused many Palestinians, it has saved hundreds of Israeli lives and the same number of Palestinian lives. After every suicide bomber succeeds in taking Israeli lives, Israel responds by launching attacks on Palestinian villages and terrorist centers that also take a toll in Palestinian deaths.

bitterlemons: What can the Knesset and your committee do in the current situation?

Eitan: Our committee deals with many aspects of the Israeli presence in the West Bank. We try to do our best to maintain human rights, even in the war against terrorism, and are supervising the conduct of the Israeli security forces in the West Bank and trying to influence this conduct according to morality and international law. When you are fighting terrorism, you face very complex dilemmas.

Now, after the courts have had their say, the issue becomes a political one. We have to remember that the Israeli court decision is binding on the Israeli government, but The Hague court decision is only a recommendation and doesn't bind Israel. The decision will be transferred

to the international political arena, to the United Nations, presumably by the Palestinians and their supporters. This is the next arena where Israel will have to fight against the practical results, if there are any, using political tools. I hope that the many democracies that opposed or expressed reservations regarding The Hague judicial process will now make more effort to block any attempt by the UN to impose sanctions on Israel.

bitterlemons: Will the fence end up on the green line?

Eitan: I don't think it's possible for Israel. The Hague court didn't take into consideration the fact that there are many Jewish settlements near the green line that Israel should protect. There are more than 100,000 Jews living on territory that, according to international and Israeli law, is beyond the green line but is still under the authority and jurisprudence of the State of Israel. Taking this position and ignoring the political dispute is an attempt to isolate the judicial process from real life on the ground; it risks the lives of more than 100,000 Jews that are living adjacent to the green line, for whom the fence on its planned route is their only security guard.

We have to take into consideration that almost everyone in the area and in the international community that has some involvement in the continuous dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis knows that, under any final status agreement, this dense Jewish population will be included within the sovereignty of Israel. We are talking about territories that constitute perhaps four or five percent of the West Bank.—*Published July 12, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

Informal Initiatives

AN ISRAELI VIEW

The Israeli public is ready for radical compromise

by Yossi Alpher

In 1994, I published a research proposal regarding final status arrangements for the settlements that became known as the Alpher Plan. I suggested a map that enabled Israel to incorporate around two-thirds of the settlers into its final status borders, while annexing some 11 percent of the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian state would be compensated with land, a Gaza-West Bank corridor arrangement and concessions in other areas of concern. The remaining one-third of the settlers, most in relatively small settlements in the Samarian and Judean mountain heartland and in the Jordan Valley and the Gaza Strip, would be evacuated. Arrangements would be made to accommodate those few who might choose to live in a Palestinian state.

In the ensuing years, that map went through a number of permutations, resurfacing in altered form first as the Beilin-Abu Mazen Plan, then as the basis for Israeli-PLO negotiations at Camp David II in July 2000 and at Taba half a year later. By the time negotiations had exhausted themselves and violence took hold, the gap separating the two sides' alternative maps had been narrowed to around one percent of the territory. Reliable polls indicated that the Israeli public would support a negotiated outcome along these parameters.

Meanwhile, a succession of Israeli governments, from Yitzhak Rabin's through Ariel Sharon's, continued to build and expand the settlements. This was a violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the Oslo agreements. It was also—at least for those Israeli governments dedicated to advancing the peace process—an incredibly mindless act that placed short-term political expediency ahead of the welfare of the peace process. The signal it sent to the Palestinian people was translated directly into the violence that broke out 16 months ago. It was no coincidence that the Mitchell Commission report placed such a high priority on freezing settlement construction as a confidence-building measure.

Months of violence have hardened Israeli attitudes on some issues, such as even a symbolic refugee “return.” But they actually appear to have instilled a greater willingness within the Israeli public to part with the most provocative settlements. The public is not happy to devote Israeli defense resources, including army reserve service, to protecting extremist settlers. It increasingly recognizes that maintaining the more isolated settlements will eventually bring about a demographic disaster for Israel. And it has come to terms with the need for, and inevitability of, a viable Palestinian state.

Today around half the public is prepared to consider unilateral withdrawal and the dismantling of the “heartland” and Gaza settlements even without an agreement. But this new attitude has not found expression in the platform of a single party in the Knesset; even on the Left, political leaders continue to hold out the hope of a negotiated settlement, and to fear the possible negative consequences of a unilateral act of withdrawal.

As for the settlers themselves, the vast majority are understandably confident of their future. These are the non-ideological settlers who live in the bedroom suburb blocs abutting the green line, whose eventual annexation to Israel even the PLO tacitly accepted in negotiations. In a few isolated secular settlements in the mountain heartland, there have been cases of settlers leaving under pressure of the intifada; no doubt there would be more if the government were to offer financial compensation now. But the ideologically-motivated settlers in Shiloh, Elon Moreh, Hebron and elsewhere in the mountain heartland and the Gaza Strip have, with great dedication and considerable political skill, ensured for themselves an extraordinary degree of influence over the Israeli internal debate that far exceeds their numbers. They remain absolutely determined to impose their messianic vision on their fellow Israelis—and on the Palestinian people.

That vision, if realized, bespeaks a disastrous outcome for both peoples. If the ideological settler minority has its way, Israel will face a choice between becoming a full-fledged apartheid state, with the Palestinian cities (area A) filling the role of bantustans, and becoming a binational state. The first alternative spells the end of Israeli democracy; the second, the end of Israel as a Jewish, Zionist state. The ideological settlers would procure for Israel a place of honor in the march of folly.

In recent years prime ministers Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak all struggled—despite, and alongside their mistakes—to reach political accommodation with the PLO in order to avert precisely such an outcome. Rabin paid with his life, Barak with his political reputation;

only the indefatigable Peres persists. None reached the point where they were actually called upon, as national leaders, to implement a final status agreement and remove settlers and settlements.

When this does happen, it will be a major moment of truth for Israeli democracy. Dismantling settlements will require an extraordinary level of leadership, capable of galvanizing a solid majority in the Knesset. And for that to happen, there will have to be a substantial improvement in the quality of Israeli political life.—*Published January 21, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

The initiative for a ceasefire between Israelis and Palestinians

by Eyal Erlich

It is clear to all that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has reached a terrible low point.

About six months ago, I proposed, together with former Knesset member Abd al-Wahab Darawshe and Professor Yosef Ginat, the idea of a “*hudna*” (an Arabic term meaning a ceasefire for a limited period). The idea was embraced by President of Israel Moshe Katzav and by the leadership of the Palestinian Authority. The concept behind the initiative is to apply the traditional Arab mechanism for resolving conflicts to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The focus of this mechanism is on honor. We feel that if we can learn to treat Palestinians with honor, we can register tremendous achievements politically. This sounds simple, but I am certain that this is the key to solving the problem.

Following are the details of the proposal, as presented to the prime minister by President Katzav, and as approved by the leadership of the PA (formal approval by the Palestinian cabinet was given on December 17, 2001):

Phase I: President Moshe Katzav, leading a delegation of notables, comes to the Palestinian national assembly in Ramallah. He delivers a speech “from heart to heart” and calls upon both peoples immediately to commence a total ceasefire for a year (*hudna*). His speech is followed by a vote in which the assembly ratifies the *hudna*.

Phase II begins immediately after the ceremony in Ramallah and continues for several weeks. Both sides act to return to the *status quo ante* September 2000.

Phase III follows (dependent on Israeli approval and on the PA proving that it is making a 100 percent effort to activate the *hudna*): negotiations commence between Israel and the PA in an attempt to reach a political settlement—interim or permanent, as decided by the two parties. If the parties register progress but do not reach agreement during the *hudna* period, the Palestinians are committed to extend the *hudna* for another year.

I believe with all my heart that realization of this initiative could open a new era in the Middle East. But Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared his rejection of the initiative in late December 2001.

Half a year passed, a terrible half year in which the circle of violence and suffering expanded and blood was spilled like water on both sides. We decided not to give up, and to try again to promote a ceasefire. I must note that we found in Yasser Arafat a serious partner to this concept. On June 5, 2002 (a somewhat symbolic date) we renewed the initiative. My good friend Abd al-Wahab Darawshe and I met with Arafat in his office in Ramallah.

I proposed to Arafat an alternative road to a ceasefire: instead of an official delegation appointed by the government of Israel that addresses the Palestinian people on behalf of the government, I proposed to organize an Israeli civil delegation, composed of Israeli citizens, each of whom represents only himself. It is this delegation that would offer the Palestinian people a ceasefire. I was delighted and appreciative when Arafat agreed to the idea and committed the PA to the task of achieving a ceasefire.

We invited a number of individuals and institutions to join us. We appreciate the readiness of [former Foreign Minister] Professor Shlomo Ben Ami to join the team leading the initiative, together with [industrialist] Beni Gaon. We also turned to the Parents Circle—the Family Forum [bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families supporting reconciliation and peace], who accepted our invitation and enthusiastically joined the ceasefire initiative.

A coordination meeting between our team and representatives of the PA was held in Jerusalem on August 7, 2002, to advance the ceasefire project. The Palestinian participants were Yasser Abed Rabbo, Nabil Kassis, Hassan Asfour, Samih al-Abid, Samir Rantisi and Ziad Abu Zayyad. The Israelis were Shlomo Ben Ami, Beni Gaon, Abd al-Wahab Darawshe, Haim Assa, Alberto Spektorowski, Parents Circle representatives Yitzhak Frankental, Roni Hirshenson and Booma Shavit, and myself.

We agreed to promote a concept slightly different from the initial idea that I presented to Arafat. We will organize a large convocation in Jerusalem to declare a ceasefire and an end to hostile acts, to be held in mid-September. (We also agreed to use the term “ceasefire and cessation of all hostile acts” instead of “*hudna*.”) We will invite 250 Palestinian representatives and 250 Israeli representatives. The Palestinian group will comprise many of the 88 members of the Palestinian parliament, as well as most of the Palestinian leadership. We also agreed to a joint effort to invite international personalities to the Jerusalem meeting, to provide sponsorship and thereby to enhance the chances for success.

We are working shoulder to shoulder with our Palestinian partners to finally bring about calm in our region.—*Published August 19, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Addressing the violence: my roadmap to peace

by Eyad El Sarraj

Very few people believe that the “vision” of United States President George W. Bush will be realized through the declared roadmap. This is not only because there are many formidable and powerful enemies of peace in all camps, and not only because both publics are in a serious state of mistrust and despair. Indeed, the roadmap has an inherent structural problem because it is missing the primary principles that should guide it and does not spell out the details of the end game.

People on both sides are traumatized by terror and violence, and confused and bewildered by the political haggling. Nobody knows what shape or borders or viability the Palestinian state will have. No one knows if there will be refugees returning. And no one knows the fate of Jerusalem.

In order for peace to set sail there should be some guiding principles. The most important is equality. This is not to say that the conflict is between two equals. Overwhelming Israeli power and unconditional United States support have no comparison on the Palestinian side, other than the tragic balance of terror that has been reached with Israel through suicide bombing. But neither side should be treated differently from the other. This principle should be applied in all issues, although Palestinians may willingly surrender their right to have a military because they understand that Israelis are obsessed with the fear that Palestinians will use arms to take back the Palestinian villages and towns that are now part of Israel.

It is a matter of principle that Palestinian fighters be granted recognition and immunity from prosecution in Israel. They believed they were fighting for their country and people. Both sides' soldiers should be forgiven and permitted to reenter life as normally as possible, while allowing room for internal prosecution of ranking officers who ordered crimes against humanity.

Israel will recognize the Palestinian right to return and Palestinians will accept the Jews' right of return. If Jews are allowed to return after 3,000 years, it is only natural that Palestinians have the right of return after less than six decades. In this respect, no nation, group or individual can claim the privilege of being "chosen." I am, like every other human being, as chosen as any—and no better than any.

The other principle that both sides must accept is that violence will only bring violence, that persecuted Jews have in their own way persecuted Palestinians who in their own way persecuted themselves and others. Both communities today suffer an endemic state of violence. During the relatively quiet seven years of Palestinian Authority governance, violence within Palestinian society rose by 300 percent every year. Israel has seen a sharp increase in all forms of violence and today the Israeli army has one of the highest rates of suicide in the world.

For this reason, the roadmap should include provisions for internal—as much as cross-border—reconciliation. Peace means creating a way of life, not only scripting a treaty between two politicians. Both Israeli and Palestinian societies must undergo a process of national reconciliation. Palestinians will have to experience a process of grieving for lost land, home and loved ones. This period should also include a process for granting forgiveness and clemency to collaborators with Israel, allowing them to reenter life as usual.

Too, Israel will have to undergo a process of acknowledging its responsibility and apologizing for the hurt caused Palestinians, while taking responsibility for Palestinian compensation. Israel must accept world condemnation of its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as the root of evil. Indeed many Jews have warned against the serious detrimental and demoralizing effects of oppressing another nation and subjugating millions of people who simply want their freedom and rights. Such a brutal and long-standing occupation has produced an inhumane environment for Palestinians, with horrifying results.

The most tragic development of the current intifada is the invention and use of suicide bombing on a horrific scale. Resulting from the Palestinians' failure to win over the Israelis, suicide bombing is the ultimate expression of despair, promising not freedom but revenge. Naturally, such operations of "terror" have added to the arsenal of Zionist propaganda that states that Israel is the only and ultimate victim, aiding further in the repression of Jewish guilt. It is not surprising that Israel's propaganda machine has managed to link Palestinian suicide bombing to international terror. Suicide bombing and the killing of civilians inside Israel is all that is needed to convince the world that Jews continue to be slaughtered as victims of racial and religious hatred and of the barbarism of "those Arabs."

As part of any peace agreement, Palestinians must accept that murdering innocent children and women in buses and restaurants in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem is a crime, one that should be made prosecutable by law. While suicide bombing is understandably a brutal form of revenge for the inhumane condition of occupation, this should not justify terror. It is tragic that suicide bombing of civilians has undermined Islam's message and the Palestinian demand for freedom.

If peace is a way of life, then resistance through peaceful means should be the Palestinian method of struggle for liberation. A peaceful resistance would liberate not only Palestine and Palestinians, but also Israel and Israelis. Peaceful resistance will allow Israelis the chance to look inward, release their repressed guilt and accept responsibility. Violence will only force them to look outside for an enemy. And when Israelis apologize for the crimes committed against Palestinians, it will help both.

For the Palestinians, this will be their opportunity to feel dignified by responding with the honorable, "Yes, we accept your apology and we accept you." On the other hand, apology will help Israelis to feel whole, rehabilitating their injured selves from their grief and loss and repressed guilt.—*Published May 26, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

The eighth day of Taba

by Yossi Beilin

On a winter day in February 2001, a few days after Ehud Barak's defeat in the special elections for prime minister, I met with Yasser Abed Rabbo, Palestinian minister for culture and information, in the al-Quds editorial offices in Jerusalem's Atarot industrial park. This was a continuation of a corridor discussion between us during the Taba negotiations of January that year.

Abed Rabbo was convinced that the primary mistake at the Camp David summit, where he also participated, was to raise the Jerusalem question at the beginning of the negotiations, rather than at the end. As for Taba, he felt that if only we had had a few more weeks, we could have completed the framework agreement for peace.

We agreed to try and continue the effort that began at Taba—this time informally, without obligating anyone but ourselves. We wanted to prove to ourselves that a final agreement was feasible, to prove to the peace camps on both sides that there is a partner and a plan. Against a backdrop of despair, lack of faith and growing violence, we believed that a model permanent agreement could revitalize the Israeli peace camp (which had not even bothered to participate in the elections a few days earlier) as well as the somnolent Palestinian peace camp.

We did not think it would take so long. Technical difficulties, primarily prohibitions on Palestinians entering Israel and Israelis entering areas A, and political circumstances—Palestinian governmental crises and Israeli elections—delayed completion of the project. Important coalitions were built on both sides: economists, intellectuals and Fateh activists on the Palestinian side, and former security officials, party representatives from the center and left, intellectuals and industrialists on the Israeli side.

The Taba discussions lasted seven days. The eighth day lasted three years. It ended in Jordan on October 12 of this year, with the signing of a letter to Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey, to which was attached the agreed version of the draft agreement.

The foundation of our talks was the plan of US President Bill Clinton, which was accepted by both sides, with reservations, in December 2000. Our basic assumption was that “god is in the details,” and that mere

agreements in principle are not persuasive with regard to the capacity to get to the root of solutions. The primary package deal or trade-off was an Israeli concession regarding Palestinian sovereignty over the Temple Mount/Harem al-Sharif, coupled with a perpetual international presence there, in return for leaving the determination regarding acceptance of Palestinian refugees to a sovereign Israeli decision.

We did not dwell on “narratives,” mutual recriminations and assigning responsibility for the past. We did not ask one another to forsake dreams. We sufficed with solutions. All the question marks, all the historical quarrels, all the United Nations decisions that we wasted long years interpreting in our different ways—all these are answered, resolved, and realized in the agreement we reached. It is not an easy agreement for either side, but never has a better one been achieved. It is offered to the decision makers on both sides; they can, if they so desire, integrate it as phase III of the roadmap, i.e., as the final status agreement that is to be achieved by 2005.

If there is broad support among both publics for the agreement we reached, their respective leaderships will not be able to ignore what we have done. Hence we are initiating a broad information campaign: an agreement is possible; the ongoing situation of terrorism and retribution exacts a heavy and unnecessary price from both sides and is pointless; Israeli-Palestinian peace will bring with it economic salvation for both peoples; it will ensure that Israel remains a Jewish and democratic state that does not rule over another people, and will enable the Palestinians to exercise their right to self-determination.

A continuation of Israel's present policy, whereby dialogue is forbidden until terrorism ends, awards a prize to terrorists who have no interest in peace. Three years after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon promised security and peace—and gave us less peace and less security—the time has come to try a different way: the Geneva Accord offers the only practical alternative.—*Published October 27, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Achieving our fundamental aspirations

a conversation with Yasser Abed Rabbo

bitterlemons: Why did you decide to embark on these negotiations?

Abed Rabbo: After the Taba negotiations, we were very close to reaching an agreement, but the change in the Israeli government after the elections stopped everything. Therefore, we began to think that this historic progress that we had made in the previous negotiations should be finalized. We started to examine which issues at Taba had not been finalized and whose resolution would allow us to complete final status negotiations without leaving anything out and without any ambiguity.

This was the understanding between the Israeli side and us. However, as time passed, other priorities evolved. The Israeli representatives and their political tendencies that were involved demonstrated that this process was special in that it broke the embargo that [Israeli Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon had imposed.

bitterlemons: What were the most difficult areas of debate?

Abed Rabbo: I cannot specify one issue. The main thing was to find a balance between the two positions so that what would be introduced to the two publics would present a win-win situation. This doesn't mean that all peace aspirations would be met, but that the basic ones would be met: [essentially], to let Israelis live without any fear or without intervention, and to enable the Palestinian people to have their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital and also to put an end to anything that could lead to future hostilities.

So, we decided that the Wailing Wall would be under Israeli sovereignty, the Haram al-Sharif would be under Palestinian sovereignty, and East Jerusalem would be divided between the two states with part of the city under Palestinian sovereignty (with the exception of the Jewish quarter which would be under Israeli sovereignty), and a special regime [comprising] international supervision and guaranteeing freedom of worship.

bitterlemons: In some aspects, the agreement holds on to ideas that have proven to fail, such as, for example, the period of time in which Israel maintains control over borders and crucial passageways. How are you convinced that Israel will act in good faith?

Abed Rabbo: This is not true. The borders will be controlled by international forces; a small Israeli contingent will be under the leadership of the international forces. For a very limited period of time, the Israelis will remain on the Palestinian borders. But the border is solely under Palestinian sovereignty, and responsibility is solely international for all the borders with Israel, Egypt and Jordan. The passageway [between Gaza and the West Bank] will be Israeli, under the control of the Palestinians. Palestinian police will patrol this passage and it will be open 24 hours, seven days a week and twelve months a year.

bitterlemons: Did you and Yossi Beilin discuss requiring an official Israeli apology or acknowledgement of the refugee problem?

Abed Rabbo: We tried hard to solve this problem and the compromise we reached was to commemorate and respect the 1948 locations [the sites of former Palestinian villages]. This is quite clear in the agreement. I cannot say that they were ready to accept all of our demands in this direction.

bitterlemons: Has the United States administration responded to the accord?

Abed Rabbo: We are in contact with the Americans. They responded in the beginning that they welcome an initiative that will lead to peace. Now we are in the process of explaining to them that this [document] is not a substitute for the roadmap; on the contrary, it enhances the roadmap because it fills the hole left in the roadmap concerning a just, comprehensive solution.

bitterlemons: There are those on the Palestinian side who are dismissing this agreement because it comes at a time when the Israeli government is not ideologically predisposed to accept it. Is the agreement just a public relations exercise?

Abed Rabbo: I think it is not only a public relations exercise—it is a very direct political message to both publics that there is a possible leadership and there is a possible solution at a time when extremists are trying to justify the continuation of this war, saying that there are no partners and there is no solution.

Notice that the main attack (besides that of Ariel Sharon) against the agreement came from [former Prime Minister Ehud] Barak. This at least embarrasses—if not completely crushes—his claims that he was generous at Camp David and that the Palestinians rejected his offer. It shows that they didn't offer the minimum of what was required at Camp David, that [the talks] were intentionally ambiguous and that he

collaborated with Sharon to give him political cover for his campaign against the Palestinian people, claiming that there was no Palestinian partner.

Now there is a solution and a partnership and that is why Barak and Sharon are attacking this agreement and trying to undermine the bid between the Israeli peace camp and us to move our nations towards a solution and away from this daily destruction.—*Published October 27, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Israel's best option

by Gerald M. Steinberg

When Prime Minister Ariel Sharon revealed his plan to evacuate Israeli settlements from Gaza and beyond, he was not simply shifting the focus away from the scandals facing his family. The investigations may have accelerated or delayed the process, but from an Israeli perspective, the logic of unilateral disengagement is inescapable. As one of the founders of Israel's post-1967 settlement policy, Sharon resisted this approach for a long time. But if he had not announced this move, another leader would have. If he is forced to resign, his successor is likely to follow a similar course.

Public opinion polls and other indicators demonstrate that the majority of Israelis view the territorial status quo—based on a Swiss-cheese map of intertwined Palestinian cities and Israeli settlements—as unacceptable. Israeli military responses to three years of terror have been quite effective, but sporadic attacks continue, and the costs of protecting small and isolated settlements are unreasonable. In addition, the multiple checkpoints, frequent closures and other sources of daily friction between individual Palestinians and Israeli soldiers contribute to the tension. And the political status quo poses a demographic threat to the survival of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

At the same time, the efforts to end this situation through negotiation of a stable agreement—from Oslo to the Quartet's roadmap—have had catastrophic results. Until there is a credible Palestinian leadership to disarm the various factions and implement a lasting accord based on the two-state model, negotiations are not going to end the conflict, and may add to the violence. The evolution of a pragmatic Palestinian leadership anchored in basic societal changes will take many years or decades. Until then, Geneva and other paper concepts discussed under Arafat's watchful eye simply lack credibility, and public relations campaigns supported by the EU will not change this situation.

Under these conditions, unilateral disengagement has become the least bad option, as many Israelis, including Sharon, now recognize. In the absence of what academics and policy makers refer to as “ripeness”—in terms of broad societal readiness to make realistic compromises—Israel needs to define pragmatic de facto borders. This logic led to the intense public demand for construction of a separation barrier/fence/wall, which has proven effective in protecting the northern coastal cities such as Netanya and Hadera from terror attacks.

The construction of a separation barrier, and a clear—if temporary—boundary, only makes sense with the reduction in the points of friction and greater contiguity for the vast majority of both Palestinians and Israelis. This means the removal of isolated settlements near Palestinian cities, and strengthening of Israeli control in strategic areas, including Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, to ensure border control. (This is not a peace plan, and political and diplomatic issues related to the 1949 ceasefire line—the “green line”—are irrelevant.)

However, despite the logic and support from the Israeli consensus, the implementation of this process will be difficult and costly. Sharon's long-term core constituency anchored in Judea, Samaria and Gaza denounced limited unilateral withdrawal as “appeasement,” and violent resistance is expected. If the issue is brought to a referendum, it is likely to gain approval, but this could delay implementation, and force some changes.

Opponents also argue that withdrawal from Gaza will be seen by Palestinians as a victory, and, like the IDF's sudden pullout from Lebanon in May 2000, will encourage more terror. However, others counter that in the long term, Israeli security and deterrence were strengthened by this move. Attacks are far less frequent and Hizbollah's power base in Lebanon was weakened, as recognized by its backers in Damascus and Teheran. Furthermore, many Palestinians, including Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), have declared that the decision to copy Hizbollah's

tactics of terrorism was a disaster. Israel's unilateral withdrawal will give the Palestinians far less than would have resulted from an agreement with Ehud Barak four years ago, and efforts to use terms such as "apartheid" to demonize Israel via the UN and the International Court will not change the situation.

In addition, for Israel's Arab citizens, separation means an end to the unfettered access to the West Bank that they have enjoyed since 1967. However, in contrast to the period between 1948 and 1967, when this territory was under Jordanian occupation and the armistice lines were impassable, the current policy of unilateral disengagement includes mechanisms for regulated movement at numerous crossing points. Jordanian fears of a mass movement of Palestinians resulting from disengagement are also unsupported.

As a result of these and other factors, the implementation of unilateral disengagement, whether under Sharon's leadership or a successor, will face many challenges. But unless a better option appears that provides security, reduces friction and ensures the survival of Israel as a Jewish democratic state, the course is unlikely to change.—*Published February 9, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

We will give you more of us

a conversation with Ali Jarbawi

bitterlemons.org: What was your impression of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's "disengagement plan"?

Jarbawi: Sharon was giving the Palestinians an ultimatum: "either you accept my roadmap with the 14 alterations injected by my government (and this is the maximum that you will get out of me) or we are going to unilaterally give you less than that. The choice is yours—if you opt for negotiations, I can give you more, but you should know (and this is a tacit understanding) that the most you will get even then is the most that is offered in 'my roadmap,' which includes only the land inside the wall."

bitterlemons.org: Why this proposal now?

Jarbawi: First, I don't think that Sharon is changing his ideology, but practically, there are many things that he wants to take into account. He wants to please the American administration, but he also wants to use this time during which the American administration is entering an election campaign to push for his own interests. He also wants to send a message to Israeli society because he was criticized internally for having no plan. Third, he wants to kill the Geneva accord.

I think that Sharon has reached the conclusion—and this might be the one item that he has changed his mind about—that after wanting all of "Eretz Israel" to become a Jewish state and advocating for a long time for the expulsion of Palestinians, their physical transfer is impossible. Now, instead of a practical transfer, he wants to implement the "legal transfer" of Palestinians. Legal transfer means that while we will live inside "Eretz Israel," we will not be part of the state of Israel, meaning we will not reach a situation of apartheid and Palestinians will no longer be able to opt for one state.

Basically, he has in mind that part of the West Bank will be incorporated into the state of Israel. The wall is the marker; it is not a security barrier, but the border. Put the Palestinians in cantons and let them call that a state, but that state will not be sovereign, will not be independent. If Palestinians accept this through negotiations, then Sharon is ready to give it to them. If they do not, then he is going to remove the Israeli military presence from small areas and sit tight until Palestinians agree to return to his plan, which he will disguise under the roadmap. The second stage of the roadmap calls for a temporary state; this is the temporary state made permanent.

bitterlemons.org: Why did the meeting between prime ministers Sharon and Ahmed Qurei never happen?

Jarbawi: From a Palestinian perspective, why should it happen? I don't understand why the Palestinian prime minister would go and meet with Sharon, especially after his speech. The Palestinian reaction to the speech was that we reject unilateral actions. A meeting with Sharon now means that we accept negotiations instead. The question is, on what basis? On his roadmap and the 14 qualifications? The greatest thing that Sharon gained from this ultimatum is that his roadmap will become legitimate and will become the maximum Palestinians can achieve.

bitterlemons.org: In this situation, what can the Palestinian Authority do?

Jarbawi: I think that the best way to face Sharon's ultimatum is not to meet with him, but to offer him and Israel a Palestinian ultimatum in return. The Palestinian ultimatum would be:

"We know that you want to squeeze us into cantons and thereby cheat us and the world of the two-state solution. We agree to a two-state solution—we have indicated this for a long time—but that two-state solution must be based on the 1967 borders, give and take minor exchanges. As such, we are giving you a few months (maybe six months) and as a measure of trust, we will offer you a Palestinian truce [during that time]. If, however, the wall continues to be built and the settlement expansion policy continues in these six months, then we will understand that you are closing the gates to a two-state solution.

"If so, then we will accommodate you. In that case, we are going to close the two-state option forever, and from then on, we will pursue the establishment of just one state. Further, from then on, you will have to bear the consequences of your occupation. We will dissolve the Palestinian Authority and you won't have the Authority there to cripple—even as you blame it morning and night. Then you will have to deal with the Palestinian people, meeting us on equal terms 20 or 30 years from now when there is one vote for every person.

"The meaning of all of this is that if you are afraid of the political effects of demography, then we are going to use it against you. Beware."

bitterlemons.org: What are the dangers of this approach?

Jarbawi: Any plan should have its alternative built in, and this requires more discussion among Palestinians. We should tell Sharon that if he doesn't accept the two-state solution [in order] to separate from us, then we will give him more of us. To give Israel more of us means that we have to dissolve the Palestinian Authority.

In order for the Palestinians to get a fully sovereign, independent state on the 1967 borders, Palestinians should use the only thing that Israel and Israelis are afraid of, i.e. the political effects of the demographic factor. Thus, the one-state solution is the medium for gaining the two-state solution. Now the question is, will the Authority dissolve itself? That is the question that remains to be answered.—*Published December 22, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

It's in the Palestinians' interest

a conversation with Avi Farhan

bitterlemons: Why do you want to remain in the Gaza Strip after disengagement?

Farhan: I was expelled from Tripoli, Libya with my family at age three. I grew up in an Israeli refugee camp near Tel Aviv. I was one of the first settlers of Yamit, in Sinai, in 1975, and the last to leave in 1982. At the time, I led a protest march from Yamit to Jerusalem and intended to set up a refugee camp near the Erez junction, because I felt once again like a refugee. Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon suggested that instead I establish a settlement near Erez, Alei Sinai, in the northern Gaza Strip. From Dugit in the west to Nitzanit in the east, this was virgin territory that prior to 1956 was a UN-held demilitarized zone. We didn't displace anyone.

bitterlemons: How is this personal history relevant to your request to remain in the Gaza Strip?

Farhan: I've been a refugee twice already. I don't want to again be an exile in my land. In the framework of real peace—not a worthless piece of paper like we have with Egypt—we can go 100 years back and 100 years forward and think about the million Jews who fled Arab countries decades ago. In a meeting with [Palestinian security chief] Mohammed Dahlan four or five years ago, I told him that we're not afraid of the Arabs, we understand their mentality and can be a real bridge to peace. We can build a Garden of Eden together, a Riviera from Ashkelon down to Sinai. Dahlan said I could stay if I agree to be a Palestinian citizen, and I replied "You're not threatening me; if I have the right to vote, I'm likely to be elected before you."

I lived with Arabs in Yamit, where I was Israel Ministry of Agriculture representative in el-Arish. I've served in the IDF military government. In Alei Sinai, I was part of a fishing cooperative in which Gazans held 75 percent.

bitterlemons: We're talking about you remaining not under conditions of peace, but in a few months, after disengagement.

Farhan: If Member of Knesset Ahmed Tibi's family can live in Taibeh [an Arab town in Israel] and Tibi can serve in the Knesset and be

Arafat's advisor, there is no reason why Avi Farhan can't stay in peace in Alei Sinai, be a Palestinian citizen and perhaps be an advisor to Ariel Sharon.

bitterlemons: Are others in Alei Sinai interested in your idea?

Farhan: We are seven families, with more showing interest.

bitterlemons: Have you discussed the legal and security conditions with Palestinian Authority/PLO authorities?

Farhan: No. There are some initial feelers from Palestinians, but no official contact.

bitterlemons: How do you plan to deal with possible Palestinian claims to the land you live on, demands to apply Palestinian law to you, to move into empty houses in Alei Sinai, perhaps attempts to hurt you physically?

Farhan: I haven't gone into those issues. I suggest to the Palestinians that they see the positive aspect of this idea. From their standpoint, even if I live in Jaffa or work at Tel Aviv University, I'm on Palestinian land, while for my part I can raise ownership demands on lands back in Libya and Yemen and Egypt and we'll all continue to wallow in the mud. As for the pragmatic issues such as ownership, we'll solve them when we get to them. The new Palestinian leadership, which looks to the West, would be shooting itself in the foot if it didn't recognize its interest in guaranteeing my security. I'm aware of the dangers.

bitterlemons: Do you need permission from the government of Israel to stay behind?

Farhan: I raised the issue with the Knesset Judicial Committee. I said I don't want to be an exile in my own land. Several members of Knesset supported me. Meanwhile Prime Minister Sharon's timetable is not sacrosanct. And I oppose destruction of the settlers' houses; that's an act of war.

bitterlemons: What's your next step?

Farhan: I've been approached by an Israeli rabbinic authority that has links with the Palestinians and by a well-known Israeli journalist who tried to get me together with a senior Palestinian, but unfortunately our security establishment wouldn't let the Palestinian visit me.

bitterlemons: Many Israelis would say you're not realistic. Do you know a single Israeli who has opted to live in Egypt or Jordan, Arab countries at peace with Israel?

Farhan: I don't even know an Israeli Jew who has opted to live in an Israeli Arab village, other than women who have married villagers and become Muslim, though there are some Israeli Arabs living in Jewish towns. We all have to "reprogram" ourselves. This is a test for the Palestinians. With all the pain and the risk, I'm prepared to be the guinea pig. If they fail, they will fail the test of the democratic world that is trying to pull them into the 21st century. It's in their interest more than mine.—*Published April 18, 2005 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

A strategic vision

a conversation with Marwan Barghouti

bitterlemons: The Prisoners' Document was an initiative made by representatives of all the Palestinian factions in Israeli prisons. How did it come about?

Barghouti: The document came as a response to the deterioration witnessed in the Palestinian arena and the dangerous signs of internal tensions. It came from a deep sense of concern that matters should not get out of hand. It also came because of the tightening of the siege on the Palestinian people.

The idea was to devise a document that constituted a common denominator for all the political forces; a difficult job in the Palestinian context because the majority of these forces are entrenched behind their programs and are not used to a common program. We felt it was high time that a joint Palestinian strategy was formulated. It took weeks of discussions before we agreed on this initiative and its present form.

We believe this is a historic document that will assist everybody, if it is adopted, to unify their political programs and rhetoric and push away the phantom of civil war that threatens our people. We hope it will also be a breakthrough in the wall of the oppressive siege under which we suffer.

bitterlemons: Much has been made of the fact that the document calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state on 1967 borders, that this is an implicit recognition of Israel, and that this is why Hamas is opposing it. Is this how the document is meant to be read?

Barghouti: The Palestinian forces have for many years, but especially after the eruption of the al-Aqsa intifada, agreed that the goal of the Palestinian people is to establish a Palestinian state with full sovereignty over all territories occupied by Israel in 1967. Recognition between the PLO and Israel happened 16 years ago and this document has nothing to do with that.

The Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaderships in the prisons participated effectively in drafting this document. They signed it and they still support it, despite the opposition from some leaders in Hamas and Islamic Jihad outside. I believe this opposition is hasty and has come without due consideration.

A close reading of the document should make clear that this is a document of national constants, national unity and political partnership. It concerns common denominators and does not promote any one party's positions. This is not the program President Mahmoud Abbas was elected on, and it is not the Hamas program.

It is a unified program and a strategic plan for everybody. All sides have to learn to coexist in light of their various programs, but they should do so within the context of one unified strategic plan and vision. I am confident that the Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaderships will eventually agree to this document.

bitterlemons: But the Hamas and Islamic signatories withdrew their support. What happened?

Barghouti: The Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaderships in the prisons participated effectively in this document and we are in constant, permanent and daily contact. Hadarim Prison includes several leading figures from the various Palestinian forces, and we are also in continuous contact and consultation with leaders in other prisons. This continuous dialogue and consultation made the task of drafting this document easier because we have mutual understanding and absolute confidence in each other.

We are gathered together in the trenches of struggle and resistance. This is not a frivolous or Byzantine debate; it is a responsible dialogue. The Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders who signed the document are well-known symbols of the struggle. They rejected the referendum but still adhere to the document.

bitterlemons: Did the prisoners expect the document to take on the importance it has?

Barghouti: The prisoners were hoping to see the document enjoy support and be welcomed, but the support the document got was beyond their expectations.

bitterlemons: Do you support the decision of President Mahmoud Abbas, Abu Mazen, to take the document to a popular referendum, regardless of the position of Hamas and the Palestinian government?

Barghouti: The document is meant to achieve conciliation. We called it "The National Conciliation Document," and conciliation occurs through dialogue, which should be the basis for adopting the document. We believe that the national dialogue conference was wise to adopt the document; moreover, President Abu Mazen's decision to adopt and support the document was highly appreciated by prisoners in all prisons who praised this principled position. We trust there is still a good chance that agreement over the document can be reached through dialogue, which is everyone's priority.

bitterlemons: Some factions, including Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, say any referendum should include all Palestinians, including those outside Palestine. Do you agree?

Barghouti: We have always called for this. In fact, it is mentioned in one of the clauses of the document that any critical decisions should be made with the participation of all our people, whether in the homeland or in exile.

bitterlemons: The document was meant to foster national reconciliation but it seems to have sown more discord. What do you think of this development, and how can Palestinians avoid further division?

Barghouti: This document can launch a unified Palestinian process. It can activate unified institutions to protect the democratic experience and consolidate the rule of law and offer solutions to important strategic issues. The document opens the door to settle matters in the PLO institutions and allow Hamas and Islamic Jihad to join on the basis that the PLO is the legitimate and sole representative of our people, wherever they are. Reinforcing and restructuring the PLO is a national necessity. This document also opens the door to forming a national unity government.—*Published June 19, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

Unilateralism

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Is the magic over?

by Aluf Benn

As Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon approaches the first anniversary of his initiative to unilaterally withdraw settlers and forces from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank, his plan faces formidable political and security challenges that cast growing doubt on its eventual implementation.

When the Knesset returned to session last week, Sharon entered parliamentary trench warfare, facing two legislative tasks: gaining approval for his disengagement plan, and passing the 2005 budget bill. He failed his first, albeit largely symbolic, test as the Knesset voted to reject his statement combining the two controversial issues.

This unexpected failure led many analysts to wonder if Sharon, the former political wizard, has grown weary and lost his magic. After all, he has lost every political trial since unveiling his plan. In May, the Likud members' referendum rejected it. In June, Sharon had to amend the details and delay the actual decision on settlement removal in order to get cabinet approval. Then, in August, his party convention blocked the entrance of the Labor party to the coalition, a necessary step for widening the plan's support base.

In the current chaotic state of Israel's political system—a byproduct of the withdrawal design—Sharon rules over a minority government, backed by 58 or 59 out of 120 Knesset members, and must form an ad-hoc coalition for every legislative move. His strategy has been “divide and conquer”: leaning on the left-wing opposition to pass the disengagement resolutions (both the plan's endorsement in principle, and a settler evacuation-compensation bill), then turning right for the budget process.

By sheer head counting, Sharon is expected to win the disengagement votes easily. His problem, however, lies within his party, where the anti-withdrawal “rebels” form an effective block of 15 out of 40 members of Knesset. Alongside them, senior figures like ministers Binyamin

Netanyahu, Sylvan Shalom and Limor Livnat are torn between their loyalty to Sharon and their need to please the Likud's central committee, which determines the party's candidate list. The troika formally supports Sharon's plan, while trying to dilute it through compromise. Recently, the three joined the settler opposition's call for holding an unprecedented national referendum over the plan.

Israeli law demands a referendum before giving away "sovereign areas" (i.e., the Golan or East Jerusalem), but not over occupied territories like Gaza. The settlers—backed by threats of violent protest and rabbinic appeals for massive refusal on the part of religious soldiers to obey orders to carry out the evacuation—now call upon Sharon to "ask the public." The prime minister hesitates, citing the inevitable delay in implementation, and probably fearing another defeat by the better-organized opposition. But pressure is mounting, and there are hints he may rethink his position.

Sharon has clearly underestimated the intra-Likud resistance to his idea. In this regard, in the past year an Israeli political myth—the image of the ruling party's apparatus as a crowd of cynical benefit-seekers—was proven wrong. As it happened, the Likudniks appeared as a strongly ideological group, opposing any land concessions as "rewarding Palestinian terrorism."

Terrorism is Sharon's second, no less complicated problem. In recent weeks, the Gaza front erupted in violent escalation. Palestinian Qassam rockets that killed two toddlers in the Israeli town of Sderot generated in response a fierce, 17-day-long Israeli Defense Forces operation in northern Gaza, in which 129 Palestinians were killed—among them at least 42 civilians—at the cost of the lives of three Israelis. When it ended, Israeli forces left the Palestinian towns and redeployed in a "security zone" outside them.

The violent events exposed the inherent paradox in Sharon's plan: in order to get out of the despised Gaza region, Israel is getting deeper into it. The unilateral idea of leaving a "security vacuum" on the other side, without a credible authority to assure security and quiet, threatens to turn disengagement into a bloody mess, with Hamas and others trying to hit at the departing Israelis. Keeping a "security zone" in post-withdrawal Gaza, no matter how narrow, is a recipe for ongoing violence, undermining Israel's claim to "end the occupation."

Sharon knows this all too well, and repeatedly says he ordered the IDF to "prevent withdrawal under fire." It is still unclear, however, how this task can be achieved without coordination with a Palestinian interlocutor.

But given the precedence of the political test, the security challenges will be dealt with later.

Sharon scheduled the disengagement votes to conclude before the American presidential election, and plans a US trip in mid-November. The United States is expected to show more involvement after the election no matter who wins, and Sharon will be asked to deliver on his still-unfulfilled pledges to remove illegal West Bank outposts and freeze settlement construction. Winning the disengagement votes with a credible majority would probably give him more room to maneuver vis-à-vis the Americans and the increasingly impatient Europeans. Therefore his domestic battle is also a diplomatic one.—*Published October 18, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Another round in the war

by Yehoshua Porath

Few situations in human history can be defined in clear-cut terms as victory or defeat. Even wars that are ended by crushing military defeats and the unconditional surrender of one side do not necessarily constitute political or economic victory for the other.

Victory and defeat are very relative terms. Further, they are concepts applicable only to the end of wars. One should be very careful not to use them for interim situations. Since the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip cannot—even by the most fertile imagination—be perceived as an end to the protracted 100-year war between Israel and the Arabs, any utilization of these concepts would be completely misplaced. At best, one can regard the most recent Israeli step as a partial and limited Palestinian Arab achievement.

This achievement was foreseeable and could have been predicted from the very first moment when Israel commenced its folly of building settlements in the Gaza Strip. This poor stretch of land with hardly any

natural resources, with little rainfall and hardly any springs, is one of the most densely-populated areas of the world. Even if Israel had millions of reserve inhabitants ready and able to settle there and to transform Gaza's national character into Jewish-Israeli, there would have been no room for them, either physically or economically.

From the outset, it was completely clear that by establishing small agricultural settlements, no more than a few thousand Israeli settlers could be implanted there, and only at enormous cost. Each settlement necessarily became the target of violent Palestinian reaction; each settlement had to be defended day and night against military incursions. Each vehicle going or coming between the settlements and Israel proper, or traveling among the settlements had to be defended by the army at high cost.

Only a mystical-messianic belief in divine intervention in human destinies can explain why various Israeli governments and parties initiated this folly. The Israeli government decision to evacuate the Gaza Strip results principally from the realization that this situation could not be maintained forever. Yet a Likud-led government cannot admit publicly that the policy of establishing settlements was a profound mistake. Therefore, the process of dismantling the settlements had to be perceived as part of a general withdrawal from the Strip. Otherwise, the government would not have had the parliamentary majority to sustain this step.

Thus far, one can assert that the Palestinian Arabs have gained an achievement: an Israeli dream of laying the ground for possible annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel has been foiled. However, history does not stop here. Under international pressure, Israel had to acquiesce in the future construction of maritime and air ports and transfer to other hands control over land access from Egypt into Gaza. Even if we erroneously assume that Egypt will make a bigger effort than in the recent past, the smuggling of rocket-launchers, heavy mortars, and artillery from Sinai into Gaza will continue. Once the Gaza ports are functional, a steady flow of these arms will enter the Strip by sea and air.

To date, Israel has only consented to the establishment of these ports and not to their actual functioning. But I doubt Israel will be in a position to resist international (mainly European) pressure to let the ports open, once so much foreign money has been invested in their construction and the economic needs are presented as paramount. One could argue that the Israel Navy would be able to control the goods imported to Gaza's sea port, and that God's angels would do a similar job as far as the airport is concerned. But let us speak frankly: no power, human or

divine, will be in a position to prevent a huge stockpiling of arms in the Gaza Strip within a few years. The government of Israel understands this; hence it has until now rejected any demand for safe passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The possibility that these arms will flow to Abu Dis, Tulkarem, or Qalqilya, which would place the majority of the Israeli population between Haifa and Jerusalem under daily threat of bombardment, and the economy of Israel under threat of near-total standstill, is real enough to create very strong Israeli resistance on this point.

As for the arms stockpiled in the Strip, they will not be used for display only, but rather to bring Israel to concede the most central Palestinian-Arab demand: the right of the 1948 refugees "to return to their homes and lands." Consequently, within a few months or years after completion of the ports (if not earlier, by means of locally produced Qassam rockets), the Palestinians will launch a static war of bombardment from the Gaza Strip against southwest Israel (Sderot, Ashdod, Ashkelon). The exact range of these probable attacks will be decided by the quality of the rockets, artillery, and mortars supplied to the Palestinian Authority and the more extreme Islamic organizations. No Palestinian leadership will have the authority or even the will to prevent these attacks as long as the Palestinian population of the Strip, mostly composed of the descendants of the 1948 refugees, continues to nourish the vision of turning back the hands of the clock to the pre-1948 situation.

And Israel? No Israeli government would let such a situation continue. I assume that, following a short period of devastating blows, and despite international pressure to concede more and more to the "poor" Palestinians and absorb more and more blows, Israel would react by re-conquering the Gaza Strip. Thus the circle will be closed. The only change that might occur concerns the question of the possible reestablishing of Israeli settlements. It is almost certain that this folly will not be repeated.

Returning to the question of victory or defeat, what is the answer? Certainly it is not a Palestinian victory, but nor is it an Israeli victory. Simply put, another round in the generations-long war between Israel and its neighboring enemies.—*Published August 29, 2005 in bitterlemons.org*

AN EGYPTIAN VIEW

Egypt: more than a “third party”

by Mohamed Ahmed Abd Elsalam

The Egyptian role in facilitating arrangements for the Israeli disengagement plan represents an enormous change in Egyptian policy. Egypt has become a major player; its role exceeds that of a mere mediator and approaches that of a partner. The Egyptian vision is pragmatic in dealing with the plan, which, as Egypt understands it, is not automatically connected to the roadmap. The efforts being made by Egyptian officials are reminiscent of the shuttle diplomacy adopted by Henry Kissinger in the Middle East during the mid-1970s. The talks between Egyptian officials and both the Palestinian and Israeli sides deal with delicate details that are regularly reviewed. Even more important are Egypt's commitments stemming from its immediate geographical proximity to the Gaza Strip.

After the Madrid conference of 1991, Egypt became one of the three main effective parties to the Palestinian-Israeli process. But it always kept its distance enabling it to review its role according to the actions of the parties directly involved and the tendencies of Egyptian public opinion. During the following years, many contacts without Egyptian involvement were made directly between the parties, such as the Oslo Accords in 1993. Egypt's engagement fluctuated between supporting the Palestinians in seeking reasonable agreements, and what seemed to be an Israeli desire for Egypt to play a different role by pressuring the Palestinians. It moved between action and inaction, case by case, regarding the Wye agreement, the Hebron Protocol, Camp David II, and Taba. But it was always present.

Recently, a number of factors have altered this approach. A reassessment of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's positions proved he was a man Egypt could deal with in order to achieve some kind of settlement. An equally-important parallel transformation took place on the Palestinian scene after the demise of Yasser Arafat. In terms of Egypt's position, this process led not only to a decision to reengage with energy in the peace process, but also to substantially improve Egyptian-Israeli relations. This new cordial atmosphere was crowned by the signing of a Qualifying Industrial Zone agreement, the release of the Israeli prisoner Azzam Azzam, Sharon's visit to Egypt, and the return of the Egyptian ambassador to Tel Aviv, in addition to talks about exporting Egyptian

natural gas to Israel. These developments also sustained Egypt's ability to influence the course of the political process.

The dominating sense in Egypt is that a special relationship binds it to Gaza, and that this is due to historical, political and demographic factors as well as “neighborhood” issues that involve border security problems between Egypt and Israel. Accordingly, Egypt's efforts this time not only reflect the traditional Egyptian commitment toward the Palestinian issue, but also direct Egyptian national interests. Any complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza will include a redeployment of forces on the border in a way different from that agreed upon under the military appendix of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty of 1979. In this regard, it should be noted that the Egyptian-Jordanian consensus reached at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit makes clear that Egypt is more concerned with Gaza's engagement with the West Bank than with the engagement of Gaza and the West Bank with the two neighboring Arab countries.

Egypt, however, is also directly involved in the arrangements for disengagement. Based on official statements, the Egyptian position holds that the disengagement plan must be considered a step toward implementation of the roadmap in order to prevent the peace process from breaking down, as happened with the Oslo accords. Since the disengagement plan will not lead to a viable Palestinian state or a permanent settlement, the intricate final status issues must still be dealt with. But Egyptian efforts this time exceed this official position. Egypt has made clear through its practical actions that Palestinian success in dealing with the challenges that may appear after the withdrawal from Gaza will pave the way for progress toward a final settlement.

From this perspective, Egypt—with American support—is playing many roles. It has worked on reaching an understanding between the new Palestinian leadership and the Israeli government on a ceasefire agreement, thereby providing a better climate for Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank. It worked to secure a consensus among the Palestinian factions in Cairo on the ceasefire agreement. This was a difficult mission that required contacts and complex compromises with a number of parties. Egypt also concluded an understanding with Israel regarding arrangements along its border with Sinai. Even more important is the follow-up to all these understandings, designed to prevent their breakdown at any point, especially in view of complicated Palestinian issues.

Egypt's next mission is to help in managing the post-Israeli withdrawal stage in Gaza and provide a successful model. This mission may be the most difficult. It involves problems related to border security and

the Palestinian armed factions, as well as administration of the lands from which Israel withdraws and the problems facing the Palestinian economy. In regard to the latter, the Palestinians will need real support, especially concerning financial and administrative affairs. Another potential problem relates to what is called the “Islamization” of Gaza, in the event Hamas gains more control than expected as a result of Palestinian elections. All this represents a huge burden in terms of contacts, follow-up and understandings with the new Palestinian leaders and the Israeli leadership, in an attempt to build a new partnership.

No doubt Egypt has played a central role here—a role not based on the traditional concepts of mediation, and one that exceeds anything done before. Egyptian efforts are using up so much energy that some in Egypt complain that our interest in these issues comes at the expense of others of similar importance, such as relations with the Nile Basin countries. What facilitates this process is the conviction on the part of all the direct parties regarding the necessity of the Egyptian role. There are positive responses from the Palestinian side and a kind of flexibility on the Israeli side, as well as support and encouragement from the United States.

Thus far Egypt has not faced huge obstacles. But it has to be noted that after the Israeli withdrawal there will be a need for both further Israeli steps and a powerful American reengagement in the peace process, if we are to avoid a regression once again back to square one.—*Published April 21, 2005 in bitterlemons-international.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Let's not get delusional

a conversation with Eyad Sarraj

bitterlemons: What do you think of the Gaza crossings agreement?

Sarraj: In principle it's a good beginning. As a Gazan, I am happy to be able to travel freely through Rafah, though I haven't tried it yet. For the first time in 38 years, I will be able to move freely without an Israeli

soldier humiliating me by ordering me to sit down, or shut up, or go and see an intelligence officer or go back home.

bitterlemons: A lot was made of the symbolism that this is the first Palestinian-controlled border.

Sarraj: I don't take that too seriously. We know (and we should not delude ourselves) that we are still under effective Israeli control. Israel will maintain a special unit in Kissufim where they will monitor the movement of all Palestinians. Israel has the right to stop anyone for six hours at Rafah, and can put its case to the Europeans and the Palestinians and the Europeans may decide to turn people back.

And let's not forget that our IDs and our passports are still issued by the Israelis. Our names, dates of birth, families and addresses are all registered in Israel. Effectively, Israel is in control. Also, Israel continues to exercise exclusive control over our airspace and territorial waters. All this tells you that we are still under Israeli occupation rule.

However, there is room for some kind of symbolic authority, and some Palestinians, particularly some ministers, are excited about this—a bit too excited, perhaps for personal or political reasons. But we don't take them too seriously.

bitterlemons: But you don't denounce the agreement, as some of the opposition factions have done?

Sarraj: No, I won't denounce the agreement. As a Palestinian living in Gaza, it is very good to be able to move from Gaza through Rafah to Egypt without any Israeli soldier there to humiliate me. This is a real achievement, and maybe this could be—we have to be a little optimistic—the beginning of something even better.

bitterlemons: Does this have a significant psychological impact?

Sarraj: I believe so. I think that Palestinians in general feel that this is a good moment, because we are able to move freely, although we all understand that we are not in total control of our lives. We do not have a sovereign state and we should not delude ourselves. We shouldn't go to the other extreme and say, “Close the border, we want to live under direct occupation again.” There are now no Israeli settlements; that is very good. We got some of our land back; that is excellent. We can now move freely to Egypt; that is fantastic.

And we must also take into account that the Israelis will not interfere directly. Now, if they interfere, they will do so through a third party that

we have accepted, namely the Europeans, who are not part of the occupying forces.

bitterlemons: The agreement also stipulates a convoy system between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as clauses on facilitating the movement of goods at the Karni crossing. How important are these?

Sarraj: They are vital, and I believe the Israelis will do everything possible to prevent them from being implemented. This Israeli government is not at all interested in a peaceful solution in which there is a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. They are interested in forcing the Palestinians to ask for a state in Gaza alone. This is why they will do everything to hinder parliamentary elections because they are an expression of national sovereignty, using Hamas and terrorism as justification. And they will complicate the issue of the convoys, again under the excuse of security.

bitterlemons: There is another aspect to this agreement, which is the third party role.

Sarraj: I very much welcome the European involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and I even welcome European involvement in Palestinian life. I hope Europeans will be more involved at all levels, by sending more consultants, in addition to money, to help us restructure our authority, plan strategically and in general help us found a state based on the rule of law and scientific advancement and development. I don't believe this Palestinian Authority is able to do so alone, and I welcome the Europeans, who are not an occupying force and with whom we should strengthen our strategic alliance.

bitterlemons: What about the role of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice?

Sarraj: I welcome her role. I think there was pressure by Rice and her camp on the Israeli government that resulted in this agreement. I think Washington is very interested in making the Gaza experience succeed.

At the same time, we have a long history of not trusting the Americans, and even if they do good, we suspect there is something bad behind it. The question we'll always ask is: how far will the US pressure Israel when it hasn't pressured Israel to uphold UN Security Council resolutions, respect Palestinian human rights or follow the path of negotiations and the peace process? How far will Washington go to face the Zionist lobby? But for this agreement, I am grateful to Rice.—
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A PALESTINIAN VIEW

This wall is a land grab

by Ghassan Khatib

It might be easy to be deceived by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's comments alluding to a unilateral withdrawal from Palestinian territory and even some settlements, if the wall Israel is building around us Palestinians were not growing longer and more oppressive by the day. Maps show the barrier's predicted path slicing into the West Bank, taking half of the land inside of the green line—half of the land that Palestinians and the world agreed would make up the Palestinian state.

But Sharon's hints that he is ready to dismantle some settlements are not an anomaly in his position, rather they are the natural conclusion of the promise Sharon made decades ago to render Palestinian statehood inoperable by dividing Palestinian land into cantons and surrounding them by Israeli military control. Sharon was never happy about building this "separation wall"—for him, it was an unnecessary division of land that God promised the Jews. But Sharon and his allies also recognized that building the wall was simply another way to proceed with his plan—to push Palestinians into as little space as possible, making their freedom and independence unattainable and leaving the rest of the land for Israel.

When Sharon speaks now of unilateral withdrawal, he is eyeing the map of the West Bank and fewer than 20 illegal Israeli settlements (of some 150) that will eventually fall inside its walled Palestinian cantons. Dismantling these is his "difficult concession" to the idea that the land of historic Palestine is not the birthright of the Jews. It is by no means an admission that this land is occupied territory, or that Palestinians have any rights here at all. And, once his allies further to the right have their say, the chances are that those withdrawals will never take place. Sharon is under fire from Israel's left, and as usual he is trying to dodge the bullet.

The international community cannot let the Israeli wall—the apartheid wall—go unanswered. First, the humanitarian crisis that it is introducing on an already-exhausted population is of immense proportions. When one takes the land of a farmer and leaves him only a plot for his home, not only his family suffers. Palestinians will be forced to buy their produce from Israeli farms built on Palestinian land and tilled (perhaps)

by the Palestinians who once owned that land. It is one more chapter in the same Palestinian story, one more land grab in defiance of all international legality and norms.

That brings us to the second reason for blocking the wall's construction: the United Nations' own resolutions. The United Nations Security Council has repeatedly voted that the way out of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict lies in the two-state solution based on Resolution 242 and the green line. This is the international consensus and international law. Why then is Israel allowed to act with impunity and draw new borders when and where it chooses? If this were truly about Israel's security, the wall could easily follow those borders sanctioned by international law.

If the wall is completed as planned, the two-state solution will be rendered a thing of the past. Three million Palestinians will be inside these barriers, detached from each other and their land, with no economic agreements to maintain financial viability and unable to move without Israeli permission. The next negotiations will agonize fruitlessly about areas where the wall might be moved or removed, distancing us further from the crux of the problem: the illegal Israeli occupation. Tensions will escalate with the desperation of a people canned in tight borders and stewing in poverty and hopelessness. The Gaza Strip already has a wall, and it is a prime example of what lies in store for the West Bank.

Ariel Sharon began the implementation of his plan to decimate Palestinian nationhood by sending the Israeli army to annul the borders that had been drawn by the Oslo process. Palestinians responded by rethinking their commitment to the two-state solution. "If Israel doesn't recognize us," they said, "why should we recognize Israel?" Thus, in a marked change from before the uprising, nearly half of Palestinians now say that the aim of the intifada is to liberate all of historic Palestine. The building of the apartheid wall will only further prove to Palestinians that Israel has no intention of offering them independence and freedom on any part of this land.

The two-state solution is the only compromise on the table, and it is in dire jeopardy. It is up to the international community—the Quartet guided by the United States—to save this region from Sharon's grand plan.—*Published December 15, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

No suicide bombings = no fence

by Yossi Alpher

The sad tale of the security fence has recently taken on new dimensions that have potentially far-reaching ramifications.

The fence project began some two years ago as a unilateral initiative by Israeli "security doves," backed—according to the opinion polls—by a large majority of the public, to stop suicide bombers more or less along the green line and to dismantle isolated settlements and those in Gaza. The model was the fence around Gaza, which has never been penetrated by suicide bombers. The objective was to radically improve the security situation and ensure Israel's long-term survival as a Jewish and democratic state, while in no way prejudicing chances for a viable and negotiated two-state settlement with the Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, after initially rejecting the idea because of the political ramifications for the settlements that would lie beyond the fence, eventually embraced it, but only because he saw that he could "hijack" the fence and run it deep inside the West Bank in order to embrace as many settlements as possible.

Over time, it emerged that Sharon and others on the right intend to subvert the original design of the fence yet further, and to use it to delineate the outlines of a Palestinian enclave state on about half of the West Bank. If Yasser Arafat and Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei do not agree to call the fenced-in enclave a "state" within the framework of a new interim deal that ostensibly corresponds with phase II of the roadmap, then Sharon, according to his most recent hints to the press and the public, will seek to impose the new arrangement unilaterally and for an unlimited period of time. Sharon has even alluded to the possibility of removing a few settlements—for security reasons, and/or in order to give the enclave some sort of technical "contiguity." In exploiting the fence project to this end, he has skillfully appealed to the public's generalized support for the fence, for separation and for removing settlements, and to US President George Bush's support for the roadmap, while taking advantage of the president's current preoccupation with Iraq and elections.

Never mind that the end product will be a disastrous arrangement that only prolongs and even escalates the conflict. Sharon believes he has a unique opportunity—while Bush is busy and as long as corruption charges don't

chase Sharon from office—to create the very Palestinian autonomous enclave that he has been talking about for nearly three decades. He has distorted the fence project to incredibly destructive ends.

Meanwhile, Palestinian opposition to the fence has been based on a series of calculations, some of which seem inspired, others of dubious wisdom. Thus the Palestinian information campaign has succeeded in persuading the world that the fence is a “wall,” even though only a few small segments out of hundreds of kilometers are configured as walls (mainly where they separate Palestinian urban concentrations from large numbers of Israelis scarcely meters away who have been, and could again be, shot at by Palestinians). This tactic is particularly successful in winning over European opinion to the Palestinian cause, because Europeans in the post-Cold War era react viscerally to the notion of walls and forced physical separation, even though Israeli-Palestinian circumstances are radically different from those of Cold War Europe.

Then, too, by focusing on the human suffering among innocent Palestinians created by the fence wherever it diverges from the green line, the Palestinian campaign has successfully diverted the attention of the international public from the original purpose of the fence: to alleviate Israeli suffering by preventing suicide bombings. In this regard, the many successes already registered by existing segments of the fence in stopping incursions into Israel by suicide bombers are of little interest to the world, because there is nothing visually dramatic about non-events.

Now the Palestinian leadership has persuaded the United Nations General Assembly to take the case against the fence to the International Court of Justice at The Hague. The potential success of this move is less clear. For years the Palestine Liberation Organization avoided having recourse to the ICJ because the outcome of such an appeal is far from a foregone conclusion. It gives Israel an international forum for making its case against Palestinian suicide terrorism and in favor of the international legality of its diverse activities in the West Bank and Gaza. And no matter what the court decides, its findings and recommendations will end up at the Security Council, where the US can prevent any definitive action being taken.

As Sharon's fence-building proceeds apace in and around the West Bank and its original purpose gets hopelessly obscured by geography and politics, it behooves everyone concerned, and especially Palestinians, to bear in mind the original and most fundamental truths about the fence. The idea began with the suicide bombings, a quasi-existential threat to Israelis. The fence works. Israelis have every right to defend themselves.

But the fence is extremely expensive, it's ugly, and most Israelis do not seek to cause hardship to innocent Palestinians. Israelis have no biological or psychological predisposition toward fences. If the Israeli public could be unequivocally persuaded that there would be no more suicide bombings, support for the fence would drop to near zero. Sharon could not proceed with the project.—*Published December 15, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

People power & resisting the wall

by Islah Jad

We may differ among us over the repercussions or the morality of suicide bombings. But what we do agree on unanimously is that when an individual insists on deploying his or her own body, a power is released that might be called a part of the “flesh against iron” strategy.

The problem with the strategy of “flesh against iron,” in this case, is that it is based on actions of an individual and hence, remains inaccessible to the public and the nation as a whole. Indeed, the nation is forced to stand back and watch this solitary occurrence.

Observe the events of recent weeks (which were not covered by the Arabic press, including al-Jazeera satellite channel), in particular those in Bolivia where citizens of an entire nation bared their chests and thus forced their government to relinquish power and authority and flee the country. The same happened in Georgia, where continuing demonstrations resulted in the overthrow of the government and parliament, and obligated Edward Shevardnadze to resign in the wake of charges that he rigged the elections.

These examples are offered here merely to demonstrate that nations possess power, a power manifested in bodies tightly pressed together and directed at a singular goal. After close examination, it appears that we Palestinians are in dire need of this power. Some will say that

there are already organizations that call demonstrations to resist and denounce the building of the Israeli wall, and there are international solidarity groups that coordinate with local Palestinian movements and organize popular activities to confront the building of this racial separation wall. This is all well and good, I would argue, but it does not achieve the formula of “flesh against iron.”

What has happened in Latin America and Georgia is what social scientists and intellectuals call “people power.” What is taken into account here is persistence and numbers— numbers are decisive in implementing goals, rather than the particular action underway. Demonstrations that are rallied to resist the construction of the wall must include thousands, tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands persistently placing their bodies as a barrier in the path of this wall. To achieve these numbers, each Palestinian movement is responsible for organizing and mobilizing people as a way of demonstrating their active presence on the ground, rather than simply maintaining a popular base in society.

Some non-governmental organizations that do manage to organize activities play an important role in maintaining contact with international groups that stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people. However, the structure of a non-governmental organization differs from the composition of a social or national movement, which is responsible for mobilizing and organizing the people. Some claim that, as a result, political organizations and parties currently play a very weak role in the public sphere—even being completely absent at times. Still, this does not relieve these groups’ responsibility for confronting this wall, and invigorating and supporting the public, in particular those who have suffered with the wall’s construction.

Political movements that maintain a popular base must take responsibility and act; this means that they must fully bear the consequences on their shoulders, rather than acting as guests at activities hosted by non-governmental organizations. Some will argue that a bloodthirsty Israeli army and Israeli settlers will easily prevent public gatherings by using excessive force. But the point here is that the goal of these public gatherings is to prevent the excessive use of force, because the Israelis cannot kill or attack thousands of people at once. True, this strategy demands a high level of consciousness, commitment, organization and support. It also requires the creation of organized political frameworks.

But right now, international advocacy is at its optimum: the companies hired by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to polish his public image have failed in their mission. That was clearly reflected in the latest European poll. Too, the United Nations is becoming more direct in its

messages regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is already a network of international support for the Palestinian cause, and this will help in gearing a broad popular movement to prevent the building of the wall. It is also worth noting that most European countries and the United States of America do not support the building of this wall.

The “flesh against iron” formula should not only include the public and its organizations, parties, and civil institutions; it must also include the Palestinian National Authority itself. Many articles have been written about the fall of the government of Mahmoud Abbas; others are debating the future of the current administration. I, for one, believe that if the current government follows the lead of its predecessor in placing our destiny at the hands of “American and Israeli goodwill,” and finds no other path except “negotiations” and “peace processes,” it will be unable to shape a future out of the numerous sacrifices of its own people.

What prevents governments from following the “path of peace,” while simultaneously organizing popular resistance? What explains the official failure to lead public demonstrations against the building of this wall or the spread of settlements?

The natural flow of life for all cross-sections of Palestinian society is already impaired. What prevents us then from specifying certain days or weeks for the public to gather around a settlement to prevent it from spreading or to halt the confiscation of Palestinian land? What prevents thousands from positioning themselves between the Israeli bulldozers and targeted Palestinian homes to prevent Israel from demolishing homes in Rafah, Jenin, or the Old City in Nablus? Yes, Israeli tanks and bulldozers can kill a single person (as they did to American activist Rachel Corrie), but Israel cannot kill thousands in one stroke.

What we need is good will, planning, organization and support. Israeli tanks may kill tens or hundreds, but they cannot murder an entire population. This is the value of pursuing the formula of “flesh against iron.” —*Published December 15, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

The United States, International Actors & the Roadmap

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Probe Sharon's biggest worry

by Hanna Amireh

There is no doubt that what Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon fears most right now is for the American peace mission led by General Anthony Zinni to push for serious political negotiations based on lifting the siege on Palestinians, an end to Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, a total halt to settlement activities and an international force providing protection to the Palestinian people.

As such, Sharon is relying on the Palestinian Authority's inability to meet his unending and multiplying security conditions. Sharon will use all his might to maintain the state of military confrontation because this maintains his image as the anti-terrorism "warrior" (the title he chose for his biography). A shift to political issues will expose the charlatan peacemaker Sharon as what he really is—an avid opponent of the peace process. Only this will produce the breakthrough necessary to create new political trends inside Israeli society that are separate from the right-wing fascist and racist trends seen today.

Now that the United States administration has commenced a diplomatic initiative and followed it up with Zinni's visit, this breakthrough is in American hands. Zinni's visit could be one means of exposing the positions of both parties, demonstrating who truly desires peace. But to do this, Zinni's mediation in practice must be based on the specific principles outlined in Powell's speech—opposing illegal occupation, settlement expansion, restrictions on movement, as well as violence and terror.

Further, Zinni could help frustrate Sharon's plans by supporting the Palestinian National Authority in dispelling the false and prominent impression among Palestinians that a ceasefire is the same as

acquiescing to occupation. The PNA must refute the idea that Palestinian internal politics is at its breaking point, as well as address the national movements that resort to gunfire only to mask their inability to lead the public in marches against occupation. (It is important to note that the absence of widespread participation in the intifada gives Israel the wrong impression that the Palestinian people are worn out and exhausted and cannot continue to resist occupation much longer. Indeed, Palestinian will remains unbowed.)

After September 11, the new international climate provides both opportunities and dead ends. For Palestinians, it has now become impossible to rely on the Arab states or international intervention, since all are pressing for negotiations at any cost. This has been demonstrated through US and European pressure, starting with US demands of the Arab countries following Powell's speech. It has also been reflected in letters sent by President George W. Bush to several Arab leaders, calling on them to exert pressure on the Palestinian leadership to "get serious" about restoring calm and ending violence.

These American demands are not new, however they gain power and influence following Secretary of State Colin Powell's speech—and herein lies the real danger. The American administration must realize that it does not aid its cause in using the Arab countries to pressure Palestinians. Doing so only solidifies Palestinian desperation. The Arab states, too, must shoulder their role as a source of support for the Palestinian cause and a just solution according to international law. This should be translated into a unified Arab stance and an action plan that responds to American attempts at division.

While some Palestinians expressed the sense that Powell's speech contained new, hopeful elements, more must soon be on the way. The visit and mission of Zinni is a test for whether the principles offered in Powell's speech were serious or only pretty packaging.

Indeed, US integrity in mediation is at stake. Palestinians will measure the seriousness of the United States position in talks with the US administration over the nature of its mediation, its understanding of United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338 and the mechanics of the US role in the negotiating process.

Only after these discussions will we be able to monitor how the United States moves forward regarding United Nations Security Council resolutions, the negotiations process and pressure applied to Israel to respect international law. The way in which Zinni fulfills all of these will be the true test of American intentions.—*Published December 3, 2001 in bitterlemons.com*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Reform and resistance

by *Jamil Hilal*

The lifting of the siege on the headquarters of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in Ramallah has coincided with an intensification of calls for reform of the Palestinian National Authority. These calls have not been confined to Palestinian quarters but came also from top United States leaders, including President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell and Israeli leaders, namely Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. In recent weeks, the discourse of reform has become so crowded with strains of ideas and aims that it is easy to lose one's way over who wants what and why.

One thing can be quickly cleared up: Sharon, who has spent most of his energy since his election as prime minister last year on demonizing and dehumanizing Arafat and attempting to weaken, marginalize and possibly destroy the PNA, cannot be said to be genuinely concerned with reforming something he loathes so much. Sharon and his government have raised the issue of PNA reform only after they failed to rid themselves of Arafat and dismantle the PNA through siege, blockade, assassination of Palestinian militants, and military invasion of towns, camps and villages. Hence, the current Israeli leadership is trying, as second best, this new tactic aimed using the issue of reform to delay as much as possible the rejuvenation of a process of political negotiations over a final settlement.

What Sharon means by "reform" is a process of neutralizing Arafat. What follows is the demand to allocate him only a symbolic role and leave the real task of governing to other, perhaps more-agreeable administrators, as well as the unification of the several Palestinian security branches into one. In other words, for Sharon and his right-wing Likud party and many old guards of the Labor party, "PNA reform" means Palestinians guaranteeing the security of Israel, including its occupying soldiers and colonial settlers, before the reaching of a final settlement.

The United States is also demanding the unification of Palestinian security forces, as well as a more financially-transparent government that is less centralized in the hands of Arafat. That is, the US administration, in the best colonial tradition, is using reform as a precondition for accepting the graduation of the PNA into statehood (and, of course, without specifying borders and other characteristics of statehood).

For Palestinians, the idea of reform is as old as the PNA, although new advocates have emerged in the arena following the military reoccupation of the West Bank. The newcomers to the reform platform are mostly from the upper echelons of the PNA bureaucracy who are now on the bandwagon for more than one reason; some have been recently genuinely shaken by the price paid by Palestinians in the second intifada. This group would like to be part of the Palestinian decision-making process, and not simply a cover for autocracy that is apportioned responsibility for policies it has no hand in making, including the creation of a situation that permitted the coexistence of a number of political centers with their own autonomous strategies and tactics that have dramatically effected the lives of large sectors of the population.

The main concern here has been the character of the confrontation with the Israeli military occupation and colonial settlements. It has centered on whether to develop and strengthen the popular character of resistance, or to use armed struggle against the occupying Israeli army and Israeli settlers, and whether to use suicide bombing of civilians inside Israel, or a mixture of these. Each of these strategies has its own impact on the Palestinian cause and society, as well as on the Israeli political scene. The leadership of the PNA has no clear vision for defining the limits of the competing strategies of Palestinian political factions, which have resulted in a kind of chaos that has negatively impacted most Palestinians.

It is difficult to clearly identify those Palestinian leaders who genuinely stand for reform within the PNA hierarchy, since many of these have other motives for calling publicly for reform. They have, no doubt, benefited from existing PNA structures in terms of status, material rewards and other privileges. By riding the reform wagon, a group of upper PNA bureaucrats seeks to keep these privileges. They know that reform is a winning internal and external ticket, but they are limiting their program of reform to issues that do not threaten their interests, for example, the unification or reduction in number of security agencies, the reduction of the number of ministers from 30 to 15 or 18 and even the formation of a “unity government” or leadership. This is an opportunistic position that plays to internal demands for reform and simultaneously sends signals to the external sponsors of “reform.”

For most Palestinians, on the other hand, reform of the Palestinian political system is absolutely necessary for motives contrary to those of Israel and the United States. Reform for them is envisaged as the separation of powers, the promulgation of a modern constitution or basic law and the holding of presidential, legislative and local elections.

A slimmer and more effective government with credible ministers also finds strong support. In other words, reform is envisaged as an enabling factor for better and more effective—as well as responsible—resistance to the Israeli occupation. Palestinians, as shown regularly by public opinion polls, want democracy, transparency and an end to mismanagement and corruption. But they also seek first of all an independent, sovereign and democratic state of Palestine on all of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital and a just and fair solution to the refugee problem in accordance with international legitimacy.—*Published May 13, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Bush may be around for six more years

by Oded Eran

Since 1967, every American president has made a key speech in which he presented the administration’s views regarding the basic components of a solution to the Israel-Arab conflict. Not one of these speeches has stuck in our memory. Comprehensive American solutions like the Rogers plan (1969), the Reagan plan (1982) and even the fresher Clinton plan (2000) never constituted a basis for negotiations; they have remained as little more than code names for the American approach.

Will the Bush plan of 2002 suffer the same fate? The answer depends on two key factors: the components of the plan, and the determination of the president and his administration to carry it out.

The programmatic part of Bush’s speech reflects an internal logic that is problematic mainly from the Palestinian standpoint. While the two-state vision is presented in Bush’s opening lines, the road to a Palestinian state is paved with a series of tasks that would be complex and challenging for any nation, but especially for Palestinian society in its current state. From the US standpoint, realization of the vision is conditioned upon fulfillment of a number of objectives:

- a new and different Palestinian leadership;
- genuine reform rather than cosmetic change;
- reforms intended to produce new and democratic political and economic institutions, a market economy and anti-terrorism measures. The new institutions include a strong and authoritative legislature, a constitution that establishes separation of powers, and a government capable of exercising effective rule;
- economic reform predicated on transparency and good management;
- reforms in the judiciary and in the security services; and of course, again, a war against terrorism.

When the Palestinians achieve these objectives, the US will support the establishment of a provisional Palestinian state. Since no explanation is offered for this provisional status, we may assume that the president believes that, following negotiations with Israel over the final borders of a Palestinian state, its capital and other aspects of sovereignty (did the president refer here to control over air space, for example, or to demilitarization?), it will be awarded a permanent status.

Throughout the entire Oslo process, deadlines repeatedly turned into bad jokes, with neither party adhering to a single one. President Bush avoided setting timetables for achieving his objectives, with the sole—and strange—exception of local elections, which are supposed to take place by the end of this year.

Even the list of Israeli tasks opens with a Palestinian task, a condition: “as we make progress toward security” and “as violence subsides,” Israel will withdraw completely to the pre-September 28, 2000 lines; settlement activity must cease; the Palestinian economy will be able to develop along with normalization, and revenues collected for the Palestinian Authority and frozen by Israel will be delivered to honest and accountable hands.

These steps will be followed by discussion of the issues of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees and borders. Here President Bush emphasizes US support for an Israeli withdrawal to “secure and recognized borders.”

Finally, the president asserts that with an intensive effort these goals can be attained in three years.

From the standpoint of the key regional players, Bush’s speech constitutes a classic instance of the glass that is both half-full and half-empty. America’s unique status internationally, the influence of the events

of September 11, and the US’ determined stance on terrorism—all oblige the regional players to respond positively to the half-full glass and to mutter their criticisms of the half-empty glass through gritted teeth.

From the standpoint of the Palestinians and the Arab world, the call to remove the current leadership, i.e., Yasser Arafat, is extremely demanding, if not impossible. As for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, even without the Bush speech, he did not intend to negotiate with Arafat, and the speech relieves him with near-finality of the possibility that such negotiations will be imposed upon him.

Nor are the other reforms simple to achieve, particularly if the US indeed insists that they be more than cosmetic.

Particularly problematic from the Arab Palestinian standpoint is the lack of synchronization, not only between the Palestinian and Israeli tracks, but particularly between the reduction of terrorism and enhancement of security, on the one hand, and the steps that Israel is asked to take, such as ceasing settlement activity, on the other. The synchronization that was implicit in the Mitchell plan of April 2001 has been replaced by what looks like a sequential process beginning with a cessation of terrorism.

In this sense the president’s speech sounded at times like a piano concert in which it is not always clear how the music played by the left hand is related to that of the right hand. The speech’s internal logic and the call for Palestinians to replace Arafat enable Prime Minister Sharon to praise the speech. Yet at the same time, in the president’s vision a Palestinian state will emerge, its borders will be determined in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, and questions like Jerusalem and the refugees will be on the president’s agenda, even if Clinton’s approach to them was not adopted. These are the elements that will help the Palestinians digest Bush’s speech.

Whether this speech survives as a plan of action will be determined by a number of factors: possible erosion in the will of both sides to maintain a situation that involves not only ongoing loss of life but deep economic damage; an absence of alternatives and a disconnect in bilateral communication. The addition of certain elements in the near term could improve the speech’s survivability. These include convening a regional conference, accelerating processes dependent on international aid such as reform of economic institutions and enhancement of the economic situation, release of revenues by Israel, and relaxation of Israeli closures that could permit a phased but rapid return to as much normalcy as possible.

Finally, all the regional actors should bear in mind that there are still more than two years remaining in President Bush's first term, without taking into account the possibility of a second term. None of the actors on the international scene has any good reason to enter into confrontation with him and the US.—*Published July 1, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A JORDANIAN VIEW

The Arab initiative and the role of Arab diplomacy

by Marwan Muasher

The security and humanitarian situation in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel has never been worse. The current year has witnessed a total breakdown of trust between the two sides, with an alarming hardening—indeed radicalization—of positions in both camps. This is not an atmosphere conducive to any attempts to resume the political process, or steps to create a new dynamic able to successfully resolve this longstanding conflict. Surprisingly, we are nonetheless witnessing serious efforts to deal with the root causes of the conflict for both sides, most of them being put forward from an unexpected quarter for the Israeli public—Arab states.

To the Israeli public, this might seem like a hopeless piece of Arab propaganda. I beg to differ. Let me outline the various steps that Arab states have taken since the beginning of this year to attempt a serious alternative to the bleak options that seem to exist only regarding the conflict. I suggest that the Arab initiative unanimously endorsed in Beirut in March of this year is a very serious attempt to squarely face the needs of both sides, and to satisfactorily address them. Consider the language of the Arab initiative regarding Israeli needs:

- **“Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended”**: For the first time, Arab states commit to a collective offer to end the conflict with Israel. This is probably one of the most important demands of the average Israeli citizen—the knowledge that the conflict is terminated, and that no further claims on Israel or its territory will be put forward by Arabs—all Arabs.

- **“Enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all states of the region”**: The security of Israel, according to this article, would be guaranteed through one collective peace agreement with full security provisions, and would be assured not only by neighboring Arab states, but by *all* Arab states, none excluded. This has always been a key Israeli demand. Despite Arab fears of Israel, brought about by Israel's occupation of parts of three Arab states, one cannot deny the existence of a genuine fear on part of the average Israeli regarding his or her own safety. The above article assures Israel that its security fears are understood, and will be addressed by all Arab states.
- **“Establish normal relations with Israel”**: This signals full recognition of Israel and the establishment of normal relations, such as those between an Arab state and any other state in the world.
- **“Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194”**: For the first time, the Arab world commits itself to an agreed solution to the refugee problem, thus addressing Israel's concern that the demographic character of the Jewish state not be threatened. To be sure, the initiative calls for achieving a just solution of the problem in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194, but it points out that the implementation of that resolution has to be agreed. The key point here is that Arabs understand well that the implementation has to be both fair and realistic, and certainly agreed-upon. In other words, there is no possibility of a solution that will lead to the changing of the character of the Jewish state. Fortunately, there have been many suggested solutions, at Taba and elsewhere, between Palestinian and Israeli interlocutors that point to the possibility of reaching a pragmatic settlement to this problem.

It is true as well that the Arab initiative also addresses Arab needs: Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. But previous negotiations between Israel, Palestinians and other Arab states have shown that these goals are well within reach.

These are powerful pledges by all Arab states which should not be ignored. To those who are skeptical of Arab intentions, let me point out a seldom-mentioned point. Notwithstanding all the violence of the past year, and the hardening of positions in the Arab world (as well as in Israel), not one Arab state has asked to withdraw its signature from the Arab initiative, though there were many opportunities to do so. The Arab initiative is proving its resilience day in, day out.

There has been another new and positive element despite this bleak environment: the emergence of a pro-active, pragmatic Arab diplomacy led by three Arab states that are key to the conflict—Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. One should not underestimate the positive contribution that Saudi Arabia has brought to the process. With their huge Arab and Islamic credentials, the Saudis have consistently signaled a willingness to play a very pro-active role in the process, bringing along with them the consent of most of the Arab and Islamic worlds. Here we should remember that Jordan and Egypt have already signed peace treaties with Israel. The involvement of Saudi Arabia, which does not have any territorial disputes with Israel, should not be underestimated.

Arab diplomacy has not stopped with the launching of the Arab initiative, however. Ever since US President George Bush made his speech on June 24, 2001, committing the United States to a two-state solution in three years as a solution to the conflict, key Arab states have tirelessly worked with the US and the Quartet to develop a realistic plan to see this vision implemented. It is a plan that fully realizes Israel's security needs and deals with them. The plan should be strong enough to guarantee that children can board a bus for school without fear. It should also be strong enough to guarantee children under the age of five a life free of malnutrition. Jordan has made clear its opposition to suicide bombings on moral and political grounds. But while we understand the emphasis on security *first*, it cannot be security *only*. We need to give people hope that they will live free of occupation, and that their children will not only survive, but prosper as well.

The roadmap offers all that. It outlines a series of mutual commitments by both parties, targets to meet these commitments, and a monitoring and assessment mechanism by the Quartet to ensure that commitments are being fulfilled in time. To be sure, it is not perfect. All sides have reservations about parts of it, but it does have all the elements of a successful resolution of the conflict, if it is adhered to, and accepted as a package. It does offer a tunnel—bumpy at times—but one that leads to light.

This roadmap should also lead to a successful conclusion, not only on the Palestinian-Israeli track, but on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, as well. We do not view comprehensiveness as a concession to Arabs, as some have attempted to argue. Comprehensiveness means the ability to trigger all the elements of the Arab initiative, in particular the ones I outlined above. We hope, therefore, that the three-year framework will apply to the Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese tracks with Israel in a way that can bring a permanent, comprehensive peace by mid-2005.

Optimistic, maybe, but certainly doable. Today, we have a clear international consensus on how to solve the conflict, going further than UN Security Council Resolution 242 did. It offers a two-state solution within a fixed time period, two elements missing from that famous resolution. More importantly, we have a willingness and a contractual commitment from all Arab states, to see an end to the longest conflict of the twentieth century.

There was a time when Israel accused Arabs of not stepping forward and providing a partner for peace. Today, Arab states are meeting the challenge of peace and are fully engaged. Let it not be said that they could not find a partner this time.

There is a way out, for both of us. There is an alternative that will allow all peoples of the region to live in peace, security and prosperity. But it will not be realized unless we both take a bold step forward. Let us do it together.—
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AN ISRAELI VIEW

Bush's dedication to the cause

by Yossi Alpher

The careful American scripting of the dramatic statements made at Aqaba last week by prime ministers Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas, coupled with President Bush's own firmly worded commitment, point to Washington's newfound determination to deal energetically with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Bush, in particular, has in the course of the past month exhibited an emotional commitment to the cause of Middle East peace that is difficult to explain without reference to the president's deep felt religious beliefs.

Many Middle East actors appear to be inspired by strong religious beliefs. Many exercise negative influence—for example, the Islamic extremists in Iran, the Islamist terrorist organizations, the American

Christian evangelicals who support the Israeli settlement movement, and the religious settlers themselves. When Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat recently incited Palestinian children to grow up to be martyrs, he too was (not for the first time) imposing extremist Islamist beliefs on the conflict. On the other hand, religious extremists are not the only negative actors in the region: witness the legacy of the secular Baathists in Iraq and Syria.

Still, it is not often that an American president tells an Arab leader, as President Bush did last summer, that in pursuing Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein he has “a mission from God.” Now Bush appears to address the challenge of providing freedom and democracy for the Palestinian people in somewhat similar religious ideological terms. There is also a personal angle: after Iraq, the American president appears to have greater self-assurance and confidence in his international role.

But there are also some hardheaded calculations of realpolitik behind the Bush administration’s newfound devotion to the roadmap and its putative end product.

The first consideration is Iraq. Assessments may differ as to Washington’s chances of making good on its promise to democratize Iraq. But as long as the US is there—whether bogged down in internecine fighting, terrorism and meddling by neighbors, or on the road to stabilizing the country—it appears to have concluded that it must demonstrate active involvement on the Israeli-Palestinian front in order to deflect Arab criticism and buy regional good will.

A second consideration is global. The administration’s war in Iraq split the Atlantic alliance and undermined the position of traditional allies like England and Turkey, where public opinion faulted governmental inclinations to join with the US. A concerted effort at peacemaking in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere answers the need to make amends.

A third consideration is domestic. Private inside polling by the Republicans indicates that the American public will support involvement by Bush, at least up to a point. The American public has little patience with Israeli settlements and wants Israeli Prime Minister Sharon to take peace initiatives. Some sectors of the American Jewish mainstream have begun to express open disagreement with the hard line evinced by the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Conference of Presidents. Bush, who told that same Arab leader last summer that he had little to risk in getting involved with the Palestinian issue since he gained only nine percent of the Jewish vote in 2000 and could hardly do worse next time, may conceivably now perceive an opportunity to increase his popularity with Jewish voters.

Finally this was, after all, “the plan.” Key administration thinkers like Paul Wolfowitz and Condoleezza Rice long intended to exploit the victory in Iraq to try to end the Israeli-Palestinian bloodletting. Nor, despite all the rhetoric about being “with us or against us,” could the administration ignore the need to win over the hearts and minds of the Muslim world in the post-9/11 era.

Yet the president’s newfound enthusiasm for this enterprise is almost certain to be constrained by heavy counter-considerations. Bush’s Middle East campaign could easily be shelved if Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) proves unable to grasp the initiative and lead a successful campaign against Palestinian violence; if Sharon balks at dismantling and freezing settlements and/or if pressure on him precipitates an Israeli governmental and electoral crisis; if regional Arab leaders prove less than forthcoming in rewarding Israel for concessions by expanding relations; and when—not if—the American presidential elections gear up to a point where pressure on Sharon, or merely the threat of failure, forces Bush to give priority to his next Florida campaign.

Bush clearly lacks what might be called a “sophisticated” grasp of the Israel-Arab conflict—indeed, of world affairs in general. Some might argue that a president who is on a mission from God and who can’t pronounce “contiguous” has no business messing with the Palestinian issue. On the other hand, President Bill Clinton’s grasp of the minutiae of the conflict was also no guarantee of success. Ronald Reagan, whose wife believed in astrology, helped bring down the “Evil Empire” and end the Cold War with a simplicity of approach and single-minded determination reminiscent of Bush.

The nature of the leadership on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides remains even more problematic. Abu Mazen’s heart is in the right place, but he has little public support and is constrained by extremists from Arafat to Hamas. Sharon, in the best case, is not really committed to the kind of final status territorial settlement that Abu Mazen, and apparently Bush, champion. Hence the single most important contribution that can now be made by friends of Middle East peace—the rest of the Quartet, the moderate Arab states, American Jewish leaders—is to keep Bush in the game.—*Published June 9, 2003 in bitterlemons.org.*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

The Quartet's swan song

by Gerald M. Steinberg

Not only is the roadmap teetering on the edge of death, but the Quartet that was created to promote this latest Arab-Israeli peace effort is also close to disintegration. Instead of the promised harmony, the members continue their solo performances and each seeks the spotlight. While European officials are making pilgrimages to Yasser Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah, United States officials meet Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas in Jericho. And the faces of European Union leaders such as Javier Solana and George Papandreou, as well as perennial United Nations representative Terje Roed-Larsen, were all missing from the group photos of the Sharm el-Sheikh and Aqaba summits. Like Arafat, the Quartet watched the show, conducted by President Bush, on television.

Indeed the Quartet, like the roadmap, had a very inauspicious debut, demonstrating that the core issues that contributed to the catastrophic end of Oslo have not been resolved. During the Oslo phase, often-competing policies of the US and Europe caused confusion and allowed the main actors to seek better terms by shuffling between the two main mediators. Now, amidst the deep fractures between the US and "Old" Europe over Iraq, and Israeli anger over European paternalism and betrayal of democratic principles (amplified in the UN), the prospects of a useful role for the Quartet are essentially zero.

The violence that followed the introduction of the roadmap was, in part, the result of the flawed Quartet framework. British Prime Minister Tony Blair's determination to publish the text immediately after the defeat of Saddam Hussein prevented Mahmoud Abbas from wresting control over the security apparatus from Arafat. Blair felt he needed a quick release in order to appease constituencies angered by the British position on the Iraq war. This gave Arafat enough power to sabotage Israeli-Palestinian security coordination, and, according to reports, to dispatch terrorists from his *muqata* headquarters.

At the same time, the premature presentation of this initiative ensured that Abbas would remain weak. The various factions, including Hamas, were thus invited to try their luck at destabilizing the new Palestinian government and the roadmap process. The results included the murder

of four soldiers guarding the highly-symbolic Erez crossing (where Palestinians enter Israel to work), followed by an Israeli-targeted attack against a Hamas leader, and then the very brutal bus bombing in Jerusalem. Together, these initial but readily-predictable failures may be fatal for the roadmap.

In terms of meeting the difficult challenges of implementing the roadmap on the ground, the EU appears to have little to offer. European leaders, as well as UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, again denounced the terror attacks by Hamas and issued more ritual calls to end the violence—as if such statements had any impact whatsoever. In contrast, President Bush increased the level of his direct involvement, reversing his initial stand and accepting Israeli actions to end terrorism conducted by Hamas. The US also threatened to take action against countries that provide assistance to terror groups, while the EU could only hint in the vaguest terms regarding possible sanctions against Hamas. And as the Americans belatedly dispatched the initial monitoring group, and forced resumption of the Israeli and Palestinian security talks in a desperate hope to save the roadmap, Europe and the UN remained on the sidelines, without influence on such critical steps.

From an Israeli perspective, the main rationale for the Quartet is to keep the other three actors from interfering with the policies pursued by the Americans. The Israeli view of the EU has become increasingly bitter, based on the European adoption of the Palestinian narrative, focusing on "settlement, occupation and victimization" (as if the conflict began in 1967). Europeans and the UN are seen to pander to growing Muslim populations and oil dependency at Israel's expense. Anti-Semitism and paternalism (particularly from the French) still play a role and, in contrast to the US, Europe puts little emphasis on norms such as democracy and freedom. In the entire Oslo period and well beyond, the EU never halted the flow of funds to the Palestinian Authority, despite its corruption and direct involvement in terror, and the investigation demanded by the EU's parliament is being conducted in secret. Finally, Israelis realize that while the other members of the Quartet will advocate "painful concessions" and risk-taking for Israel, only the US will assist Israel if and when such policies go badly wrong.

These problems were reflected in the first disastrous days of the roadmap's life. It is now clear that only the full force of "Pax Americana," without petty political competition from its "partners," may be able to create some stability. Perhaps by banging enough heads together, the Americans may force the disarming of Hamas and force the PA to ensure that it has a monopoly on the use of force, as necessary for any

proto-state. If they succeed, this could also set the stage for beginning the deep changes necessary for transforming the conflict. For their part, the other three members of the Quartet need to examine their roles and past failures more critically, while avoiding contributing to the failure of another peace process and to more violence and murder.—*Published June 23, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Three pieces of advice

by Ghassan Khatib

The deterioration in Palestinian-Israeli relations that has put us back into the vicious circle of violence and ended the implementation of the first phase of the roadmap has also once again focused attention on the American role in this conflict. Most Palestinian politicians and analysts, and some on the Israeli side, have blamed the United States (although not only the United States) for the recent collapse. What magnified American responsibility for the failure to implement the roadmap was US insistence that it take sole responsibility for the monitoring role that is a crucial component of the roadmap plan.

The roadmap began as a Quartet-crafted document that reflected a compromise understanding between the divergent views of Quartet members—Russia, the United Nations, the European Union and the United States. But when the actual implementation began, the administration of George W. Bush pushed the other Quartet members aside and gave them the impression that it would take the lead in supervising roadmap implementation. It is no surprise, then, that the US is widely seen as responsible for the roadmap's failure.

Certainly, the recent increase in US attention to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is related largely to the difficulties American policy is facing in the Middle East region. The significant decline in credibility that the US has experienced as a result of this conflict, the war in Iraq, and also its actions in some Islamic states, is pushing the American administration

to try to offset the slide in credibility by acting as peacemaker between Palestinians and Israelis. As a result, the collapse in Palestinian-Israeli relations and the subsequent eruption of violence coinciding with the dramatic swing in tension in Iraq is having a negative impact on US public opinion about Bush administration policies. We can only expect, then, that the government will have to do its best to prevent Palestinian-Israeli relations from slipping off the abyss. That begs the question, however, as to whether the US will proceed along the right path, and in a manner that takes into consideration lessons from the past.

Two general deficiencies have characterized the US approach as it attempted to implement the roadmap in recent months. These are the inability to understand and compensate for the traditional power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as a superficial American understanding of internal Palestinian politics. While there remains a slim chance of salvaging the roadmap from this dramatic deterioration, that chance rests on the extent and quality of political capital that the administration is willing to invest.

As such, three words of advice might come in handy. First, it is still possible to reinstate the ceasefire, provided that this cessation of violence is mutual on the part of both Palestinians and Israelis and stems from each side's adherence to that early clause of the roadmap that calls for Palestinians and Israelis to declare an end to all violence anywhere against the other.

Second, all components of the first phase of the roadmap should more or less be implemented in parallel: steps in security, political reforms, troop withdrawal, a settlement freeze and dismantlement, and the reinstatement of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem, etc. The sequential approach, which is the Israeli approach, is fatal.

Third, the United States government should refrain from the deep interference in internal Palestinian politics that has characterized recent weeks and show more respect for Palestinian law, the constitution and democratic processes. Recent US interference in the form of public statements and practical interventions has only backfired.—*Published September 1, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Letter from Rafah

by Ghazi Hamad

Today I went to the community center in my town of Rafah, here in the southern Gaza Strip, only to find people frantic with worry. Israeli tanks have closed off our town and there are reports, even now, of more tanks being moved in to the border area between Gaza and Egypt. Several of us in the community took it upon ourselves to try to calm the residents, many of whom were packing their things and abandoning their houses in fear that Israel would fulfill its threats to demolish them.

You must stay, we told them. We cannot have a third catastrophe. We have lived two wars and left two homes. We have no option but to stay.

Rafah has had more than 1,100 homes demolished over the course of the last three years. Those who have been made homeless are now renting in other parts of the town, but there are no more homes to rent. Outside this very community center, there are families living in the soccer field. Some are staying in schools at night, and still others are living in tents in the street.

We told them that there are contacts between the Palestinian Authority and the United States, between Egypt and Israel. But who can say what will happen to these people in the coming hours? Prime Minister Ariel Sharon wants to finish off Rafah, and if he wants to level the whole place, he will.

I heard what Secretary Colin Powell and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice said about the Palestinians after their meetings with the Palestinian Authority. And I have to say that they are fooling no one. While the Americans want to appease the Arab world by showing that they are meeting with our leadership, the truth will be written in my town, perhaps tonight. The common denominator between this American administration and Israel is their mutual wielding of power and violence. Together, Israel and the United States have chosen to isolate the Palestinian Authority. Now we will see if the United States will sanction more bloodletting of innocents. Rafah is surrounded by Israeli checkpoints and settlements and our people have no escape.

And I believe it will be a massacre if the Israeli military enters Rafah in order to demolish those homes along the Gaza border. People here

are preparing themselves. They will not surrender to the bulldozers in silence. The Israelis will come with many weapons, and the Palestinians will use what they can.

Two nights ago, two missiles were fired from a helicopter at two in the morning into the offices of my newspaper, *al-Risala*. The computers, the furniture, lie in smithereens. That office sits in the middle of a residential area in Gaza City. Israel is trying to smother even our ability to speak.

Mr. Bush, you have the power of the presidency in your hands. I believe that you know the truth. You know that the Palestinian people are living under a terrible occupation. You know that our days and nights are haunted by screeching missiles flung from the sky. You know that the day that we do not see death is a rare day in our lives.

How then do you, as a man committed to democracy, agree with Sharon's practices? I am asking you now to live in our tragedy, to listen to the crying of our frightened children, to hear the frantic voices of my people. Listen very well, and then decide.—*Published May 17, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Talk straight to the new Palestinian leadership

by Saul Singer

Three almost-simultaneous events—the reelection of George W. Bush, the demise of Yasser Arafat, and the Knesset passage of Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan—provide a stellar opportunity for advancing Middle East policy not seen since the American victories in the Cold War and the Gulf War in 1991. The new constellation of events brings us full circle, since the last one resulted in the mistaken bet on Arafat, through Oslo, as the founder of a Palestinian state-in-the-making.

The last order, that of relying upon Arafat to take Palestinians to their "promised land," collapsed when Arafat turned down the state offered to him at Camp David and launched a terror war against Israel. That war

was itself discredited by the attacks of September 11, which created a global divide between states and entities that support terrorism, on the one hand, and their victims, led by the United States (and Israel), on the other.

In June 2002, Bush applied the new global order to the Arab-Israeli conflict when he called on the Palestinians to “elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror.” Bush simultaneously deepened the American commitment to Palestinian statehood while, for the first time, making that commitment contingent on Palestinian actions—democratic reforms and ending terrorism.

Unlike in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US did not set about trying to make regime change happen, and may or may not have prevented Israel from doing so. The result was a stalemate in which all there was to do was wait for Arafat to leave the scene, one way or another. Now he has.

Initially, the old adage, “If you don’t know what to do, do what you know,” is likely to hold sway. This means attempting to revive the frozen American-European roadmap. But if new/old leaders maintain Arafat’s refusal to use the ample political and military forces at their disposal to combat terror, the roadmap will remain as stuck as it ever was.

Rather than follow the roadmap into the same old dead end, it would behoove the parties to take this moment to think slightly out of the box. For the Palestinians, this would begin with absorbing the wider context.

As far as Bush is concerned, America has much bigger fish to fry than forcing the Palestinians to accept a state that, under Arafat, they did not want and wouldn’t take action to bring about. Unlike his predecessor, Bush does not believe that transformation of the region revolves around the Arab-Israeli conflict, but the opposite. It is now obvious that Bush and even Sharon believe in a genuine two-state solution more than Arafat ever did, but they are content to wait until there is a Palestinian leadership that believes in one as well.

The main litmus test for Palestinian seriousness on this score is not just the abandonment of terrorism, but of the “one-state solution,” also known as the “right of return.” When a Palestinian leadership abandons the challenge to Israeli sovereignty posed by the Palestinian claim of the right to live in Israel, the conflict will, in principle, be over. Ami Ayalon and Sari Nusseibeh have (unlike the “Geneva Accord”) already provided such a formula: “Palestinian refugees will return only to the State of Palestine; Jews will return only to the State of Israel.”

Regardless of what Sharon says, disengagement and perhaps even the completion of the security fence will, in fact, be entirely tied to Palestinian actions. So if a Palestinian leadership wants to stop these unilateral Israeli actions, it has the power to do so by taking the steps that would make a negotiating track desirable and irresistible.

The tactical challenge for the international community, including the Bush administration, will be to avoid doing the Palestinian leadership the “favor” of lowering its standards of compliance with the roadmap’s stop-terror-first sequence. This would ensure yet another Arafat-style stalemate, not to mention the loss of more Palestinian and Israeli lives.

The strategic challenge, if the promise of this moment is to be realized, is for the US to demand that the Arab states help pull the rug out from under Arafat’s old one-state game. This means saying out loud that the demand of “return” to Israel won’t fly because it is inconsistent with the world’s two-state vision. A good start would be for President George W. Bush, though he has already said it once, to repeat this principle enough to make it a central pillar of his second-term Middle East policy.

Arafat’s demise holds the promise of ending Palestinian helplessness. The outside world can assist by saying so, and by shining a spotlight on the root cause of the conflict: the inability of the Palestinians and the Arab world to reject the one-state fantasy, in the form of the assertion of an asymmetrical Palestinian “right” to immigrate to Israel.—*Published November 8, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

We have an opportunity

a conversation with Khalil Shikaki

bitterlemons: Is it too early to start talking about implementing the roadmap?

Shikaki: I think it would be a big mistake if the Palestinians have not already started the discussion with the Israelis on Israeli implementation

of their part of the roadmap. The Palestinians have already started implementing their own commitments, and it would be unthinkable for the Palestinians to be doing so without the Israelis doing so as well. I believe the primary objective of the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting should be to ensure that the Israelis as well as the Palestinians are implementing those commitments to which they have already agreed.

bitterlemons: Is it practical at this stage? President Mahmoud Abbas seems to be following a tactic of talking the factions into a ceasefire rather than disarming them, as phase I calls for?

Shikaki: The roadmap certainly does *not* say that the only way of establishing a cessation of violence is through Palestinian violence against the factions. It leaves open the door for the Palestinians to find ways to ensure a cessation of violence. The part that you are referring to, and which might be difficult for Abbas, is the part that deals with the collection of arms. But for that to start, the roadmap also states that, with the help of the US in particular, Palestinian security forces will be restructured and rebuilt. Only once they are restructured and rebuilt will those forces begin to collect weapons.

I believe that from now until the end of the first phase of the roadmap, which could be somewhere around the parliamentary elections in July, the outcome of those elections will clearly indicate that the newly-established government has the legitimacy to collect arms. The Palestinians, therefore, by the end of the first phase of the roadmap, will be in fulfillment of their commitments.

bitterlemons: You mentioned the US. In her just-completed visit, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice didn't mention the roadmap once. Is the US still interested in the roadmap?

Shikaki: I think the US at the rhetorical level is clearly committed to the roadmap. In reality, however, neither the US nor Israel has indicated that it is considering the activation of the roadmap in an operational fashion so that it can become binding and so that the actions of the two sides today would be measured by their commitment to the roadmap. The Americans have difficulty in pressing Sharon on settlements, for example, whether on freezing settlement construction all over the occupied territories, including expansion for "natural growth," or on the removal of outposts, which is also required by the roadmap.

The US, especially since the Israelis presented their disengagement plan, has given priority to that plan and has to a large extent ignored Israeli commitments with regards to the settlements. There are other

important Israeli commitments under the roadmap in addition to the settlements, but certainly, for the Palestinians, the settlement issue is one of the most urgent issues. If Israel does not freeze settlement construction, efforts by the Palestinians to improve the security situation are going to be seen by the Palestinian public as an attempt to preserve the status quo, even as the Israelis continue to change the status quo daily.

bitterlemons: You mentioned the unilateral disengagement plan. How does that alter the picture?

Shikaki: The Israeli disengagement plan can be considered as part of the implementation of the second phase of the roadmap. This disengagement is, in any case, not going to start for another six months or so. If we say the roadmap has already started, in six months the first phase of the roadmap will be over and it will be time for Israel to begin, as phase II states, taking further action on settlements and allowing the establishment of a Palestinian entity with provisional borders. That entity must have contiguous territory. Therefore, in implementing phase II, Israel not only needs to pull out of Gaza, but needs to carry out significant settlement evacuation in the West Bank as well.

bitterlemons: With the current Israeli government, isn't there a fear that it would prefer to see a phase II Palestinian state and nothing else?

Shikaki: I think the Palestinians will make a decision on the state with provisional borders based on what they see between now and when that time comes. It may be that the Palestinian Authority does not wish to change its current status to become such a state. What is important is that the Israelis evacuate the settlements, and that they remove the impediments to territorial contiguity. What the Palestinians wish to do with that is optional.

The roadmap clearly states that the Palestinians have the option of declaring a state with provisional borders. But the Palestinians may decide that they would rather keep the current political and legal status of the PA. This does not mean the Israelis would not have to implement their own commitments. These are not optional. The only optional part is whether the Palestinians should declare a state with provisional borders.

bitterlemons: If the US is not serious in pressuring Israel, how optimistic are you that we will witness a return to the roadmap?

Shikaki: I think it is very clear that we now have an opportunity in the post-Arafat period in which the Palestinians are demonstrating a

commitment to the implementation of the roadmap and, in fact, are already implementing it in terms of political reform, in terms of the unification of the security services and in terms of ending violence.

Ignoring all of this could lead to a situation of great disappointment on the Palestinian side, and this could have very serious consequences for the ability of the president to continue to maintain the existing ceasefire. This ceasefire is fragile, and will remain so unless it is part of a larger political process, which starts with the implementation of the roadmap and even goes further—we should be looking as quickly as possible at permanent status issues if we start implementing the roadmap. If Washington does not press Israel to go along with what the US has itself proposed, I think the reaction on the Palestinian side is going to be very negative.—*Published February 7, 2005 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

As if Palestinians are occupying Israeli land

a conversation with Zakaria al-Agha

bitterlemons: As someone who has observed United States involvement from the 1991 Madrid conference till now, how would you assess its role?

Al-Agha: I don't really see any important change from Madrid to Aqaba, despite that American policy under President George W. Bush has been far less involved than that under the administrations of presidents Clinton and Bush Sr. Perhaps over the last few weeks there has been some activation of the American role, but we have yet to feel any progress on the ground. To date, American policy from this administration still supports the Israeli point of view accusing Palestinians of being "terrorists" and accusing this struggle against occupation of being "terrorist," all of which negates the United Nations charter giving people under occupation the right to struggle against that occupation.

Despite the many years of occupation—now exceeding 36 years—there have been no effective measures implementing United Nations

Resolutions 338, 242 and 1397, as well as others related to the Palestinian problem. Indeed, we hope that this new activity of the Americans will be translated into a real vision on the ground and real progress in terms of pressuring the Israeli government to take measures to end the military occupation of the Palestinian territories, while first stopping Israeli aggression and settlement activities in those territories.

bitterlemons: Can you name some positive contributions that the United States has made in the history of the conflict?

Al-Agha: During Madrid and after, there was hope among Palestinians that the Americans would adopt an effective role. After President Bush's initiative in 1991 and the measures he took against Mr. Shamir at that time, we expected positive things. [Ed.'s note: George Bush Sr. withheld US loan guarantees until Israel agreed in part to stop some settlement construction.] We were also impressed by Mr. Clinton's active role and active sharing in solving the problem by receiving Mr. Arafat in the White House several times and visiting Palestine, but we were shocked after Mr. Bush came to office. He denied Palestinians the right to their elected president and banned President Arafat, thereby interfering with internal Palestinian affairs.

This negatively affected the Palestinian people, who felt that the Americans were following the lead of the Israelis—as if Palestinians were occupying Israeli land. Frankly, there is now mistrust between the Palestinian people and the American administration, but we hope that the American administration will take steps to restore trust. There must be good trust between the two sides.

bitterlemons: What was your opinion of Prime Minister Abbas' speech in Aqaba?

Al-Agha: The truth is that Mr. Abbas' statement was cause for criticism from the Palestinian people. Bush asked each leader to state his commitment towards the other side, but Mr. Sharon did not do this. It seemed to our people that Mr. Abbas was being pressured by the Americans and the Israelis, while Mr. Sharon was not. This was what made our people angry with this speech.

Maybe they expected Mr. Abbas to give a strong statement similar to that of Sharon, but because Mr. Abbas was addressing the Americans, international opinion and Israeli opinion, he forgot the opinion of his people. Sharon, on the other hand, first addressed his people. But this imbalance in the statements demonstrates once again that Mr. Abbas is sincere in his commitment to the roadmap, while Mr. Sharon is not.

bitterlemons: Do you think that the roadmap has failed?

Al-Agha: I can't say that, but I think it is in danger. I think Sharon and his friends are not sincere, but that the Americans can still make this roadmap succeed if they pressure the Israeli side. They have convinced Mr. Abbas, and even though his statement made problems among Palestinians, he remains committed to this process. Now the American role is to pressure Sharon.—*Published June 9, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

The Iraq War

AN ISRAELI VIEW

It really will create a new Middle East

a conversation with Shimon Peres

bitterlemons: How will a war in Iraq affect the [2003] elections in Israel?

Peres: Voters will go to the polls thinking about the Iraqi issue and relations with the US. The closer we are to war, the more security-minded the atmosphere will be.

bitterlemons: What sort of governmental coalition would you like to see after the elections?

Peres: A coalition with three goals: it will agree to enter negotiations with the Palestinians immediately; it will agree to a Palestinian state; and it will agree to change the electoral system by raising the threshold for entering the Knesset. It will be centrist, built around the two big parties, otherwise it won't have a majority. And it won't be dependent on the religious parties and the settlers. It will separate religion from politics. The alternative is a right-wing coalition that's dependent on the settlers.

bitterlemons: You are in effect pointing to the centrality of the settlements. What is your solution for them following elections?

Peres: Comprehensive dismantling of settlements only in the Gaza Strip. Everywhere else it's complicated, and I suggest three principles: removing isolated settlements; concentrating settlements in the settlement blocs, including land swaps with the Palestinians; and [that] anyone who does not wish to leave a settlement or move to a bloc will be permitted to remain under Palestinian rule, with Israel ensuring their safety.

bitterlemons: Will the conquest of Iraq by the United States bring about realization of your vision of a new Middle East?

Peres: After World War II, the central problem was communism. Today it's terrorism. The distinction favors communism, because it was never as aggressive as terrorism. It's not that America is attacking terrorism; terrorism attacked America. This is not a war in the sense of army vs.

army, but rather of organizing against terrorism. It is Iraq's proximity to nuclear weaponry that put it at the head of the list of objectives.

The question is whether the US will do the job alone or in harmony. I don't see a possibility of American failure in Iraq; the US is on the defensive and has no alternative. The discussion is whether the international reaction should only involve the war on terrorism, or the denial of infrastructure to terrorism as well. You can't eliminate terrorism without eliminating the infrastructure.

bitterlemons: As you understand the Americans, this is what they intend to do?

Peres: Not really, but I think they'll get to it, and that the conquest of Iraq will really create a new Middle East. Put differently: the Middle East will enter a new age. For the time being this will happen without us, as long as there's no Palestinian solution.

Many peoples in the region are ruled by frightened dictators who have to decide whom to fear more, the terrorists or the war against terrorism. [Syrian leader Bashar] Assad fears for his legitimacy due to the war against terrorism. [Palestinian leader Yasser] Arafat can also lose his legitimacy. The Saudis gave money for terrorism due to fear. No terrorist-sponsoring country is democratic. I don't believe in Huntington's clash of civilizations; within every civilization there's a clash. In those countries [that support terrorism] there will be revolutions. Television will play a role like in the collapse of the Iron Curtain. This will happen with the Palestinians, too. The Arab world is ripe for internal revolution like the USSR and China in the past decade.

bitterlemons: What will happen to the peace process in the post-war circumstances you have described?

Peres: There will be three actors: us, the Palestinians and the Quartet. We won't be able to play the powers off against one another any more. After Iraq, the Americans have no alternative but to cooperate with the Quartet. Two things happened here. On the positive side, the nature of the solution is more or less known. On the negative, trust has disappeared. This brings us to the Quartet's task. Unlike others, I don't think the Quartet should send the military here, but rather should grant financial assistance and legitimize a different Palestinian regime in which Arafat can remain if he's not the ultimate arbiter. [Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon's decision to accept the Bush plan will backfire on him. If Arik doesn't see the realities he won't remain prime minister.

bitterlemons: You are as optimistic as ever.

Peres: Look, there are no national strategies any longer. There's only national poverty. With the global economy, there are only global strategies. We're moving from a world of enemies that are national to a world of global dangers. Can you place boundaries on pollution? We in Israel are also living in the past. In 1965, I came out with the slogan "scientification of the country." They laughed at me: "That Peres with his dreams again." And look at us today... —*Published December 23, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

This is our hope

a conversation with Nabil Shaath

bitterlemons: When the Palestinian leadership looks past the Israeli elections and the war on Iraq, what does it see ahead?

Shaath: We would like to see a road to peace. What seems to be the major obstacle now to stopping the confrontations and ending the occupation is the specter of the war on Iraq and the elections in Israel on January 28. With these two on, the Americans have retreated from the position of putting the roadmap plan in force, and with these two on, there seems to be little likelihood that there will be a major advance for peace.

After that, we are really hoping that things will change and that the dynamics in Israel will be such as to push for peace; the dynamics in Palestinian society doing the same; and the international community applying more pressure to get the peace process moving. At least this is our hope.

bitterlemons: When members of the Palestinian Authority get together and think strategically about how best to pursue those goals, what are the key things you work on?

Shaath: We are working on things that we can control now. We are working on the constitution; we are working on Palestinian reform;

we are pursuing a dialogue with Hamas to stop all violence between [Palestinian factions] and stop all violence against civilians; we are engaged in a process of persuading the rest of the Arab world and international community to keep the hope alive and to push the American-sponsored roadmap.

We are also engaged in at least some form of dialogue with at last some Israelis. This is tricky because the more we engage in that dialogue, the more it can create some negative effects among those in Israel who would use this against these peace supporters. So, as much as we would obviously like to see win the elections the coalition that supports peace and an end to occupation, we have a limitation as to how much we can advocate this without embarrassing the Israeli parties.

bitterlemons: Can you say who those parties are?

Shaath: Well, they are obviously parties within the pro-peace camp in the Labor party and in Meretz.

bitterlemons: What do you think right now is the Palestinian Authority's biggest worry for the coming months?

Shaath: We are worried very much about the Israeli extreme right, which is now quite powerful within the present Israeli government, [and may] try to use the war on Iraq as a pretext for escalation against the Palestinian people, such as a full occupation of Gaza, an attempt to transfer Palestinians out of Jerusalem, or out of Palestine altogether.

We are afraid that the Israeli government and the Israeli extreme right will try to push aside the minimum constraints in the Geneva Convention by claiming that the Palestinians are just part of al-Qaeda and are doing what Osama bin Ladin did in New York, painting us with the Taliban [brush] and discounting any [Israeli] commitments as an occupier to the Geneva convention.

bitterlemons: How close do you think that we are to this scenario?

Shaath: We are not far. The present government includes many people who support this ideologically and are not hiding their orientation. Within the Israeli security agencies and the army, there are those who are trying to operationally translate ideologies into specific action.

However, I received assurances everywhere I went that this is not going to be tolerated. Mainly from [US Secretary of State Colin] Powell

himself, very clearly and very adamantly, and also from [German Foreign Minister] Joschka Fischer, [British Foreign Secretary] Jack Straw, [French President Jacques] Chirac and others. The world cannot possibly look aside if this happens. Therefore, even though there is great risk, I am not really an alarmist.

bitterlemons: If Ariel Sharon does win the Israeli elections, do you think that negotiations are possible with his government?

Shaath: From our point of view, we are ready. We have been ready. We have never taken the position that we decide who is the Israeli partner. But if the question is posed differently—do you think that the Israeli party led by Sharon is really ready to go to elections and willing to make these elections lead to real peace?—I say that I am really skeptical that that is going to happen, especially with what looks like the “new line” of the Likud party and the kind of partners Likud will have.

Not unless there is a real commitment by the Americans will anything push that kind of government to go back to real negotiations leading to peace. It is not impossible, but highly improbable.

bitterlemons: What is your message to the Israeli people, then, on the eve of elections?

Shaath: We, Israelis and Palestinians, both need to position ourselves as clearly and as early as possible to regain the peace process and regain the process of negotiations, guided this time by clear objectives and less manipulative ways of delaying forever the inevitable.

Second, I think that we should both act as clearly as possible against escalation, particularly against civilians—be they Palestinian or Israeli civilians—in order to reduce the wounds between our two people. This is a goal that needs to be pushed and supported by the Israeli people, as much as the Palestinian people.

Peace—it is inevitable that we will get back to it. So let us keep our contacts, our relations, our hopes and our visions directed to life after this confrontation and not be consumed by the confrontation. Let us move into action that will put both our efforts in the right direction.—
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A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Don't celebrate too soon

by Mouin Rabbani

The Anglo-American invasion of Iraq is eerily reminiscent of previous Middle East conflicts.

Denounced by most of the world as a manifestly illegal imperial tantrum, opposed by a clear majority of the United Nations Security Council, and the subject of a major trans-Atlantic slugfest, it harks back to the 1956 Suez debacle.

Conceived on the basis of a thoroughly bizarre and equally fanciful grand strategy, it reminds not a little of Ariel Sharon's adventurous attempt to reconfigure the region in 1982.

And ceaselessly advocated by Israel's ruling circles as the bolt of lightning that will resolve their combined military, political, and economic predicaments, it has much in common with that other famous "liberation" of Arab territory in 1967.

The view that Israel will emerge as the main regional winner of this war, and that its various adversaries will in the process be cut down to size or eliminated, is shared throughout the Middle East. While Israel certainly stands to gain in numerous ways—this is, after all, one of the reasons this war is being fought—celebration seems somewhat premature. Israel's military victories in 1956, 1967, and 1982, it bears remembering, ultimately resolved nothing. And viewed in historical perspective, they appear dubious indeed.

This is not to make light of the challenges that lie ahead. These will be many, difficult, and violent—perhaps even existential. Using the camouflage supplied by the roadmap, Israel will seek to administer the *coup de grace* to the Palestinian Authority and consolidate its hold on the occupied territories even further. To the north, a decisive clash with Hizballah is just a matter of time. And as the Sharonistas in Israel and Washington have long since made clear, Syria and Iran are already firmly within their crosshairs.

Terrible as all of this undoubtedly is, it will have unforeseen implications as well. In practical terms, it will amount to a reversion of the Arab-Israeli conflict to that which existed prior to 1967—a zero-sum game to eliminate

either Zionism or Palestinian nationalism from the region's political map, as opposed to a struggle to achieve a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of partition. As in the decade that followed the 1948 war, it will be defined by popular and clandestine struggles to undermine Arab governments that serve foreign interests, and the emergence of new movements to organize and sustain such struggles. Regime change, in other words, is not only what Washington decides. It will also take curious twists and turns—a process likely to intensify rather than mitigate conflict, whether with Israel or the United States.

What has been striking so far is the number of fanciful assumptions entertained about the current conflict by its advocates: that the UN and international community will fall into line once Washington demonstrates seriousness of purpose; that Turkish acquiescence is merely a matter of money and time; that the Iraqi military won't fight, causing the Iraqi regime to spontaneously combust the moment hostilities begin; that the main military challenge confronting US forces is how to prevent the rice and flowers offered by grateful Iraqis from clogging their tank engines.

Assumptions about The Day After, whether within Iraq or the region at large, will prove similarly fantastic. But as the wars of 1956, 1967, and 1982 demonstrate, it can take decades for the appropriate lessons to be learned. The only prediction that can therefore be made with certainty is that we're in for a very rough ride.—*Published March 24, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

A prelude to Israeli-Palestinian peace

by Shlomo Ben-Ami

In the Arab-Israel conflict, one must admit, wars were sometimes a catalyst for a political process. Arabs and Israelis alike learned the lesson of compromise only after they had exhausted all other possibilities.

Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir rejected a peace initiative by Egyptian President Sadat in 1972, condemning the parties to live the trauma

of the Yom Kippur War before they could assume the inevitability of compromise and reach a settlement some years later under the auspices of United States President Jimmy Carter. And it was the first intifada and Gulf war that served as the introduction to the Madrid Peace Conference and eventually to the Oslo accords.

I never believed that the American invasion of Iraq was justified and legitimate. Nevertheless, I welcomed it with the hope that it would force the Bush administration to repeat the logic of the first Gulf war and assume, once the war was over, a more resolute and assertive involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The immediate effect of the war was indeed that of creating improved conditions for a reactivation of the peace process. Iraq is defeated, Syria has presumably been “disciplined” and a formidable American military machine has been deployed on the Iranian border. The concern of the Arab regimes for their stability in the wake of the Iraq war, and their fear of Bin Ladin or “Bin Ladinism,” combined with American pressure, produced regional conditions for an attempt to create an all-Arab envelope of active support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process that are better than those that existed when US President Bill Clinton invited the parties to Camp David. Clearly the Saudi peace initiative and its eventual endorsement by the Arab League were closely linked to the effects of 9/11 and the Iraqi situation.

The major weakness of Clinton's peace enterprise lay in the deficiencies of his international diplomacy. Desperately short of quality political time at the end of his presidency, Clinton was unable to rally the Arab governments to his enterprise and could not build an alliance with the Europeans and the Russians to sustain his peace deal.

It is precisely on this point that the Bush administration is now positioned to perform better. The new global and regional conditions produced by 9/11, the dramatic decline in the position of the “rogue” states in the region—Iran's penchant for a revolutionary foreign policy may also be undermined by the very serious domestic challenges now faced by the regime—and the exhaustion of both Israelis and Palestinians by an intifada neither can really win, offered President Bush a unique opportunity to build an international alliance for peace in the Middle East (the Quartet may be such an alliance) that his predecessor could not put together.

After two years of relative indifference with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian track, the Bush administration learned from the Iraq war that a vital pillar of any grand strategic design to “restructure” the Middle

East will have to be an Israeli-Palestinian peace. The administration finally recognized that in a region where the leaders are mostly “pro-American” and the masses “anti-American,” one does not have to embrace the cynical discourse that all the ills of the Arab world come from Israel's occupation of the territories in order to accept that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a major cause of instability in the region, and a convenient platform for mass hysteria throughout the Arab and Muslim world.

America's Iraq adventure is not the first case in history where a “war of liberation” declined into a “war of occupation,” and the “liberator” became the “occupier.” America is today an occupying power in the heart of the Arab world, a condition that is bound to perpetuate the sense of humiliation and rage throughout the region. Addressing the Palestinian dilemma with the pledge to help create a Palestinian state is for the US a way to acquire a legitimacy of sorts for an embarrassing situation.

But with the specter of dead American soldiers and civil chaos in Iraq, and with no clear outline of an exit strategy, not to mention the domestic constraints on the president in an election year, it is very doubtful that the administration will be able to maintain for long such a high level of commitment and involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian labyrinth.

A totally different matter is whether the roadmap as such is the right tool for bringing about an Israeli-Palestinian peace. If a high degree of American involvement is maintained, the roadmap can perhaps help reactivate the peace process and probably even bring about a temporary end to violence.

The international platform that produced the roadmap, and the mechanisms of monitoring and supervision that the Americans plan to put in place, are all principles I have been advocating as a lesson from the collapse of our peace enterprise.

However, I believe that the roadmap is still inadequate. It repeats some of the major fallacies and weaknesses of the Oslo process. Sooner or later, peace will require that the parties be presented not just with a vague framework but with precise parameters for a final settlement, and that an American-led international mandate with a multinational force be put in place to assist the Palestinian Authority in its transition to full statehood and in disarming the militias. The mandate should likewise monitor and supervise Israel's compliance with its commitments.—
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Politics, Economics & the Public

AN ISRAELI VIEW

A society in the dark

by Lily Galili

About a million and a half poor people; 300,000 unemployed; the State Prosecutor investigating Prime Minister Ariel Sharon; 550,000 children below the poverty line; 12 women, one for each month, murdered during the past year by their partners; the Israel Police investigating Labor Party Chairman Amram Mitzna; some 15,000 families over the past year involved in eviction proceedings due to inability to pay their mortgages; about 150,000 eligible persons, including the elderly, disabled and new immigrants, waiting for public housing that has almost entirely ceased to be built inside the green line; rent support for the needy reduced during the past year, thereby forcing many to move to focal points of unemployment on the periphery or across the green line; the police investigating the primaries corruption scandal of Likud Member of Knesset Naomi Blumenthal; according to police reports, nearly 40 percent of new immigrant youth from the former Soviet Union using drugs; a special Knesset committee investigating the decline in the level of mathematics education in Israeli schools.

This is the face of Israeli society in 2003.

Taken at face value, there is no link among these phenomena; their connection to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is even more tenuous. Some are economic and welfare-oriented, some societal, while others involve issues of political integrity. Yet at the most fundamental level, they are all linked by an invisible thread: growing poverty, a deepening corruption of norms, a weakening democracy, growing interpersonal violence, declining educational levels—all byproducts of the ongoing conflict.

Their common denominator is that they all grow in the dark. For nearly 36 years, since June 1967, the Israeli spotlight has been pointed at one arena only, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When the spotlight focuses on

only one point, everything else is in the dark. And it is well known that in the dark, far from scrutiny, a lot of bad things can happen. Many in Israel have lately been quoting American Supreme Court Justice Brandeis, who said that, "Sunlight is the most powerful of all disinfectants." He was referring primarily to the transparency required in order to maintain orderly democratic life, but his remark can be applied to all walks of life, simply because with light you can see, and with darkness you can't.

Thus the darkness facilitates the growth of poverty, crime, hunger and corruption. The problem is not only that the situation mortgages economic and financial resources in ways that increase the damage inflicted on widespread strata of society—primarily Arabs, ultra-Orthodox and new immigrants. Worse, this "situation" mortgages intellectual and emotional resources to the extent that it renders Israeli society indifferent concerning everything happening within it as well.

Even the word "situation" is a byproduct of the "situation": a nebulous, laundered term that replaces a genuine effort to cope. Generally, it refers to the ongoing occupation and control over another people, the repeated terrorist attacks, the anxiety level and depth of pain that characterize Israeli life. Instead of courageously coping with each of these dilemmas, we speak in generalities about the "situation" as an ineluctable act of god.

This characterization applies equally to Israeli right and left. Both ends of the political spectrum are well aware of the economic, social and moral price that the ongoing conflict is exacting from Israelis. Put simply, the right still argues that the price is justified, or that there is no alternative, while the left is of two views. There are those who are more concerned with the ongoing damage inflicted by Israel on its neighbors, while others are worried primarily about the damage inflicted upon ourselves.

Nor are the two blocs of equal size. Over the past two years, the attacks, which have cost more than 700 Israeli lives including many children, have left little room for considerations of morality. While a growing camp on the left does focus on the question of what this is doing to us, its voice is lost in the din of terrorist attacks and military operations in the territories. In this symbiotic conflict, the questions regarding what all this does to "them" and what it does to "us" are inextricably linked.

Israel's recent electoral campaign painfully illustrated the corrosive effect of the conflict on Israeli society. In a reality where the ranks of the unemployed grow daily and more people slip under the poverty line, the elections might have been expected to focus on these issues. But that was not the case. Once again the election broadcasts focused

on Arafat, campaigns were promoted with shots of tanks heading into combat, and close-ups of terrorist attacks were shown to recruit votes. It worked. The weak and the poor, who should have demanded change in their own name, are once again supporting the same regime that brought them to this impasse. Even they lack the internal space to consider their own welfare.

The depth of despair is illustrated by the fact that this was the first election campaign in which the left did not promise peace and the right did not promise security. On the other hand, in the course of the campaign suspicions arose concerning acts of corruption in the Likud primaries, and published reports cast a heavy shadow over the behavior of senior members of the establishment. Nobody cared. The public is incapable of probing such issues while it is waiting for a possible mega-terrorist attack or is listening for the clatter of Israeli tanks entering Palestinian cities.

Thus, under cover of darkness and noise, the welfare state collapses and democracy is eroded—for nearly 36 years.—*Published January 27, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Barely surviving

by Adel Zagha

With the eruption of the confrontations in September 2000 and the subsequent tight closures of the Palestinian territories, the slim and unsustainable recovery begun by the Palestinian economy in 1998 came to an abrupt halt. In the 20 or so months since then, the economy has been decimated. The Israeli economy has also been negatively affected, although, unlike that of Palestinians, it is far ahead of barely surviving.

Does Israel want a proletariat revolution in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and against whom? Is the Israeli objective to test the accuracy

of modern weapons against suburban revolutions as Alain Joxe suggested in his May 19 lecture, "Countering Israel's role in the strategy of hegemony," at Birzeit University? Or are mere security concerns on the mind of the Israeli government?

The economic war waged against the Palestinian people is part of Israel's military and political war aimed at tiring Palestinians and bringing them to their knees. In the words of Israeli commentator for *Yedioth Ahronot* Ron Ben Eshai, "It is impossible to vanquish the al-Aqsa intifada militarily, but it is definitely possible to frustrate it and to wear out the Palestinians physically and economically until it dies out."

The strict land, sea and air blockade imposed on the 1967 Palestinian territories and between all Palestinian cities and villages is placing a stranglehold on the economy and its future prospects. The closure prevents 125,000 day laborers from getting to their jobs in Israeli markets. The resulting daily losses in remittances have been estimated at \$3.4 million dollars, which removes a principal source of income for the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). In 1999, those 125,000 workers contributed \$1.3 billion dollars to the Gross National Product - a fourth of the total. The World Bank estimates the total loss in Palestinian GNP at \$2.4 billion in real terms from September of 2000 until the end of December 2001.

In addition, more than 200,000 workers in the domestic economy are now unable to go to work due to the closure of roads between Palestinian towns. Even those who can get to work have not maintained the same level of contracts, wages or salaries. The percentage of unemployment in the occupied territories ranges between 40 to 50 percent, making the very concept irrelevant. The ratio of poverty in these areas is now unprecedented. The World Bank speaks of 1.5 million people living below the poverty line of two dollars a day.

This amounts to pauperizing the masses. Workers are thriving to survive under unbelievable conditions of suffocation. The result is obvious: continuous violence. The reaction is obvious: armed incursion and heavy military response for what Israel proudly calls the "destruction of terror infrastructure." It is a vicious circle.

The full blockade has virtually suspended the import of goods to the territories from abroad (including Jordan and Egypt), and between cities, not to mention internal trade. Construction activities, the leading sector in the '90s, have come to a halt. Only those engineering firms fulfilling contracts with the PNA for a few European Union- or Japan-funded projects still have something to do. Tourism that was to flourish

in peace is nearly dead. Those who built hotels, restaurants and so on have lost hope. The agricultural sector has been severely damaged, resulting in un-harvested crops and oversaturated West Bank and Gaza Strip markets. Fishing has been banned in Gaza, depriving hundreds of families from their main source of income.

Total losses to Palestinian infrastructure have amounted to more than \$750 million since the beginning of the confrontations.

The PNA is effectively bankrupt, since tax revenues have dwindled to one-fifth of previous levels. There is a sharp drop in PNA revenue collections associated with declining economic activity and disrupted tax administration, as well as Israel's suspension since December 2000 of the transfer of tax revenues collected on the PNA's behalf (over \$500 million at that time) and increasing emergency expenditures, particularly in the health sector.

The present situation is unsustainable. Households have in many cases exhausted their savings and capacity to borrow. Emergency employment schemes, for all their merits, have not significantly dented unemployment. The fiscal situation continues to deteriorate, and donor contributions have not closed the budget deficit. Up to now, the PNA has managed this deficit by borrowing from commercial banks, cutting salaries, squeezing operating costs and delaying the payment of bills, but all of these strategies are reaching their limit. By the end of 2001, the PNA's arrears amounted to \$430 million, most of these owed to Palestinian commercial suppliers (in turn placing significant pressure on Palestinian commercial banks). Significant health and environmental issues are arising with the increase in poverty.

Since the occupation in 1967, Israeli policy has continued to attempt to bind the occupied territories to the Israeli economy, both as a source of cheap labor and a captive market for its goods and services. The territories make up the third biggest buyer for Israeli exports, importing two billion dollars worth of Israeli goods annually while exporting only \$250 million in exchange. Hence the renewed interest of the Israeli and Palestinian bourgeoisie in returning to the "peace process" and cementing the economic subjugation of the Palestinians. The continuity of the confrontations constitutes an enormous source of danger to the Israeli economy and its investments.

Yes, security remains the top priority on the Israeli agenda. But the economy of confrontations tells us that squeezing Palestinians economically is a backfiring weapon against the Israeli economy itself, inasmuch as the "war on terror" creates a vicious never-ending circle

of violence. What is left, after all, is the fact that peace can only be achieved through genuine efforts at the negotiations table to achieve development, so that the process of twinning peace and development can create the social base for a long-lasting peace.—*Published May 27, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Winning over public opinion

by David Kimche

Have you ever stood at a busy street intersection, holding up a large placard, demonstrating against your prime minister? I did that, back in May 1998, when Binyamin Netanyahu had brought the peace process to its knees. I felt very foolish and embarrassed at first until I grew accustomed to the stares, the catcalls, the hooting of the cars and also—luckily—the well-wishers. For a whole week, some of my colleagues and I stayed in a “peace tent” that we erected on the pavement near the prime minister’s home in Jerusalem. During that week, many hundreds of citizens visited our tent, to identify with us or to argue with us. More to the point, we had full media coverage, especially after the City Council tried to evict us and we appealed to the High Court.

I believe that the fact that some prominent professors and a former director-general of the foreign ministry were willing to spend a week on an inhospitable Jerusalem sidewalk had an effect on some people. A hundred, nay, a thousand such acts would have had considerably greater effect. And this, in a nutshell, is the dilemma of the peace movements in Israel—how to make an impact that can affect public opinion.

There are today some 30 major peace movements in Israel, and a similar number of smaller fly-by-night groups of concerned citizens who meet to discuss how they can become relevant. Representatives of those 30 movements met together recently under the aegis of the “Peace Coalition” to discuss possibilities of greater cooperation, but there was

no breakthrough on the vital question of how to impact public opinion. One of their major problems is the dearth of funds needed to organize activities. Another problem is the lack of interest in their activities on the part of the media. A newspaper editor once cynically told me: “Peace stories don’t sell newspapers, nor do stories about Arabs, unless there is a negative slant.”

Huge Peace Now demonstrations, which take an enormous effort to organize, are rewarded at best with 30 seconds of coverage on TV and a few lines in the press. No wonder that hands are lifted in despair, that many fall by the wayside.

Yet the despair is not justified. The pessimism is out of place. For the truth is that the activities of these 30 or more peace movements have had an enormous impact on public opinion and have helped to shape the attitude existing in Israel today favoring a withdrawal from the occupied territories and a dismantling of settlements in return for a real peace with the Palestinians. Dr. Tamar Hermann, one of the leading experts on public opinion in Israel, confirmed this to me after making an exhaustive study of the co-relationship of peace activities and public opinion.

Indeed, the plethora of peace movements and splinter peace groups existing in Israel today is in itself significant. Each one has its ways and means to influence its own circle, each one has its own *modus operandi*.

The situation in the Arab world is different, but there, too, there have been some significant developments, especially in Palestinian society. The tireless efforts of Sari Nusseibeh to recruit supporters for his joint declaration with Ami Ayalon are creating a new kind of dialogue in the Palestinian street. More than 20,000 Palestinians have already signed the declaration.

Similarly the activities of the Copenhagen Group, formally known as the International Alliance for Arab-Israel Peace, have created a new agenda, not only for the Palestinians, but also in Egypt and in Jordan. The Copenhagen Group is unique in the sense that it is the only regional peace movement in the Middle East. It is the only movement in which Egyptians, Jordanians, Israelis and Palestinians work together in friendship and in harmony for a common cause—the promotion of peace and the creation of a public opinion amenable to peace.

Under the slogan “Peace is too important to be left only to governments,” the Group has held numerous activities, such as the “Partners in Peace”

conference held in Copenhagen in May 2003 in which more than 100 members of the four chapters of the Group participated.

The mere fact that Arabs, among whom were leading intellectuals such as the late Lutfi el-Khouli, agreed to work together with Israelis in the same organization has had a dramatic effect. There have been literally hundreds of articles written in the Arab press for—and against—Copenhagen. The press conference that was held after the Group's Peace Conference in Cairo in 1999 was attended by more than 100 Arab journalists. Fuad Ajami, Edward Said and other leading Arab intellectuals have all written about the Copenhagen phenomenon.

Peace Now, Copenhagen, the Peres Center for Peace, Nusseibeh-Ayalon, and all the other peace movements are, each in its own way, contributing to creating a new climate in the Middle East. The difficulties are tremendous. Given the extremism, the hatred, the prejudices existing on both sides of the divide, their work is all the more important and their success all the more remarkable.—*Published August 7, 2003 in bitterlemons-international.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Public opinion is critical but complicated

by Khalil Shikaki

Public opinion is a critical component for any peacebuilding strategy. It provides leaders, movements, and agreements with legitimacy, or deprives them of it. Leaders know that if they want to be reelected, they must keep their fingers on the so-called “pulse of the street.”

Of course, it is a little more complicated. For example, charismatic leaders who enjoy lots of legitimacy can sell agreements that are painful or have little legitimacy in the eyes of their public. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin did it when he brought the Palestine Liberation Organization to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip after signing the Oslo agreement; and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat did it when he accepted that same agreement that neither addressed the major issues of the conflict, nor

explicitly froze settlement activities. Yet, in both cases, two-thirds of the public supported the Oslo agreements once the positions of the leaders became known. Conversely, those same leaders can also block the door to agreements that enjoy public legitimacy and support.

To make things more complicated, publics have different needs and priorities. Both Palestinian and Israelis want peace on the one hand and security and/or land and rights on the other. Public perception of behavior appropriate for obtaining security (for example, by voting for Ariel Sharon or Hamas) may be incompatible with public perception of behavior suitable for obtaining peace (for example, accepting a viable two-state solution). One's ability to tap the sources of moderation is sensitive to one's ability to neutralize the sources of “deviant”—or contradictory—behavior, something that may not always be feasible.

On the other hand, pressing the “fear” buttons by raising the threat perception of the public, even if done by moderates such as Ehud Barak since his failed reelection bid, can generate extreme views on the peace process. Efforts by right-wing groups and leaders to frighten the Israeli public regarding the implications of an Israeli recognition of the right of return for Palestinian refugees, or efforts by Palestinian extremists with suicidal missions fall into the same category.

But perhaps the worst enemy of public opinion is misperception. In a June 2003 survey on Israeli and Palestinian opinion on the peace process, Yaakov Shamir of Hebrew University and I found that 65 percent of Israelis and 52 percent of Palestinians support the proposal that after the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and the settlement of all issues in dispute, there would be a mutual recognition of Israel as a state of the Jewish people and Palestine as the state of the Palestinian people. Yet, both publics are not aware of this mutual level of support: only 37 percent of the Palestinians believe that a majority of Israelis supports that recognition, and only 32 percent of the Israelis believe that a majority of Palestinians supports such recognition.

Moreover, in the Palestinian survey, only 40 percent believe that a majority of Palestinians supports such recognition; this indicates that this Palestinian “public” opinion is still partly private.

Similarly, the reaction of some Palestinians to the findings of the recent refugee survey conducted in the West Bank-Gaza, Lebanon, and Jordan by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research was excessive because the views expressed by the refugees were until then private. The findings have shown a majority of refugees wanting to reside in the Palestinian state after being granted the right of return.

Misperception and miscommunication are often accompanied by distrust. The same Israeli-Palestinian surveys have also shown that a majority in both publics believes that its leaders will stand by their commitments to the roadmap (57 percent of the Palestinians and 59 percent of the Israelis). But it suspects the other leader's intentions: only 15 percent of Palestinians believe Sharon will stand by Israel's commitments, and only 30 percent of Israelis think that Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas will stand by Palestinian commitments.

Driven by various needs and subject to fear, misperception, miscommunication and distrust, public opinion can be lethal to peace movements. Understanding its complexity is imperative. One of the tasks of peace movements should be to expose each side to the views of its own public while helping each public become better informed of the opinion of the other side.—*Published August 7, 2003 in bitterlemons-international.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

We need a transformational approach, too

a conversation with Aaron David Miller

bitterlemons-international: How do you define the role of public opinion in promoting Middle East peace?

Miller: Based on the past 25 years of my involvement in formal Arab-Israel negotiations, I discern two very disturbing trends. One is that, unlike in Northern Ireland, where popular pressure and grass roots mobilization brought the sides to the negotiating table, in the Middle East public opinion has played a negative role in Arab-Israel conflict resolution.

Secondly, the work I did as a State Department negotiator, from the late 1980s to the collapse of Camp David II and the advent of the Clinton parameters, was largely transactional, i.e., negotiations were viewed as a business proposition. Now we have to add the transformational

approach if we are to succeed. Political agreements that are essentially transactional cannot produce real changes in attitude. In addition we need individuals, groups and public constituencies to define relationships. Only people will define the character and quality of peace.

bitterlemons-international: What does this say about the chances for peace?

Miller: I've concluded that the timeline for Israeli-Palestinian peace is very long. I don't see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ending next month or [next] year or in five years. If this is truly a generational conflict, passed on from generation to generation, then we, the powers-that-be, better start caring about investing in the next generation. We (the US, Israel, the Palestinians) made fundamental mistakes over the past 10 years by not taking seriously people-to-people movements. As a negotiator [I realize that] we didn't analyze the element of time and its impact; we thought we could fix everything too quickly. Three years ago at Camp David we risked total collapse if we failed—due to lack of proper preparation, lack of alternatives, and not thinking about what comes afterwards.

bitterlemons-international: How are you addressing that challenge?

Miller: I left the State Department in January 2003 to deal with this. Seeds of Peace is unique in that it bridges the gap between transactional and transformational diplomacy. The kids, ages 14 to 16, are sanctioned by their governments, and represent the practical center, which is where peace will be made. The adult delegation leaders are also chosen by their governments and establishments. So there's a link to reality, to politics and to power. We bring them to a facility in Maine for three summer sessions. There are currently 160 young Israelis, Palestinians and other Arabs from Tunisia, Qatar, Egypt and Jordan, with their flags and anthems. They change in the way they look at one another after hearing the other side's narrative. They want their leaders to produce the same sort of transformative change.

bitterlemons-international: That's a very small vanguard.

Miller: Hamas may be running 10,000 or 15,000 kids through their summer camps, while we have run 2,500 kids through our camps in 11 years.

bitterlemons-international: Could you expand on the reasons why we in the Middle East are so different from, say, Northern Ireland, regarding the influence of public opinion?

Miller: The stakes in the Middle East are perceived to be existential, and so high that the capacity for change is limited and the ability to dole out punishment is not. There's an expression in Arabic: "The wet man is not afraid of the rain." Once you're wet, it doesn't matter how wet you get.

On the Israeli side, there is a notion that the state knows best. There seems to be a genuine lack of legitimacy to public movements and popular pressure. You saw it work regarding Lebanon but never anywhere else in the Arab-Israel arena. Breakthroughs were produced when leaders or their proxies met in dark rooms and the leaders dared to go beyond the views of their constituencies, e.g., Begin and Sadat, Rabin and Hussein, Rabin and Arafat.

On the Palestinian side, I can't answer the question except with reference to the asymmetry of power. The occupation and the absence of a legitimized diversity of views have stopped any movement, let alone non-violent movements, from emerging. There have been efforts in the past but they've never come to much.

In my judgment this is one of the key unexplored issues in the conflict: the absence of the public's capacity to mobilize.

bitterlemons-international: Can you assess the impact of diasporas on public opinion regarding peace movements?

Miller: Sadly, the reality is that 10,000 miles away, the fears and anxieties are magnified. Far from serving as a bridge, American Jews and Arabs serve as a wall. I've never understood why these communities cannot serve as a vanguard of dialogue on some of these issues. The efforts that are made do not represent the mainstream.

bitterlemons-international: Why are peace movements in the Arab countries either weak or nonexistent?

Miller: There are stronger peace movements in Israel than in the Arab countries. Diversity of opinion is natural to a democracy. Israel's peace movement doesn't necessarily have strong organization or tactics, but it is allowed to exist. In Egypt and Jordan, it is far more difficult.

But public opinion has little impact on the leadership in any of these countries. Where are the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who say "enough already"? You get some of that on the left, but [you don't get] the centrist response you appear to have gotten in Northern Ireland on both sides.—*Published August 7, 2003 in bitterlemons-international.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

The dangers of economic separation

by Ephraim Kleiman

Because of the great size disparity between the Palestinian and the Israeli economies, the character of the economic relationship between them is of much greater importance to the Palestinians than to Israel. Decisions regarding this relationship should, therefore, be left in their hands.

In view of the short distances between the population and business centers of the two parties, the length and geographically-convoluted nature of the border between them, and the fact that there has been no customs boundary between them in the last three decades, the desirable trade arrangement for the Palestinians seems to be a customs union. This allows the free movement of goods between the two parties, unhindered by any economic control or barrier, but also requires imports from the rest of the world to be taxed at the same rates in both.

The high probability of Israel not admitting Palestinian workers in large numbers in the foreseeable future lends great importance to the substitution of exports of Palestinian labor by exports of goods produced by this labor in the Palestinian economy itself, which a customs union will facilitate marketing in Israel. The security barrier now being established creates a physical border that also makes feasible various degrees of economic separation, such as a free trade area agreement (FTA), or even a trade regime that does not discriminate at all in favor of imports from the neighboring country.

The sharp economic decline in the Palestinian territories since Oslo, following the deterioration in the security situation, has given rise there to the mistaken impression that the cause of the economic troubles is the customs union set up by it. This impression was furthered by a World Bank study that failed to separate the impact of the closures and the security restrictions from that of the customs union itself. But whatever the result of the Palestinian debate on this matter, the two economies seem bound to drift apart in the future.

It is difficult to envisage today a reasonable mechanism for joint decision-making, such as a customs union requires, that would be acceptable to both sides. Furthermore, the mutual lack of trust and the perceived power imbalance can be expected to result in attempts by individual Palestinians to evade the agreed-upon rules, provoking an over-

reaction of the Israeli customs authorities that will impede trade flows. The experience of the past two years might also make the Palestinian authorities prefer an arrangement that does away with Israel's power to withhold from the Palestinian treasury the customs and VAT revenues collected for it by Israel.

Economic separation might, however, have serious adverse effects on the Palestinian economy, making it undesirable for both the Palestinians and Israel. Even if the slide toward it is unavoidable, all effort should be made to minimize the damage it causes. In principle, the security barrier can be consistent even with a customs union. But in practice, by raising the transportation and transaction costs of Palestinian exports, it renders them less profitable.

There are, on both sides, those who welcome the setting up of a physical border as providing the opportunity for establishing the permanent economic relationship on an FTA basis. Such an agreement allows each party to pursue its own customs and indirect tax policies, but exempts from customs duties goods produced in the other one. The definition of what constitutes local production for this purpose greatly restricts the import component that can be embodied in it. Palestinian exporters can be expected to encounter considerable difficulties in satisfying the Israeli authorities' demand of proof that their merchandise fulfills these "rules of origin." These difficulties cannot be dismissed by arguing that a physical border in any case creates a trade obstacle, as the costs of obtaining certificates of origin, of their examination and of the verification of the goods conforming to them raises this hurdle further.

But the greatest danger in turning the physical border also into an economic one, even within an FTA agreement, is that it will invite pressures for the further widening of economic separation. There are those in both economies who wish to be protected from competition from the other. In particular, for some years already there have been calls in the Palestinian economy to impose protective tariffs on "infant industries" supposedly requiring a period of hothouse conditions to be able to compete with Israel's. Such a step can be expected to raise a demand for retaliation in the form of a protective tariff on Palestinian goods, and pretty soon the FTA agreement might start to unravel in practice, if not in theory.

There is no real alternative in sight today to the markets Israel provided for the Palestinian economy. Restrictions on its access to them are bound to take a heavy toll in poverty, misery and widespread unemployment, making it imperative to minimize their scope.—*Published January 13, 2003 in bitterlemons.org*

A WESTERN VIEW

Palestinian economic revival

by Nigel Roberts and Stefano Mocci

The World Bank has spent much of the last year analyzing and discussing with the Palestinian Authority, the Government of Israel, and the international community what is needed to revive the devastated Palestinian economy, and what it will take to develop a new and healthier economic relationship between Israel and the PA. We have done so knowing that economic growth and prosperity by themselves might not guarantee peace, but that stagnation, unemployment and widespread poverty make any search for reconciliation infinitely more difficult.

When the GOI announced in June 2004 its plan to withdraw from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank, the World Bank was asked by the PA, the GOI and the donors to review the initiative's potential impact on the Palestinian economy. In the report *Stagnation or Revival? Israeli Disengagement and Palestinian Economic Prospects*, issued in December 2004, the Bank concluded that disengagement in and of itself will not make an appreciable difference to the prostrate Palestinian economy. A lot more than the act of disengagement is needed if Palestinian economic fortunes are to be revived.

The report, endorsed and adopted by the international community at recent conferences in Oslo and London, emphasized the need for a sustained flow of foreign assistance. It also argued, however, that foreign aid is not the key factor in bringing about economic revival. A cursory appraisal of the history of donor assistance in recent years illustrates this. During the intifada, donors doubled their annual disbursements to almost one billion dollars per year—over \$300 per person per year, itself a record in the annals of foreign assistance. And yet, at the same time, Palestinian personal incomes contracted by almost 40 percent in real terms. This is a graphic illustration of how a malign policy environment can overwhelm the benefits of additional donor assistance. Only if this environment changes can donor assistance achieve very much at all.

What exactly do we mean by the policy environment in this case? We are talking about all of the restrictions on the movement of Palestinian goods and people imposed during the intifada. These have so severely distorted and compressed the functioning of the economy that returns on investment are now for the most part negligible. If disengagement is to

have much positive impact on the Palestinian economy, it will therefore need to be accompanied by a swift dismantling of closures. This, in turn, places a premium on the PA and on Palestinians to restore law and order and to abide by Palestinian security obligations as defined under the roadmap. In addition, in order to attract back the private investors whose efforts are essential to the achievement of sustained growth, the PA will need to accelerate its program of internal governance reforms in areas like legal and judicial reconstruction and combating corruption.

These complementary activities can be defined collectively as “preconditions” for Palestinian economic revival. Only once these policy changes begin to take root will donor assistance have any positive transformational impact (as opposed to merely slowing the speed of economic decline, as it does now). Put another way, donor developmental assistance can only bring sustainable growth if the policy environment changes first. In this sense the Bank has argued that meaningful progress on closure, security and reform is a necessity if one wishes to achieve a “quantum leap” in levels of donor developmental assistance. In adopting this logic, the donor community, at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) in Oslo in December 2004, requested the Bank to translate its recommendations into a set of concrete steps that should be taken by the PA and the GOI—and to assess progress toward implementation.

The Bank has since then been working with officials of the PA and the GOI to identify possible practical ways of dismantling today’s closure regime without compromising Israel’s security, as well as seeking new ways to support Palestinian reform. One aspect of this work has involved a dialogue on options to improve the border passages and terminals. Israel wishes to upgrade these terminals into modern, efficient and secure facilities. The Bank has proposed an approach to border management in which cargo flows would be regularized and determined principally by market demand, involving the adoption of internationally-accepted terminal service standards, modern risk management techniques and commercial dispute resolution mechanisms. Critically, these new facilities should dispense with today’s highly disruptive back-to-back system of cargo inspection. To permit this new management philosophy to be implemented without appreciable risk, the terminals need to be equipped with the latest security scanning equipment.

Efficient border terminals alone will not be enough to revive the economy, however. Israel will need to adopt a more comprehensive approach to dismantling closure, including the removal of the checkpoints and roadblocks introduced into the West Bank during the intifada, and establishing a flow of people and goods between Gaza and the West

Bank adequate to maintain the economic coherence of the two parts of the Palestinian territory. It will also be important to maintain a reasonable and predictable flow of Palestinian labor into Israel while Palestinians seek to reduce their excessive economic dependency on Israel and to develop export competitiveness—something likely to take many years, and to require transitional support of various kinds from Israel and the donors. Important, too, is to maintain the current quasi-customs union economic relationship between Israel and the PA, in both Gaza and the West Bank—at least until such time as new and appropriate arrangements can be mutually agreed.

There is some cause for optimism these days, but the road to Palestinian economic recovery will not be an easy one, even if the parties can agree on how it should be constructed. The Bank’s December report speaks of a recession “of historic proportions,” of a “loss of all economic dynamism,” and of the PA’s fading political control and popular support. Even under the most optimistic assumptions, the PA will face daunting challenges as it attempts to cater to its rapidly expanding population.

Unless a solid start is made very soon, the goal of recovery and eventual prosperity may slip from our collective grasp, condemning Palestinians to long-term penury and Israel to the possibility of an impoverished, bitter and angry neighbor. And in this context it has to be said that very little has changed on the ground since the Bank delivered its December warning.—*Published April 21, 2005 in bitterlemons-international.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Are the Palestinian Arabs in Israel radicalizing?

by Sammy Smooha

The division between Arabs and Jews in Israel within the pre-1967 borders is deep indeed. The Palestinian Arab minority emerged in 1948 under the tragic circumstances of war, occupation, destruction, and population transfers. In Israeli eyes, it became part of the enemy and

was put under military administration for 18 years. Both Arabs and Jews see themselves as indigenous to Israel and demand exclusive rights to the same territory.

The Arabs are a disadvantaged, working-class community in a middle-class society. They are totally isolated from the Jews: 90 percent of them live in all-Arab communities and 10 percent in separate neighborhoods in Jewish cities. They do not enjoy power-sharing and suffer from discrimination in public budgets and appointments and in private sector hiring.

Arab-Jewish relations are also marred by profound discord over three ideological issues: the Jewish-Zionist nature of the state, the narrative and solution to the Palestinian question, and the appropriate regional integration of Israel. To put the Arab predicament in blatant terms, Israeli Arab citizens constitute a minority that is visible, ethnic-religious, linguistic-cultural, national, inassimilable, discriminated against, suspect of disloyalty, and dissident. It is a minority that is highly mobilized and fighting to transform its status.

These features of the Arab minority underpin the “radicalization thesis,” which is prevalent among the Israeli establishment, Jewish public, media, and academics. Another version of it (“resistance thesis”) is widespread among the Arabs as well. According to this thesis, the Arabs are becoming increasingly alienated from the Jews and the state. Violent conflict is inevitable and imminent, as evidenced in the bloody October 2000 Arab uprising.

The historical forces that propel the Palestinians in Israel include the Palestinization of their identity and the Islamization of their way of life and world outlook. The Arabs reject their position as a minority and regard themselves as part of the regional Muslim Arab majority. Their partial modernization, including a high fertility rate, disables them from fulfilling their escalating aspirations. They feel highly-deprived compared to the Jews. They are angry at the protracted Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and at the continued humiliation of their people. Jewish state negligence and discrimination and growing Jewish ethnocentrism and intransigence are drawing the Arab minority further from the state and the Jews.

This view of the Arab minority is so compelling that few dare to challenge it. In the late 1970s, I formulated the counter “politicization thesis.” It posits that radicalization forces have been counterbalanced by stronger processes that make the Arab citizens more politicized in their national consciousness, keenly impatient with discrimination and exclusion, and

militant in their struggle for equality and peace. They are undergoing Israelization that links them in various ways to Israeli society. They are getting used to, and finding numerous advantages in, life in Israel: modern lifestyles, welfare state benefits, rule of law, democracy. They dearly cherish Israeli citizenship.

The growing democratization of the Jewish state expands and protects Arabs’ individual and group rights. Peacemaking with the Arab world and the Palestinians since 1977, notwithstanding severe setbacks, has made Israel more acceptable and legitimate in Israeli Arab eyes. The Jewish majority is gradually resigning itself to the existence of an Arab minority with equal rights.

Which thesis is more scientifically valid? I believe that politicization, rather than radicalization, squares better with the hard facts: the intense Arab struggle is largely democratic and peaceful, the Arabs have not participated in the two violent intifadas, they continue to take part in parliamentary politics despite its limited gains, they believe in a two-state solution, and they reject vehemently any intimation to cede the Arab Little Triangle [an Arab populated part of Israel west of the green line] to a new Palestinian state. They have developed as a separate segment of the Palestinian people with the destiny of remaining in Israel and playing the patriotic role, approved by both Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, of a pro-Palestinian lobby.

The Palestinization of their identity, culture, and ties is moderated by their pervasive Israelization. Even their Islamization is restrained by the realization that as a Muslim minority in a Jewish state, they cannot and must not try to take over and Islamize the state, in contradistinction to the main thrust of the fundamentalist Islamic movements in Muslim countries.

Public opinion surveys that I have been conducting since 1976 provide ample attitudinal evidence for these incontrovertible facts: 21.5% of the Arabs rejected Israel’s right to exist in 1976, 6.8% in 1995 and 10.2% in 2003; 17.9%, 6.0% and 3.1%, respectively, supported the use of violence in order to improve their condition in Israel; 32.9%, 10.3% and 5.6%, respectively, defined their identity as Palestinian devoid of an Israeli component. These are only several highlights to illustrate that the data do not confirm the radicalization thesis.

A new series of surveys, launched in 2003 as “The Arab-Jewish Relations Index,” sheds more light on the Israeli Arab orientation. To cite just a number of findings: 82.4% of the Arabs favor the inclusion of the Arab parties in coalition governments; 70.7% fear state violence;

74.1% agree that the Palestinian refugees should be compensated and settled in Palestine only; 54.6% think that in the sphere of culture Israel should integrate more in Europe-America than in the Middle East; 72.1% consider Israel as a Zionist state to be racist; 53.3% feel estranged and rejected in Israel as citizens; and 68.7% approve of the solution that “the Arab minority would enjoy democratic rights, receive its proportional share of the budget and run its religious, educational, and cultural institutions.” These and many other results reveal a complex picture, a mixed bag, neither black nor white, of Arabs who tie their life and future with Israel, seek integration without assimilation, and desire to fulfill their national aspirations through a separate Palestinian state and cultural autonomy within Israel.

The point of departure for change requires abandoning the radicalization perspective and conceding that the present version of a Jewish and democratic state does not work anymore. Since the Jewish-Zionist character of the state is hegemonic for the Jews and the option of a binational state desired by the Arabs is infeasible, the only just and workable dispensation for the Palestinian Arab minority is a new formula of a Jewish and democratic state that both sides can tolerate and that can revitalize and rebuild Arab-Jewish coexistence.—*Published June 24, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

VIEW OF A PALESTINIAN CITIZEN OF ISRAEL

Democratic toward Jews and Jewish toward Arabs

a conversation with Ahmed Tibi

bitterlemons-international: Are Arab-Jewish relations inside Israel becoming more tolerant or more tense?

Tibi: There is a growing rift in relations between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority inside Israel. It has increased especially during the four years of intifada, mainly during the October 2000 demonstrations when 13 of us were shot dead by the Israel Police. Another 15 were

shot dead during the following two and half years, sporadically, by Israeli police forces. This has created growing feelings among the Arab minority that the system, and mainly the Jewish majority, is dealing with us as enemies, not co-citizens.

bitterlemons-international: Against the backdrop of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, how do you understand the relationship between Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians elsewhere?

Tibi: I describe the Palestinian people as a triangle. The base is the West Bank and Gazan population. One side is the diaspora Palestinians, while the other side, the shortest one, is the Palestinian citizens of Israel. We are the smallest [component], but without us there is no triangle. And we are different because we are citizens of Israel, with the positive and negative implications of that.

We are the group most interested in ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because we believe in principle in an end to the occupation and the self-determination of the Palestinian people, but also because, in view of our civic standing, we believe that ending the occupation will improve Jewish-Arab relations. But these relations will also be intensified once a Palestinian state comes into existence, with issues of equality, discrimination, national minority status, etc., coming to the fore in Israel.

bitterlemons-international: Does Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s disengagement plan serve these objectives?

Tibi: In a sense, any progress [toward ending the conflict] will help us. We can’t say no to withdrawal from any settlement or a single meter of territory. We want to see a gradual process of ending the entire occupation. But this is not Sharon’s direction, because he himself says that his plan is the worst for the Palestinian side. He’s leaving Gaza but encircling it, making it a big jail. International passage will still be controlled by the occupation, and most important, Sharon is saying—and I believe him—that he’s withdrawing from Gaza to deepen the Israeli presence in the West Bank, including building the wall and gaining legitimization for the settlement blocs. So we are very cautious with this project, and I cannot support it in the Knesset.

bitterlemons-international: How do you assess the Orr Commission of Inquiry report on the events of October 2000 and the Lapid ministerial committee’s recommendations for implementing it?

Tibi: I have some reservations about the report, but its background description of the Arab-Jewish relationship is very important. And some of the conclusions are important.

As an official commission, the law says the conclusions should be implemented immediately by the government. But [instead] the government formed a new committee, the Lapid committee, including great haters of Arabs like [ministers] Effie Eitam, Beni Elon, Tzachi Hanegbi, Gideon Ezra, etc. They proposed emptying the Orr report of its contents, with not one conclusion regarding those who shot 13 of us. The Lapid committee is a total failure, a conspicuous cover-up attempt. Letting Eitam and Elon deal with this is like letting the butcher herd the sheep.

bitterlemons-international: How does Israel's Arab minority deal with Israel's definition of itself as a Jewish and democratic state?

Tibi: Israel defines itself as Jewish and democratic, but in all spheres of life there is inequality between Jews and Arabs. We do not accept this definition; it deepens the inequalities. There is a contradiction between democracy and an ethnic definition of a Jewish state. In the end Israel is indeed both [democratic and Jewish], but it is democratic toward Jews and Jewish toward Arabs.

bitterlemons-international: How, in your view, does the rest of the Arab world view the Palestinian population of Israel?

Tibi: Lots of ignorance was evident during most of the last 50 years of non-relations between the Arab world and Israel's Arab minority. Part [of the Arab world] did not know we existed. Others accused us of cooperation with the Zionist project. This was the situation until 15-20 years ago. Recently there is more and more [Arab] understanding of our situation, our status, our political struggle and way of thinking. We are known in the Arab capitals; we are invited and accepted there.

bitterlemons-international: Can you offer a prediction regarding your situation in, say, ten years?

Tibi: I am asked this question every ten years! I don't know, really, because there are a lot of factors dominating this issue: we [Palestinian citizens of Israel], the Arab states, the [Israeli] state as an institution, the Jewish majority, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the growing trend in Israeli society of supporting the transfer idea, [Minister of Finance Binyamin] Netanyahu's declaration that the Israeli Arabs are more of a demographic threat than those in the West Bank and Gaza, and economic factors.

I, as a leader of the Palestinian minority in Israel, am interested in bridging the gap between minority and majority. We have a joint, bilateral interest—all of us—in accepting [the Palestinian citizens of Israel] as a national minority with rights and national dignity.

bitterlemons-international: If this happens, could Israel then still claim to be a Jewish state?

Tibi: In principal, I cannot accept an ethnic definition. But we should all try to bridge the gap even under this definition, which is part of Israeli basic law. We can do a lot even in these circumstances.—*Published June 24, 2004 in bitterlemons.org*

Camp David

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Barak was willing, and so were US Jews

by Yossi Alpher

Perhaps there will always be those who doubt that former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, for all his critical faults, fully hoped and intended to reach a final status agreement with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat at Camp David, and that he took tremendous risks in pursuing that goal. The modest task that Barak assigned me at that time left little doubt in my mind exactly how serious he was.

During the weeks leading up to Camp David, Barak's government was coming apart at the seams. Its detractors from within, led by cabinet minister Natan Sharansky, were energetically explaining to the American Jewish community and the media that the peace plan Barak would bring to Camp David constituted a betrayal of Israel's most fundamental interests. Barak himself, who did not know the American dynamic well, had been neglecting the US scene. He seemed to believe that he could ignore Congress and the media as long as he coordinated closely with President Bill Clinton. Moreover, for domestic political reasons he had entrusted the Israel Foreign Ministry to David Levi, who disapproved of Barak's peace plans and to a large extent prevented Israeli diplomats in the US from speaking out in favor of the prime minister's intentions. By late June 2000, full page ads were being published by Jewish organizations in American papers warning against the prospective peace "sell out."

At the eleventh hour, the prime minister recognized that he had a problem: if an agreement were achieved at Camp David, Barak and President Clinton would have a hard time selling Congress and the American public on the need to allocate the billions of dollars that would be required for refugee rehabilitation, water desalination, and Israel's emerging security needs. I was given the title "Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister," and asked to help persuade the US media and senior Jewish leaders that Barak deserved their support. During part of my two week mission I was accompanied by Yoram Ben-Zeev, the Foreign Ministry's very capable deputy director for North American affairs.

In the course of traveling cross country and meeting with the Jewish leadership and key editorial writers, and armed with a persuasive background analysis and presentation of Barak's intentions, I discovered that my task was indeed feasible. Americans, especially American Jews, wanted peace for Israel and understood that it could only be achieved at the cost of painful concessions. In more than one key city, I helped write the next day's editorial in the main newspaper, welcoming Israelis and Palestinians to Camp David and wishing them success.

Two specific incidents, I believe, best illustrate the premise—which is equally valid today—that a determined Israeli prime minister with a realistic peace program can get the US to back him actively.

One took place in a major West Coast city. I had finished addressing the leadership of a very large Jewish community, asking for their support. Many of these Jewish leaders tended as a matter of course to be more hawkish on Israel's behalf than Israelis were. (I have compared notes with leaders of other diasporas, such as the Armenians, and find this rule of thumb to be true in general.) In this case, in particular, several of the leaders were Orthodox Jews who believed strongly in the Greater Land of Israel and were closely affiliated with the settlers of the West Bank and Gaza, some of whose settlements would be evacuated if Barak succeeded at Camp David and a Palestinian state were established. After a few moments of silence, one of them turned to the group and, his voice breaking, said: "We knew this time would come. I think we have no alternative but to get behind the prime minister of Israel." There was no further debate.

A second incident occurred in a meeting with Richard Perle, at the time a close adviser of George W. Bush, then Republican candidate for president. It was important to brief Perle, who is well known for his conservative views, in order to ensure that the Republican opposition line up behind President Clinton and provide bipartisan support in the event Camp David succeeded. But the briefing boomeranged: Perle refused to listen to my outline of Barak's positions, and pronounced that no peace agreement would be acceptable if Barak gave Arafat a foothold in Jerusalem. In that case, Perle added, he would personally advise Bush to condemn the agreement.

This exchange, duly reported back to Jerusalem, was quickly leaked to the media, presumably by someone who sought to torpedo Camp David before it had begun. But the leak, too, boomeranged: Bush's entourage, briefed by Ben-Zeev and wary of appearing to undermine a serving president's peace efforts, reacted by distancing itself from Perle's intervention and giving its blessings to Camp David.

Of course, many lessons can be derived from the brief unpleasantness with Perle. He was apparently right about Arafat, but not about the inevitability of sharing Jerusalem if we are ever to have peace. Bush and his advisers, who have been critical of Clinton's deep involvement in a failed peace process ever since taking office, nevertheless understood at the time that peace in the Middle East should be beyond politics in America, and that the US could not permit itself to turn its back on an Israeli leader who was determined to make peace.—*Published July 15, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Camp David: An exit strategy for Barak

by Ghassan Khatib

Until Camp David, Palestinians were in a relatively comfortable negotiating position opposite Israel. Generally, the conflict was still perceived as one of occupation and fulfilling the Palestinian people's basic rights to self-determination and statehood. In return, Israel would see fulfilled its basic rights to peace, security, integration and prosperity. But that framework was seen as problematic by many Israelis—including former Prime Minister Ehud Barak—who did not want to concede on crucial issues such as the refugees, Jerusalem and a real end to Israeli control over the occupied Palestinian territories and their borders.

Barak, who made no secret of his criticisms of the Oslo agreements, had always thought that Oslo's transitional philosophy where Israel would gradually redeploy from all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (barring Jerusalem, military outposts and settlements) weakened Israel's bargaining position when it came time to negotiate final status issues. Barak, like most Israelis, was not prepared to compromise on refugee rights and Jerusalem and control over borders. He wanted to avoid further scheduled troop redeployment in order to add negotiations over territory to the agenda. That is why he unilaterally brought an end to the implementation of Oslo's transitional phases and decided to force everybody to Camp David where the gradual redeployment and final

issues would be handled in one deal. Territory was then to be used as a bargaining chip for avoiding compromise on other issues.

As such, Barak had two objectives at Camp David: either to reach a final settlement ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and achieving Israel's objectives of peace, security, integration and prosperity without compromising on Jerusalem, the refugees or many of the settlements, or to end the entire peace process and place the blame squarely on the other side.

Barak pursued that goal by ensuring two things. First, he promoted the impression that this was a take-it-or-leave-it deal and that it should not be considered a step followed by others. He did not want this process to remain alive after Camp David. The other thing Barak was keen to do was to declare Palestinian culpability. Therefore, Barak—in true Israeli fashion—asked United States President Bill Clinton to join him in blaming Palestinians, using the argument that official US support was the only way Barak would be reelected in the coming vote.

And so, while Camp David might have been viewed as an encouraging attempt to open up final status talks and the beginning of real discussion over the parties' positions, all productive results were sabotaged. Another possibility could have been to declare that, while participants were unable to conclude a final agreement, they would continue implementing the interim agreements simultaneously with final status negotiations. That would have kept the process alive and prevented a vacuum. As we know, neither of those steps was taken.

Indeed, the only way to understand the unfolding of events is to believe that Barak wanted Camp David to serve as his exit strategy from a peace process that was leading inevitably closer to ending the occupation and negotiations on the Palestinian refugee problem and Jerusalem's future. Consistent with this was Barak's decision weeks later to encourage the leader of his right-wing opposition, Ariel Sharon, to make his provocative visit to Jerusalem's holiest Muslim shrine. Barak's army and police then activated a military plan to brutally shut down civilian protests against the visit, killing tens of Palestinian demonstrators and decisively transforming relations between the two sides from peaceful negotiations into bloody confrontation.

Still, Israel was unable to escape the parameters of the peace process. Even when the international community offered assistance via the committee led by US Senator George Mitchell, it did so in the form of a stabilizing package for returning the parties to talks. At that time, it was

Prime Minister Sharon who undermined the initiative, with the help of Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet.

It was only after the events of the September 11, on one hand, and the resumption of Palestinian suicide attacks on the other, that world perception of the conflict shifted fundamentally. Hand in hand, Israel and the American administration generated misconceptions over the nature of this conflict, turning it from one of fulfilling rights and implementing international law into one about violence and terrorism. Hence, Barak's goal at Camp David was in fact completed by Sharon, Osama Bin Ladin and some Palestinian Islamic activists. The finishing touch was provided by President George W. Bush when he put the Palestinian-Israeli conflict squarely in the arena of his "war on terrorism."

The current situation is a clear setback for Israelis and Palestinians who supported the peace process, and a victory for those who have always sought to undermine a two-state solution. The only net outcome of this victory will be to guarantee the continuity of the Israeli occupation and undermine any chance of real peace. Currently, we seem to be assured that this conflict will continue for another generation at least—unless we see one of two changes. Only if the composition of the Israeli government transforms and returns to power Israelis who believe in the two-state solution, or if the attitude of the international community led by the United States amends towards a more responsible approach will we see an end to the grueling violence and bloodshed anytime

AN ISRAELI VIEW

A preliminary summit should have been held

a conversation with Shlomo Ben-Ami

bitterlemons: Former Prime Minister Ehud Barak now argues that Camp David was a kind of success, since it was proven there at a relatively early stage that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was not ready to reach a genuine agreement, thereby enabling Israel to avoid a far worse crisis. What's your opinion: success or failure?

Ben-Ami: Certainly not a success. The idea was to reach an end of conflict, and it produced the intifada. The only dimension of success was as a learning experience for the Israeli public regarding the price of peace. Prior to Camp David, there were lots of illusions. Peres, for example, argued that “with 80 percent [of the territory] we can do the job.” On the right, they thought we could both rule and make peace. The fact is that Israeli public opinion acquiesced in the price we have to pay in partitioning Jerusalem and other areas.

bitterlemons: If you could repeat the exercise, with the benefit of two years hindsight, what would you change?

Ben-Ami: I would set as a condition for going to Camp David that we insist on a preliminary leadership summit. On the first day of Camp David, we should have stopped: here we have the teams that negotiated in the Stockholm track; now the leaders have to discuss the gaps and the overall framework, and only after that should we return to work in teams.

I told Barak and [then-US President Bill] Clinton that we should reverse the mechanism of the meeting; the teams are trying to guess what the leaders will agree to. I told Barak, “Why did you bring us here, after all, I can meet with Abu Ala [Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qrei] back in Jerusalem. We have to put everything on the table, and if there is no agreement in the leadership summit, that means there’s no agreement.” Barak’s stubborn refusal to meet with Arafat was a big obstacle.

bitterlemons: Why didn’t Barak want to meet with Arafat?

Ben-Ami: This is a classic example of personality as impediment. Barak is incapable of crossing cultural lines. He has difficulty functioning in a hostile cultural environment. All of his meetings with Arafat were catastrophes. There were meetings prior to Camp David where Barak and Arafat sat and said nothing; he wasn’t capable of speaking at all. Arafat and Clinton had very difficult meetings, but they were substantive.

bitterlemons: You didn’t deal at all with the topic of Jerusalem prior to the summit. Isn’t this a case of poor preparation?

Ben-Ami: This was the main topic that was not discussed in advance. On the first day of Camp David, I stated “This is the Jerusalem conference; This will make or break the deal.” The first positive turn of events was when I presented my personal proposals on Jerusalem. This obliged Arafat to be more flexible on the territorial issues.

bitterlemons: What did you learn about Arafat at Camp David?

Ben-Ami: He’s the most impossible man you can imagine. He’s actually not a leader; rather, he’s led by a series of myths, he’s a kind of “surfer” with a few fundamental beliefs regarding the Jewish state and Islam. Once, after Camp David, I told Arafat, “You invented a movement for liberation and national struggle along the lines of the ‘60s, and now, as we approach the moment of truth, you return to Islam. Rejection of the Israeli claim to historic entitlement over the Land of Israel is fundamentalism.”

I don’t know anyone who walked out of a meeting with Arafat having heard a single sentence that had a beginning and an end. But this is a strategy! He won’t let you entrap him on anything.

bitterlemons: Was the Israeli right wing right about him? Should we have made a more incisive assessment of the man prior to Camp David, based on what we knew about him before the process began?

Ben-Ami: In retrospect, I agree that it was an historic mistake to bring him here; it almost cost us the State of Israel. At various instances we should have taken stock. But as a historian, I would say that only now have the conditions developed for delegitimizing Arafat. Prior to Camp David, there were no international conditions that would permit it. Here, the right wing was right in its gut feelings—both about the partner and about the deep currents of the conflict. But the right wing was not right about a solution, because it has no solution.

bitterlemons: Other than Arafat, how did the Palestinians function at Camp David?

Ben-Ami: The internal political component in both camps was an impediment. At Camp David, we saw the older, Tunis clique vs. the younger and more pragmatic figures. I don’t know what was more important to the older set, reaching an agreement or stopping the younger set. The older leaders were indifferent; at times there was a sense of a leadership that won’t take its fate into its own hands. Abu Mazen [then-negotiator Mahmoud Abbas] was like a tourist in a safari park. In my view, they bear the primary guilt for the Palestinian national movement’s obsession with seeking justice instead of a solution, while their younger generation at Camp David signaled that it would concede justice for the sake of a solution.

Apropos, King Hassan of Morocco told me in January ‘93 that he told Abu Mazen that the time had come for the PLO to let the local leadership in the territories negotiate with Israel. In other words, he had begun to recognize that perhaps the PLO was not a partner.—*Published July 15, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Nothing tangible was on the table

a conversation with Muhammad Dahlan

bitterlemons: When Palestinians left Camp David, what was the deal on the table?

Dahlan: In terms of procedures, the deal was that no blame would be placed on any party by the American administration. United States President Clinton agreed to this and so did the Israelis and Palestinians. We agreed to continue the negotiations after Camp David in order to reach a solution.

Then Clinton said he would merely praise [former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud] Barak and the next day, Barak broke his commitment. He held a press conference and used the line that he “did not have a partner.” President Clinton also blamed the Palestinian Authority and President Arafat in what can be considered a breach of our understanding.

Politically, there was extensive conversation at Camp David on all the core issues. These discussions were serious, but they did not reach agreement because the Israeli side refused—after 12 days of negotiations—to present anything written or tangible on any of the issues.

When Clinton’s initiative arrived regarding land, refugees and borders, it was not enough to entice the Authority and the Palestinian people to agree to a solution and a historic deal of this magnitude. On the land, the deal was to agree that 91 percent of 1967 lands would go to the Palestinian Authority, in addition to a one percent land swap. The total would have been 92 percent with eight security conditions: that there must be an Israeli military presence in the Jordan Valley; a presence at the borders; early warning stations; control over airspace; that the Palestinian state be demilitarized; three [Israeli] pathways to Jordan; freedom for Israeli planes to fly over Palestinian airways and so on. These conditions subtracted from Palestinian sovereignty over land not exceeding 92 percent. It was not like what they later claimed—that a magnificent offer was presented. It was only 92 percent.

But we are not talking about percentages as if we are in the market. We are talking about how much the United States and Israel grew closer to resolutions of international legitimacy, [United Nations Resolutions] 242

and 338 and the principles of land for peace, which are the foundations of the peace process and Madrid.

The city of Jerusalem was to be divided into four categories—al-Haram, the Old City, the surrounding neighborhoods and the villages around Jerusalem. There were four security systems in Jerusalem and four types of sovereignty. This was not a solution. Nothing essential could be derived from this.

The refugee issue did not budge one inch at Camp David. There was only talk about a “solution” to the refugee problem. When we reached the conclusion that this was the offer before us, we rejected it. Evidence that the offer was not sufficient is that, later on, President Clinton presented a more developed offer and the Israeli side at the Taba talks came even closer to international resolutions.

bitterlemons: Was it your understanding that the talks were over and that conflict was imminent?

Dahlan: No, the intifada arrived as a result of internal Palestinian-Israeli circumstances. It did not occur because of planning or ill intentions but due to Palestinian desperation after seven years without arriving at a final agreement, the change of Israeli government leaders every two or three months and prime ministers refusing to commit to the agreement signed by his predecessor. This happened with Peres after Rabin, and Netanyahu after Peres, and Barak after Netanyahu, and later with Sharon.

The intifada happened because of the loss of hope in the peace process. We were not surprised and nor were the Israelis. In the last meeting in Washington with [US envoy] Dennis Ross, two days before the intifada erupted, I told Shlomo Ben-Ami and Gilad Sher that the situation would erupt if Sharon visited the Haram [Jerusalem’s holy mosque].

bitterlemons: What was your impression of the American role during and after the talks?

Dahlan: President Bill Clinton was serious and conscientious and had high hopes of ending the conflict between the two peoples. However, the state department and White House team in charge of the file always viewed the issue in terms of Israeli demands. They thought that every time the Israelis conceded something, this should be enough for the Palestinian side. It had nothing to do with the logic of justice or a fair solution. The logic was that anything Israel was ready to relinquish, you Palestinians should just take.

After that, Clinton put forward his ideas, which had some positive aspects and some weak points. They were clearer than the Camp David negotiations. But the intifada had already begun. Mistakes were made by the three parties in trying to save the situation. And now we have arrived at this tragic state.

bitterlemons: As you know, Israel has been very successful in using Camp David to demonstrate that Palestinians do not want peace. Why have the negotiators been so reluctant to speak about the subject?

Dahlan: I personally am not reluctant. I have spoken about this publicly to the media and in symposiums in the West Bank and Gaza. There are negotiators who are reluctant to talk about the subject, but I am not. Some negotiators accused me of trying to push the president towards the agreement and that is true. It is my job to encourage the president to reach a solution that would end the suffering of the Palestinians—but not just any agreement, only one that the Palestinian leadership agrees with.—*Published July 15, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

A WESTERN VIEW

Camp David: The US-Israeli bargain

by Bruce Riedel

In the two years since former United States President Clinton convened a summit meeting in Camp David, Maryland, to try to bring a just and lasting peace to Israelis and Palestinians, much has been published about what happened there and why the summit failed to reach an agreement between the two parties. But one aspect of the summit has been neglected in the analysis—the bilateral discussions between Israelis and Americans over how to assist Israel in managing the risks of a peace agreement should one have been concluded. As the President's Special Assistant for Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council, one of my responsibilities at Camp David was to oversee these discussions and, in particular, to conduct them with my Israeli counterparts in Prime Minister Ehud Barak's office. It is important

to understand these discussions to better assess the proposals Barak put on the table in their full perspective and to understand the kind of peace agreement he and President Clinton were trying to build.

The Prime Minister's office had done considerable work preparing for Camp David on the subject of how to minimize the risks to Israel, through a deal that would accompany the proposals Barak would make to the Palestinians on a final status agreement. This work flowed from earlier preparations for an agreement with Syria, which had been the subject of intense diplomatic effort in the winter of 1999-2000, but the new proposals Israel put on the table at Camp David were framed to deal with the specifics of a Palestinian settlement. The Israeli effort was led by Barak's chief of staff, Danny Yatom, and his foreign policy advisor, Zvi Shtauber.

At the core of the proposals Barak's team suggested to the American side at Camp David was a transformation of the Israeli-American security partnership. That relationship is deep and rich in practice, built on years of close and effective partnership, but it has always lacked a formal commitment based on treaty. Barak suggested at Camp David that the US and Israel conclude a formal mutual defense agreement including a commitment by the US to come to the assistance of Israel in the event of attack in the future, enshrined in a treaty to be ratified by the Congress and the Knesset. This treaty would be fully like the American treaty relationship with its NATO allies, and thus include a nuclear umbrella commitment by the US, i.e., an American promise to respond to a nuclear attack on Israel with American nuclear forces.

This idea had been floated by the Israeli side during the discussions on a Syrian agreement before and after the Shepherdstown, West Virginia, peace conference in January 2000, but not in the detail that was presented at Camp David. In July, the Israeli team put a draft treaty on the table and began detailed discussions with us on the modalities of treaty ratification in the Senate.

Equally important to the proposed formal codification of the US-Israeli defense partnership, Barak also asked for an enormous new US financial package to help buttress the chances an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement would endure. Barak asked for a commitment from Clinton to fund, either through US money or money solicited from other partners like the Europeans and Japanese, a financial aid package amounting to almost \$35 billion over several years. The US would continue its existing financial aid packages for Israel and Egypt (amounting to almost five billion dollars annually), and take on the burden of providing most of the new assistance. The Palestinians would be the beneficiary of the majority of the money.

About \$10 billion would be money for compensating the Palestinian refugees from the 1948 War who have lived in exile for over a half century. The US would agree to try to elicit donations from countries around the world to help compensate these refugees in lieu of their return to their homes. The money would be distributed in various means to be negotiated as part of the Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Our own internal US estimates were that this amount was too little for the job but was a reasonable basis to begin the process of raising funds.

Another \$10 billion would be used to develop water desalination plants to increase the usable water available to Israel, the Palestinians and Jordan. A number of the expensive desalination plants would be constructed to increase the water supply for the three states. The Palestinians would be the principal beneficiaries of this development project. Again the US would take on the burden of trying to elicit the donations needed to make up the \$10 billion.

A further \$15 billion would be money for Israel's exclusive benefit. About three to five billion dollars would be used to upgrade and modernize the Israel Defense Forces, particularly in the area of new early warning aircraft, attack submarines, helicopters and the deployment of the Arrow anti-tactical ballistic missile defense system. Another \$2.5 billion would go to assisting the redeployment of IDF units from bases in the West Bank to new bases to be constructed inside the green line, and another one billion dollars to construct new training facilities to compensate for those lost in the transfer of the Judean Desert to the Palestinian Authority. Two billion would be spent on building new roads and fences to delineate the new borders between Israel and the PA, and about three billion dollars would go to help pay for the expenses of removing Israeli settlers from settlements to be abandoned in the West Bank and Gaza.

Barak also asked for Israeli access to some of America's most advanced defense technology, in particular the Tomahawk cruise missile and the F22 advanced fighter aircraft. Both requests raised potential problematic issues. The transfer of cruise missile technology could be seen as a violation of the missile technology transfer control regime, which the US was a major sponsor of, and the F22 is a still-to-be-produced aircraft that Congress had been very jealous of exporting. (Clinton did commit the US to providing F22s to Israel, subject to congressional approval, at the end of his administration.)

The details of the Israeli requests were very closely held in Washington during and after the summit. There was considerable opposition to some elements of the package, particularly the technology transfers and the

new treaty commitments. It is fair to say there was also a fair degree of sticker shock at the size of the package. Some aides wondered whether the Congress would balk at a request of this magnitude.

The president's view was simple; if it would help Barak sell a controversial and painful series of compromises to the Israeli public and to resolve the outstanding refugee and water issues, then he would do all he could to get the treaty and the money. He told Barak during the summit that he would do so and Barak operated on the assumption of full American support, subject of course to the Congress. Barak and Clinton obviously assessed that the friends of Israel on Capitol Hill would mobilize to support such a deal, if the peace agreement was reached with the Palestinians. Clinton was very clear, however, that the US-Israel deal was entirely contingent on conclusion of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

Unfortunately, that was not to be. Interestingly, Chairman Arafat made only one request from the president for direct American help. Arafat asked if American military personnel would form the core of a peacekeeping force to be deployed in the Jordan Valley to replace the IDF deployment there. This request came in the middle of the night when Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat woke me up at three am to ask this key question. I called Sandy Berger and the president immediately. Again, Clinton was positive and said yes.

The logic behind Barak's requests is best explained by Israelis. At Camp David, we understood the Israeli thinking to turn on two key points. First, only a massive effort at economic reconstruction would make a complex deal with the Palestinians work. That is, a major refugee compensation program and new water resources would be essential to creating the peace dividend that would encourage peoples on both sides to see peace as benefiting their lives. Second, any deal—no matter how generous to the Palestinians—would face violent opposition from some in the region, probably including both Iran and Iraq and maybe others like Osama bin Ladin who oppose the very existence of Israel and would thus pose long range security threats, maybe even nuclear ones, to Israel. Thus a deal for peace would still require a large security dimension for the long term. President Clinton fully appreciated the logic of Barak's argument.

Obviously, these discussions all hinged on getting an Israeli-Palestinian deal. They were overtaken by the failure of the summit but they provide a unique insight into what a deal may require from the US to be sustainable. Clearly, no future administration is bound by Clinton's promises at Camp David, but the discussions there illustrate the

magnitude of what needs to accompany a deal to ensure its survival and effectiveness.

These discussions were self-evidently important to those of us involved in them. The reshaping of Israeli-American relations they suggested would have been fundamental and profound. They also had their light moments, however, such as when the president suggested the delegations watch a movie one night to relax. The movie chosen dealt with the capture of a German U-boat in World War II. The next day the Israeli team told me they had forgotten their navy's need for two additional submarines to add to those the US had already helped fund from Germany. I suggested to the president that night that we show romantic comedies from then on to the delegations.

Two years after Camp David, the tragedy of the missed opportunity the summit presented is clearer than ever. Imagine a Middle East without the intifada and with a peace agreement buttressed by an enormous reconstruction fund, akin to the Marshall Plan that President Truman used to rebuild Europe after World War II. Imagine how the lives of the peoples of the region would be better, especially those in refugee camps. That missed opportunity is what one sees more and more clearly.—*Published July 15, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

War in Lebanon

VIEW OF A PALESTINIAN CITIZEN OF ISRAEL

Israel was the aggressor

a conversation with Ahmed Tibi

bitterlemons: What caused a prominent political commentator for Maariv daily newspaper, Ben Caspit, to invite you to leave Israel at the height of the war in Lebanon?

Tibi: I think that the general atmosphere of the Israeli state during the war was radical fear, frustration and an attempt to try to find the closest “enemy” that could easily be caught. This was done by targeting the Palestinian citizens of the state of Israel, mainly their leadership. Caspit did it by publishing this McCarthy-like article asking me to accommodate myself to his position, to support the war and the army, or to leave just because I said from the very beginning, “Stop the war, I’m against it.”

bitterlemons: How do you explain the seeming sympathy of the Arab citizens of Israel for Hizballah in this war, given that it is a Shiite movement and its rockets killed Israeli Arabs as well as Jews?

Tibi: The overwhelming Arab view in Israel was against the war. The Arabs perceived Israel as the aggressive side and all of Lebanon as the victim of this huge military machine destroying infrastructure and killing hundreds of civilians—women, children and the aged. It was just natural that we would express empathy for the victim, saying at the same time that we are against targeting civilians, whether in Beirut, Haifa or Gaza.

bitterlemons: What is your personal view of Hizballah, its ideology and the way this war started?

Tibi: From the beginning, Hizballah said they would try to kidnap Israeli soldiers to exchange for Lebanese prisoners. It was obvious. I think that not to release Samir Kuntar [the most veteran and prominent Lebanese prisoner in Israel] at the last minute in 2004 [the last prisoner exchange] was a political mistake. When you leave an occupied land, you close the entire portfolio by releasing the prisoners also. The same mistake is

being made by Israel in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Obviously, from a socio-religious point of view, we differ with Hizballah, but this is not the point at all. We are talking about supporting the war in Lebanon or not, supporting the destruction of Lebanon or not.

When [Iranian leader Mahmoud] Ahmadinezhad said some months ago that Israel should be destroyed, I criticized this statement. The two-state solution is the best. We are in an era of constructing a state, not destroying a state.

bitterlemons: Initially, for example when Prime Minister Ehud Olmert first spoke to the Knesset on July 17 about the war, the Arab members of Knesset did not criticize the Israeli war effort. What changed your minds?

Tibi: Nothing. Just 15 minutes before Olmert's speech, I proposed a motion of no confidence in this government, attacked it and opposed the war. Being silent during one speech should not be interpreted in an extreme way.

bitterlemons: How do you assess the overall effect on Arab-Jewish relations in Israel of the Israeli Arab position in this war?

Tibi: We say definitely that we are against sending rockets to Haifa and Nahariya. And we have empathy for the families killed and injured. I think the war itself, which was initiated against the most liberal and civilized Arab country in the area, with the destruction [it involved] and the positions of the [Israeli] political leadership and the press, enlarged the split between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority that was there already. The attempt to dictate to us opinions and positions by some journalists and leaders was a kind of fascist attempt to intimidate us because of our opposition to the war. These articles and positions were a clear cut fascist expression of an overwhelmingly bellicose spirit sweeping the country.

But as usual, *deja vu*. We were there in 1982 when the consensus supported the war then was split and broken. Today we are in the same position, with consensus support for the war already starting to crumble. Meretz is changing its view, and the right wing is attacking the government and claiming poor management of the war. We were alone in the beginning, but now we are not. Yet no one will tell us after two or three months, "You were right," because we are Arabs and not part of the consensus. I am not sure that Ben Caspit will write, "Ahmed, I apologize."

bitterlemons: How do you assess the stability of the Olmert government now that there is a ceasefire?

Tibi: As a physician, I can say "bad prognosis" from the personal and political aspect. Personally, Olmert has lost enormous points as a leader, [Defense Minister] Amir Peretz has lost a lot and is being attacked even in his Labor party, and [Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff] Dan Halutz should be happy if he remains chief of staff, as should other generals of the general staff. Israel lost politically, militarily and socio-economically. The Israeli economy was devastated, with at least four billion dollars in losses in markets. We said from the very beginning that this would happen.

bitterlemons: How do you assess the ceasefire agreement?

Tibi: First, there will be a cessation of the air war and missile attacks, but there will be confrontations in southern Lebanon; we are far from silence. Israel should withdraw from the Shebaa Farms and leave no excuse for anyone to say it controls Lebanese land. It shouldn't penetrate Lebanese airspace and coastal waters. Lebanon and Hizballah should do the same, respecting Israeli sovereignty. An exchange of prisoners will definitely take place. I said this from the beginning.

bitterlemons: You have traveled several times to Lebanon and know the leadership well. Are you a candidate to help mediate a prisoner exchange?

Tibi: I don't think this is a task for someone like me from the Israeli Arab community. The Germans and other Europeans or the UN are best at this.—*Published August 14, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Israel is focused on the north, not Palestine

by Yossi Alpher

In terms of Israel's interests in the Palestinian arena, many of the ramifications of the end of fighting in Lebanon are negative, both militarily and politically.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which temporarily ended the fighting in the Lebanese arena but is already proving difficult to enforce, is generally also a poor model for an Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire in Gaza. In Lebanon, an international force is being introduced to support a weak government that at least has good intentions. A similar measure in Gaza would support an equally-weak—but extremist— Hamas government that is liable to draw encouragement from Hizballah's successes over the past month.

On the other hand, Israel's increasingly obvious military achievements in Gaza (Qassam rocket firings were down to about a dozen last week and have ceased in recent days) obviate the need for anything but humanitarian international intervention there. Nor have Israeli forces reoccupied Gaza as they have southern Lebanon. Moreover, 1701 blames Hizballah for starting the war and does not in any way criticize Israel for its offensive in Lebanon and the damage and loss of life it caused. This is a helpful precedent for Gaza, where the IDF will now be free—assuming peace and quiet in Lebanon—to deploy more forces if needed.

Broadly speaking, it is not at all clear whether a war fought by Israel in Lebanon to restore its deterrent profile has actually done so. This could have negative repercussions for the way Palestinian militants view Israel. The most obvious example is the failure of 1701 to return Israel's two abducted soldiers from Lebanon. This hardly bodes well for a resolution of the hostage affair in Gaza. More important is the warning by senior Israeli security officials that Hamas will now seek to obtain a rocket arsenal similar to that deployed so effectively by Hizballah in Lebanon.

Moving from military to political repercussions, the conclusion of the war in Lebanon does not improve the prospects for an Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Some on the Israeli left are calling for the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference to be reconvened, or some other multilateral process invoked, as a means of using the outcome of this war to leverage a renewed political process. But Madrid followed an American-led military triumph that ostensibly ushered in a regional pax Americana, which in turn helped generate a peace process. In contrast, the United States is now in deep trouble in the Middle East, while the Lebanon conflict ended without a decisive victory for either side. Many see these circumstances as an achievement for Islamist forces in the region that have no interest in peace with Israel.

Certainly, the Palestinian Authority remains as weak and anarchic as before the war, and no one is pressuring Israel to consider it a

viable partner for negotiations. Even Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's disengagement initiative on the West Bank has now at least temporarily been shelved; Olmert has emerged from this war (and from 1701) weakened politically, with his initiative discredited by the violent aftermath of Israel's two previous unilateral disengagements.

On the regional map that has emerged over the past two months, Israel confronts militant and aggressive Islamist enemies in Lebanon and Gaza. They are backed by Iran and its client state, Syria; reject Israel's very existence; and feed on failed Arab political entities on two fronts. Under these circumstances, if any peace initiative at all is conceivable at this point, it is likely to be directed toward Syria, not the Palestinians. Damascus is perceived as the weak link in the Iranian-led front against Israel—and the Iranian threat now takes unequivocal precedence over the Palestinian problem.

This means political stalemate on the Palestinian front. And political stalemate could generate new military and terrorist escalation.—
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AN ISRAELI VIEW

Lessons from the war in Lebanon

by Ephraim Sneh

What are the likely ramifications of the war in Lebanon for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

A Palestinian looking thoughtfully at the war should draw the following conclusions:

- The really substantive and existential regional conflict is between Iran and Israel.
- Israel is the strongest military actor in the Middle East. Even if it wasn't well-prepared for this war, and even when it acted hesitantly, Israel inflicted huge damage and destruction on Hizballah that attacked it and on the Lebanese state that shelters that organization.

In other words, whoever hosts the proxies of Iran is liable to suffer irreversible damage.

- With 4,000 rockets hitting Israeli territory, Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah did not succeed in undermining the steadfastness of Israeli society. Nor did more than 1,000 dead Israelis in the second intifada break Israel. Evidently, Israelis are not crusaders who come and go, but people attached to their land like us.

If these conclusions are correct, there is no way I can realize the vision of an independent Palestinian state through confrontation with Israel and partnership with Iran and Syria. From an economic standpoint, too, the only way I can escape from an \$800 per capita GDP is by linking up with the Israeli economy with its \$20,000 per capita GDP. Economic links with my Arab neighbors will not upgrade the Palestinian economy. And without a growing economy, the Palestinian state will never stand on its own two feet.

An Israeli looking perceptively at the war should also draw some conclusions:

- My real enemy is the regime in Iran and, of course, all those who serve it. With most of the Palestinians, my quarrel is over territory; with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinezhad (and with Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh) I'm debating my very right to live here. My right to live here in a Jewish state is not up for discussion. Territory can be an issue of compromise—but not my right to live here.
- The conflict with the Palestinians is draining resources and energies that I need for the other, existential conflict.
- The occupation hurts my international standing and weakens my position in the international arena where I confront Ahmedinezhad and Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah.
- The very absence of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict alienates the moderate actors in the Arab world who are my natural allies and provides an excuse for my enemies to incite against me and fight me.

The Palestinian and the Israeli are my virtual creations. Yet both exist. They take different points of departure: each wants a larger portion of the same piece of land, and they are uncompromising in their conflicting perceptions of history. But their interests coincide. Both would profit from an Israeli-Palestinian permanent status agreement and would lose from its ongoing postponement. The broad outlines of such an agreement have been fairly clear for several years, and are favored by about two-thirds of the public on both sides.

The lesson of the war in Lebanon is the need to begin negotiating a permanent status agreement. It will take several years to implement it. But both sides need to start talking now, to build their economies and societies and confront the wave of fanaticism that threatens us all.—*Published August 21, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

International involvement more important than ever

by Ghassan Khatib

The end of the war in Lebanon will have a very strong effect on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This effect goes over and beyond the general and always-correct observation that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the continuing Israeli occupation of Palestinian land are at the core of the hostile relations and problems between Israel and the Arab world.

Many analysts, including some Palestinians, have tried to highlight possible linkages between the Israeli-Lebanese escalation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the similarity between the Islamic Hamas and Hizballah movements.

But in spite of these superficial similarities, there is actually little substantial in common in the two cases. Although they are both part of the Israel-Arab conflict, in the Palestinian case the escalation is simply a continuity of a conflict that has been going on for a long time and is characterized by being a legitimate struggle of an occupied people to get rid of an illegal occupation. In Lebanon, the conflict is between two independent and sovereign countries (a significant difference already), and it includes strong regional factors and agendas that are not all genuinely Lebanese.

On the immediate political level, there are several sometimes contradictory consequences. The war in Lebanon detracted attention from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to the disadvantage of the

Palestinians. The war showed that the Hamas-led armed Palestinian resistance is much less impressive than that of Hizballah. But at the same time, the lack of a decisive Israeli victory in Lebanon and an end to the war that left the fighting ability of Hizballah intact increased the Arab—and especially the Palestinian—public's support for armed resistance as the best approach to deal with Israel, and for political Islam as the most promising ideology.

In other words, the way the war in Lebanon ended strengthened the support for political Islamic movements and armed resistance among Palestinians, at the expense of the public standing of those who call for non-violent political and peaceful approaches for dealing with Israel and the occupation. It would seem to contribute further to the trend of radicalization that has been evident in Palestine in the last five to six years.

On a more micro-analytical level, it is also evident that the war in Lebanon shifted the trend in the balance of power within Hamas. Until the capture of an Israeli soldier in Gaza and the war in Lebanon, the more moderate and realistic wing of Hamas in the ministries and parliament seemed to be in the ascendancy. The way the war in Lebanon ended, coupled with the Israeli arrests of relatively-moderate members of the government, has played into the hands of the more radical wing of Hamas that is based either outside Palestine or functions outside the Palestinian Authority.

Two major developments can possibly reverse this trend. One would be constructive negotiations to find a deal that would ensure the release of the Israeli soldier in exchange for a number of Palestinian prisoners in Israel, in addition to settling some of the immediate outstanding issues. These importantly would include the transfer of tax monies collected according to the Oslo agreement by Israel on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Israel has refused to hand these over, thus preventing the PA from functioning and deepening the dependence of this government on money brought in from various sources, but mainly from Iran.

The other necessary development is to activate a political process and bring back international efforts to resume negotiations to end the occupation. Such a development would create a situation conducive for a national unity government that, in turn, would empower the peace camp led by President Mahmoud Abbas.—*Published August 21, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

Between Iran, the Shiites and Sunni Arab weakness

by Asher Susser

In recent years, the Middle East has witnessed a series of historical changes that provide the regional context to the ongoing confrontation Israel is engaged in on its southern front with Gaza and to what is now developing into an almost full-scale war between Israel and Hizballah in Lebanon.

The last quarter of a century has witnessed the continued, steady decline of the Arab states and the relative impotence of the Arab state system. The erstwhile hegemonic Arab powers—Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia—have all lost much of their regional clout. The Arab League is an empty vessel. In the present crisis, it has not managed to convene its members because of internal dissension. Never mind doing anything about the current conflagration, the Arab collective is incapable even of convening to talk about it. The Middle East, therefore, is no longer the “Arab world,” at least in the sense that it is not the Arab states that set the regional agenda.

The decline of the Arab states has been accompanied by the rising regional power and influence of the non-Arab states: Israel, Iran and Turkey. Indeed, it is Iran and Israel that are presently clashing indirectly in Lebanon, while the Arabs, much to Hizballah's displeasure, watch from the sidelines as more or less passive bystanders (apart from a few demonstrations here and there).

Iran's stature has been further reinforced by the demise of Baathist Iraq, hitherto the main bulwark to Iranian influence in the Arab East, now transformed into the first Arab Shiite-dominated state. Shiite Iraq has paved the way for a dramatic change in the regional balance of power between Sunni and Shiite, and the creation of what King Abdullah of Jordan referred to as the “Shiite crescent,” stretching from Tehran and Baghdad (via Syria) to Hizballah in Lebanon.

Iranian patronage—financial, political and military—has over many years (again via Syria) transformed Hizballah into a state within a state, not only with a relatively-formidable military structure, but with an elaborate network of social services for the Shiites of Lebanon, whose

widespread identification with Hizballah provides the organization with a solid foundation of popular support, essential for its political longevity and power in the Lebanese arena. For Iran (and Syria), the arming and entrenchment of Hizballah have transformed Lebanon into their own outpost and frontline of defense (or attack) against Israel. A senior Iranian official recently described Hizballah as “one of the pillars of [Iran’s] security strategy”.

The weakening of the Arab state has raised the profile and relevance of primordial, sectarian and religious identities, coupled with the rise of non-state actors throughout the region. The likes of Bin Ladin, Zarqawi and his successors, Hizballah and Hamas (the latter now in some mode of control of the non-state of Palestine) have created a unique brand of chaotic statelessness. Some Arab states, notably Sunni Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, are concerned by the emergence of both Iran and the destabilizing non-state actors and have in the recent conflict come out openly to criticize Hizballah for its rash and adventurous behavior in picking a fight with Israel. They would not be unhappy to see Israel downgrading Hizballah, and thereby weakening an Iranian client in what would be the first serious setback in recent years for Iranian-Shiite ascendancy, which they really and truly fear.

Israel, in a way, is being expected to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them, too. Israel, for its part, would expect these Arab states to at least give their backing and blessing to a new political order in Lebanon that would embolden the Lebanese government and the non-Shiite majority to clip the wings of Hizballah. Syria, recently forced to leave Lebanon, has in this conflict played second fiddle to Iran. It might be worth exploring the possibility of reengaging Syria in the stabilizing of Lebanon.

If the Lebanese prove incapable, as they might, then encouraging Syria to assist in the containment of Hizballah would make sense. Syria may do so lest it be drawn in the future into an undesirable clash with Israel because of Hizballah’s subservience to Iranian interests, which are not all in line with those of Syria. The Syrians, after all, are much more vulnerable than Iran to Israeli reprisal.

In conclusion, it is important to highlight what is perhaps the key linkage between Gaza and Beirut, above and beyond the coincidence of Israel’s campaign on two fronts against its non-state enemies. Though it may not appear so on the surface, the present campaign, on all fronts, is an absolutely vital component of Israel’s withdrawal strategy. It is not the undoing of that strategy, but quite the opposite. It is intended to create the essential preconditions for Israeli redeployment—that is, to

set the rules of play for the neighborhood to ensure a secure Israel after withdrawal, without being dragged back into reoccupation with all the hazards that entails.

If Israel fails to set such rules by reinforcing its deterrence, it could become impossible for it to withdraw from the West Bank. That, in turn, would suck Israel into a host of other existential problems related not to Arab power but to its own demographic vulnerabilities.—*Published July 24, 2006 in bitterlemons.org*

Looking Ahead

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Democracy is an enlightened choice for peace

by Mudar Kassis

When it is clearly time to work on laying the foundations of democracy in Palestinian society (for this society has a clear stake in laying these foundations—so do its neighbors and the world), the bargaining of interests and powers is dictating a “compromise.” Competing powers, fighting over the Palestinian “style” of self-determination, always manage to reach a compromise that steps on the toes of democratization. (Democracy, after all, cannot enforce something against the will of a nation.) This, unfortunately, happens to be the history of Arab-Israeli struggle, of occupation, and of the “war-like peace process” that Oslo turned out to be.

One of the problems of democracy is that it has not stopped being nationalist by nature, and tends to be localized rather than global. In practice, democracy controls relations within a state/society, but not between nations. If national interest and democratic processes and values come into contradiction, national interest dominates because of democracy’s localized nature. Hence, there can be nothing democratic in a conflict, other than the democratically-made choice to be non-democratic.

The answer to the rhetorical question of whether it is easier for two dictators to reach peace than it is for two leaders democratically representing two nations is, unfortunately, not only rhetorical. On the other hand, the harder choice (to make peace by democratic will) is the more lasting one. But this choice presupposes the existence of two democracies in a conflict, which cannot be the case when one nation is subordinated to the other by occupation. This may explain why decolonization is typically not a democratic process.

This was the case with each decolonized Arab nation, throughout Africa, and in Latin America. It seems that the effort put into the struggle against occupation, the colonizers’ destructive force, and the means

required to face colonial power and violence leaves societies with political traditions, an economy, education, and set of values that make it very hard to democratize.

We should also bear into account that democracy is not an automatic choice. We should be able to imagine nations that would willingly choose a non-democratic system for their lives. There are certain conditions when democracy is “the right choice” for a nation. These conditions boil down to the fact that people should have a stake in democracy, or else some other system might happen to be more suitable for their lives.

The main interest at stake that democracy protects and sustains is power-to-be-shared and wealth-to-be-distributed according to a certain social contract. Hence, powerlessness, poverty and lack of sovereignty cannot produce democracy. The lack of democracy, as a result, is not likely to produce a sustainable peace. This logic leads to a well-known conclusion: colonialism is a vicious circle for both the colonizer and the colony. Both sides will pay a price for each day that passes without breaking this vicious circle, although that price may be more affordable than bloodshed, which only grows and accumulates, making settlement more difficult.

The mechanism of build-up for this vicious circle is blindness. The seeking of revenge (hatred due to an emotional reaction to violence) creates a situation where people tend not to see the long-term effect of the damage on themselves, and attention is deflected from the original goals. Parties tend to put more effort into harming the other than into reaching their initial goals. If the political leadership works only on the pulse of the street, it, too, becomes blind. (Note that if it does not, it risks losing popularity.) This seems to explain why damaging the future is the “modus operandi” of Middle Eastern politics. It results from the shortsightedness or cowardly nature of its political leaders.

What we need are leaders who are truthful enough and dedicated enough to have a political vision of peace and justice, who are willing to lead and then to give up their political careers after signing a genuine peace treaty designed to last. Only such a leadership can lead the two nations of Israel and Palestine into genuine democracies of the future, where the bounds of the democratic system extend further than those of the army.—*Published August 12, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI VIEW

If you will it, it is not a dream

by Shlomo Gazit

I have no doubts; it is just a question of time. Once again we shall see delegations of Israel and the Palestinians sitting around the table and renewing their negotiations. The two sides seek it, need it and are ripe for it. I don't know when this will happen, but we have to prepare for that day, now. We cannot permit the process that begins again to end again in crisis and deadlock.

I see three obstacles that the two sides will have to overcome.

First and foremost, the establishment of a national leadership on both sides that really and truly believes in the need to reach historic compromise—compromise based on painful bilateral concessions, courageous concessions, without which there can be no settlement. We are all well aware of the parameters of the anticipated agreement. We can call it the Clinton formula, the Camp David or the Taba agreements. The problem is not the content of the agreement, but rather a leadership that understands that there is no other way, a courageous leadership capable of persuading its people, Israelis and Palestinians, to choose this path.

The second obstacle is the practical expression of the painful concession. A political agreement, once achieved, will oblige the leadership to enforce its decisions among domestic opponents. We know well who the opposition will be, who will try to sabotage and thwart these decisions by force. We know the extremists in Israel and the extremists among the Palestinians. Again, the two leaders and the two leaderships will have to call upon both courage and strength to do their duty.

The third obstacle is perhaps the most problematic of all. Both Israel and the Palestinians will have to convince one another of the sincerity of their intentions. They will have to remove the psychological barrier of lack of confidence that has been there all along, and that has grown and expanded particularly during the past two years of insane violence.

Twenty-five years ago we witnessed the dramatic visit of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem. In his historic speech in Jerusalem, he spoke of the fact that 70 percent of the conflict is the psychological barrier between the two sides. “My visit here, in Jerusalem,” he continued,

“has toppled that psychological wall!” I expect the Palestinians to persuade me, as Sadat did, of the sincerity of their intentions.

But I am well aware that we bear the same obligation toward them.

I will begin with a move that echoes Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem. As prime minister of Israel, I will invite whoever heads the Palestinian political entity at the time to come and address the Israeli people from the podium of the Knesset. True, the words will be addressed to the people of Israel, but this will also be a first-class gesture to the Palestinian masses. The Israeli prime minister’s reply will present the main points of his plan for immediate action, even before negotiations have begun and before any agreements are reached.

Again, as prime minister of Israel, I will convene a cabinet meeting that will confirm “the end of the Israeli occupation of the territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.” I’ll make sure the language of the resolution speaks specifically of the “West Bank” and not “Judea and Samaria.” This will be accompanied by a second resolution, the complete cessation of expansion of settlements in these areas, and an additional gesture: the removal of all Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Immediately thereafter, the Israel Defense Forces general staff will meet in the presence of the prime minister. At this meeting, the prime minister and minister of defense will issue a directive for the immediate withdrawal of IDF forces from areas A and B, and transfer of full responsibility for the needs of the population to Palestinian hands. Orders will be issued to IDF forces to cease addressing the Palestinian people as enemies. From that moment on, they will become residents of a neighboring Arab country with whom we intend to live in peace. And as a symbolic step, this meeting will also decide on cancellation of the position of “Coordinator of Government Operations in the Administered Territories” and transfer of all liaison and coordination operations from the IDF to a special civilian authority under the Prime Minister’s Office.

An additional gesture: the unilateral, massive release of Palestinian security prisoners.

Utopia, you say? Perhaps. But in the words of the father of the Zionist movement, “If you will it, it is not a dream!” —*Published September 9, 2002 in bitterlemons.org*

AN ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN DIALOGUE

Israel, Palestine and the US: the next four years

Dialogue no. 1, March 2005, between Ghassan Khatib and Yossi Alpher

Alpher: To discuss the next four years, I think we have to look first at the past four years.

They have been tragic for both Israelis and Palestinians in many ways: escalating violence, the absence of a political process, economic hardship—all inflicted by us on ourselves. In this sense, the most striking tragedy of all has been the absence of sound leadership. Neither Yasser Arafat nor Ariel Sharon nor George W. Bush had a realistic strategy for peace, or even for stopping the violence. This, more than any other single factor, determined our fate during this period. The reasons for this failure of leadership were multi-faceted. They included the Palestinian reaction to the collapse of the peace process and outbreak of violence (thereby supporting Arafat’s reliance on violence); the Israeli reaction (electing and supporting a leader, Sharon, to wage war rather than peace); and the American reaction to 9/11.

What, if anything, is already changing or is likely to change in this paradigm during the coming years?

First, Arafat has departed the scene and been replaced by Mahmoud Abbas, who rejects the strategy of violence. Under the best of circumstances, he will require time to stabilize his rule and reduce the violence. And at the level of issues, Abbas’ peace menu is no more realistic than was Arafat’s.

Secondly, Bush has been reelected, amidst a flurry of statements to the effect that Arafat’s departure and Abbas’ election will reenergize the American commitment to a viable two-state solution. But the US still faces issues in the region to which it assigns much higher priority—Iran, Iraq, al-Qaeda—and it is not at all certain that it will risk large doses of its prestige on our problems, particularly if this means a clash with Israel.

And it does. Sharon has committed to unilateral disengagement—a welcome innovation. But he still seems to reject genuine peace negotiations with an Arab partner, whether Abbas or Bashar Assad.

This means that the next four years will probably, at best, witness limited progress toward Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Khatib: The future of Palestinian-Israeli relations and the future of Palestine and Israel depend not only on the political dynamics in the two countries, but also to a large degree on the rest of the region and international powers—in particular, the United States.

The fierce and bloody confrontational nature of the last four years, during which the American administration's policy toward this conflict is best illustrated by its near total absence, is an important factor in predicting what will happen in the next four years.

The negative effect of the deliberate American reluctance to engage in the conflict ought to influence American strategy in the coming four years, if only for American interests. In any reasonable analysis, most conclude that the lack of a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a negative factor on the regional scene, and that a solution would create an atmosphere more conducive to improving the overall regional situation.

Meanwhile, both Palestinians and Israelis have suffered immensely, and both sides have moved further away from any previous achievements they might have made.

The Israelis, who experienced the most prosperous period in their history during the peace process years, have suffered their worst ever economic downturn as a result of the violent confrontations. In addition, the average Israeli has never before been so unsafe. Needless to say, the movement toward normalization with the Arab countries that characterized the 1990s has been replaced with the most hostile regional atmosphere ever in the absence of actual war.

Palestinians, meanwhile, have also gone through some of their worst years in the history of the conflict, with disastrous economic deterioration; a huge number of casualties, especially among the youth; debilitating damage to the infrastructure; and the resulting retreat in the process of constructing the fundamentals of a state. This is in addition, of course, to the damage that has been done, at least in the US and some European states, to the Palestinian image.

These gloomy conditions should alone be enough to convince the two parties to look for different approaches and means to get them to their respective and legitimate objectives.

Alpher: We agree on the negative effect of Washington's lack of involvement and the need for that to change in the coming four years.

But I don't agree that the current regional attitude toward Israel is "the most hostile ever"—at least not at the regime level. Indeed, somewhat to my own surprise, the past four years of conflict have alienated Israel's neighbors to a lesser extent than anticipated. Jordan and Egypt withdrew their ambassadors but did not sever relations. The conflict did not overflow across the Jordan River.

Now Egypt is reengaging, thanks to the Gaza withdrawal plan. While Israeli expectations of Arab countries establishing or renewing relations with Israel in the coming months are exaggerated, the outlook is better than expected.

One explanation for this phenomenon is the Arab perception, like ours in Israel, that Arafat preferred violence to statesmanship. Abbas appears to share this assessment; witness the dramatic success of his diplomatic ventures thus far in the Arab world. A second explanation, at least regarding the past year, is Sharon's disengagement plan, which our Arab neighbors view in a positive light.

Thus, with Abbas running the Palestinian Authority and assuming Sharon proceeds with disengagement, the coming year is likely to bring regional and international diplomatic benefits for both Israel and Palestine. But beyond that year, the doubts loom. After disengagement, Israel's new coalition will collapse and elections will be in the offing. The Bush administration will not try to capitalize on the momentum of disengagement if this means friction with Sharon. Abbas may be less than fully successful in preventing suicide attacks against Israelis. Hence, after a relatively good year in 2005 we may be in for a bad or problematic year, one without progress, in 2006. The big question beyond that is whether, in a best-case scenario and with American involvement, we will witness more disengagement or the return to a genuine negotiating process.

An additional intriguing issue for the coming year or two is: assuming Palestinian violence ends, how much democracy will Bush demand from Palestinians before he'll get behind their statehood needs? He's already asking for more than he asks of Egypt and Jordan.

Khatib: Sharon's unilateral plan for disengagement from Gaza will not by any means be a reason to expect positive developments toward a peaceful future. There are two main reasons for this: as it stands, according to a recent World Bank assessment, implementing the plan will only lead to further deterioration of the social and economic conditions in Palestine. Secondly, the plan involves a parallel consolidation of occupation through settlement expansions in the rest of the 95 percent

of occupied Palestinian territories, i.e. the West Bank including East Jerusalem.

To get to a reduction of violence and peaceful negotiations that lead gradually toward peace requires a change in the current governing paradigm of Israeli politics. Unilateralism must be replaced by bilateralism. There can be no real peace without negotiations, and negotiations are held between at least two sides. It borders on the illogical to talk of a unilateral ceasefire.

The orderly and peaceful transition since the absence of the late President Arafat, in addition to the acceleration in the reform process on the Palestinian side, should see a shift in international pressure from that side to the positions and behaviors of the current anti-peace process government in Israel. This may allow and contribute to a possible change in Israel.

Changes in both Israel and Palestine will create a different and positive atmosphere. This in turn should attract growing international efforts to seize these new opportunities as it corresponds with the growing interest on the international level, especially in Europe and the US, of removing the factors of instability in the region created by the continuous confrontations and violence between Palestinians and Israelis.

Without intense international interference that includes the US administration, however, all regional efforts, including Egypt's, will not move things forward. Only readiness in both Israel and Palestine, combined with a renewed international involvement led by the US, can prepare the ground for a different phase in the history of this conflict.

Alpher: I believe your assessment of where disengagement is leading us is far too pessimistic, while your hopes for a genuine peace process in the coming years have little basis in the realities of the day.

After the first phase of disengagement, both the Israeli public and the US will demand more disengagement, this time entirely in the West Bank. Israeli elections might get in the way, but more disengagement, not more settlement-building on the West Bank, is likely to be the only alternative to more fighting. In this regard, Sharon does not talk of expanding settlements in 95 percent of the West Bank, but rather of consolidating the settlement blocs near the green line. Nor can you expect a change in the "governing paradigm of Israeli politics": the new paradigm is unilateralism, because most of us have lost faith in an end-of-conflict scenario in the near term, and anyway, we have a prime minister who simply doesn't believe in negotiating peace with our Arab neighbors.

Sadly, in the coming four years there is not likely to be much movement toward real peace. But there will be movement, and if Palestinians start adjusting to the advantages of Israeli unilateralism, they can benefit from them, too. The benefits for them are the increment of additional territory and the dismantling of settlements, both key building blocks for an independent Palestinian state. Whether Gaza after withdrawal is a "bigger jail" or not will depend on whether Palestinians get their security act together and whether Egypt comes through and takes over security along the Gaza-Sinai border. In the worst case, a bigger jail is certainly preferable to a smaller jail, especially when you're not being asked for a quid pro quo.

The international community is not likely to pressure Israel on this account as long as things are moving, even unilaterally. International—meaning mainly American—pressures will focus on Israel only if, first, the Palestinians deliver on democracy, reform and security and second, Israel ceases to move forward, either unilaterally or bilaterally.

This brings me back to an earlier question that I invite you to address: if the key to American support for a peace process is, as Bush insists, reform, just how much Palestinian democracy and suppression of violence will satisfy him? And shouldn't you be talking to Washington about this? Indeed, looking toward the next four years, shouldn't one of Abu Mazen's first acts as chairman of the Palestinian Authority be to upgrade the quality of PLO/PA representation in Washington?

Khatib: To argue that a withdrawal from Gaza will lead to any kind of public or international pressure for further withdrawals in the absence of a negotiation process is counterintuitive. Israeli unilateralism is exactly designed to do only so much and no more. It is designed to show the international community that Israel has "made sacrifices" and to show Israeli public opinion how difficult it was to make these "sacrifices." In the absence of any negotiations, this unilateral approach is set to solidify the current status quo rather than alter it.

To argue in this context that a bigger prison is better than a smaller one is neither here nor there; in the long run, a prison is a prison.

Unilateralism is designed by the strong party to further its interests. A withdrawal from Gaza and four West Bank settlements will buy the stronger party time. That time, in the absence of negotiations, will be used—as it already is being used—to consolidate the occupation of the West Bank by consolidating the settlements there. Any such consolidation will only prolong the time it takes to reach a peaceful settlement. This land is the homeland of a people who will continue to

do whatever they can in order to achieve their independence by ending the occupation from all of the Palestinian territories.

There is a strong link between these efforts toward freedom and independence, on the one hand, and the democratization and reform process, on the other hand. Once again, and hardly surprisingly, the main obstacle to democratization has been the occupation. After all, whom should you vote for under occupation? The first thing the Palestinian people did after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority was hold free and democratic parliamentary and presidential elections. And now, after the death of the previous and democratically-elected president, the Palestinians are again engaged in a series of elections at the local, parliamentary and presidential levels

Palestinians have demonstrated and are demonstrating both the willingness and the desire to push on with the democratization and reform programs even while living under an oppressive and violent occupation that counteracts such programs at every step. Witness, for example, the difficulties presidential candidates had in campaigning, including Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas] in Gaza during an Israeli incursion into the northern Gaza Strip, let alone the difficulties Jerusalem voters faced in casting their votes.

The genuine efforts of the Palestinian people in favor of democracy and reform, in addition to the clear commitment of its elected leadership to the roadmap and the expected 100 percent efforts of this leadership to fulfill Palestinian obligations under the roadmap on the security level should expose the shortcomings of the unilateralist approach of the Israeli government for all to see. There can be no substitute for negotiations and a bilateral approach. Anyone who expects a unilateral approach to bring any positive developments in the long run is sticking his/her head in the sand.

Alpher: By definition, unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank will change the status quo, not solidify it. A large majority of Israelis want disengagement in order to buy us time to keep the two-state solution alive, and to proceed eventually to more disengagements, either unilateral or, better, by dint of bilateral agreements.

If, as you intimate, the newly-elected Palestinian leader is going to “fulfill Palestinian obligations under the roadmap on the security level”—also largely unilaterally—then while this may not “expose the shortcomings of the current unilateralist approach,” it certainly will help restore Israelis’ faith in the Palestinians as a partner for a bilateral process. It will also win international support for the Palestinian cause.

As I see it, under the best of circumstances we could be at such a point in about a year: Israel has withdrawn from Gaza and the West Bank, while the PLO/PA, led by Abu Mazen, has restored security. The question is, where do we go from there? Neither Abu Mazen with his devotion to the right of return, nor Sharon, who is suspicious of peace and still covets part of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, is a candidate for a final status “end of conflict” agreement. Hence, under this best case scenario, in 2006 we can either proceed with more disengagement (imagine Israel removing tens of thousands of settlers from the West Bank; this will take several years of planning and execution), which is good for both of us (though not as good as a peace agreement). Or Bush will have to intervene in a big way. And I wouldn’t hold my breath waiting for Bush.

If, on the other hand, in the coming year we fail—meaning Abu Mazen fails at restoring security and Sharon fails at disengagement, both due to violent internal opposition—then we are looking at catastrophe, not for two or three years, but for far longer: a (pre-’94) South Africa-like reality without a (post-’94) South Africa-like solution. In that case, only massive outside intervention will resolve the conflict or even manage it.

Khatib: You are right to point out that both sides face problems in stopping the violence, but the point you seem to miss is that for Palestinians the occupation itself is an act of violence. Thus, while the Palestinian leadership will be—and already is—exerting a 100 percent effort on the security front, the failure or success of this effort depends mostly on Israel.

As such, it is Israel’s willingness for calm that is being put to the test here. Ultimately, all sides know (or at least should know) that any solution has to be political and therefore negotiated between the two sides. Thus, unilateral withdrawal is a step in the wrong direction: even though removing settlements is a desired outcome, to do so in a bid to win time and avoid political negotiations, while simultaneously expanding settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, simply sends the wrong signals.

And a ceasefire, vital to restart political negotiations, depends on signals. This is not only about violence, it is about showing a readiness to end the occupation. If the right signals are sent, if settlement building ends and expansions are frozen, if closures are lifted and assassinations end, if prisoners are released, things could move a lot faster than you seem to believe.

This brings me back to my source of optimism that you so derided originally. The above argument seems to me to be beyond question. Internationally, everyone is agreed that to end the conflict, political negotiations to end the occupation must be entered into. If it becomes clear that the Israeli government is the major obstacle to this (both internationally and domestically in Israel), pressure for a change of the Israeli leadership should become irresistible.

The Sharon-led Israeli government has failed to meet any of its objectives. If Sharon should fail to grasp the nettle now, surely that should become obvious to more secure feeling Israelis. The Palestinians are showing leadership. The international community will follow. Only Sharon remains.

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Abdel Aziz Rantisi gave this interview as the political leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It was to be his last interview with the press. One day later, he and his bodyguard and driver were killed by an Israeli missile attack on his car. Rantisi was named the head of Hamas in Gaza in late March, after the group's spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was also killed in an Israeli missile strike.

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Sheikh Ahmad Yassin was the spiritual leader of the Islamic Movement Hamas. He was assassinated in March 2004 in an Israeli missile strike that also took the lives of nine others as they were leaving a Gaza mosque after prayers. Yassin was 65 years old and spent eight years in Israeli prison before being released in 1997 in a prisoner exchange.

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The Best of Bitterlemons: Five years of writings from Israel and Palestine is a compilation book of the most prescient and important articles published through the *bitterlemons* family of publications. Creators and editors Yossi Alpher and Ghassan Khatib introduce this volume of 83 short essays and interviews touching on the most fundamental issues of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Contributors include former prime ministers, negotiators, military leaders and journalists, hailing largely from Israel and Palestine.
